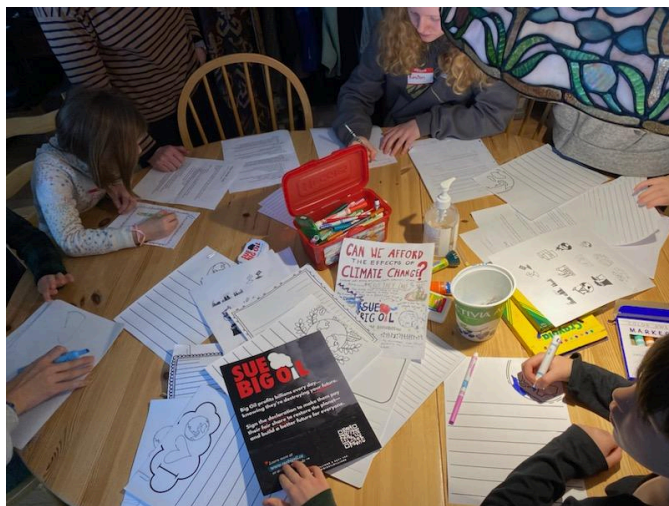


Writing Letters for Change

Note: You may want to split this activity into two meetings—one to learn about successful actions run by kids and make a plan, and the second to write letters.

Your club has talked about the effects of the climate crisis in your neighbourhood, you’ve identified problems in your community, and now you’re ready to put your ideas into action! A simple yet powerful first action for your club is to write letters to your local representatives, city departments, or even companies in your community, making a specific demand. For example,



you could ask your city for dedicated bus lanes or safer sidewalks near your school, or you could petition your school board to switch to renewable fuel sources.

Many politicians, particularly at a local level, spend a lot of time reading letters from their constituents. Your voice counts—even if you aren’t old enough to vote, politicians pay attention when lots of people write to them about the same issue. If you can organize your group to write letters, and inspire others to do the same, you could see real change in your community.

You can send emails to your representatives and local companies, but physical letters are even better. Not only can you make them personal with your handwriting, drawings, and stickers, but also politicians and other community leaders often use physical letters as examples to demonstrate the urgency of an issue. Maybe you’ll even get to hear your own words read out in a city council meeting!

Supplies:

- paper
- pens and pencils
- art supplies, such as markers or pencil crayons
- stickers to decorate your letters, or images to glue onto them
- addresses of local representatives or businesses
- sample letters

Do Ahead:

You could do these steps as the first day of your letter-writing activity, or you could add them onto the end of the map making activity, zine writing, or other club meeting.

1. Read about or watch videos of successful community actions run by kids and families. Ask questions about what you observe in their campaigns:
 - How did they identify a problem in their neighbourhood?
 - How did they successfully argue their case?
 - How did they follow through on their campaign?
2. If you haven't already done this during another activity (such as the **mapping workshop** [\[link\]](#)), brainstorm climate-related problems in your community that need to be solved. The more specific, the better! For example, it's better to advocate for shade trees and structures in your local playground than to write letters complaining about how it's hard to play outside during heat waves. Consider things like:
 - What laws and bylaws are already in place in your community to protect the environment?
 - What technologies and fuel sources are being used in your neighbourhood?
 - What areas of your neighbourhood become particularly dangerous during extreme weather events, such as heat waves and flooding?
3. If you don't already know, research the people in charge of the problem. Do you need to write to the Parks and Recreation department in your city? Is this an issue for your local school board? City council? Local businesses?
4. Find out if there is another local group already working on this problem. You might be able to join forces with another climate action group to amplify your message!

How To:

1. Together, talk about what makes a persuasive letter. Here are some ideas:
 - Start by introducing yourself. Your local representatives want to know who you are!
 - Explain what you want to see changed.
 - Add a few details and facts about the change you want to see, and why it's important. Be brief and persuasive.
 - End with a couple of sentences about how this new change matters to you. How would it benefit your community?
2. Start writing. As you work, help each other by sharing ideas and suggestions.
3. Get creative with your letters! You can add illustrations, stickers, or whatever artistic details you want to draw attention to your message.
4. Make a plan to get your letters into the right hands. Will you mail them to your city council? Drop them off at your school? Put one person in charge, and ask that person to check in with the group when the letters have been delivered.

After the Activity

When you've finished writing your letters, show each other your work and talk about the activity. Some questions you might ask:

- What did you write in your letters? Are there any messages you'd like to share with the group? Why did you choose these particular words or images?
- What do you think the politicians or other people reading your letters will think about your messages? Will you be able to change their minds?
- How will it change your community if your letters work? How will you celebrate?

Take It Further:

- Follow up on your campaign, whether you're successful or not. The [Ontario Nature letter-writing guide](#) has great advice about how to follow up on your letters, no matter what response you get.
- If you haven't teamed up with another climate organization, this might be the time to do it. Is there an ongoing campaign you can join, or someone who can help amplify your ideas? Can you double or triple the number of letters you send if you work with other groups in your community?
- How can you get your friends, classmates, or neighbours involved? After [For Our Kids Burnaby](#) wrote letters to their city council asking them to join the Sue Big Oil campaign, one member of the club got his whole elementary school class involved and ran a letter writing workshop!
- If your city council will be voting on the issue, can you attend and show support? Find out your local council's rules before you go; for example, you may not be able to hold signs in the council chambers, but you might be able to hold a rally outside before the vote.

Resources:

Successful youth-led actions:

- The For Our Kids website is full of examples of kids and families making change happen in their communities: https://www.forourkids.ca/our_stories.
- In collaboration with Sue Big Oil, For Our Kids Burnaby successfully petitioned the Burnaby City Council to join the Sue Big Oil campaign with persuasive and creative letters: https://www.forourkids.ca/for_our_kids_burnaby_resentats_to_the_burnaby_environment_committee_in_support_of_sue_big_oil.
- Climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe has a great roundup of kid-led climate actions, including some suggestions about finding your own place in the climate movement: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PsIL9WC-2cQ>.
- A young activist in Baltimore won her fight to stop a solid-waste incinerator from being built in her community: <https://grist.org/justice/meet-the-black-activist-who-derailed-a-big-polluting-project-before-graduating-college/>.

Resources for letter writing:

- A brief guide and letter template for writing to politicians about fossil fuels: <https://www.barefootbooks.com/blog/post/2022-05-letter-to-representative>.
- Ontario Nature's quick guide includes useful steps for following up on your letter-writing campaign: <https://view.publitas.com/on-nature/effective-letter-writing/>.
- For Our Kids has instructions for writing fun and creative cards to politicians: https://www.forourkids.ca/cards_for_climate.