



## A Full Circle Leadership and Global Leaders collaboration

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# Lesson 1: The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

## Write a Letter. Protect a Culture. Save an Ecosystem.

### **Description:**

Through short videos & readings students will gain a basic knowledge and appreciation of the beauty of the **Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and an introduction to the Gwich'in People**. Students will be inspired to action by reading about Samantha Smith, a young girl who changed the world with one letter.

### **Purpose:**

An introduction to taking action, leadership, the power of a handwritten letter and saving the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge & protecting the Gwich'in people and culture.

### **Objectives:**

The Student will:

1. get an introduction to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge & the Gwich'in People and the urgent need to act right now to protect the Arctic Refuge from oil drilling.
2. learn the impact/power of a single letter.
3. develop letter writing skills by writing a letter to the elected officials.

*These activities are meant to flow and build on each other.*

*If your time is limited, start with the Arctic Warrior video and teach letter writing and get the letter in the mail!*

*Then begin the 30 Actions in 30 Days!*

# Lesson 1: Activities

Activity	Time	Materials Needed/Description
How to Start A Movement	2:54 min	TedTalk: Derek Sievers <a href="https://www.ted.com/talks/derek_sivers_how_to_start_a_movement?language=en">https://www.ted.com/talks/derek_sivers_how_to_start_a_movement?language=en</a> Followers are needed for leaders to exist. This TedTalk emphasizes the courage of the first follower!
Samantha Smith reading	15 min	<a href="https://www.samanthasmith.info/index.php/history">https://www.samanthasmith.info/index.php/history</a> 11 yr old Samantha Smith wrote a letter to the leader of the Soviet Union and U.S. President Reagan asking them to work for peace not nuclear war. Her letter was one of millions written during this time in history. Her letter positively changed the relationship between the USA & the Soviet Union.
Video on Arctic Warrior, Lenny Kohm & 12 year old student	5:44 min	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-1x1dvxkU4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-1x1dvxkU4</a> Lenny emphasizes the best way to become an activist is to start. 12 yr old teaches us we can take creative action and influence millions at any age.
Videos on how the Gwich'in oppose drilling	3 min each	<a href="#">Now This - SAEXploration Letter Comment Delivery</a> <a href="#">Now This - BP Actions 2019</a> Short videos that give an excellent summary of the issues and how Gwich'in and regular citizens are working to protect the Arctic Refuge and block the oil drilling.
30 day guide for action	30 Days!	<b><a href="#">30 Days of Action: December 7, 2020 - January 6, 2021</a></b> An incredibly hands-on easy-to-use, step-by-step guide for us to take an action a day. <a href="#">Defend the Sacred on all of their platforms</a> A comprehensive informative website explaining historical, political, cultural context around the Arctic Refuge, the Gwich'in people, and the citizens supporting the Gwich'in
Introduce Letter Writing	15 min	See 3 page handout below: <b>Writing Elected Officials</b>

# Writing to Elected Officials

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Look up the name and contact info for your U.S. Congressional Representative and two Senators here:  
<https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials/>

Know who to address the letter to. Start your letter with a proper salutation and date:

"To the Honorable [Name]" or "Dear Senator [Name] or President \_\_\_\_\_.

**Get straight to the point.** *The first line of your letter should summarize why you are writing. Are you thanking the official for support? Asking for them to oppose a bill? Requesting that they give attention to something?*

**I am urging you to co-sponsor a bill to permanently protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.** The Arctic Refuge is one of the last truly untouched wildernesses of North America. Drilling in the Refuge will be remembered as one of the great environmental tragedies of the 21st century, as well as a violation of the most basic human rights of the Gwich'in people.

Every single tract that is under consideration for leasing contains sensitive habitat and resources that would be threatened by drilling. This includes habitat for threatened polar bears, countless bird species, and the Porcupine caribou herd, which the Gwich'in people rely on for their subsistence and culture. This rushed process has ignored concerns about threats to the Gwich'in people, threatened wildlife, and our climate.

## Back up your concerns.

*How is this issue affecting you/others? What has the official done that merits praise or complaint? Statistics are helpful, but personal stories carry more impact. Here are some.*

- One of our last truly wild places, the Arctic Refuge is no place for drilling.
- Every single one of the 32 tracts BLM is considering selling off for drilling in the Arctic Refuge coastal plain include sensitive resources that would be threatened by drilling.
- The coastal plain is held sacred by the Gwich'in Nation, who have depended on this special place and the wildlife within it for their food security and way of life for generations.
- Industrial development anywhere on the coastal plain poses an existential threat to the Gwich'in, threatening their food security and human rights, but the Department of the Interior has failed to adequately study the impacts of drilling on natural resources and the subsistence lifestyle of the Gwich'in people.
- This rushed process has ignored concerns about threats to the Gwich'in people, threatened wildlife, and our climate. This lease sale must not go forward.

## Special Concerns About Caribou:

- The Gwich'in Nation -- Indigenous people of Alaska and Canada - consider the coastal plain sacred and have relied on the Porcupine Caribou Herd that migrates there for thousands of years for their primary food source and way of life.
- The Gwich'in have a deep cultural and spiritual connection to the caribou, and still rely on the herd for 80% of their diet.
- The Porcupine Caribou Herd depends on the coastal plain as a safe place to calve their young, where baby caribou are protected from predators and insects that carry disease.
- It is well documented that oil and gas development and infrastructure impacts and displaces caribou, and that caribou mothers are particularly sensitive to disruptions.
- Gwich'in traditional knowledge also tells us that industrial activity in the coastal plain will disrupt the

# Writing to Elected Officials

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- sacred calving and nursing grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd.
- The entire coastal plain is critical for caribou, but BLM has failed to incorporate these concerns or adequately analyze or provide protections to address these impacts.

## Special Concerns About Polar Bears:

- Almost all of the coastal plain is designated as critical denning habitat for polar bears under the Endangered Species Act, where mother bears give birth and nurse their newborn cubs.
- Keeping this area free from disturbances is essential to ensuring the survival of newborn polar bear cubs.
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has admitted that leasing in areas where polar bears den will negatively impact polar bears.
- The Bureau of Land Management has failed to adequately analyze the impact of drilling on polar bears.

## Be respectful.

Showing respect earns respect. Sign off with a respectful closing:

*"In peace,  
[Your Name]"*

*"Sincerely,  
[Your Name]*

# Writing to Elected Officials

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**Write your letter now.**

**Before you mail -- snap and share your solidarity on social media!**

The more letters we send, the better chance we have of delaying this destructive process until the next administration can stop it. Harness the power of social media to inspire your friends, family and networks to help protect this sacred place!

**Before you mail your letter (or maybe as you're mailing it) take a photo or video with your letter and post to your social media channels.**

**Tips: Make sure to:**

- tag @SierraClub in your posts,
- use hashtags: "#ProtectTheArctic" and "#StandWithTheGwichin"
- direct your followers to the shortlink sc.org/arcticletters

**Here's additional info for you to use on social media!**

- *This letter stands for Indigenous rights, healthy wildlife and a better climate. We must get thousands in to defend the Arctic Refuge.*
- *The Gwich'in people have relied on the Arctic Refuge for countless generations. I'm taking action to #StandwiththeGwichin and #ProtectTheArctic.*
- *I wrote a letter to defend the sacred Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from oil and gas drilling -- will you join me, [@tagfriend]?*

Or get creative! Invent the caribou shuffle challenge, add a wintery filter or tag and challenge your friends, it all helps!