

CALCAGNO CULLEN

Archive as Action: Written Exchanges
and Affirmations to Strangers



GRADE LEVEL: 2-12; can be adapted to various grade levels



OBJECTIVE

This lesson allows students to utilize writing and drawing skills, while developing a connection to, and possibly empathy for, other members of the community.

VOCABULARY

- Greeting, Body, Closing
- Signature, Postscript
- Address
- Communication
- Exchange

MATERIALS

- Pencils/Pens
- Paper
- Ultra-fine tip markers
- envelopes
- postage stamps
- internet/white pages

BEFORE HAND

- Visit the CAC exhibition 'Archive As Action' and discuss the New York City Letter Writing station as part of Calcagno Cullen's installation. You can also view the entirety of the project at nycletters.blogspot.com

DISCUSSION

- Ask students if they have ever received letters or cards in the mail.
- Discuss the differences between receiving a handwritten letter versus a digital message such as through email or social media.
- Think of how and why sending a handwritten letter can be more meaningful and personal than sending a digital message.
- Discuss reasons why you might write a letter.
- Discuss reasons why including a drawing or illustration might be an important part of letter writing, at least for Cullen's NYC Letter project.
- Decide to whom the letters will be sent. This could be to a favorite author, to someone you don't know in a place you've always wanted to visit, to children in the hospital, to folks who are incarcerated, a home for the elderly, etc.
- Once you decide who the letters will be going to, the class can brainstorm what each group may want/need to hear. Often affirmations and encouragement are wanted and received with thanks from most any group.

PROCEDURES

- Show students the standard letter format (including a heading, greeting, body, closing, and signature). At the teacher's discretion, students are welcome to deviate from the standard format for a more artistic feel.
- Have students write their own letters and include drawings, personal anecdotes, and/or positive affirmations. If students are having trouble thinking of what to write, have them think of inspiring and motivating stories to share, as well as things that make them feel happy. Cullen often tells a story about the day, and ends her letters with a question, eliciting a response from the receiver.
- Address and stamp the envelopes and include a Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope to further promote a response if desired.

RESOURCES

- <https://www.grammarly.com/blog/how-to-write-a-letter/>
- http://www.getty.edu/research/special_collections/highlights/artists_letters/index.html
- <http://mentalfloss.com/article/81543/15-handwritten-letters-famous-artists>
- <http://www.theartleague.org/blog/2015/12/18/amazing-letters-from-artists/>

