



## Writing to a Government Official

**Theme:** Government and Law

4th Grade Social Studies

Common Core Standard HSS 4.5—Students understand the structures, functions, and powers of the local, state, and federal governments as described in the U.S. Constitution.

There are three different **levels of government** on which we can rely as United States citizens: **federal**, **state**, and **local**. The **federal government** is the largest one—the president of the United States is part of it. The **state governments** are the next largest—each state has one. State **governors** are part of state governments. Lastly, **local governments** are the smallest. They cover entire counties, but also individual cities. For example, our **mayors** are parts of our local governments.

When we citizens want change, we write to our government **officials**, or heads of government, to pass laws. We citizens make the decision about which government to write (local, state, or federal). If we want change to be made for the whole country, we write to the federal government. If we want change to happen for our state only, we write to our state government officials. If we want change for just our city or county, we write to our local government officials.

Have you ever thought about changing or creating your own law? What would it be? Now's your chance to draft up an **argument** to create one! Each level of government is made up of many **representatives**, or officials. There are many different kinds of representatives to learn about, but for the purpose of this exercise, we are just focusing on the levels of government.

**Materials:**

- 2 pieces of paper
- Pen or pencil

**Developmental Objectives/Domains:** By completing this activity, you will

- 1.) Develop an appreciation for our government and its job serving its citizens.
- 2.) Understand the beginning stage of how laws are passed.
- 3.) Enhance your knowledge of how government officials stay in contact with their **constituents** (the citizens which they serve) and work to **progress** (make better) our societies.

**Procedure:**

1. Think of something you want to change. Is there anything you've noticed about the way our **society** (our greater community) does things that you wish were different? Think of the subject of your **proposition** (the change you are suggesting).
2. Decide what **action** you think should be taken to fix that problem. In other words, what do you want your proposition to say? *Note: This is just for fun! If you want to create a funny proposition, like "Everyone should have to wear his or her shoes backwards on Wednesdays," then write that.*
3. Write down your reasons for why you want this change. What are the **problems** you have identified? List those. Then write down why you think your law will fix those problems and how life will be better if your law is passed.
4. Decide to which level of government you should write. Remember, who will your proposition affect? Will it only affect the people in your city? Then write to your local government. Will it affect everyone in California? Then write to California's state government. Do you want this to affect the whole country? Then write to your federal representatives.
5. Write your letter. Include the reasons you listed in step 3. If you were actually sending this to an official, you would need to **persuade** (convince) him or her. How will you do that? Describe the problem you and your community face. How does it affect you all? How can you fix that? Explain your proposition to him or her.