

Campaign to

CLOSE HOMESTEAD DETENTION CENTER

Helping children write letters to Congress

A toolkit for grades K-3



**American Friends
Service Committee**

We invite young people to write letters to Congress, urging members to do all they can to shut down the Homestead Child Detention Center, unite children with their families, and prevent other centers from opening.

Letters can come from anywhere in the country and from children of all ages. They can be writing, drawings, or both. Letters can come from children who have experienced detention or family separation, or they can come from children who are just learning about these issues but who know that all families should be together! The voices of young people are powerful and important – and can help influence Congress to do what’s right.

This toolkit was designed for educators and other adults who work closely with children and youth. It’s important to share this information with their parents and guardians so they can continue to have discussions at home.

Use this toolkit to help children grades K-3:

- Learn about the experiences of migrant children in detention.
- Contribute to a collective letter to Congress to shut down Homestead detention center and help unite children with family members or other adults who care for them.

Materials you’ll need:

- Paper, pens, colored pencils, and/or markers
- Envelopes and stamps
- Flip chart or whiteboard (optional)

Activities:

- Discuss what migration looks like.
- Share and discuss stories of child migrants.
- Contribute to a collective letter to Congress.

Key terms:

Migrant	A person who moves from one place to another, including from one country to another. People migrate from their home country for many reasons, including to escape violence or poverty.
Asylum	Asylum is a human right under international law. It ensures that countries offer protection to migrants who are unsafe in their home countries.
Detaining	To hold someone in official custody, often in a secure facility, such as a detention center or jail. People in detention are not allowed to leave even if they want to.

Opening activity:

Discuss what migration looks like.

Begin by asking these questions:

- What makes you feel safe?
- What does “home” mean to you?
- What might it feel like to have to move because your home no longer felt safe?

Listen carefully to their responses, affirm their stories/answers.

Tell them that many people – or migrants – from Central America and other places are coming to the United States because they do not feel safe in their home countries. Many migrants are traveling in large groups – which are called caravans – because that makes them feel safer in their journey. Some are with families. Some, including children, come alone.

They are seeking safety in the U.S. There are laws agreed to between countries that if a person is not safe in their home country, they can ask for protection in a nearby country. That’s what we call “asylum.”

Activity:

Share and discuss stories of child migrants.

Read one or two stories from this UNICEF resource about children who left their homes:

<https://www.unicef.org/stories/tales-love-and-hope-migration-trail>

We recommend Kylie’s and Jennifer’s stories.

Use your discretion of what’s appropriate to share with the children you’re working with.

Show the pictures that accompany the stories.

Say, “Here are a few stories of children who had to leave their homes quickly.”

Invite the children to respond.

Ask them, “If you needed to travel, who would you want to travel with to help you feel safe?”

Have them draw a picture of that person or people.

Come together in a circle and have them share the drawing and say a few words about why they feel safe with that person or those people.

Activity:

Discuss what's happening at Homestead detention center – and how we can stop it.

Here's some information you can share about Homestead detention center:

Homestead detention center is a place where children who came to the U.S. seeking safety are separated from their loved ones and held for weeks or months at a time.

Children sleep in big rooms that are not comfortable and can hold up to 250 kids. They're not allowed to leave. They're closely monitored by guards and not allowed to touch or hug anyone, even their own brothers or sisters. Some end up staying there for months without contact with their family.

I wonder how that would feel. I wonder how it makes you feel to know about it.

Detention can be very harmful for children's physical and mental health. It can affect children long after they leave detention.

Every person should be able to travel to escape violence or extreme poverty. It is wrong to put anyone in detention for seeking a better life.

It's important that we end child detention. The American Friends Service Committee and many other organizations are working to shut down Homestead detention center so children can be with their families or other adults who care for them.

And we can help them by writing a letter to Congress today.

Ask:

- What do you think of these children being detained?
- Some end up staying there for months without seeing their family or talking to them on the phone. What do you think of this?
- How do you think they're feeling?

Listen to their responses.

1. Create a collective letter to Congress.

Young people are invited to write letters to Congress, asking them to do everything in their power to shut down Homestead detention center and work to end child detention.

Congress makes a lot of important decisions that affect our communities, states, and country. They are elected by voters, so they have a responsibility to make decisions that help the people and communities they represent.

When we write letters to Congress, we are letting them know what people in their community want. Today, we're writing letters so they know we want to shut down Homestead detention center and we want the U.S. to stop detaining children.

Ask the children, "Would you like to write a letter to people in our government who could decide to stop detaining children? Let's write a letter together. What would you like to say?"

- Brainstorm ideas and write them down on a flip chart paper or a whiteboard.
- Here are some messages you could include:

Stop detaining children.

Close Homestead detention center.

Children belong with their families or other adults who care for them.

Everyone has a right to live someplace safe.

- Invite children to add their drawings and pictures to the big letter.
- Read the letter back to them. Make sure they all feel good about the message.

2. Share the letter online.

- Take a picture of the letter.
- Share it on Facebook.
- Tweet it to your congressperson using the hashtag **#EndChildDetention**, and tag **@afsc_org**.
- Look up your representative's Twitter account at migrantjustice.afsc.org/contact-congress.
- Learn more about online safety at: migrantjustice.afsc.org/online-safety

3. Mail your letter to Congress.

Look up your representative's address at migrantjustice.afsc.org/contact-congress.

If you can, please send us a photocopy that we can share online and at our events!

Copies of letters can be sent to Kristin Kumpf, AFSC, 1822 R ST. NW, Washington, D.C. 20009

Concluding activity:

What more can we do?

Say a few words to reinforce why writing letters to Congress matters. Thank them for what they did.

Remind them that this is an ongoing effort. Take a few minutes to brainstorm some ideas on what else they could do to help.

That could include sharing some information with their parents or caregivers. Here's a website where people can learn more: migrantjustice.afsc.org.

Thank you for taking time to advocate for migrant children and for humane U.S. immigration policy. We appreciate your partnership in this effort!

AFSC is a Quaker organization devoted to service, development, and peace programs throughout the world. Our work is based on the belief in the worth of every person, and faith in the power of love to overcome violence and injustice.