

Evaluating Persuasive Letters

Convincing evidence can make all of the difference when you are trying to be persuasive. Need proof? Then check out the following two sample letters designed to convince President Barack Obama to take action on global poverty, and answer the reflection questions found at the bottom of this page.

Persuasive Letter 1

Dear President Obama,

Imagine if you had grown up in the same Angolan town as Jonas, a twelve-year-old boy who is struggling to survive even as we speak. You see, his country is being destroyed by a civil war that has been raging for nearly twenty-five years.

For Jonas, that means a lack of clean water and safe shelter. It means that schools are rarely open and that his father has spent more time away from home fighting than he has with his son. It means fear and hunger and, most of all, poverty.

If you were Jonas, your life expectancy would be thirty-seven years—barely old enough to even run for president here in the U.S.—and there would be a 40 percent chance that you couldn't even read or write.

Is helping people who live in poverty the kind of change you were talking about when you were elected, Mr. Obama?

Jonas hopes so . . . and so do I.

Persuasive Letter 2

Dear President Obama,

Do you realize how lucky you were to be born in the United States of America? After all, you could have been born in a million different countries on a million different continents, and there's not a single place that would have been better than here.

Think about it. What would your life be like if you were born somewhere else? Would you be the president? Probably not. Would you be able to read? Probably not.

You probably wouldn't even have food to eat or a roof over your head. You certainly wouldn't have the fancy homes and cars that you have now.

That's why you should care about poverty. I do.

Questions for Reflection

1. If you were to rate the two persuasive letters on a scale of 1 to 5—with five representing the highest score possible—what scores would you give? Why?
2. Working with a partner, identify and provide an example of each of the different types of convincing evidence—statistics, star statements, and stories—used in persuasive letter 1. Circle the piece of evidence used in persuasive letter 1 that you think is the most convincing.
3. Working with a partner, list three places in persuasive letter 2 where the author could have inserted a statistic, star statement, or story. Explain what type of evidence you would have tried to find had you written this piece.