**OPEN LETTERS TO PEOPLE OR ENTITIES**

**WHO ARE UNLIKELY TO RESPOND**

Rhetoric

Open Letters are letters, often critical, addressed to a particular person or group of people but intended for publication for (probably) a different, broader audience. They originated as letters to government officials published in newspapers for the public to read. Modern authors have recently added to the Open Letter concept by writing funny, often irreverent, diatribes targeting social groups or even inanimate objects. Your task is to write your own Open Letter to a person/group/thing/concept of your choice and send it to a real audience, Hinsdale Central’s newspaper, *Devil’s Advocate*.

Similar to our “Poetry as Rhetoric” unit, you’ll have a day or so to brainstorm, and a few days to craft this in class. The core skills that we’re working on here are 1) audience 2) message 3) tone 4) narration/ description, 5) rhetorical devices, and 6) refutation/naysayer

**Think more about AUDIENCE:** For this letter, the “audience” component of the rhetorical triangle will be a little more tricky. You are going to send this to Hinsdale Central’s newspaper, *Devil’s Advocate*. They may or may not choose to publish it, but you’re going to have to manage 2 audiences. You have an imaginary audience in the person/thing that you’re writing to AND you have the real audience of current Central students and staff who read *The Devil’s Advocate*. So, while you are playfully writing to your desk in 3rd period Spanish, you also need to consider your ACTUAL readers, students/staff at Central. This is more sophisticated that what we did in your poem. What will students/staff find interesting? Appropriate? Funny? Worthwhile? Entertaining?

**Think more about TONE**: Because your real audience is Central students/staff, you’ll need to cater your tone to match this audience, AS WELL AS what your content/message is. If your topic is about bullying and you’re sending a message to students/staff about how we currently don’t address it well, what tone would work for both your message/content and your audience? Probably something serious, passionate, or intense. If your topic is about a math hallway bathroom hand dryer that hardly blows air and your message is that the facilities are laughably bad, what tone would work for both your message/content and your audience? Probably something sarcastic, funny, mocking, or lighthearted.

**Think more about NARRATION/DESCRIPTION**: In your poem, many of you needed to stick in a moment LONGER and sustain the description, to really show, not tell. Here’s your second chance. And, in rhetoric, you really need to consider the effect of the description—are you trying to describe this thing as useless or powerful? Stressful or relaxing? Good or bad?

**NEW: Rhetorical Devices:** We just learned all about these, and now it’s your shot to add them in. Strongly consider the rhetorical effect of what you’re doing on a word/sentence level. Don’t use the device unless it works well with your tone/approach.

**NEW: Refutation/Naysayer:** You’ll get information about how to address counterargument. You’ll need to work this into your letter.

**Requirements:**

1. Don’t actually name anyone by name. If you want to write to your 6th Grade Health Teacher, address your letter to just that: An Open Letter to My Middle School Health Teacher

* That said, consider what would be appropriate for you to “criticize” for this. You have a lot of freedom to criticize pretty much anything—Central’s food, library, softball field, locker room, etc.—just be careful when you criticize a person/people, especially a person/people who is going to read this (students/staff). There’s a difference between playful joking and being a jerk. While you might write an open letter to the English department and tease them about their obsession with SSR and italicizing titles, that’s a lot different than straight up telling them that they’re all stupid, fat, and they ruined your life. Same thing with your family or your friends. Be edgy, interesting, and say what you really think, but especially because you’re writing this to a school publication, don’t cross the line. If you’re not sure if you’re crossing the line, talk to me.

1. Length requirement: One page, single spaced.
2. Be creative and write about something you’re interested in AND that your audience will find entertaining, worthwhile, or interesting.
3. Continue to use “you,” just like in the poem you wrote
4. Demonstrate a strong, clear and consistent tone

**CALENDAR: What to do if you’re ABSENT!**

**Turned in by end of class (do**

**Date What we’re doing in class this if you’re absent!)**

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| Thurs, 9/22 | Open Letter Unit: Devil’s Advocate  Go to My Website and Read 2 of the options available for the open letter assignment.  Type a response for each.  Begin Brainstorming | Type a response for each of the 2 samples you selected that analyzes questions in packet |
| Fri, 9/23 | Continue Brainstorming  Select Your Top 2: What’s Your Tone? What’s Your Message? | Brainstorm Work |
| Mon, 9/26 | They Say I Say Ch. 4  Select Your Topic For Your Open Letter: Reconsider your message and tone. Also think of 2 objects, people, or scenes you could describe in detail. Write 1 paragraph of your open letter. | They Say I Say Ch. 4 Work;  Detail, 1 Paragraph of Letter |
| Tues, 9/27 | ½ of Letter Due | Rhetorical Devices Inclusion:  ½ of Letter Due |
| Wed, 9/27 | They Say I Say Ch. 6 (Skip Chapter 5)  Work Naysayer Into Letter | They Say I Say Work: Ch. 6  Naysayer into Letter |
| Thurs, 9/28 | Finish Open Letter: Final Draft | Finish Final Draft |
| Fri, 9/29 | Arrange WORK and Final Draft:  Annotations!  Reflection (Skills)  SEND TO DEVIL’S ADVOCATE  TURNITIN.COM  Share | Turnitin.com; annotated final draft; email DA |

“AN OPEN LETTER TO PALEO DIET ENTHUSIASTS,” BY [LEA BAYLIS](http://www.mcsweeneys.net/authors/lea-baylis)

Dear Paleo Diet Enthusiasts,

The thing is, we just don’t care about what you eat, or why. And we’re tired of your pseudo-science rationalization of why this new diet is the best thing you’ve ever done. But what’s really ridiculous is how presumptuous it is of you to assume you know what our hunter-gatherer ancestors ate way back in the Stone Age. What do you really even know about the Stone Age? Have you even thought about it since fifth grade? It was a hard life back then. Just to survive was a real challenge. Apparently, language was pretty new, and yet you think they had time to make kale chips and bake with coconut flour. Amazing.

There is one thing that would impress me about the Paleo Diet, and that’s if you went full on. Like, move into a cave and start hunting your meat and gathering your vegetables. Go on, hunt some big game with a bow and arrow. Prepare your meat without the benefit of running water and antibacterial soap. Carve your own knife that’s sharp enough to cut through bone. Let’s see the best loincloth you can make without a sewing machine or thread or a f\*\*\*ing needle. I’d like to see you harvest all of your own produce every day, without your car or a shopping cart or any twist ties or rubber bands. Remember, no refrigerators allowed. Let’s see you prepare all of your delicious Paleo salads without running water or multiple knives or a vegetable peeler. Just get so immersed in the Stone Age lifestyle that you remember what a f\*\*\*ing miracle it is to have fire. Really, idealizing the diet of a people whose life was so much harder than yours, and then trying to emulate their diet without trying to live their life, I mean, come on, don’t you hate yourself just a little?

Let’s take a step away from your psychotically narcissistic sense of how important your food is to remember what it was like when you didn’t care what you ate. Before you knew what quinoa was, before you started the cleanses, before the flax and chia seeds invaded your body, heck, even before you started drinking coconut water. Remember how easy it was to just eat food like the rest of us? Just get the salad bar, no one cares as long as we don’t have to hear about how much better you are than everyone else. These days it seems like you can’t even travel without your blender. Really? Why don’t you bust out your mortar and pestle and start from there, Paleo worshiper. And forget the CrossFit, just forget it. Try walking around the plains to gather that fresh healthy food instead. Do you see why we’re annoyed yet?

We, the non-Paleo world, would really love it if you would just keep your food preferences to yourself and stop making such a fuss. Don’t preach, don’t pester, don’t try to educate, don’t share your f\*\*\*ing thesis about all the toxins in our bodies, just eat your food and shut up. There is so much more to talk about than food. Are we clear?

Best,  
Lea

**More Examples:** On my website (centralrhetoric.weebly.com), click on 2 of these samples to read and then respond to the following questions, for each:

*Type a response for each of the 2 samples you selected that analyzes the following:*

1. Who do you think the target audience is (not who the writer is “playfully” writing to)? Explain.

2. What do you think the main message is, in a sentence?

3. Which line best captures the main message? Quote it.

4. Use a sentence to explain why this line captures the message so well.

5. What are some adjectives to describe the tone?

6. Which line has the most “tone” in it? Quote it.

7. Use a sentence to explain why this line captures the tone so well.

8. Identify at least 2 rhetorical devices this writer used. Quote them and explain.

[An Open Letter to People Who Fawn Over My Wheelchair](http://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/an-open-letter-to-people-who-fawn-over-my-wheelchair)by Laura Hyde (3/13/2015)  
[An Open Letter to Women Who Shame Catcalling](http://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/an-open-letter-to-women-who-shame-catcalling)by Wendy Litner (2/27/2015)  
[An Open Letter to People I Hardly Know But Who Hug Me Anyway](http://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/an-open-letter-to-people-i-hardly-know-but-who-hug-me-anyway)by Susan Gilbert Guerrant (1/23/2015)  
[An Open Letter to Semicolon Abusers](http://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/an-open-letter-to-semicolon-abusers)by Alex Rosenfeld (1/16/2015)  
[An Open Letter to My Beloved Woolly Armpits](http://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/an-open-letter-to-my-beloved-woolly-armpits)by Jennifer Burns (11/21/2014)

Or, consider from Hinsdale Central student examples:

Go to <http://www.hcdevilsadvocate.com/category/an-open-letter/>

Then, click on the pages at the bottom. Each has a different Open Letter.