AP Lang Social Justice Paper

**Context:** It’s the political season. This year, social justice issues are hot-button topics. We’ve been reading about issues of Man’s inhumanity to Man all year, from Grapes of Wrath, Persepolis, and Maus to The Jungle, Nickel & Dimed, and Fast Food Nation. Don’t forget the articles, too, from the articles of the week to in-class hand-outs to the Bedford Reader. Over this year, it has been my hope that you will have used these texts as a lens through which to view your world. The events in these texts didn’t happen in a vacuum, and they are as relevant today as they were when the texts were written. The issues still exist, in one form or another. My second hope is that you not only learned that the issues exist and that you can recognize them around you, but that you want to *do* something about them. This class has been all about understanding how arguments are made, how voices are used. It’s time to use yours.

**Assignment:** Write a letter to a (currently running or currently serving) politician (legislator (like a congress person or a person on a board or council) or executive (like a president, a governor, a mayor, a superintendent, etc.). Which politician you choose is up to you; more about how you will decide later. Take a position on a social justice issue and advocate for a ***specific solution*** to a problem you see.

**Procedure:**

Step One: Decide what makes you angry. Preferably you will have found something in one of our readings that has spoken to you and made you feel there was a wrong that needed to be righted.

Step Two: Articulate your topic area. Are we talking about political corruption? Crime? Homelessness? Unemployment? Discrimination? Addiction? Poverty? Hunger? Welfare and public assistance? What is the general topic?

Step 2.5: Research. Dig into your topic and find the current state of your subject. Worried about homelessness? Find out the current state of homelessness (Locally? Regionally? Nationally? (Globally?)). You’re not only looking for numbers and the scope and scale of the problem, but you’re looking for descriptions and examples. What is life like for people in these conditions? Think of the descriptions we were given in all of our texts…not just throwing statistics at you, but piling on the real life examples and descriptions.

Step Three: Narrow that topic and articulate your position on it. What, exactly, is the problem we have? WHY do you think this wrong should be righted? What benefits will accrue because this concern is addressed? Financial gains? The ending of suffering? Advancements in arts and culture? Will we be safer? Healthier? Happier? Come up with three reasons why this wrong should be righted (see the “common audience motivation” list). Also, decide on a locale. Are we local? Regional? National? Global?

Step 3.5: Cluster. Group the research you’ve already done – all the numbers, and stories, and examples, and descriptions, etc. – under the banner of each of the three reasons/arguments/motivations you developed in Step three. If you’re arguing that fixing this problem will make everyone healthier then this is where you highlight or group or cluster or whatever all the supporting material you’ve found that will make us healthier. Feel free to organize this information graphically if it will help you.

Step Four: Research. Now that you know WHAT you want fixed and WHY you want it fixed, figure out HOW you want it fixed. Research potential solutions. Odds are, if you’re worked up over a problem and if you see a “wrong” out there to be righted, someone else has seen it, too. Also, it’s likely that there are already proposed solutions for you to find. I don’t require you to invent a solution to “food deserts.” If you DO have what you think is an original idea for how to solve the problem, then research the feasibility of your solution. If you DON’T have an original idea, then research the feasibility of other proposed solutions. What has and hasn’t been tried before? How did it work out? Are there solutions to the problem that are working elsewhere that could be used or adapted for use “here” (wherever your “here” is in this case)?

Step Five: Decide. What solution is best for the situation in the time and place you want to solve it? What is it about your solution that makes it the best? Why, if I am the person to whom you are writing, the person you are exhorting to take action, why should I work to implement this particular solution? What exactly is the plan? What are its benefits? What are its complications?

Step Six: Audience. To whom are you writing? Who is the legislator or executive who is best situated to implement your proposed solution? Factors to consider:

* Viewpoint: how aware of the issue is your audience? If they are aware of the issue and the considerations involved in it, how do they feel about it? Are they opposed to your ideas or would they be poem to them? How can you find out their position? The more public a figure you choose, the easier it will be to discover their position on your issue (or at least a related one).
* Sphere of influence: What “level” of politician are you soliciting? The greater his or her sphere of influence, the more he or she can affect. However, this means he or she will also, likely, have more obstacles in his or her way, and it means you will have less influence upon him or her and less direct access to him or her. The mayor of Dearborn can be seen personally by you and has a much easier time making changes than does the P.O.T U.S., however, all the mayor can affect is Dearborn. The more remote the politician is to you in terms of power, accessibility, and influence, the greater the risk of failure on your part to make change and the greater the potential reward if you do.
* Power: Can the person get done what needs to be done? The P.O.T.U.S. can't change the sales tax rate in Michigan, so writing to for that purpose means you have the wrong person.

Step Seven: Outline. Organize your information into a cohesive while, deciding what information should go where. Experiment with this: where is the best place to include counter arguments, either to the reasons/arguments/motivations you are providing or to the plan you are proposing?

Step Eight: Draft. Craft the organized information into sentences. (You know, finally write the paper.) ALSO, find the address where you will be mailing the letter.

Step Nine: Peer Edit. Using a checklist and the rubric and two other people in our class, have people who aren’t you read and respond to your paper.

Step Ten: Revise. Using the feedback from step nine, make corrections to your letter.

Step Eleven: Peer Edit again!

Step Twelve: Final Draft. Make your final version, formed and addressed as a letter and ready to drop into the mail, including an envelope and stamps, etc.

**Requirements:**

--Paper must revolve around a social justice issue. Topic must be approved by instructor (just to make sure we’re all on the same page as regards what makes a “social justice” issue. (i.e. – some kids’ parents may not let them play GTA V…not a social justice issue; only 44% of the world has access to the internet…okay, we can work with that)

--Paper must be a *process* paper. You must follow the steps. If you just show up with a final paper, don’t show up….

--Paper must follow MLA format. All sources must be properly cited in-text. All cited sources must be included in a properly formatted MLA works cited list. All formatting conventions (header, etc) must be correct.

--Paper must be a letter, in letter form.

--Paper must use a minimum of TEN (10) sources. Of those sources, at least THREE (3) must be from texts we used in class (first or second semester, regardless of Mr. Palise’s class or Mr. Atkins’s class), and at least FIVE (5) must be found through independent research on the part of the student.

--A word about sources: be choosy about where you get your information. Analyze sources for potential bias. Choose sources who will *increase* your ethos with your particular audience.

--Paper must include argument and your own ideas, but must be built upon a solid foundation of research. If this is simply a diatribe that you throw down in a fit of pique, it will not bode well for you.

--Paper must include the intentional use of at least FIVE (5) different rhetorical strategies (see approved list). On the version of the paper you give to Mr. Palise, these intentional uses of the different rhetorical strategies must be indicated in some way (highlighted, underlined, etc) and labeled.

--Paper must be mailed to the politician to whom it is addressed, send through USPS.

--Paper must also be turned in to Mr. Palise

--Spelling and grammar count

--Paper must include summary, paraphrase, and direct quotation when synthesizing information from sources

**Skills assessed:**

--Argumentative writing (as you take a position and justify it using logical reasoning with main points of your own construction

--Synthesis writing (as you take disparate sources and information and use them to support your position and its arguments)

--Rhetorical Analysis (as you analyze the sources you will use in your paper or in your research to determine what the author’s purpose was and whether or not the information will bolster or undermine your positions)

--Use of ethos (as you choose sources that add (or detract from) your credibility)

--Use of pathos (as you carefully craft language to have a specific emotional effect on your intended audience and as you choose supporting materials that appeal to the emotions of the audience)

--Use of logos (as you construct specific logical arguments that use reasoning and evidence to prove your claims)

--Ability to weigh and select among possible pieces of evidence and example in order to defend and support your position

--Audience analysis (as you determine who the best person to receive your message is and tailor your message to that specific audience)

--Rhetorical strategies (as you determine which effect you want to create and then pick and choose among your tools for the one most appropriate or effective for the job)