

**WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS**

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



2020

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

Your students can help Jani Silva in Colombia and 6 other cases of people under threat worldwide

HIGH SCHOOL EDITION

WHAT IS WRITE FOR RIGHTS?

Hello and thank you for joining this year's Write for Rights!

This guide was created to help you and your students participate in Write for Rights, Amnesty International's largest annual global letter writing campaign, focusing on individual cases of human rights abuses around the world. Amnesty International is a grassroots, Nobel Peace Prize-winning human rights organization; we are independent of any political party, ideology, or religion. Each year through Write for Rights, we help free people who are wrongfully imprisoned and end other human rights abuses.

This year's seven cases are all individuals at risk, people like Jani Silva on the cover, who faces intimidation in Colombia for her work to defend the Amazon.



How does Write for Rights work? Millions of people around the world like you and your students write a letter to the government official responsible for the case. These letters pile up in their offices and can't be ignored—imagine receiving a million letters on your desk!

We supplement these letters with e-mail actions, lobbying, media attention and social media. We also write “solidarity” notes to the people we are trying to help, or their families, to give them hope.

By participating in Write for Rights, your students will support these cases and learn the skills needed to write effective appeal letters and be exposed to human rights through stories of people from different countries and cultures.

This guide was created for High school students (grades 9 – 12) and may be implemented in a single or multi-class session.

Ready to get started?

- **Sign up** now at amnestyusa.org/w4r/classroom
- **Write and mail** your students' letters (either to the addresses on each case sheet or to us)
- **Report** your students' letters by January 31, 2021 at amnestyusa.org/w4r/report or using the form in this guide
- **Read** the Instructions page for more info
- **Ask** questions and get help by contacting me at w4r@aiusa.org and (212) 633-4181

Thank you again for taking part!

Laura Galeano

Laura Galeano

Programs Associate at Amnesty International USA



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INSTRUCTIONS

1) SIGN UP AS AN EDUCATOR AT [AMNESTYUSA.ORG/W4R/CLASSROOM](https://www.amnestyusa.org/w4r/classroom)

2) WRITE AND REPORT LETTERS WITH YOUR STUDENTS

The case sheets and sample letters supplementing this guide are available at [amnestyusa.org/w4r/classroom](https://www.amnestyusa.org/w4r/classroom)

- Work on the **3 cases** in this guide
- **Learn more** about the other cases (and take action on them) at [amnestyusa.org/w4r/classroom](https://www.amnestyusa.org/w4r/classroom)
- **Report online** at [amnestyusa.org/w4r/report](https://www.amnestyusa.org/w4r/report) or by sending the report form in this guide to us at the address below

**Reporting is important, as we share the total number with the people we are trying to help and their families, as well as with the government officials we are trying to persuade.*

3) MAIL YOUR STUDENTS' LETTERS BY **JANUARY 31, 2021**

You have two options for sending in your letters:

1. Mail the letters to the addresses included on each case sheet, and let us know how many you sent at: [amnestyusa.org/w4r/report](https://www.amnestyusa.org/w4r/report) (this is the **preferred** option to ensure the authorities receive mail quickly)
2. If you cannot mail your letters directly, mail all letters and the letter reporting form (Page 15 of this guide) in one envelope to Amnesty International USA's office:

Amnesty International USA
Attn: Classroom W4R
600 Pennsylvania Ave, 5th Floor
Washington, DC 20003

**If you need help with postage, let us know and we may be able to reimburse you.*

QUESTIONS? Contact Laura at w4r@aiusa.org or (212) 633-4181

LEARNING OBJECTIVES & MATERIALS

KEY LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To familiarize students with general concepts of human rights issues (e.g. freedom of expression, freedom of association, prisoners of conscience)
2. Engage students in writing clear and succinct letters to government officials that incorporate correct syntax, tense and tone
3. Analyze the role of government in relation to human rights and human rights abuses
4. Expose students to different cultures and experiences through stories of individuals in the Write for Rights cases
5. Understand the role of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in holding states accountable to human rights objectives

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. What are examples of human rights in these cases?
2. Why is it important to protect the human rights of all people?
3. What is a human rights defender?
4. How can we incorporate the learning objectives into our every day lives?
5. What human rights issues do you see reflected in your own community?

MATERIALS

1. Case Sheets
2. Sample Letters
3. Annotated Letter
4. Letter Scaffold
5. Reporting Form

GLOSSARY

Amnesty International: Amnesty International is a global movement of more than seven million people in over 150 countries and territories. We are campaigning for a world where human rights are enjoyed by all. Our motto is “Better to light a candle than curse the darkness.” Amnesty has grown from seeking the release of prisoners of conscience to upholding the whole spectrum of human rights. We speak out for anyone and everyone whose freedom and dignity are under threat. Amnesty International is impartial and independent of any political party, ideology, or religion.

Freedom of expression: The right to seek, receive and share information and ideas, without fear or interference. It is closely linked with freedom of association (the right to meet with anyone you choose, for example, to form and join clubs, societies or trade unions) and the right to take part in a peaceful assembly, such as a demonstration or public meeting.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights: The UDHR was drawn up by the United Nations in the years immediately following World War II. Since 1948, it has formed the backbone of the international human rights system. It is a declaration of intent by every government around the world that they will abide by certain standards in the treatment of individual human beings.

Impunity: Impunity is when people who have committed crimes avoid punishment. Amnesty calls for these people to be investigated, tried and sentenced fairly, according to the law.

Human Rights Defender: An HRD is someone who, individually or in association with others, acts to defend or promote human rights at the local, national, regional or international levels, without resorting to or advocating hatred, discrimination or violence. HRDs come from every walk of life; they may be journalists, lawyers, health professionals, teachers, whistle-blowers, farmers, or relatives of victims of human rights violations. They might defend human rights as part of their professional role, as part of a volunteer group, or one-time basis.

Solidarity Letter: A letter, drawing or other message of support delivered to the individuals in each Write for Rights case. When these messages arrive in huge numbers, they are also a reminder to authorities and others that the world is watching. Those letters not only bring hope, but they can also help make people safer. Appeal letters are the letters sent to government officials.

Inalienable: Refers to rights that belong to every person and cannot be taken from a person under any circumstances.

LGBTI: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex. Discrimination based on real or perceived LGBTI status could be based on sexual orientation (who you're attracted to); gender identity (how you define yourself, irrespective of your biological sex), gender expression (how you express your gender through your clothing, hair or make-up), or sex characteristics (for example, your reproductive organs).

NATIONAL TEACHING STANDARDS

National Council of Teachers of English

Number 4: Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

Number 11: Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

Number 12: Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

National Council for the Social Studies

Number 5: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions.

Number 6: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance.

Number 9: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of global connections and interdependence.

Number 10: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.

THIS YEAR'S 7 CASES

This guide will provide lesson plans for 3 of the 7 cases; however, if you have more time or would like to work on other cases altogether, these lesson plans can be adapted for the other 4 cases.

See below for a short summary of each case and find more information at [amnestyusa.org/w4r/classroom](https://www.amnestyusa.org/w4r/classroom)



BURUNDI: GERMAIN RUKUKI

Jailed for 32 years for defending human rights

Above everything, Germain is a husband and father. But this stalwart of human rights has never seen his youngest son. Instead, the father of three is sitting in a jail cell in Burundi, sentenced to 32 years imprisonment on sham charges after a flawed trial. “For how long must my husband suffer this injustice?” asks his wife, Emelyne.



COLOMBIA: JANI SILVA

Threatened with death for defending the Amazon

Born in the heart of the Colombian Amazon, Jani Silva has dedicated her life to defending the trees and land that are everyone’s lifeblood. From the age of 16, she’s been standing with the campesino farmers of Putumayo, a region nestled in the south of the country and brimming with unique biodiversity. Her work has pitted her against forces greedy for that land’s oil wealth. Harassed by unknown aggressors, her life is in danger.



PAKISTAN: IDRIS KHATTAK

Abducted for exposing disappearances

Described by his daughters as an “enthusiastic but terrible” cook, Idris Khattak is Pakistan’s expert on enforced disappearances. He’s spent years documenting them for Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. But in November 2019, Idris, too, disappeared. After his daughter, Talia, bravely went public calling for her father’s release, the authorities admitted they had him. Now Idris could be charged with espionage, which could mean 14 years in jail or a death sentence.



SAUDI ARABIA: NASSIMA AL-SADA

Jailed for defending women's rights

For much of her life, Nassima al-Sada has campaigned for women's freedom in Saudi Arabia. Now, she's lost her own. She's one of 13 prominent female activists prosecuted for demanding women's right to drive and the right to carry out their daily business without the permission of a male "guardian". Since her arrest in July 2018, she has been locked up, enduring torture and solitary confinement – all for her peaceful efforts to defend women's rights.



TURKEY: MELIKE BALKAN AND ÖZGÜR GÜR

Prosecuted for celebrating LGBTI rights

From day one, biology students Melike Balkan and Özgür Gür dedicated themselves to defending lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI+) rights at their university. As members of the LGBTI+ Solidarity Group, they have organized campus Pride marches successfully for years. But in May 2019, the university banned the planned march and called the police to disperse the peaceful sit-in. Despite simply exercising their right to peaceful protest, 18 students and an academic are now on trial.



USA: ANA* & VICTORIA*

Detained by ICE after fleeing from danger

Ana* (22) and her daughter Victoria* (4) fled Honduras after repeated threats against their lives after her partner and Victoria's father was killed because of his political beliefs. Ana has been suffering from ovarian cysts that have pained her daily for months and has not received the appropriate medical care. Victoria now has anxiety attacks, nightmares, and wets the bed—something she didn't used to do.



USA: TEYONNA LOFTON

Shot while waiting outside of a gas station

On the evening of May 31st, Teyonna decided to go out to get something to drink from a local gas station around the corner from her home. Security footage from the gas station shows a white vehicle driving onto the scene and an individual opening fire on the customers who were waiting in line. As people hit the ground, you can see Teyonna has been shot. With medical bills mounting, this Chicago teen wants answers. Why did the police not come to the scene? Why was no incident report filed? Why has she received no updates on her case?

TEACHING THE UDHR

Historical Context

After the horrors of World War 2 it was felt in many countries that an international charter on human rights¹ would reduce the chances that such atrocities would be repeated. As a result, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights was established and by 1948, a Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) had been drawn up. The UDHR is an important document for curbing unjust behavior by governments.

Though the Declaration itself is not legally enforceable, the International Conventions that emanate from it (e.g., the International Convention on Social, Economic, and Cultural Rights and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights) and are ratified by individual countries are expected to be incorporated into appropriate national legislation which is, then, enforceable; in addition, countries that are signatories to such conventions are expected to submit reports on their national compliance to the appropriate UN body. “Watchdog” organizations also help to monitor compliance.



TEACHING THE UDHR

The word “rights” is used in a number of different contexts to include legal, moral, and human rights. Those rights which are thought to have universal application are known as human rights.

1. Give students copies of the UDHR
(www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf)
2. Ask students to pick out an Article of the UDHR, read it aloud and then provide a simplified version of the Article – what do they think it means?
3. In small groups, ask students to discuss the following questions:
 - How do the values and principles expressed in the UDHR relate your everyday life and the way you treat others?
 - Is this about the basic values and principles of being a good citizen, and if so, where do these principles come from?
 - How do you learn a code of conduct?
 - How do you learn what it means to be a good citizen?
4. Share out responses and then read this quotation by Eleanor Roosevelt, made at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, March 27, 1958:

Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places close to home—so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any map of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person: the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere.

5. As a follow up activity, have students answer the following aloud or in journal entries:
 - How do you recognize respect for human rights near your home or community?
 - What challenges exist in your own community for recognizing and acting on fundamental human rights?

LESSON PLAN 1: FOR ANA* & VICTORIA*

For this activity, **provide context** by discussing the role of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). You can ask your students to explain what they think ICE's role is meant to be when it comes to immigration enforcement.

Next, **introduce** Ana and Victoria's case sheet which can be found at [amnestyusa.org/w4r/classroom](https://www.amnestyusa.org/w4r/classroom)

Discuss the following:

1. How do you feel after reading Ana and Victoria's story?
2. What rights are Ana, Victoria and the other families in ICE detention being infringed upon?
3. What are some reasons that families, like Ana and Victoria, would leave their home country and come to the United States?
4. What do you think the responsibility of the host country (in this case, the US) is in this scenario?

Explain to your students that due to the outbreak of Covid-19 in detention centers all across the US, families face serious consequences the longer they are detained. After a recent court ruling, parents have been left with the decision to either remain imprisoned with their children or release their children to sponsors in the US.

Explain to your students that they will now be tasked with **writing letters to the Acting Secretary of Homeland Security** requesting that all families be separated together from ICE detention. Note the importance of being polite, clear and factual in their letters.

Have time to write a message of hope too? Please get creative! Employ your students' art skills and have them draw and/or write to Ana, Victoria and other families, to let them know that there are people out there that know about their story and care.



LESSON PLAN 2: FOR TEYONNA LOFTIN

For this activity, give some context regarding the **Break the Cycle of Violence Act**. For a short reference sheet, please see: www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/AIUSA-Break-the-Cycle-of-Violence-Act-Congressional-Leave-Behind.2020.pdf

Read aloud:

Communities of color have a long and complicated history of disadvantage and marginalization in the US, which contributes to the disparate impact of firearm homicides and injuries. Unfortunately, community-level firearm violence in the US disproportionately impacts communities of color, particularly young black men. **Firearm homicide was the leading cause of death for black men and boys aged 15-34 in 2018 and the third-leading cause of death for Latino men and boys in the same age range.**

Discuss the following:

1. How do you feel about the statistic provided in that excerpt? Are you surprised at all by this information?
2. What do you think can be done to better address firearm violence in the US?
3. Why do you think individual states and the federal government have trouble passing gun laws?

Next, **introduce** Teyonna's case sheet which can be found at amnestyusa.org/w4r/classroom

1. How do you feel after reading Teyonna's story?
2. How should the authorities have responded to the shooting incident?
3. What can be done to prevent incidents like this from reoccurring?
4. How might Teyonna's story have been different if the Break the Cycle of Violence Act was passed?

Explain to your students that they will be writing to the State Attorney of Illinois to ask that Teyonna receive the victim's compensation she is owed. Students can use this opportunity to write about personal experiences if they feel comfortable doing so.

Have time to write a message of hope too? Please get creative! Employ your students' art skills and have them draw and/or write to Teyonna, to let her know that there are people out there that know about her story and care.

LESSON PLAN 3: FOR JANI SILVA

Start by **discussing the issue of climate justice** in your class. Do students know what environmental justice is? What does it mean for communities to attain environmental justice? You can reference communities in the Philippines or Indigenous communities in Canada who have suffered long-standing environmental consequences that threaten their livelihood due to the damaging practices of large corporations and fossil fuel companies. You can relate these issues of environmental justice to Articles in the UDHR; namely, Articles 3 and 17.

Discuss the following:

1. Which communities are usually those most adversely affected by issues of the climate crisis?
2. What can be done to better address communities that are losing their rights to housing, life and health?
3. What is the role of individual countries in this fight for environmental justice?

Next, **introduce Jani's case sheet** which can be found at [amnestyusa.org/w4r/classroom](https://www.amnestyusa.org/w4r/classroom)

1. How do you feel after reading Jani's story?
2. What obligations does Colombia have in this particular case?
3. Who can you think of in your community or in other communities in the US that are doing similar work to Jani?
4. Imagine that you started an environmental justice club at school. How would you feel if you were threatened because of your work to protect the environment? How do you think your school would respond to these threats?

Explain to your students that they will be **writing to the Ambassador of Colombia** to request that the Colombian government provide Jani with protective measures so she can continue her important work.

Have time to write a message of hope too? Please get creative! Employ your students' art skills and have them draw and/or write to Jani, to let her know that there are people out there that know about her story and care.

Once their letters are complete, allow time for students to reflect on what they have learned and the letters they have written. Consider asking students the following questions to inspire reflection and sharing among the class:

- How has your understanding of human rights changed?
- How did it feel to advocate for another person's human rights?
- Which case inspired you, and why?

LETTER REPORTING FORM

Please let us know the number of letters you and your students wrote. You have two options for sending in your letters:

a. Mail the letters to the addresses included on each case sheet, and let us know how many you sent at: [amnestyusa.org/w4r/report](https://www.amnestyusa.org/w4r/report) (this is the preferred option to ensure the authorities receive mail quickly)

b. If you cannot mail your letters directly, mail all letters and the letter reporting form in one envelope to our office:

Amnesty International USA
Attn: Classroom Write for Rights
600 Pennsylvania Ave SE, 5th Floor
Washington, DC 20003

If you need help with postage, let us know and we may be able to reimburse you.

Questions? Contact Laura at w4r@aiusa.org

YOUR NAME: _____

YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

OF STUDENTS WHO PARTICIPATED: _____

NAME OF SCHOOL: _____

WOULD YOU LIKE A WRITE FOR RIGHTS CLASSROOM CERTIFICATE?

- Yes
 No

MAILING ADDRESS FOR CLASSROOM CERTIFICATE AND ADDRESSED TO WHOM:

HOW MANY LETTERS DID YOU (OR YOUR CLASS) WRITE FOR EACH CASE?

1) 1) Burundi: Tell Burundi to free Germain now

Appeal Letters _____ Solidarity Messages _____

2) Colombia: Demand protection for Jani

Appeal Letters _____ Solidarity Messages _____

3) Pakistan: Tell Pakistan's authorities to release Idris

Appeal Letters _____ Solidarity Messages _____

4) Saudi Arabia: Tell Saudi Arabia to free Nassima now

Appeal Letters _____ Solidarity Messages _____

5) Turkey: Tell Turkey to acquit protesters of all charges

Appeal Letters _____ Solidarity Messages _____

6) USA: Tell ICE to release all families in detention

Appeal Letters _____ Solidarity Messages _____

7) USA: Demand victim's compensation for Teyonna

Appeal Letters _____ Solidarity Messages _____

ANNOTATED LETTER

President Lenín Moreno
President of the Republic of Ecuador
Palacio de Carondelet
Quito
Ecuador

Make sure to have the correct address for your target, which includes title, organization name and full address with country for foreign contacts

Dear President Moreno,

Use the correct salutation for your target to show respect

I write to you regarding the response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the Amazon. Indigenous and human rights organizations say that they have been excluded from Emergency Operations Committees in charge of implementing safety protocols in response to COVID-19.

Introduce the purpose of your letter early on

I ask you to ensure that the Indigenous peoples of the Amazon participate in the decision-making structure in charge of the COVID-19 response in the Amazon and guarantee that this response respects their rights and needs and is sufficiently funded. Any policy or action affecting Indigenous Peoples should comply with human rights standards, including the right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).

Describe the desired outcome in your second paragraph as clearly as possible

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Be polite in your closing statement – the target is more likely to act in your favor this way

Yours sincerely,

Jane Doe

Include your signature; it's more powerful than you think!

LETTER WRITING SCAFFOLD

RECIPIENT'S TITLE AND ADDRESS	
THE SALUTATION (GREETING TO THE RECIPIENT)	
INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT THAT OUTLINES THE PURPOSE OF THE LETTER	
STATEMENT OF THE DESIRED OUTCOME OF THE LETTER	
DESCRIPTION OF THE SPECIFIC ACTION REQUIRED TO MEET THE DESIRED OUTCOME	
THE COMPLIMENTARY CLOSE (SHORT AND POLITE REMARK TO END THE LETTER)	
YOUR SIGNATURE	

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL?

Amnesty International is a grassroots, Nobel Peace Prize-winning human rights organization; we are independent of any political party, ideology, or religion. Each year through Write for Rights, we help free people who are wrongfully imprisoned and end other human rights abuses.

WHERE DO I FIND MORE INFORMATION ON EACH CASE?

Case sheets and sample letters on each of the ten cases can be found at [amnestyusa.org/w4r/classroom](https://www.amnestyusa.org/w4r/classroom)

HOW MANY CASES SHOULD WE WRITE ON?

It's up to you. There are 7 cases this year. For each case, Write for Rights involves writing a letter to the government official who can resolve the case and a letter or note of solidarity to the person (or their family) we are trying to help. Every letter helps.

One option if time is limited, but you want to have your students take action on every case is to write letters on two cases, and then sign the sample letters on the other 5 cases.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO PARTICIPATE?

All that we require from you as an educator are paper, envelopes and postage. We encourage you to send all letters directly to the addresses on the case sheets; here are postage rates: within the United States, letters (up to 1 oz.) cost 50 cents each and to all other countries, airmail letters and cards (up to 1 oz.) cost \$1.15 each. If cost is a barrier for participation, please contact us and we will try to reimburse you for postage. Please note that you are welcome to raise funds for postage.

SHOULD MY STUDENTS INCLUDE THEIR NAME AND ADDRESS ON THEIR LETTERS?

It is up to you! Students can sign their full name or just their first name, and either leave off their address or include it. Please note that sometimes governments will send an acknowledgement letter on the case and sometimes the people we are trying to help will respond to solidarity notes. If a student does not include their address, then they will not be able to receive these.

WHEN SHOULD WE WRITE?

Anytime between now and January 31, 2021!

DOES IT REALLY MATTER IF I SHARE HOW MANY LETTERS MY STUDENTS WROTE?

Yes! It is essential to let us know how many letters your students wrote, either by filling out the online form or by sending their letters to our office. We share the total number of letters with the people we are trying to help and their families, as well as with the government officials we are trying to persuade. Reporting also helps us evaluate how we can improve Write for Rights and get more people involved. To report, please use the feedback form on page 15 or go online at: [amnestyusa.org/w4r/report](https://www.amnestyusa.org/w4r/report)

DO OUR LETTERS REALLY MATTER?

Yes! A letter may seem a little old-fashioned in this age of online activity, but that is also a source of its strength. When authorities receive thousands of letters about a particular person, they know that the world is watching them. Individuals who have experienced these human rights abuses tell us that our letters to government officials and solidarity letters have a huge impact. Hear from them at [amnestyusa.org/w4r/successes](https://www.amnestyusa.org/w4r/successes)

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS? Contact Laura at w4r@aiusa.org or call (212) 633-4181