



Letter to Self – Activity

By Katie Gould, PBS NewsHour Extra Teacher Resource Producer

Introduction

In this very personal activity, students have the chance to write a letter to themselves to open either at the end of the school year or on next New Year’s Eve.

Subjects

This activity can be assigned in any class, though it draws most heavily on ELA skills

Estimated Time

20 minutes

Grade Level

6-12

Materials

Blank sheets of paper

Envelopes

Pen/pencil

Optional: staples and duct tape

Warm Up Activity

To get students to turn their focus on the past year, show them the Google Year in Search video (1:30 minutes) which can be found on the PBS NewsHour Extra [Celebrate 2014: Looking back and moving forward](#) page. You may wish to ask students to respond to the events in the video:

- What stories do you think were the most important and why?
- Were there any stories that you felt were missing from the video?

Main Activity

1) Optional: Show students the History Channel’s video on the history of New Year’s (which can also be found at the top of the PBS NewsHour Extra [Celebrate 2014: Looking back and moving forward](#) page) to help students think about the diverse traditions and colorful history of the beloved holiday.

2) Tell students that they now have the chance to write a letter to themselves as a celebration of the way things were and the way things might be in the future in their own lives. Prompt students to choose from the following topics and then write about them in the letter to themselves. Suggested topics:

- What was great about 2014? What was bad?

- Do you think you changed over the last year? How?
- Who are your friends and why?
- What are your favorite and least favorite things? Think food, colors, clothes, hobbies, sports, music, classes, etc.
- Do you think you will change over the next year? How and in what ways?
- Do you have any predictions about the next year?
- If you could give your future self one piece of advice, what would it be?

Important: Tell the students that they are the only person who will ever read their letter (unless they choose to share it with others). This means that they can write in any language, draw pictures, do a great job or not such a great job – because they are the only ones who will ever know. You can offer to keep the letters in a large manila envelope that you can staple and duct tape close to prove that you won't open and read them (under no circumstance should you open and read them). Or they are free to keep the letter themselves and open them at the end of the school year or the end of 2015.

3) Give the students 15 minutes in class to write and provide them with as many sheets of blank paper as they would like. You can also provide a stapler and duct tape so students can seal them up before they give them to you to keep or to deter themselves from opening them early. You should also do yourself a favor and write your own letter – you will treasure it just as much as your students will.

4) At the end of the time, collect the letters that have been given to your care, stuff them in the big class envelope and make a big show of closing and duct taping it shut. Place it, ideally, in a filing cabinet that only you have access to (one with a lock is even better).

Conclusion

At the end of the school year dig out the envelope and pass them back to your students. Everyone should open the letters at the same time, but remind students that the letters are private and they should only share them if they want to with their classmates (I don't recommend them sharing the letters, because that could create pressure on other students to share). Enjoy!