



Writing Project: The Protest Letter

Hope: A Platform for Change

Related Subjects: Art, English, History, & Civics

Grades: 8-12

In the spirit of the ICA's exhibition, *Shepard Fairey: Supply & Demand*, we offer secondary Art, English, History, and Civics teachers this learning opportunity for exploring key historical figures featured in the artist's work. In this lesson students will evaluate the political or activist career of a historical figure featured in Fairey's work and then will prepare a protest letter as a symbol of their own citizen action.

Writing Procedure:

1. First, the student will select one of the following world leaders or historical figures featured in Shepard Fairey's heroic graphic portraits.
2. The student will perform preliminary research in order to prepare a profile of their figure; identifying and describing significant events during his/her career as well as personal motivations.
3. From this list, the student must identify an issue that he/she personally cares about (e.g. cure for poverty, end to violence, curbing the drug trade, overcoming racism, stemming pollution, supporting community pride, family etc).
4. The student will address their chosen figure and prepare a letter directing him/her to bring about change regarding the selected issue. As an alternative, the student can address their letter to a current person of influence. The student should be specific about the outcome they would like to see as a result of their protest letter. This persuasive letter will be approximately 500 words or less.

Your Protest Letter should include:

- I. To—address to whom your letter is directed and why
- II. Issue—identify and explain the issue
- III. A solution
- IV. The necessity of the immediacy of the change

This protest letter is a modified version of the 2007 activity by Stace Budzko, WallTalk teacher at the ICA.

World Leaders:



Barack Obama (U.S., 1961-)
Shepard Fairey, *Obama HOPE*, 2008,
Courtesy of Obey Giant Art



Richard Nixon (U.S., 1913-1994)
Shepard Fairey, *Nixon Stamp*, 2000,
Courtesy of Obey Giant Art



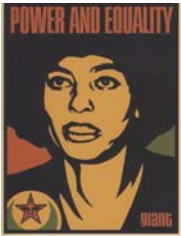
Fidel Castro (Cuba, 1926-)
Shepard Fairey, *Obey Castro*, 2003



Joseph Stalin (Russia, 1878-1973)
Vladimir Illyich Lenin (Russia, 1870-1924)
Mao Zedong (China, 1893-1976)

Shepard Fairey, *Giant Stalin*, 1997; *Giant Lenin*, 1997; *Obey Korean Soldier*, 1998; *Obey Mao*, 1997;
 Courtesy of Obey Giant Art

Activist Historical Figures:



Angela Davis (1944-)
 Shepard Fairey, *Giant Angela Davis*, 1998,
 Courtesy of Obey Giant Art



Emiliano Zapata (1879-1919)
 Shepard Fairey, *Zapata*, 1999, Courtesy of Obey Giant Art

Sample Protest Letter:

Excerpt from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," April 1963

Available online at http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html

My Dear Fellow Clergymen: **(Audience)**

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct action campaign **(solution)** that was "well timed" in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation **(issue)**. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."

We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward gaining political independence, but we still creep at horse and buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, "Wait." But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six year old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white

people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five year old son who is asking: "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?"; when you take a cross county drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored"; when your first name becomes "nigger," your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John," and your wife and mother are never given the respected title "Mrs."; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness"--then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience **(personal narrative)**.