

Speak up for Salmon

Subject

Civics/Community Engagement
English Language Arts

Objectives

The students will:

- Research a locally relevant issue affecting salmon
- Participate in the democratic process
- Construct a persuasive letter
- Identify local public officials

Materials

- Computer and printer or pencil/pen
- Blank paper
- Business envelopes
- Stamps
- List of elected officials (appendix)

Size/Setting/Duration

Entire class/indoors or outdoors/30 minutes

Background

After completing the Students for Salmon Program and learning about actions that people take in their everyday lives which either help or hurt salmon, discuss the importance of citizens being involved in government affairs, of having your voice heard, and the pros and cons of living in a democracy. Voting is an action adult citizens can take to voice their support for someone who can help protect areas that salmon need to thrive, such as waterways and riparian zones. Yet that does not mean that since students are not adults, they cannot share their concerns. Writing letters to officials who have been elected by voters to encourage them to take action to protect salmon and their habitat is a powerful way youth can participate in the democratic process and allow their voices to be heard.

Procedure

Threats facing salmon

As students learned, there are various threats facing salmon. Students should research some of the human-caused threats salmon face. For inspiration, there are some examples below. Discussing the concepts of fair and unfair engages students quickly, and provides the opportunity to identify how their researched issue affects them, their family, and their community.

- Climate change and associated warming temperatures
 - [NOAA Fisheries Report](#)
 - [US Forest Service Climate Change Resource Center Salmon and Trout](#)
 - [Inside Climate News Article](#)
- Riparian habitat loss and urbanization
 - [Seattle Times Article](#)
 - [Science Daily Article](#)
 - [Oregon State University Article](#)
- Fish passage barriers preventing access to spawning grounds
 - [NOAA Fisheries Article](#)
 - [US Fish and Wildlife Service Article](#)
 - [Middle Fork Dam removal project](#)
 - [Elwha River Restoration resources](#)

Students should choose one of these locally relevant issues facing salmon as the focal point of their persuasive letter to their elected official. For example, a student can focus on the impacts urbanization has on salmon, and write about the need to protect urban waterways and the riparian corridors along those waterways. By choosing 1 topic, the letter can be more specific and focused instead of being broad.

Identify your representatives Next, students should research who their representatives are, and decide who to write a letter to. They could choose to write to a local or state official, such as a County elected official, their state legislative representative, or a national official, such as their representative or senator.

To find their elected officials, there are a variety of resources to utilize. On a Whatcom County level, they can visit the Whatcom County Elected Officials [website](#). Here, they can see a list of elected officials, and the best ones to write to about issues facing salmon are the County Executive or the County Council. When selecting those options, students are brought to a website that shows contact information, including mailing address.

On a state and national scale, they can utilize the Washington State Legislature District Finder [website](#). On this website, students simply input their address and click "Find My District." When they do this, a list of State Legislators (Representatives and Senator) appears under the "Legislative" tab. They can click on any of these names to be brought to a website which shows their contact information, including mailing address.

When clicking on the "Congressional" tab, a list of National Legislators (Representatives and Senator) appears. They can click on any of these names to be brought to that person's website, which shows their contact information.

Craft a letter

Next, students can begin crafting their letter. Included in the appendix below is a template, which includes an outline that students can copy and paste into a blank document and fill in the blanks. This can also be a template for a hand-written letter if that is the method chosen for letter writing. To extend the learning beyond writing a letter and sending it, you can encourage peer review of letters by having students share their letters with each other to review them, checking for spelling and grammar.

Next, students can address their envelope, put a stamp on it and send it in the mail!

Do your part!

After putting their letter in the mail, they can continue to practice responsible stewardship in their everyday lives. In the post-visit presentation, students learned about actions they can take to help salmon, such as using less water, recycling, and being respectful around streams. Now they can couple this letter writing to their elected officials with continued stewardship!

Appendix: sample letter

Representative/Senator's name

Their Address

Their City, State, Zip

Date

Dear _____ (elected official name) _____:

My name is _____ (your name) _____ and I am _____ (your grade level) _____ at _____ (your school) _____. I am writing to you today because I am concerned about _____ (issue) _____. Salmon are important to me because _____ (how this effects you) _____.

Salmon face many threats in our shared waterways. One in particular human-caused threat is _____ (issue) _____. This is threatening salmon populations because _____ (cause) _____.

Because of the many threat's salmon face, it is important to take action to prevent further declines in their population. Not only are they important to me, my family, and my community; they are a vital part of the environment, culture, and economy of Whatcom County and the Pacific Northwest. I hope you can help me find a solution to this problem in our community. I urge you to consider this when voting on legislation that can impact those components.

Thank you very much for your attention to issue. With your help, I believe we can find a solution.

Sincerely,

Your name

Your Address

Your City, State, Zip