



THE NATIONAL
WWII MUSEUM

“Dear Ma and Pa”

Primary Documents:
Letters Home from the War

A Lesson Plan from
the Education Department of the
The National WWII Museum

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Dear Ma and Pa

Primary Documents: Letters Home from the War

Letters written by soldiers in World War II to family, loved ones, and friends were a lifeline between the writer and those on the home front. By carefully reading these letters, students can learn much about the intricacies of war, and the emotions, fears, and desires of soldiers away from home. Letters are primary sources by which we can peek into the private thoughts of the writer and hear his or her perspectives of the war.

OBJECTIVE: By reading a soldier's letters and answering questions about them, students will learn about the individual soldier's experience in World War II and discover how to use letters as a primary source for research. After answering the questions, students will be able to write their own letters home in the style of the examples.

BENCHMARKS: **Grades 7-8:** H-1A-M4; H-1A-M5; H-1A-M6, H-1B-M16; H-1B-M17; H-1C-M17
Grades 9-12: H-1A-H2; H-1A-H3; H-1A-H4; H-1B-H13

DIRECTIONS:

1. Pass out copies of the four letters by Edward Jennings to students to read or have students read them out loud.
2. Pass out worksheet questions for students to complete.
3. Hold a short discussion about the use of letters as a primary source of historical information. Explore the pros and cons of using such a source.
4. Assign students the task of writing a letter of their own to a loved one. The theme of the letters can be either the most frightening or the most exciting experience in each student's life. They should write as if they are in or near that moment in their lives.
5. Students can volunteer to read their letters to the class.

ASSESSMENT: Components for assessment include the worksheet and the student-written letter.

ENRICHMENT: Have students create their own WWII personalities based on what they have learned in the classroom or on further research in the library. As these characters, students write letters home describing camp life, battlefield experiences, personal thoughts about war, and what they miss most about home. They must be careful to use accurate language and content of the time period.

Dear Ma and Pa
Questions about the Edward Jennings' letters

Directions: Write your answers in the blanks and list the letters where your answers are found. If you use quotes, be sure to put quotation marks around them.

1. What assignment did Jennings get when he arrived in England? _____

2. According to letter #1, how long will Jennings serve in the Army? _____

3. Why can't Jennings write details about where he is posted? _____

4. Do we know where Jennings was on D-Day? _____

5. What does Jennings think about the war? _____

6. What evidence is there that Jennings misses home? _____

7. What do these letters tell you about wartime conditions in England? _____

8. What do you think is blacked out in Letter #4? _____

9. What can you tell about Jennings' personality from these letters? _____

Directions: Read the following four letters written by Edward Jennings to his mother during WWII. He wrote more than 100 letters to his family between March 30, 1943 when he entered the Army and September 25, 1945 just before he was discharged.

Pay attention both to the facts and the mood of the letters. Look up any words you do not understand. Answer the questions that follow.

*Sunday
October 24, 1943
England*

Dear Ma,

I have waited until now to write you this letter to let you know that I am stationed somewhere in England, I arrived safe & sound after a disagreeable voyage. I went from the port where I landed to a replacement seaport which was a beautiful place. From there I was assigned to the Division I am now with and shall be with as an artilleryman for the duration & six months. I will write a letter tomorrow & give you more details, although censorship being very strict, I won't be able to write anything but general matter. But this V-mail will reach you more quickly so you can be assured I am in fine health & as satisfied as one can be in my shoes.

So until tomorrow, I am,

*Your loving son,
"Ed"*

Letter #1

Dear Ma and Pa, 5

*Sunday
June 4, 1944
England*

Dear Mom,

Have been receiving your letters regularly and also another letter from Mrs. Hawlin which I lost somewhere. I am eating cheese sandwiches up here at the Red Cross while I write so you will have to excuse any smudges from here on in. As usual, everything is still OK and uneventful. I sent you a package last week with a few articles in it including the pair of civilian shoes which need repair. But don't send them back until I ask for them. Also, if you can get a hold of one, please send me a cigarette lighter as matches are scarce. And just as quick as you can send me a safety razor because mine is broken & until I receive it I will have to borrow which will become increasingly difficult. Please rush those two, Ma, if you can. I went to confession yesterday to the Dominican Fathers.... They are the ones that wear white robes with black cloaks. It was an interesting experience. You must be doing quite well for yourself nowadays with a nice big car, etc.... How did Paul make out with his exams? After that comes a vacation. Would that I could have one also. Well, I guess that is all for tonight, Ma. So for a while I remain

*Your loving son,
"Ed"*

Letter #2

Letter #3

Sunday
June 11, 1944
England

Dear Mom,

Well, as you now know, the invasion has begun and the anxiety of waiting and wondering is over. Now the decisive period comes. As you can easily see and as all the papers say that only was the beginning. There is still a lot to come. Concerning your son Ed, you have as yet no need to worry. I am safely situated in a chair up here at the Red Cross. My time is yet to come. We will all know when soon enough....

At last the beginning of the end has come. Now everyone is waiting for our own personal future to unravel. I went to Mass and Communion this morning and am going to try to go next week for Fathers Day. The day when the old man gets a break for a change. I'll bet at this moment, 8:40 P.M., Dad is sitting in the living room chair with his right ear to the radio and his left leg crossed over his right smoking a cigarette. That's who Fathers Day is for—men like Dad who work day after day getting very little thanks for their work yet going on just the same. I suppose I will be in that position some day....

I have received three letters from you in the past week up to June 2. Well, this is all for now, Mom. I am in fine health so please don't worry. Give my love to Dad and Paul and tell Dad I will write during the week. So for now good bye. I remain,

Your loving son,
"Ed"

Letter #4

Sunday
July 16, 1944
Somewhere in France
In a foxhole

Dear Mom,

Well, I imagine you must be a bit anxious about me since I haven't been able to write in quite some time. But believe me there is a reason. Right now I am in a foxhole just as far below the ground as I can get. And this is the safest place to be for those German 88's are really rugged. Naturally, censorship is very strict and I can tell you practically nothing except that at the present moment I am all right. So don't worry. If it's in the books, I'll be back to see you before very long. But do me a favor will you? The next time Kaulin starts to cry about the heat down in Texas, tell him for me that he doesn't know how lucky he is. Also tell him to stop wishing to get in and start praying he stays where he is because its Hell with a capital H.

The people themselves are very friendly with a few exceptions, the result of four years of German occupation. Americans are well liked. And when you ride through the streets the houses are covered with French flags & quite a few stars & stripes. And as you go along, the people wave, some hold up their fingers in the sign of a V, others throw flowers or candy at you. Little children calling Viva l'Amerique. That part of it is romantic and thrilling but this part up here is just war and war is neither thrilling nor romantic. It's just dirt, danger and hard work....

I receive your letters regularly and am very glad to hear about Paul and his farm work. Give Dad my love and tell him to keep praying as he always had & I will try to do my part. Well, that is all Ma, as it is getting a bit noisy around so until my next chance, I remain

Your loving son,
"Ed"

P.S. What a way to spend my birthday.

