

ESL Writing Lesson

Using Writing to Help Make Sense of 9/11 Experiences

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As background, read a selection of articles from Issue #33 of *The Change Agent* that are appropriate for your class level.

Overview:

Letter writing is a great way to practice writing about emotions and describing experiences.

Goal:

To express emotions in English about 9/11

Objective:

Students will practice writing a letter to a peer or someone they can confide in, describing their experience on the day of the 9/11 attack.

Level:

Intermediate-advanced

Pre-Writing:

Teacher and students brainstorm adjectives that describe how they felt on 9/11. Students think of people they might like to communicate with by letter about 9/11.

Prompts:

To help students recollect details, use any or all of the following prompts:

- Where were you on 9/11?
- What were you doing?
- Whom were you with?
- What did you do when you found out about 9/11?
- How did you feel?
- Whom are you writing to and why did you pick this particular person?



Free Writing (First Draft) and Sharing

Students write first draft without worrying about spelling, punctuation, or organization. They read out loud what they've written to a partner. Partners ask questions, make suggestions, and help the writer think more about what matters most in their writing. Writers use this conversation to get clear about the main idea of their piece.

Re-Writing (Second Draft)

Students have an opportunity to write a second draft, incorporating new insights they may have gotten from the conversation with their partner. With this draft, students aim to organize their thoughts more coherently. They still don't have to focus too much on spelling and grammar at this point. Teacher reads this draft and makes comments and suggestions.

Repeat the Process (Third and Final Draft)

Now students incorporate suggestions and make final corrections. They can hand-write their letter or type it up on the computer.

Action

- Students send their letters by regular post or by email, although they can also choose not to send their letter.
- Everyone writes on an index card who they can talk to if they feel sad, depressed, or anxious or if they simply have something they want to share.
- Class discusses the availability of mental health services and supports in their community. Look up listings; gather resources.

- Share ideas for incorporating writing into class and everyday life, such as dialogue journaling, diary writing, or memoir writing.

Additional Activity

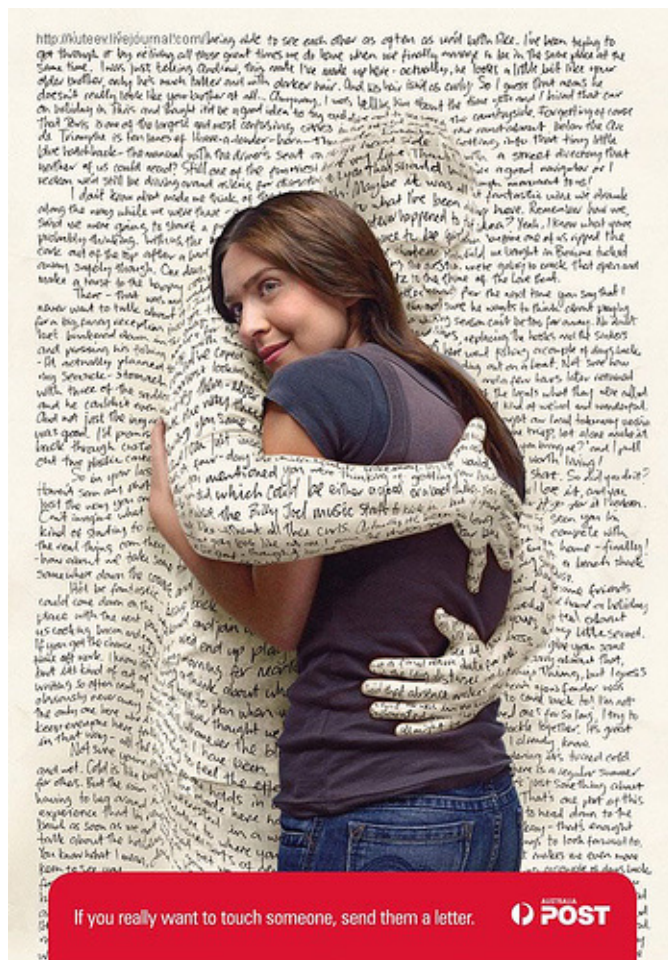
Use the image below as a discussion prompt in the classroom.

- Describe what you see in this image.
- What is the message of this image?
- How do you feel when you receive a letter?
- How do you feel when you send one?

Review

Teacher walks students through a review of the process, including 1) how students felt about reading their partner's letters and any suggestions to make it an easier process; 2) how it felt to write multiple drafts; 3) how they felt about actually sending their letter (if they chose to do so); 4) how the writing process affected them.

Elizabeth Gonzalez teaches at We Make the Road New York. Reference for Online Letter Writing tool: <www.readwritethink.org/letter_generator/files/resources/interactive/>.



This ad reads, “If you really want to touch someone, send them a letter.” It was created by a marketing agency for the Australian postal service.