

Social Studies 9: Consumerism Unit

Letter to the Editor

One way individuals can use the media to influence Canadian society is through the use of “letters to the editor”. Most newspapers will devote a section of the paper for people to express their ideas and opinions on various issues, often referred to as the editorial page.

People will take the time to write a letter to the editor when they are passionate about an issue. Politicians recognize that in our busy world, if someone stops to spend part of their day expressing their opinions, it must be important to that person (and could be important to a whole lot of other people who didn't take the time to express their opinions). So these letters can be an important tool for changing or creating new laws.

Your assignment:

Choose one area of focus that you are interested in relating to the issues of consumerism. For example, you may want to discuss the impact of consumerism on the environment. Because letters to the editor are usually written to encourage change, you want to discuss the problems created by consumerism, in addition to the solutions to those problems. On the other hand, you may believe that consumerism isn't all that bad, and all of those people out there telling us it is a problem are just fear mongers – in that case you would want to discuss why consumerism is not a problem and how people can respond to those who say it is. Remember, the stronger your evidence, the stronger your arguments.

Many papers will receive dozens of letters every day, so to make your letter stand out, here are some hints:

- Your letter should state your belief or opinion. It should also give reasons why you feel this way. Your purpose is to try to **convince readers to feel as you do**.
- Include your name, address, email address and phone number at the top of your letter. Editors often require this information because they will need to verify your identity. You can state that this information is not to be published.
- **Be concise** and focused. Remember that short, concise letters sound confident. Long, wordy letters give the impression that you're trying too hard to make a point.
- Be sure to have **specific evidence** to support your point of view
- Think of **interesting and engaging** ways to get your point across. You will probably need to write several drafts of your letter to condense your message.
- Don't appear to be overly emotional. You can avoid this by limiting your exclamation points. Also avoid insulting language.
- **Proofread** your letter. Editors will ignore letters that contain bad grammar and poorly-written rants. The use of **key terms** will help to make your writing more convincing

BONUS

Many editorial pages will include an opinion piece written by an employee of the newspaper, which is often accompanied by an editorial cartoon. As a bonus opportunity for this assignment, find an editorial cartoon that has already been created and explain why you feel this cartoon best supports the ideas in the cartoon. Or take it even further and create your own editorial cartoon (artistic skill will be considered secondary to the effort and relevance of your idea).