

AAC Guidelines for Pen Palling

Writing a pen pal letter may seem like a small, simple act but done in the right way, it can have a huge impact. Adopt A Class encourages all classes in the first through eighth grades to have a regular pen pal exchange between the students and the adopters. Pen palling promotes literacy, writing and communication skills, as well as helps to establish a relationship between the students and their mentors.

Currently all AAC teams exchange their pen pal letters in hard copy format. While some teams will type their letters, and print them out for delivery to the schools, writing letters with pencil and paper slows us down in an often hectic world. For the kids, receiving handwritten letters makes it special and teaches patience.

When Establishing Your Pen Pal Program Consider These Recommendations:

- **Start Early:** Begin working on pen pals with your students as early in the school year as possible, so that you can maximize the number of letters that participants can exchange. Many teams start exchanging letter before their first visit to the classroom.
- **Set a Routine:** Be clear about the frequency of your letter exchange and what the format of the letters will be. For example, how often will you write and how quickly should you write back once you receive a letter? Will you mail the letters in one large envelope or will you have someone for the adopting team stop by the school to pick them up? Make sure your plan is realistic for both the teacher, the students and the adopters.
- **Guide the Conversation:** Help students generate ideas for writing their letters. You may find it helpful to start the exchange with specific questions, a form letter or a lesson on how to format a friendly letter. Keep in mind, for students this may be the first real letter they have ever composed or received.
- **Get Creative:** Think of a unique way to enhance the pen pal exchange perhaps a decorated bulletin board or special area to display the letters. This will make the program stand out as a special activity.

Keep Pen Pals Safe and Secure:

It is important to take the necessary steps to ensure the students in your pen palling program are safe.

Teachers should read the letters their students compose to make sure the student isn't sharing any personal information, such as their home addresses or inappropriate information such as requests for gifts.

It is important that if any information is shared that is concerning or alarming in anyway, that it is brought to the attention of either the teacher, resource coordinator, principal or AAC Staff right away.