

Lesson Plan - Letters Home

When working with documents, there are steps that must be taken to fully understand what you can learn. Historians and archivists examine documents in a variety of ways to fully understand both the document itself and the context provided by a document. The very first step is deciding what type of document(s) you are looking at.

Have students examine the two images of the first pages of the two documents. What kind of documents are they looking at? Fill in part one of the worksheet provided.

These are letters written by the same person. Ruben Harold Kenly was a soldier during World War I, which began on July 28, 1914 and ended on November 11, 1918. The United States entered the war on April 6, 1917.

Have students read the transcribed versions of the letters. Also have them examine more closely the images of the original letters. This is the second part, identifying who wrote the document and for whom the document is for. Have them answer questions about the letters on the worksheet available.

The next step in the process is understanding the document.

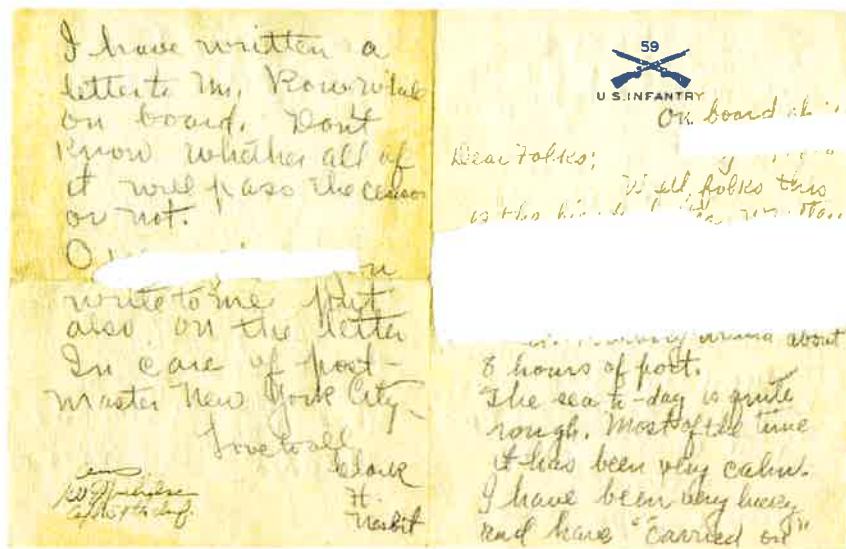
Have students look at the images of the letters provided as well as identify similarities and differences based on the transcripts. Answer the questions in Step Three of the worksheet.

The next step is the context of the document and what can be learned from the document.

Have students fill out the last step in the worksheet.

There's a lot that can be learned from documents like these. The later document does not have a location but we can still assume he is in the same location as the first document because of the mentions of Hempstead and New York. Prior to leaving for Europe in August of 1918, Kenly was likely based in the Aviation General Supply Depot and Concentration Camp (Garden City), a temporary wartime establishment located adjacent to Camp Mills. Based on the first document, Kenly was in an Aero Squadron, an aviation unit with combat flying, training, ground support, construction and other components of the Air Service.

We also know Kenly was still in the United States because his letter is not censored. Letters from overseas would usually be censored to prevent information about troop locations and military information wasn't available should the letters be intercepted by any of the Central Powers.



A letter in the museum collection from Clark H. Nesbit that has been censored

Letters like the ones from Kenly show what was important to the men serving during the war. Kenly asks for pictures to be sent to him of the family. He also mentions two of his brothers, Frank and Bill. After reading this document, a historian would generally research the family. After doing this, it can be seen that both the brothers also served during World War I; Frank in the Navy and Bill (William) in the Coast Guard. Kenly was from Cañon City and after the war returned home. He worked at Portland Cement Company until his retirement in 1958.

Analyzing a Written Document

Step One

What type of document are you looking at?

Step Two

Describe the documents. Are they handwritten or typed? Written by the same person? Are there identifying marks? What else do you notice?

Read the transcripts of the documents. Who wrote them? Who read/received them? When were they written? Where were they sent from?

Step Three

Just looking at the images provided, is there anything different between the two documents? What is the same?

Look at who the documents are addressed to. What are the similarities? What are the differences? Why would things be different based on who the recipient is?

Step Four

What other events were happening when these documents were written?

What can be learned about these other events from this document?

Hempstead, L.I., N.Y.

April 1918

217 Aero Squadron

Field No. 2

Dear Mother,

I guess I am writing home pretty often lately. But an answering letter I got. I feel like I have as much time to write as you folks have. I read a letter from Kate today.

Today is Saturday and is inspection day. They inspect everything you have. Issued property and personal. It has to be arranged in my cot exactly in every detail. The inspecting officer would notice the smallest mistake. Then a fellow would be in bad.

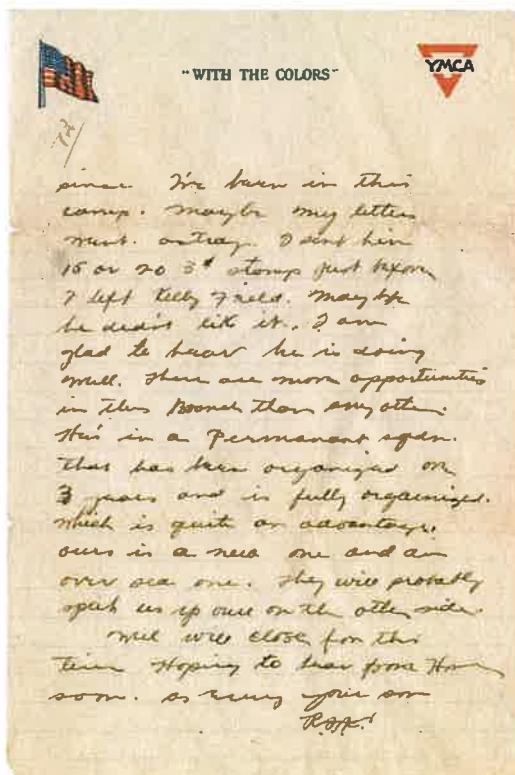
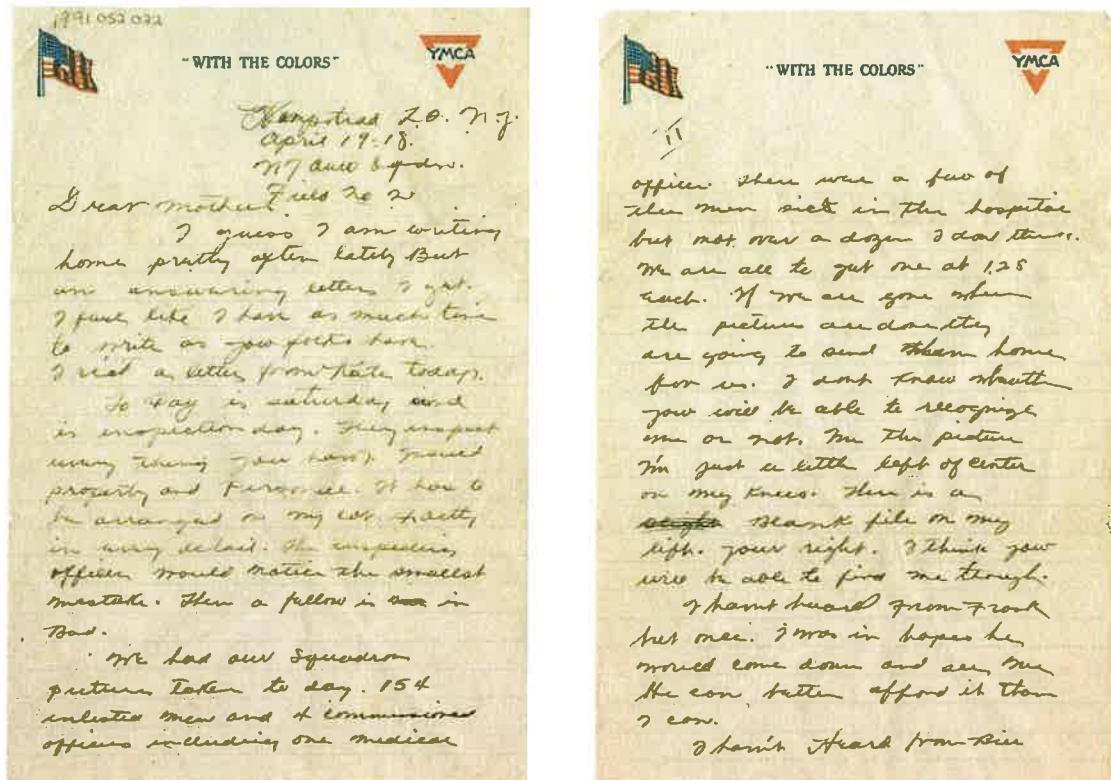
We had our squadron picture taken today. 154 enlisted men and 4 commissioned officers including one medical officer. There were a few of the men sick in the hospital but not over a dozen I don't think. We are all to get one at 1.25 each. If we all give when the pictures are done they are going to send them home for us. I don't know whether you will be able to recognize me or not. In the picture I'm just a little left of the center on my knees. There is a blank file on my left, your right. I think you will be able to find me though.

I haven't heard from Frank but once. I was in hopes he would come down and see me. He can better afford it than I can. I haven't heard from Bill since we've been in this camp. Maybe my letters went astray. I sent him 15 or 20 3¢ stamps just before I left Kelly Field. Maybe he didn't like it. I am glad to hear he is doing well. There are more opportunities in this branch than any other. He's in a permanent sqdn. This has been organized for three years and is fully organized which is quite an advantage. Ours is a new one and an over sea one. They will probably spot us up over on the other side.

We will close for this time. Hoping to hear from home soon.

As ever your son,

RHK



July 5. [19]18

Dear Dad,

As I've just about finished today's work and I have a little time I thought I would write and thank you for the two dollars you sent me. It came in very handy on account of having to buy a new pair of marching shoes. A fellow next to me in the brk [barracks] wore mine home on a 2 weeks furlough to S. Dakota without asking. Bill got the \$10⁰⁰ too at last! It laid up in the Garden City post office since June 25. We got both letters in the same mail. Also one from Kate and Grace.

As yesterday was the 4th, nobody feels much like working. Anyway, we haven't much material. Myself with several others are working the steel hangers we built a month ago. I am supposed to be a radio mechanic but am scoring in the capacity of an electrician just now. I'm the assistant foreman so I don't do much work. I don't see much of the foreman McGowan. He goes to Brooklyn every night and I think must hide out and sleep in the daytime. The most of my work just now is on two search lights and carriages for them. We have been experimenting on how to illuminate the field for night flying. So far we haven't done very much good. So far there hasn't been very much night flying on account of the poor landing place. It's pretty easy to wreck a machine at night.

There was quite a big turnout in N.Y. yesterday. 27 of our machines flew over the city and landed in Van Cortlandt Park. All got back all right but two. A Curtiss fell in the Hudson River and a little Speed Scout got mixed up in the trees. These were brought back in trucks this morning.

I didn't go over as I had arrangements to go down the bay, Bill went out though. He seems to know as many around here as I do. He is still lying around the brk and doing nothing. I don't know when his detachment will go to work.

I had some pictures taken over in Hempstead last night. I expect to get them tonight or tomorrow. I'll send a couple of them home when I get them. Bill also had his taken today. Tell Kate I would like to have some pictures of the folks at home. Grace, Bill and all. I've got some in my trunks if Bud hasn't opened it. He said when he wrote me he hadn't opened it yet.

Well I guess I have to get back and lock up the tool room for the night so good bye.

Your son,

RHK



ARMY AND NAVY
YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION
"WITH THE COLORS"



Dear Dad

July 6. '18.

As I'm just about finished today's work and have a little time I thought I would write and thank you for the two dollars you sent me. It was in our house on account of having to buy a new pair of marching shoes. A fellow next to me in the 3rd score was having on a 2 month furlough to S. Dakota with out salary. His cap. the 10th too. at least. He came up in the Sodden city post office and gave us \$5. my get back letter in the same mail. also one from State and Soale.

As yesterday was the 4th we had a little time this morning.

TO THE WRITER: SAVE BY WRITING ON BOTH SIDES OF THIS PAPER
TO THE PUBLIC AT HOME: BUY FOOD, BUY LIBERTY BONDS AND WAR BONDS STAMPS.

Any way we have much material. Myself with several others are boring the steel barrels we built a smooth one up. I am supposed to be a Radio Mechanic but am serving in the capacity of electrician just now in the aviation forces so I don't do much work. I don't see very much flying forming out down. They go to Brooklyn every night and I think must hide out and sleep in the day time. The most of my work just now is on the search lights and tarpaulins for them. We have been experimenting on how to illuminate the field for night flying so far we have done very much good. So far they have had very much night flying on account of the poor banking weather. It pretty easy to miss by mistake of night.



ARMY AND NAVY
YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION
"WITH THE COLORS"



We were quite a big time over in my yesterday. 97 of our machines flew over the city and landed in the central park. We got back in right for too. a little full in the Hudson river and a little up so about got mixed up in the trees. Then we brought back in Central Park in the morning.

I didn't go over as I had arrangements to go down to the bay. Bill was over though. He seems to know as many around here as I do. He is still flying around the Park and doing nothing. I don't know when his attachment will go to work.

TO THE WRITER: SAVE BY WRITING ON BOTH SIDES OF THIS PAPER
TO THE PUBLIC AT HOME: BUY FOOD, BUY LIBERTY BONDS AND WAR BONDS STAMPS

I had some pictures taken over in Thompson last night. I expect to get them to night or tomorrow. Bill send a couple of them home when he gets them. Bill also has his tail - today. See how I would like to have some pictures of the girls at home. Since Bill and myself I've got some in my trunk if Bill hasn't opened it. He said when he was going that he had and open it yet.

Now I guess we have to get back and locking the tool room for the night so good night

Yours truly
L. D. H.