

Grade 4 Daily Lesson Plans

Day 1: Class discussion to introduce project: What is a social problem? Build background knowledge by discussing and recording student responses to the question of what problems they have observed in their neighborhood. Student responses in my class included homelessness, people with HIV/AIDS, offensive billboards, ocean pollution, violent video games. Expand on the question: What are some social problems in the country? Responses included war in Iraq, gas prices, acid rain, child abuse, endangered species, etc.

Record responses on chart paper and display this and subsequent charts during duration of project for students to use as references.

Home study:

Distribute pocket folders that will become project folders for notes, research material, drafts.

Show parent letter to families. Return tear-off.

Discuss social problems with family members.

Day 2 and 3: Students continue to research the social problems in which they are interested. Many students will need adult help in comprehending material from internet sources or news magazines. These sources are generally not written for children. We broke students up into groups and made sure a teacher, t.a., or parent volunteer worked with each group in turn to break the reading material down for the children. We asked students to pose and answer questions such as, How do homeless children go to school? How do toxins get into the environment? How can we stop acid rain? Are there ways to help homeless people besides giving them money? How many children die from AIDS in a year?

When students had familiarized themselves with their topics, we asked them to write at least one paragraph restating some of the important ideas and facts they had learned. These paragraphs would be used when they composed their business letters.

Home study:

Continue reading and discussing research material with families. Write up the paragraph demonstrating new learning.

Day 4: Discuss and chart: What is a charity? Can you name any charities? Do you and your family donate to or volunteer with any charities? What do those charities do? Students should begin to develop interests in types of charities and the problems they address. Students may be able to make personal connections to issues, needs, or programs.

Home study:

Discuss with families. Begin compiling list of charities (these discussions with families were very productive in my class). If students are proficient with computers, they can begin looking at charity web sites and sharing results in class.

Day 5: Students will begin doing individual research on charities. Demonstrate an internet key word search using a digital projector or by working on a computer with small groups. For example, some students had noticed a van which appeared every evening at a Hollywood street corner, distributing food to a long line of homeless people. We wondered if we could identify this group through internet research, and whether it was an organized charity. We used the keywords **charity homeless food Los Angeles**, and came up with a list of approximately 50 charities. Many were national groups. One group called Food on Foot appeared to be local, and in fact, was the group we sought.

During this stage, unless your classroom is well equipped with computers and printers, you may be able to arrange use of a library, computer lab, etc. so many students can work at once. This is a good opportunity for more experienced students to work with those who are less proficient with the internet. Students should print information on charities in which they are interested and add them to their folders. Students should identify more than one charity which responds to the social problem or problems in which they are interested. If students are already familiar with a charity through family or religious group involvement, so much the better.

Home study:

Continue compiling information if needed.

Read downloaded material (you must specify that students read what they have printed.

Encourage them to highlight, underline, take notes).

Day 6: Discuss the difference between a program and overhead in a charity's budget. Explain that an informed donor tries to find a charity which will make effective use of his donation. Discuss the types of programs that charities might offer – from research to feeding programs, etc. If possible, use a digital projector to demonstrate finding budget information from the IRS website. Students should have some understanding of budgets, percentages, and multi-place numerals. Give students time to find and review data for the charities they are studying. Ask them to identify charities that appear to have a high ratio of program expense to overhead. Refer back to the charities' web sites to determine what programs the charities offer. If possible, invite a guest speaker from a very local charity such as school PTA or other non-profit to discuss the services they offer and their program costs, fundraising, and overhead.

Home study:

Continue compiling and reading information. At this point, review folders to ensure that students have completed meaningful research with evidence that they are reading the material.

Day 7: Discuss criteria for selecting a charity – addresses an important social problem, offers effective programs, makes good use of funds, offers volunteer opportunities, etc. Sort students into groups approximately according to the types of charities they are investigating. Invite students to share information and ideas about which charities they are interested in supporting. By day 6, students should be ready to make their decision.

Day 8: Ask each student to explain to the class which charity he has selected and his reasons. Note which students have chosen the same or similar groups.

Introduce business letters. Show samples if possible. Introduce assignment – each student will write a three paragraph business letter to the charity he has selected explaining why the problem that charity addresses is important, the value of the programs the charity offers, and its effective use of funds. Students may also wish to include any personal interests or connections they have.

Students may have limited experience with business letters. Model business letter format on chart paper, writing a sample letter to a charity the class has discussed, or is in some way interesting. The first paragraph introduces the writer and the Charity Checks project. This paragraph also explains the writer's interest in the problem and its significance. The second paragraph discusses the value and importance of the programs the charity offers. In the third paragraph, the writer expresses his thoughts about or experiences with the problem, and his pleasure in supporting the fine work of this organization. Writer also addresses other possibilities for addressing the problem.

Students discuss their ideas in pairs or small groups and begin making notes for their letters. Ensure that students have adequate research material to accomplish task.

Home study:

Begin rough draft of business letter.

Day 9: With students, develop and list criteria for effective business letter – demonstrates knowledge of the problem and its scope, charity's programs, ratio of program to administrative expenses, makes personal connections; is well-organized, etc. Give students time to develop three paragraphs and do additional research as needed, or share resources with classmates if more than one student has chosen a particular charity.

There are times in our writing workshop program where student work is not considered finished or accepted for grading until the student has produced a quality piece of work which meets all the criteria for a top grade. We will provide support for the student until he reaches this goal. Because the letters would be displayed in the classroom for the students, our sponsor, and other guests to read as well as being sent out into the world, we decided students would revise their letters with as much help and as many times as necessary. Students are encouraged to refer back to the research they have done on previous days.

The following was our list of criteria that we developed as a class:

- Letter introduces the writer.
- Letter briefly explains the Charity Checks program.
- Letter demonstrates understanding of and knowledge about an important social problem.
- Letter demonstrates knowledge of what programs the selected charity offers, its history and/or philosophy, and other important facts.
- Letter demonstrates understanding of how the charity uses its funds.
- Letter clearly explains why the writer has selected this charity.
- Letter demonstrates other ideas about how the writer could contribute to solving this social problem, if appropriate.
- Letter is clearly organized into three paragraphs.

- Letter is free from spelling or other errors.
- Letter follows the format for a business letter.

Home study:

Complete rough draft of business letter.

Day 10: Collect rough drafts and offer students written feedback, including suggestions on improvements where needed. Help students determine whether their letters meet criteria. Read aloud examples of successful drafts for discussion. Allow time for students to develop and revise drafts using written feedback and ideas from shared work.

Home study:

Complete revised draft.

Day 11: Spend time demonstrating proper business letter format, including headings, date, body, and closing. Teach students how to find a mailing address on a web page. Write a model letter on chart paper, marking spacing and format clearly, and display chart prominently. Students adapt their drafts into the correct format. Suggest that typed letters are standard in the business world, but that letters neatly written on lined paper are also acceptable. Some students will need practice in order to head and space letters correctly.

We found that many students had completed successful letters at this point, but some had not. The proficient writers worked on other projects while we spent time in class working with students who needed to do additional research or writing. Students showed unusual motivation in completing their letters, and we had to do less prompting than expected. Some students had to recopy letters several times in order to correct formatting errors.

As completed letters were turned in, we made two photocopies of each. One copy went to Charity Checks for their archives, and one copy of each student's letter was backed on 9"x12" colored construction paper and mounted on the classroom bulletin boards, where they were displayed until after our presentation ceremony. Having their work included in the display was also motivating for students in getting drafts done.

Home study:

Complete draft in business letter format.

Collect letters on to provide feedback and/or corrections as needed.

Day 12: Students design posters to promote charities. Show examples of effective advertising design: simple design, large central image, clean background, attractive colors, good use of space, lettering is easy to read and is part of design, catchy and brief slogan, verbal or visual puns, etc. Students fold blank paper into quarters and draw a different concept and/or design in each quarter. These small sketches are called thumbnails.

Home study:

Complete four thumbnail designs for poster.

Day 13: Ask for volunteers to share thumbnails. Discuss merits and survey class about which concepts and designs are the most effective. Distribute watercolor or other heavy paper and have students lightly rough out design and type in pencil. Students need to ensure that they will have enough room for their lettering, and that all words are spelled correctly before being colored. If students will be using crayon resist technique, demonstrate using crayons to build up wax on the paper so that the watercolor used for the background will “resist” the waxy build-up. Students can also use paper towels or tissues to blot excess watercolor from crayoned areas. Allow time for paint to dry, and flatten posters under heavy books. Mount all posters in classroom.

Day 14: Discuss plans for presentation ceremony. Demonstrate how each student will be introduced to sponsor and will shake his hand, make eye contact, and state briefly his name, the charity he has chosen, and what the charity does. Practice. Demonstrate how to address an envelope and place stamp. Obtain consent forms for media coverage if needed. Confirm whether principal, parents, PTA members, or other guests will be present. Discuss with students etiquette for hosting guests in classroom. We found that Charity Checks provided many suggestions for facilitating the presentation.

Day 15: Presentation of checks and mailing letters. If possible, a ceremonial walk to the nearest mailbox is very effective as each student places his own letter and check in the box. For many students, this will be the first time they have mailed a letter.

Home study:

Discuss feelings about the project and the ceremony with family members.

Day 16 and 17: Thank-you notes to class sponsor, Charity Checks personnel, and/or others. Share responses to project and discuss the purpose of a thank-you note. Use student ideas to write several model thank-you notes. If time permits, have students reproduce miniature versions of their posters on the notes using watercolor pencils and/or crayons.

Be sure students refer back to their folders for accurate spelling. Collect project folders in a central location as part of the classroom library and so that thank-you notes from the charities can be entered.

Extension: We returned to this project later in the year as we studied magazine articles as a type of expository writing. Using examples from “Scholastic News,” “Kids Discover,” “Time for Kids, etc. students investigated social problems which concerned them, using the internet, magazines, newspapers, interviews with knowledgeable campus or local sources, etc. to research and write “articles” about these problems, informed by awareness they had developed during the Charity Checks project.