

Young Jack's Plea for a Raise

Topic: Biography and Writing

Grade Level: 3 - 6

Subject Area: Social Studies, ELA

Time Required: 2 - 3 class periods

Goals

- Investigate primary source material to learn biographical information.
- Demonstrate that letters are written for different purposes and audiences. The tone and style of a letter depend on its purpose and audience.

Essential Questions

How can historical evidence be used to learn about a person's character? What makes an effective persuasive letter?

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- analyze and interpret an historical document.
- write an effective persuasive letter demonstrating that demonstrates an understanding of audience and purpose.

Connections to Curriculum (Standards)

National History Standards Historical Thinking:

3. Historical Analysis and Interpretation
4. Historical Research Capabilities

National Council for History Education:

History's Habits of the Mind 10

Recognize the **importance of individuals** who have made a difference in history, and the significance of personal character for both good and ill.

NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts:

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts.

5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.

12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

Prior Knowledge and Skills

Students should be familiar with letter writing, understand what it means to persuade, and have some context for the subject of the letter.

Historical Background and Context

The archives at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum include more than 8.4 million pages of documents related to JFK's family, his pre-presidential years, and his time as president. Among the wealth of primary source material are thousands of letters, some of which can be used with elementary-age students.

Family letters are of special interest to students and allow them to learn about a historical figure's personality, relationships, and values. "A Plea for a Raise" was written when JFK was ten-years-old. By analyzing this document, students discover some clever techniques that JFK used to convince his father to increase his allowance.

"A Plea" may be used in several ways. Students may analyze it to learn about John F. Kennedy's personality and character, and make connections to the leadership skills he displayed later in life. They may also study it as an example of persuasive writing and use it as a model to prepare their own persuasive letters.

Materials

- Biography of John F. Kennedy
- Document, "Plea for a Raise"
- Graphic Organizer, "Analyzing a Persuasive Letter"
- Graphic Organizer, "Preparing a Persuasive Letter"
- Photograph of John F. Kennedy and his family
- Chart paper
- Examples of letters (friendly, formal, business)
- Envelopes
- Stamps

Procedure

In this lesson, students read and analyze a document written by ten-year-old John F. Kennedy for the purpose of convincing his father to increase his allowance. They use the graphic organizer, "Analyzing a Persuasive Letter," to identify components of a persuasive letter. The graphic organizer, "Preparing a Persuasive Letter," will help students prepare their own persuasive letter.

Activity One: “A Plea for a Raise”

1. Invite students to share their knowledge of letter-writing. What types of letters have they written or received? Record their responses on chart paper, noting the purpose of the letters they have written or received.
2. Ask students, *“Have you ever written a letter to try to change someone’s mind, or convince that person to take a particular action or position?”* Explain that this is called a persuasive letter. *What makes a persuasive letter effective?* Strong arguments, good reasons that will persuade the reader.
3. Show students the photograph of John F. Kennedy as a young boy and elicit students’ prior knowledge of John F. Kennedy. *In 1927, when this future president was ten-years-old, he wrote a persuasive letter. Let’s read it to find out why he wrote it and who he was trying to persuade.*
4. Pass out copies of “A Plea for a Raise.”
5. Guide students to analyze the various components of the document. Here are some suggested questions:
 - To whom is JFK writing? How do you know?
 - What is the purpose of the piece? Why is he writing it?
 - What words and sentences does he use to support his purpose?
 - How has he organized it?
 - Why do you think he chose to make it look like a book?
 - What do you notice about his spelling, grammar, vocabulary?
 - Do you think the quality of his writing supports his purpose?
 - How would you have responded if you were his father?
 - What else do you notice about the document?
 - What questions do you have about it?
6. Students may use the graphic organizer, “Analyzing a Persuasive Letter,” to summarize their findings.
7. Explain that biographers study historical evidence such as photographs and documents to try to learn more about someone’s personality, character, and special qualities, and to learn more details about that person’s life. Ask students to reflect on the document, its effectiveness, and what it reveals about JFK’s personality and character.

Activity Two: *Writing Your Own Persuasive Letter*

1. Explain that students will have a chance to write their own persuasive letter.
2. Brainstorm a list of things that they would like to obtain, change, or convince someone to do.

3. Once students have selected something they want, ask who it is they need to write to—who will be the “audience”? Have them use a blank graphic organizer, “Preparing a Persuasive Letter” to plan their own letter. They should pay special attention to the second part of the handout in which they write convincing reasons to persuade their audience. (They may need to do some research to find out who should receive their letter.)
4. Provide models of letter formats for students according to the audience of their letter (informal, formal, business).
5. Have students write a letter using the information from the handout. Help students find addresses for their letter’s recipient and make sure students include their own address in their letter so that they may receive a response.
6. Have students share their letters before mailing them.
7. Post any responses on a bulletin board.

Assessment

Have students write a response to JFK as if they were his father, Joseph P. Kennedy Sr. The response should refer to details about “A Plea for a Raise” (such as the format of the request, the arguments provided, spelling, grammar, etc.) and explain why or why not the request is granted.

Extensions

1. Discuss the role of president and what qualities one might need to be an effective president. How does “A Plea for a Raise” demonstrate JFK’s potential as a leader, and specifically as president?
2. Have students read JFK’s biography, either individually or as a read aloud. Ask them to look for evidence of JFK’s personal qualities as they read (or listen to) the biography. Have them consider whether these qualities are consistent with those identified in analyzing “A Plea for a Raise.” Are they surprised by any decisions or actions in the biography? Is there biographical information provided in “A Plea for a Raise” that is not included in the biography? (*JFK was a boy scout.*)
3. Discuss ways in which a president might need to be persuasive. You may follow up this discussion with excerpts from some of JFK’s landmark speeches:
 - Remarks of Senator John F. Kennedy at the University of Michigan, Student Union Building Steps, Ann Arbor, Michigan, October 14, 1960
<http://www.jfklibrary.org/universityofmichigan>
 - Address of Senator John F. Kennedy to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association, September 12, 1960
<http://www.jfklibrary.org/houstonministerial>

- Address at Rice University on the Nation's Space Effort, September 12, 1962, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/riceuniversity>
- Radio and Television Report to the American People on Civil Rights, White House, June 11, 1963
<http://www.jfklibrary.org/civilrightsaddress>

Accommodations

Complete the graphic organizers as a whole class.
Write a persuasive letter as a whole class or in small groups.

Additional Resources

Books

Cooper, Ilene. *Jack. The Early Years of John F. Kennedy*
New York: Dutton Children's Books, 2003.

168 pages; illustrated. Includes source notes, bibliographical references, and index.

Note: A description of the childhood and youth of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the thirty-fifth president of the United States.

Grades 6 – 8, and young adult. A thorough look at Kennedy's boyhood and early political career, illustrated with black and white photographs and primary documents such as hand written letters and report cards.

Heiligman, Deborah. *High Hopes. A Photobiography of John F. Kennedy*
Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2003.

64 pages; illustrated. Includes bibliographical references and index.

Note: Photographs and text trace the life of John F. Kennedy.

Grades 4 – 6. This handsomely designed biography, generously illustrated with photographs and primary documents, reveals the impressive accomplishments of Kennedy's abbreviated presidency.

Rappaport, Doreen. Illustrated by Matt Tavares. *Jack's Path of Courage*
New York: Hyperion Books, 2010.

48 pages. Includes bibliographical references, timeline, author's note and illustrator's note.

Grades 2 – 5. One of an impressive series of biographies which include direct quotes from the person. Bold, full-page illustrations and informative but limited text make JFK's life story accessible to younger readers.

Sommer, Shelley. *John F. Kennedy: His Life and Legacy*

New York: HarperCollins, 2005. 152 pages; illustrated. Includes bibliographical references and index.

Note: A look at the many roles of John of Kennedy, how he shaped 20th century history and continues to influence American life today.

Grades 5- 8. Written by a former staff member of the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum, this biography provides interesting anecdotes, photographs from the Kennedy Library, and an introduction by Caroline Kennedy.

Magazines

Cobblestone. JFK Issue. May 2007.

Articles on JFK's early years, the PT- 109, the election of 1960, the New Frontier, foreign affairs, and the assassination. Includes timelines, games, and other activities.

Websites

<http://www.jfklibrary.org/>

The John F. Kennedy Library website includes photographs, biographies, speeches, and lesson plans.

<http://www.nps.gov/history/NR/TWHP/wwwlps/lessons/33jfk/33jfk.htm>

A biographical inquiry-based unit developed by the National Park Service. Focuses on JFK's birthplace at 83 Beals St in Brookline, MA, now a national historic site. Questions guide students in the examination of photographs and texts.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/kennedys/filmmore/index.html>

This site, based on the American Experience from PBS, includes a timeline, photographs, and a family tree.

Analyzing a Persuasive Letter

<p>Purpose — What is the goal of the letter? What is the writer trying to achieve?</p>	
<p>Audience – To whom is the letter written? What is important to know about this person?</p>	
<p>Voice – Is voice of the letter informal or formal? Humorous? Serious?</p>	
<p>Word choice – Identify interesting words or phrases that enhance the letter and help convince the recipient.</p>	
<p>Special Features – What special features or techniques are used to make the message more persuasive?</p>	

Analyzing a Persuasive Letter

Argument: List reasons the author uses to convince the recipient of his/her desired goal.

1.

2.

3.

Preparing a Persuasive Letter

Purpose — What is the goal of the letter? What are you trying to achieve?	
Audience – To whom is the letter being written? Give key information about the recipient. What is important about this person?	
Voice – What should be the voice of the letter? Informal or formal? Humorous? Serious?	

Argument: List at least three reasons to convince the recipient of your desired goal.

1.

2.

3.

A Plan for a raise

By Jack Kennedy

Belonged to my

Mr. J. P. Kennedy

Chapter I

My recent allowance is no 'tilled' word for me. I am and other things of child and that now I am a man and I put away my child things. Before I would spend 20¢ of my 50 allowance and in five minutes I would have empty pocket and nothing to give and 30¢ to live. When I a account of how to buy

cars, no, knowable, blankets, searchlight, books things that will last for years and I can always use it while I can use a chocolate marshmallows sundary with vanilla ice cream and so I put in my plea for a raise of thirty cents for me to buy about things and pay my own way more ahead.

James

John Fitzgerald Kennedy

Transcript of letter

A Plea for a raise

By Jack Kennedy

Dedicated to my
Mr. J. P. Kennedy

Chapter 1

My recent allowance is 40 cents. This I used for areoplanes and other playthings of child hood but now I am a scout and I put away my childish things. Before I would spend 20 cents of my 40 cents allowance and in fixe [five] minutes I would have empty pockets and nothing to gain and 20 cents to lose. When, I am a scout I have to buy

canteens, haversacks, blankets searchlids [searchlights], poncho things that will last for years and I can always use it while I cant use a cholcolate marshmallow sundae with vanilla ice cream and so I put in my plea for a raise of thirty cents for me to buy scout things and pay my own way more around.

Finis

John Fitzgerald Francis Kennedy



A family portrait of the Kennedy children: (L-R) Jean, Bobby, Patricia, Eunice, Kathleen, Rosemary, Jack, and Joe Jr. in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, ca. 1928. Copyright John F. Kennedy Library Foundation