

Welcome Kit

Welcome to American Pals!

Please contact us at contact@americanpals.org if you have any questions before or during the program. We are happy to help!

Table of Contents

ABOUT US	3
BEFORE THE PROGRAM	4
DURING THE PROGRAM	5
AFTER THE PROGRAM	6
TOPIC CARDS	7
PROGRAM WORKSHEET	8
PERMISSION SLIP	9
COMMUNICATION TOOLS	10

About Us

American Pals is an intra-national pen pal project with a simple goal: to enable students to get to know their own country and fellow citizens better. We pair middle and high school classrooms from different geographic and cultural environments across the United States, and allow students to develop safe, non-digital relationships with peers using the time-honored tradition of offline letter writing.



Before the Program

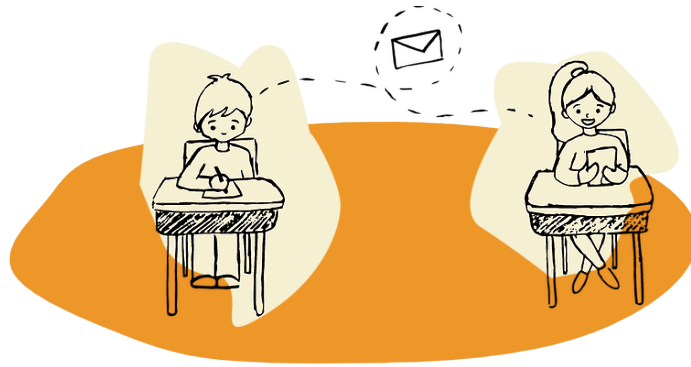


1

Contact your Partner Teacher

- Phone, email, or video chat with your partner teacher.
- Agree on common goals.
- Decide which teacher will start the pen pal chain, how many letters you'll exchange, and when the chain should end.
- Decide what topics will be discussed and what order they will be placed in (see Topic Cards on page 7 for suggestions).
- Assign students to their pen pal (feel free to use Google spreadsheets and/or program worksheet on page 8).
- Optional: provide parents/guardians with the program description and permission form (page 8), or create your own permission form if you feel one is needed.

During the Program

**2**

Introduce the Program

Introduce the pen pal program to the class and discuss students' initial reactions to it.

- **Tip:** Teach students how to write a letter. We encourage handwritten letters (although it is also ok for students to type and print out their letters).
- **Tip:** Add a tab to the Google spreadsheet with what the class discussed as a way to look back at it later.

3

Write the Letters

Have students write letters to their pen pal. Just a reminder that students should only use first names when corresponding with pen pals, and they should not exchange personal contact information (home address, email address, phone number, social media handles, etc).

- **Tip:** Have students introduce themselves in their first letters. For specific topic ideas for subsequent letters, see suggestions on page 7.
- **Tip:** Remind students that these are not essays and will not be graded! Encourage them to communicate sincerely and from the heart.

4

Send the Letters

Have the students pass back their letters in their unsealed, labeled envelopes for you to review before sending off. Exchange letters back and forth with your classroom throughout the program based on the timeline you discussed with your partner teacher.

- **Tip:** Some teachers choose to scan or take photos of all the letters before sending them off in case they get lost.

After the Program

**5**

Discuss What Your Class Has Learned

Have a discussion in class about what students discovered during through their letter exchanges.

- Revisit original discussion notes in Google spreadsheet and compare. What did your students learn from their pen pals? How accurate/inaccurate were their assumptions about the region?
- Email contact@AmericanPals.org and fill us in on the results of the program in your classroom!

6

Wrap up with Something Fun!

- Use a video app like Skype to have the students meet each other face to face after the process or send a video to their pen pal via email.
- Decide with your class if they wish to send a final letter with their contact info to keep in touch with their pen pals.

Topic Cards

Some classes like having suggestions for what to discuss in their letters. Below are sample questions on a variety of topics; complete topic cards can be downloaded at www.americanpals.org/resources. Feel free to use them to guide your class, or create your own topics with your partner teacher.

Topic Card: Society Today

- 1) Is technology making us feel more alone or more connected?
 - a. Has technology changed the way family and friends interact with each other? How?
 - b. Do you like to use social media? Why or why not?
 - c. Do you think people can be “addicted” to technology?

Topic Card: Your Values

- 1) How would you describe yourself and your values?
 - a. What sense of purpose / mission / duty guides you in your life?
 - b. What would your best friend say about who you are and what inspires you?
 - c. What are you most proud of in your life?
- 2) Think of someone you look up to, either a famous person or someone you know. Who is it and what is it about them that you admire?
 - a. What makes a person admirable?
 - b. Whom do the people in your life tend to admire most?

Topic Card: Youth Today

- 1) Are kids today more or less “stressed out” than past generations?
 - a. What causes stress in your life?
 - b. How do you deal with stress?
- 2) A dilemma is a situation in which it is difficult to decide what is the right thing to do. What is a dilemma (or more than one) faced by young people today?

Program Worksheet

American Pals Welcome Kit / 8

PARTNER TEACHER	
PARTNER CONTACT INFO	
CLASSROOM TO INITIATE LETTER WRITING	
NUMBER OF LETTERS	
DURATION OF PROGRAM	
PROGRAM GOALS	

Student Pairing Chart

[illegible]

Permission Slip

Dear Parent / Guardian,

Our classroom will be participating in pen pal exchanges with a classroom from a different region of the United States this year. Your child will be paired with a pen pal in the same grade and exchange non-digital letters over the course of the school year. Every student in the class will get a pen pal from the same partner class. These letters are not graded and are a fun way to practice important writing skills while getting to know about a different region of the country.

The goals behind these exchanges are:

- 1) To practice writing for an authentic audience;
- 2) To learn about life and people in different parts of the United States;
- 3) To experience a traditional form of non-digital communication.

To ensure the privacy and safety of students, we strictly adhere to the following guidelines:

- 1) Students are only given the first name and last initial of their pen pal;
- 2) Letters are sent "teacher to teacher," not "student to student";
- 3) Students do not exchange any personal contact information, digital or otherwise. That means no exchanging of home mailing address, telephone numbers, email addresses, social media accounts,..etc.
- 4) Teachers preview letters before sending them to ensure that tone and content are appropriate and respectful.

For more information on these pen pal exchanges, please visit American Pals at www.americanpals.org. Please let me know if you have questions or would prefer that your child not participate for some reason. Thank you!

Communication Tools

Here are some resources that teachers have used in the past to aid their cross-collaboration with their partner teacher.

[SKYPE](#)

A video chat app if you want to connect with your partner classroom at the end of the program.

[GOOGLE DRIVE](#)

A great way to share files and collaborate with your partner teacher.

[SLACK](#)

A chat app if you want a platform to talk with your partner teacher and keep track of the conversation.