**Letter to USA Teacher**

Hello,

My name is XXXXXX and I’m an Assistant English Teacher. I currently teach 7th-9th grade English to Japanese students in XXXXXXX, Japan.

I am hoping to start a pen pal program with your school. Attached are the lesson plans and other materials for this program! Our school year starts in April, so I am hoping to connect early so we can get approval for this plan to be implemented in the fall of 2022, early September.

We have two classes of our 8th grade age students who will be writing the letters and looking for pen pals, one class of 27 students (13 boys and 14 girls), and one class of 26 (13 boys and 13 girls).

The goal would be for Japanese students to send 3 letters over the course of the semester. Final dates/deadlines for letter sending can be finalized once we have a chance to talk!

Japanese Students send Letters beginning of September

American Students receive and respond beginning of October

Japanese Students receive and respond end of October

American Students receive and respond Beginning of November

Japanese Students receive and respond early December

American Students receive final letters late December (hopefully before holidays)

One fun thing I loved the idea of, was sharing local (pre-packaged) sweets or stickers along with the last package as a holiday treat for both groups if that is something you are interested in.

Another option would be for an ending zoom call, but only penpals on the West coast would be able to make it possible for us to Zoom at the end of the school day. For East coast, I would be willing to video call at any time as a teacher/cultural ambassador.

For example

4pm PDT is 8am Japan time.(March-November)

3pm PST is 8am Japan time.(November to March)

My goal is to increase my student’s understanding of English through a peer group of interactions and encourage them to learn more about the different cultures of each other. I also want to engage them in fun and real life lessons where they can talk about their interests with students their own age.

I look forward to working with you!

Best,

XXXXXXX

* + **What You Will Receive / Index**

Documents and Resources Included:

* Questions to Answer before starting
* Do’s and Don’ts
* Learning Objectives and Outcomes for English and Social Studies Common Core

American side

* Letter home to parents template
* Introduction lesson to students about Japan (doc and PowerPoint)
  + Introduction to Japanese schools (First Exchange)
  + Foods and Culture (Second Exchange, will be sent later on)
  + Festivals and Celebrations (Third Exchange, will be sent later on)
* Reading and responding to student’s lesson plan (doc and included in pwpts)
* Pen pal letter example

Japanese side

* Introduction lesson
  + Intro to American School (Pwpt)
  + American Food and Culture (can be made by students if you want)
  + Festivals and Celebrations
* Answering prompt questions lesson
  + Writing
  + Final draft and sending letters.
* Receiving the letters
  + Vocab lesson
  + Responding to letters day 1+2

**What I Will Need from You Before Starting**

* Information on local area for PowerPoint
  + What is special about the town you live in?
  + Do you have any special foods?
  + About how long does it take you to go places?
  + What do students do for fun outside of school in the area?
* If your students think there is anything they want represented about their town/culture in the PowerPoints, please let me know!
  + It’s also optional if you wanted to make it a requirement for your class to make the PowerPoint themselves, I’m open to providing them a template and they can send it over when finished! And I can provide a grading rubric for the teacher.
  + This would be for PowerPoint 2 and 3 about Food/Culture and Holidays/Celebrations

**Sending the Letters: Do’s and Don’ts**

**Identifying Information**

* Students should only write their first name
  + In the case of two students with the same name, they can use their last initial.
* Students should not include personal information such as social media, emails, phone numbers or addresses.

**What can you add?**

* Students can include fun things that represent America!
  + Stickers or washi tape
  + Pictures from magazines or newspapers
  + Newspaper spread or grocery store ads
  + Printed out pictures of bands/ popular things
  + Drawings, doodles or illustrations

**For Teachers:**

Please make sure when reviewing letters that

* *Ensure that there is no language that could be perceived as abusive, scandalous, obscene, racist, vulgar, pornographic, hateful, profane, criminal, or offensive material of any kind.*
* Letters should be legible enough so that Japanese students can read the words, but they do not need to be typed.
* No food should be sent individually
  + If students are interested in sending food, a good thing would be to hold a poll of the most popular treats in America.
* Students should not send any bought items (jewelry or toys)
* **Letters shouldn’t be sealed so teachers can review them**
  + - **This is so we can pre-make vocab lists for the students and know what to help them with when we get to translations**
* When packaging letters
  + Letters can be folded or unfolded as long as they are legible.
  + If possible, package in a waterproof folder so they aren’t damaged while shipping.

**Learning Objectives and Outcomes**

Letter writing hits specific standards of the [COMMON CORE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/) FOR WRITING:

* With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose.
* With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing.
* Write routinely over extended time frames and shorter time frames for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Additionally,

* Helping the learners to develop critical reading, and to practice writing in a creative way
* To practice writing tasks that deal with meaningful, engaging and real life situations are indeed better than conventional, artificial as well as decontextualized exercises.

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL SKILLS

* Global project-based learning requires students to collaborate with peers from different backgrounds.
* Students build empathy, respect, self-awareness, and international-mindedness.

DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

* Students practice important 21st century skills like online research, managing usernames/passwords, protecting personal information, and forming healthy habits of online discussion.
* Student reflections are suggestive in the following two aspects: linguistic and cultural gain can be achieved through pen pal exchanges on the one hand and a dual-language design can be helpful in raising students’ awareness of their language learning process on the other hand.

Not only are students improving their writing skills, they are also building communication, collaboration, and creative thinking skills, all goals for all 21st century learners

* Talk with students about what information they can share like school name, teacher name, city, and state they live in. Also emphasize the information they cannot share such as last name, home address, personal email, or social media accounts.
* Discuss appropriate topics to write about including favorite games to play, foods to eat, sports to watch, etc. being mindful of cultural differences and sensitivities, as applicable. This is a good opportunity to delve into another country’s cultures as part of a social studies unit.

OTHER BENEFITS

* Students are more likely to be engaged with something personal where they can share their own opinions and experiences.
* It can give students a great insight into other cultures.
* It shows them the wider world
* It encourages international relations

More info on potential standards for a wide range of Social Studies classes

<https://www.penpalschools.com/social-studies.html>

Sources for text above:

<https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation.aspx?paperid=88533>

<https://ncolctl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Pen-Pal-Activities-as-a-Learning-Tool.pdf>

<https://www.penpalschools.com/learning-outcomes.html>

<https://beneylu.com/pssst/en/schoolpenpals/>

**Letter Home to Parents**

Hello,

Our class is working on a penpal exchange project with *XXX Junior High School* in *XXX, Japan*. There may be times when we trade pictures of our classes so we’d like to get your permission before we begin. **Note:** this picture will not be shared online or with anyone but the teachers and students of the class.

Students are asked to not disclose personal information like phone numbers, addresses, social media accounts or email addresses until the project is done. After the project is completed, students are welcome to continue contact with their students by sending their contact information to the teacher who will give it to the student in Japan.

For more information, please contact your teacher.

If you have any concerns, email the Japan contact, [EMAIL@gmail.com](mailto:EMAIL@gmail.com)

Please sign and return to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, 2022

My child, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, has permission to have their picture shared with XXX Junior High School teachers and students.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Student:

* I understand that this is a cross-cultural exchange.
* Until the end of the project, I will not share my email, phone number or social media with the students.
* If I want to continue the penpal program, I will give the teacher my email with my parent’s permission.
* I will write my letters with kindness and respect

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Introduction to Japan (See Attached PowerPoint)**

* We live in Nagasaki, Japan. Nagasaki is a prefecture, similar to a county of a state. Nagasaki is on the biggest island, Kyushu.
* More info on your area here!
* Schools are a little different here. They start school in April, and finish in March. Their grades are from 1-6th grade in elementary, then 7-9th junior high, and 10-12th senior high school. All junior and senior high school students have to wear a uniform even in public schools.
* The school day is from 8:15 to 4:30 and students have 6 periods, with a 10-minute break in between periods. They stay in the same classroom for almost all of their classes, and even eat lunch in their classroom. Students spend 15-20 minutes after lunch cleaning their classrooms and schools by sweeping, taking out trash and wiping down surfaces.
* At the beginning of every period, students spend one minute in silence, sitting at their desk. They then stand, bow and greet the teacher. At the end of class, they stand, bow, and thank the teacher.
* At the end of the day, students often spend another 2-3 hours at school studying or doing club activities like sports.

Discussion

* How is Japan different from the US?
* What do you think about their school?
* Would you want a similar schedule? Why or why not?
* If you could share one thing from American schools with Japanese students, which would it be?
* What could pen pals learn from one another?
* What could a person learn about you from a letter?
* What would you want to learn about your pen pal?
* Why is it valuable to learn about another person’s country, customs, or culture?
* Why is writing a letter better than texting or messaging on social media?

**Reading and Responding to the Letters (See Pwpt)**

Critical Thinking

* First read the letter for fun and write notes on what you want to say back.
* Second look for mistakes
  + Why do you think the students made these mistakes?
  + Have you learned another language? Do you think it’s easier or harder than English?
* Write a thoughtful response to the letter
* Turn it in and check for slang words and specialized words
  + Why do you think it’s harder for students to learn slang words?
    - Example of Japanese slang and translation- what do you think they mean?
  + Slang words require context to the jokes/puns/meanings
    - Ex/ dope, cringe, bet, GOAT, slay, wack, I feel you, etc
* What about how they write?
  + Does their handwriting look the same or different yours and your friends?
  + Why do you think that is?
  + Try writing some of the Japanese characters

Japanese Slang:

やばい (yabai)

"yabai" is much like the English “oh my god” and “crazy” and can be used in both a negative and positive way. If something is “yabai” it can be amazingly good or horribly bad and guessing which will really depend on the context.

例）あの服やばいね

Ano fuku yabai ne

Example: Those clothes are great/hideous

**Penpal Example from Japanese Student**

Dear Friend,

How are you? My name is (name). I am from Nagasaki, Japan. I have a mom, dad, sister and a dog. I like basketball and games. My favorite is Minecraft. Do you like games?

I go to XXX Junior High School and I am in class 2-1. I walk to school at 8am. I have six classes. My favorite subject is math class. We have school lunch in our classroom. My favorite lunch is curry and rice. I don’t like natto. We clean the classroom every day after lunch. We sweep the floors and take the trash out. School ends at 4:30pm. I am in the basketball club and we practice 3 days a week.

On weekends, I practice basketball and play Minecraft. What do you like to do?

What is American school like?

Please write back, see you!

(Name)

Things to Talk about

* Places you’ve travelled/want to travel
* Hobbies/interests
* What club you are in
* Family
* Pets
* What you like to do in your hometown
* Favorite foods
* Favorite YouTuber/singer/idol

**Example American Student Reply:**

Keep in mind

* Short sentences (compound sentences are difficult to translate)
* Reply to questions and talk about your own information even if they don’t ask
* Ask questions about things you don’t understand
* Keep vocab relatively simple. Some big words are okay, but we don’t want them to have to look at the dictionary for each sentence. Ex/ bolded words.
* Try to keep the length reasonable. The students want more than just 3 sentences, but three pages will be very difficult. About 1-1.5 pages is perfect.

Dear (Name),

I’m from (place in America). It’s in the **countryside** but I like it. I don’t play basketball, but my friends do. I’m on the soccer team. We practice one hour after school on Mondays and Fridays. I play Zelda on the switch. Do you play Zelda?

Wow! That’s really cool that you walk to school. I take the bus. It’s a 30-minute **ride** and I listen to music or talk to my friends the whole way.

I don’t like math. I think Science is better because we have a **tank of fish** in our classroom and I can feed them. What is natto? Do you like cleaning the school? Our school is so big I don’t think the students could clean it all by themselves.

American school is different. We start at 8am and have 7 classes. We only have a 4-minute break between classes! We can wear **whatever** we want to school though. I usually wear jeans and my favorite band tshirt. Do you know (band name)? What about (tv show)? Those are my favorites!

I’m excited to talk to you.

Bye, (Name)