Greetings from Far Away: Writing Informal Letters with V-Mail

OVERVIEW
Students will learn about the use, process, and historical context of Victory Mail (V-Mail) during World War II. Using V-mail as a basis, students will also learn about the elements of and how to write an informal letter. Students will practice their new letter writing skills using a V-Mail template.

OBJECTIVES
Students will...
- Understand the history of V-Mail and its processes.
- Name and identify the five elements in an informal letter.
- Write an informal letter that includes the five elements.

KEY VOCABULARY
- **Victory Mail or V-Mail**: the primary form of secure mail between civilians and military personnel used by the United States government during WWII
- **Informal Letter**: a letter written to someone you know well, like a friend or family member
- **Heading**: located at the top, right of your letter, it includes the sender’s line-by-line address followed by the date
- **Greeting**: the beginning of your letter
- **Body**: the main part of your letter that includes a clear topic
- **Closing**: the end of your letter
- **Signature**: your name either printed or signed

BACKGROUND INFORMATION
16 million Americans served in the military during WWII, many of which were stationed at overseas bases. Without the technology we have today, letter writing was a fundamental source of communication. Unfortunately, mail bags with letters to service men and women were very heavy and took up a lot of space in cargo planes traveling with other important supplies. In order to lighten the load, but still provide the essential need for soldiers to communicate with their loved ones, Victory Mail (V-Mail) was developed.

Letters were written on small pieces of paper (7 x 9 1/8 inches) and sent to the post office. What followed was a tedious, but necessary process! Letters were sent through censors, photographed, and saved as negatives using microfilm (a very small form of the original letter). These microfilm negatives could fit thousands of letters—the difference of hundreds of pounds being shipped overseas! Once they arrived at their processing facility overseas, the negatives would be developed and...
printed into large sheets. The large sheets were cut into single V-Mail letters, placed in new envelopes, sorted, and distributed.

**ACTIVITY PROCEDURE**

**Introduction (5-10 mins):** Ask students about letters: What is a letter? Have they written/received one? What is the difference between a hand-written letter and an e-mail? Explain to students that during WWII, hand-written letters were one of the primary forms of communication. Since 16 million Americans were enlisted in the military, many of them would write and receive letters that needed to be flown overseas. In order to "lighten the load", **Victory Mail (V-Mail)** was developed. Use the PDF slides to show pictures and describe the V-Mail process.

**Activity #1 - V-Mail Process (10 mins):** Using the photo slides as an aid, describe the V-Mail process to students.

It was more than just writing a letter and putting it in the mailbox! Letters were sent through a censor, photographed, and placed on microfilm negatives, then shipped (usually by air) to locations across the globe. Once they arrived on base, staff would develop and print the film onto large sheets of paper. Lastly, letters were cut, sorted, and delivered to service men and women. The photos shown were taken on a base in Papa New Guinea.

**Activity #2 - Elements of an Informal Letter (10-15 mins):** Next, students will learn about and identify the essential elements in an informal letter using V-Mail as an example.

Most V-Mail letters were **informal letters**, meaning they were friendly letters written to people who knew each other well. Ask students to provide examples of who you might write informal letters to (best friend, brother, mom, grandpa, etc.). Every informal letter has **five elements**: the heading, the greeting, the body, the closing, and the signature.

**The heading** is located on the top right of the page and includes the sender’s name and address (street name, city, state, and zip code) followed by the date. **The greeting** is a friendly beginning to your letter. Ask students to provide examples of a greeting (Dear..., Hello, Hi, Greetings, etc.). **The body** is the main part of your letter. It should include at least three sentences on a clearly defined topic. **The closing** is the end of your letter. This is usually a way to say goodbye. Ask students to provide examples of a closing (talk to you later, keep in touch, with love, hugs and kisses, etc.). **The signature** is your name written or signed at the end of the letter. Remind students that you do not have to write your given name, sometimes the writer will use a nickname. Ask students to provide examples of a signature (Bob, Nancy, Mom, Dad, Pop Pop, Your Sweetheart, etc.).

Lastly, use the example V-Mail letter in the final slide from the V-Mail processing document to identify the five elements of an informal letter. Additional letters are provided if more practice is needed.

**Activity #3 - Writing V-Mail Using the Informal Letter Format (25-30 mins):** Now that students know what V-Mail is and how to write an informal letter, they will write a V-Mail to a classmate. Allow students a notebook or scratch paper to draft their V-Mail letter. Only use the printed V-Mail worksheet when their letter is ready. Letters can be placed in a classroom mailbox or given directly to the teacher to "run through the mail censor" for assessment before delivering the letters to recipients.

**Conclusion (5 mins):** Tell students writing letters can be a fun form of communication, even with access to e-mail today. Before ending the lesson, show students an example of a V-Mail letter and choose an element of an informal letter for them to identify for a formative assessment. Provide post-its that can be stuck to the whiteboard under the element name or popsicle sticks with names/numbers to place in buckets with the element name written on it.
ASSESSMENT
A rubric is recommended for the V-Mail letter writing activity for a summative assessment. An example rubric for a 2nd-3rd grade student is provided below. The rubric can be modified for older students to include criteria such as vocabulary words, provided topic or content, etc.

MODIFICATIONS/EXTENSIONS
This lesson can be extended into a semester-long activity where students are assigned to or randomly choose a class pen-pal. Students will write each other weekly V-Mail letters on topics assigned by the teacher. All letters would be assessed by the teacher before delivery to students.

RESOURCES
- V-Mail Process in Photos (pg. 4-9)
- V-Mail Worksheet (pg. 10)
- Rubric Assessment for V-Mail Worksheet (pg. 11)
V-MAIL PROCESSING IN PHOTOS

All photographs come from the National WWII Museum’s Digital Collection. These photographs are from the service of Mary Lynes, Women's Army Corps (WAC), who served in Papua New Guinea. Gift of Mr. John M., Sr. Lynes, 2010.309.

Film that holds thousands of V-Mail letters arrives via airplane.

The film is processed upon its arrival. After developing the film, the fixing bath is poured over the film.
The developed film is enlarged from about the size of a thumbnail to 4 ¼ x 5 in.

Letters are printed onto large rolls of paper and inspected for quality. If an image did not develop well, it was marked out and re-processed.
Letters were cut from the large roll of paper into individual letters.

After being placed in envelopes, letters were sorted, bagged, delivered to military personnel.
IDENTIFY ELEMENTS OF AN INFORMAL LETTER

All photographs come from the National WWII Museum’s Digital Collection. These photographs are from the service of Private First Class Bernard Fox, who served in the 46th Medical Depot Company in the European Theater of Operations. Gift of Ms. Lois I. Solomon, 2015.031.
DEAREST LOIS,

YOU DID YOU GUESS IT? I ACCORDED.

DON'T RECEIVED SOME Writers. What did you
THINK ISN'T THAT THE BEST THING I COULD GET LETTERS
FROM YOU AND OTHERS. EVIDENCE, EVEN IF YOU ARE TOO BUSY OR IS IT
JUST TO BECKY TO WRITE. IT'S GOOD THING YOUR MOTHER IS A
SECRETARY. YOU TAKE CARE IF YOUR COLES EVIDENCE.

AS LONG AS I KNOW THAT YOU ARE ALL WELL OF
HOME. IT'S NOT THAT COUNTS. DO HOLL PARTY TO:> DON'T
WANT TO COME ON MYSELF. MAYBE IS LIKE YOU SAY.

YOUR ANOTHER MOTHER LETTER IS OKE SAYS. WHICH PAST
YOU ARE BACK AT SCHOOL AGAIN. ABDUUL ORDERED, YOU
TOOK THE VACATION WAS NOT LONG ENOUGH. IT'S ALMOST
TYPICAL. JUST WHEN YOU START TO ENJOY IT. IT IS ALL OVER
THEY FINE AND MAKING GOOD PROD OF MYSELF
AUN TOLL. NOT MIND EXCITING I WRITE ABOUT. UH.

NOT IS EVEN IN ITSELF BUT ALSO IN MANY MUCH MUCH TO
DADDY

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP?

REPLY BY V.MAIL

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP?
DEAREST LOIS,

EVERYTHING IS JUST FINE HERE 17-Day I JUST RECEIVED
PAW IN MY BULK MAIL Nov. 20 to DEC. 21 missing DEC. 22
and incoming surprise 2 letters dated January 12th. one from
Mother who was surprised with a new outfit.

MINT SHEET AND 24 PENNIES ARE MOST WELCOME
AND JUST AS MANY TIMES READ. THAT I LEARNED ABOUT YOUR
NEW OUTFIT. MOTHER SAYS YOU ARE QUIET THE LADY I

YOUTH CAN'T UP WITH. HOW I LIKE YOUR NEW VIOLET.

LOOKING AT IT 1 NEW POST WANTED VIOLET EXCEPT
THAT THERE WERE THE POSTS THAT ALSO 6 YOU LIVED
ABOUT THERE. I AM SURE THAT YOU LIKE IT. AS FAR AS
NOW I'M ABOUT MY CRUMPETS

WHEN THEY WRITE SOME IT IS VERY HAPPY TO WRITE TO THEM
AS I DO IN THE STATES.

THOSE LETTERS ARE A REAL BLESSING.

I HOPE I CAN BE_SÔBER TODAY.

TELL MOTHER I HOPE SHE SAW THE PENCILS SUGGESTED IN

MORE THAN JUST REGARDS MOTHER

LOOK WELL AT YOURSELF.

Love,

M.
Directions: Write a letter to a friend or family member. Be sure to include the five elements of an informal letter: a heading, a greeting, a body, a closing, and a signature. Remember: write the name and address of who you are sending your letter to in the center box.
## RUBRIC: V-MAIL WORKSHEET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0-1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HEADING</strong></td>
<td>No heading included in the letter.</td>
<td>1-2 parts of the heading are included</td>
<td>3 parts of the heading are included</td>
<td>4-5 parts of the heading are included</td>
<td>All parts of the heading are included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name, address (street, city, state, zip code), and date</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GREETING, CLOSING, AND SIGNATURE</strong></td>
<td>No greeting, closing, or signature included.</td>
<td>1 element (greeting, closing, or signature) included.</td>
<td>2 elements included (greeting, closing, and/or signature).</td>
<td>3 elements included, however are not cohesive.</td>
<td>3 elements included and cohesive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BODY</strong></td>
<td>Body includes 2 or fewer sentences with no clear topic.</td>
<td>Body includes at least 3 sentences with no clear topic.</td>
<td>Body includes 3-4 sentences with somewhat clear topic.</td>
<td>Body includes 3-4 sentences with clear topic, however may slightly veer off-topic.</td>
<td>Body includes 3-5 sentences with clear topic from beginning to end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SPELLING</strong></td>
<td>5 or more spelling errors</td>
<td>4 spelling errors</td>
<td>3 spelling errors</td>
<td>2 spelling errors</td>
<td>1 or no spelling errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GRAMMAR</strong></td>
<td>5 or more grammatical errors</td>
<td>4 grammatical errors</td>
<td>3 grammatical errors</td>
<td>2 grammatical errors</td>
<td>1 or no grammatical errors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>