The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects. Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom. In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. The activity is structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Students are encouraged to further reflect on the issues.

Core Skill Sets:
These icons identify the most relevant core skills students will develop using this resource. Learn more about the WE Learning Framework at www.WE.org/we-at-school/we-schools/learning-framework/.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- To date, over 3 million actions have been taken for Amnesty International's Write for Rights, including letters, emails, petition signatures and social media shares (Amnesty International).
- Journalists, political opponents, land defenders, Indigenous rights defenders, dissidents, civil society leaders and student organizers are the most common targets of harassment and unfair arrest (Amnesty International).
- Azerbaijani journalist Khadija Ismayilova, who works for Radio Free Europe, was sentenced to seven years in prison in a case that was widely criticized by human rights organizations; she was targeted for her investigative work into the finances of the ruling Aliyev family (New York Times).
- Lawyer Malek Adly criticized the Egyptian government's handing over of territory to Saudi Arabia and called for an inquest into human rights abuses by security forces; he was jailed in Egypt as part of a larger crackdown on free speech on trumped-up charges including plotting to overthrow the state (New York Times).
- Hamid Ghasemi-Shall was born in Iran and immigrated to Canada after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. He was in Iran in 2008 to visit his mother when he was arrested, accused of being a spy and sentenced to death. He was held for 64 months before returning to Toronto. His brother died in prison in Iran, reportedly of cancer. (Toronto Star and Maclean’s).
- In 2013 it was reported that over 1,590 Canadians are in foreign prisons, many of whom don’t receive support from the Canadian government (Toronto Star).
- Recent high profile cases of Canadians detained overseas who were supported by massive campaigns for release include John Greyson and Tarek Loubani, detained in Egypt and Homa Hoodfar, detained in Iran (Globe and Mail and CBC).
- Amnesty International has a network of 2,500 letter writers including many students and classes as part of their Urgent Action Network in Canada (80,000 around the world) (Amnesty International).

**KEY TERMS**

**Prisoners of conscience**—People who have been jailed because of their political or religious beliefs, ethnic origin, sex, colour, language, national or social origin, economic status, birth, sexual orientation or other status providing they have not used or endorsed violence.

**Slow activism**—Originally referring to craft-activism (using arts and crafts to create community), now refers to traditional, non-digital ways of organizing action.

**Clicktivism**—A blend of “click” and “activism,” clicktivism refers to the trend of social justice causes migrating online. Clicktivism includes exclusively digital actions such as signing online petitions and sharing causes on social media and is often used as a criticism in contrast to digital activism, which is a tool used to support traditional modes of organizing action.
THEMES AND COURSE CONNECTIONS

• **Themes**: Human Rights, Local Issues, Global Issues, Communication, Community, Values and Ethics, Socially Conscious Living
• **Course Connections**: Language, Social Studies

MATERIALS

• Front board
• Paper and writing utensils
• Computer/tablet with Internet access

SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS AND LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

• Recognize how letter writing can effect change on social issues
• Understand how advocacy and communication can help to create a better world
• Write letters to encourage communication, advocacy, support and relationship-building

MAP IT

Have students locate the countries and cities mentioned in the Global Voices article on a world map to demonstrate the expanse and interconnectedness of the issue.

• Iraq
• Azerbaijan
• Egypt
• India
• Iran

DISCUSS

1. What is the purpose of writing letters? Consider your own ideas and find reasons given in the Global Voices article.
2. How is writing physical letters different than digital forms of communication? Consider the act of writing and receiving letters.
3. What was the last handwritten letter that you wrote? Why is letter writing so unpopular?
4. In your opinion, what is the best form of communication and why?
5. What is Amnesty International? What is their purpose?
6. What is clicktivism? What are the pros and cons of clicktivism?
7. What might the “healing element” be in writing letters?

DIVE DEEPER

Have students try writing a letter for a cause they care about. Letter writing can serve many purposes including, but not limited to:

• Communication
• Advocacy
• Support
• Building or maintaining relationships

Ask students to select the type of letter they would like to write. Students may choose to write letters to the following:

• A family member such as a grandparent to help build their relationship
• A member of the Canadian Armed Forces to show support and learn more about what they do
• Their local Member of Parliament in regard to an issue affecting their community or to an MP who is Minister of a specific department
• Join Amnesty International’s Write for Rights campaign

Review the standard conventions for writing a letter (clear and concise, polite, free of grammar and spelling errors, following an introduction, body and conclusion format, etc.). Ensure students introduce themselves and explain the purpose of their letter, if applicable. If students wish to receive a reply they should mention that in the letter.

Encourage students to perform background research and create an outline or draft before writing the final version to organize their thoughts. Students may benefit from a peer review session.

Be sure to mail the letters to make this exercise more purposeful for students.

RESOURCES

Amnesty International [www.amnesty.ca](http://www.amnesty.ca)
Amnesty International’s Write for Rights campaign [www.writeathon.ca](http://www.writeathon.ca)