

*Pen Pals: Communicating with the Community*

Education Transfer Plan  
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## **Overview of Project**

Through this project, students will be challenged to think, communicate, empathize, and learn. The main component of this project will be to have students write letters to their peers. This communication will show students that literacy skills can be used in a functional way to build relationships and share information. Also, students will learn about health care professions by interacting with doctors, nurses, technicians, and other professionals. Finally, students will master core concepts of word processing software. They will be familiar with a computer and ways to use it productively.

## **Objectives for Students**

1. Students will be able to compose a friendly letter and type it in a word processing software
2. Students will be able to identify and discuss a variety of roles of health care providers
3. Students will be able to apply learned social skills such as caring, empathy and relationship building

## **Resources**

1. Computers equipped with word processing software
2. Digital camera
3. Stationery including postage stamps
4. Children's literature about health care, friendship, technology, etc.
5. Transportation for students to visit pen pals

## **Background Information**

It is important for me as a teacher to contemplate why I chose this or any project and what my students will gain from it. First, I realize that many of my students, because of their age and backgrounds, have myopic views of the world. Some may not have traveled far from their communities, so they may not know what opportunities exist in the world. Second, students learning occurs better when there is a real world application or motivation to learn. This project exemplifies applied, hands on learning both in the social realm and the academic realm. For example, students will understand that their writing is purposeful and not merely an exercise to improve skills. Similarly, students will have to build relationships with strangers through personal interaction and written communication. Finally, students will be exposed to a university setting. Research has shown that the more college is discussed, the greater the likelihood that students will attend. While college awareness is not the main focus of this project, it will be emphasized whenever is appropriate.

## **Project Description**

There will be two main components to this project. Each component will address various standards, and further lessons will be planned as needed. It is my goal to observe students and note what interests them. I will try to plan lessons in accordance with this “feedback” from students. While I am initiating this project, I want my students to guide the actual lessons by suggestions, comments, and their questions. Therefore, only a skeleton of the actual project and sample lessons are provided here.

The first component will be teaching literacy skills through adopting pen pals from within the hospital community. These patients will be chosen based on their age, ability to communicate through verbal and written medium, and compatibility with first grade students. It is not essential or hoped that students will be constant residents of the hospital. As and when patients are discharged, students will write to them at home. For the purposes of the field trips, it is hoped that patients can visit the hospital on these days.

The goal of this aspect of the project is to teach that literacy skills have real world applications. The main skills addressed will be the form of a friendly letter, sentence composition, grammar, and English language development. Moreover, this project has the potential to teach the power of literacy in building relationships, giving comfort, and expressing one’s emotions and thoughts. This is one aspect of literacy that is often ignored in the core curriculum because reading and writing are taught through rote drills and with little or no connection to the real world or other people. For example, when a student reads a decodable book with many “long A” words, that student is not understanding that literature can affect people’s thoughts, ideas and emotions. That student is just learning the long A sound. It is my goal to teach literacy in a way in which students become familiar with their own voice and realize their agency in using that voice to bring about positive and desired outcomes. This will be accomplished by studying how certain literature makes us feel and how our words, written or spoken, have an impact on others.

The second component to this project is introducing students to computer technology by teaching them Word. The main skills that will be addressed include: familiarity with letter positions on the keyboard, spacing, inserting and deleting text, formatting text. In addition to these technical skills, I want students to understand that technology and computers are relatively recent inventions which have drastically changed how people live and work. One avenue this discussion might take is to compare and contrast work done with computers and then work students do with crayons and other materials. Also, history and social studies can be included by looking at life before computers.

The final component of the project is the broad category of building social skills and communicative competence in students. Many of these students need ample opportunities to interact with others so that they can build their English speaking skills. Language develops in a rich environment where students have a chance to participate in their learning. The field trips are specifically designed to give students a new environment with the opportunity to learn about the world outside of their immediate surroundings. Furthermore, students will be quickly thrown into new peer relationships with their pen pals. These pen pals may be facing serious illnesses and challenges which will be new to the student. The goal here is to confront the challenges which illnesses and hardship offer, discuss them, and learn how to cope and grow from them. For my students, part of the challenge will be to learn how to empathize, to share feelings, and to build relationships despite differences.

# Sample Lesson

**Title of Lesson:** Addressing an Envelope

**Objectives:**

Students will be able to:

1. address an envelope with return address, mailing address and stamp in correct positions
2. explain the need for following standardize protocol for addressing an envelope

**Materials Needed:**

1. one envelope and stamp per student
2. letter written by student
3. piece of mail

***Instructions for Implementing Lesson***

**Setting the Stage**

Ask students to share a time when they have sent or received a piece of mail. This can be done with partners or through AB questioning with the teacher.

**Acquisition of Skills**

Teacher should show a piece of mail she received in the mail. Describe how there are two addresses and state the reasons for this.

Also, show how where the stamp is placed and how it is metered so it cannot be reused. Discuss how the stamp is used in place of money. (A math extension is to talk about how much stamps cost and why their prices rise depending on how far the letter goes, etc.)

Then, teacher should model addressing an envelope. Discuss using small, neat handwriting and placing all elements in their correct positions.

**Guided Practice**

Students address their own envelopes with the teacher's guidance. Students walk to drop box and mail their letters.

**Closure**

Teachers and students review parts of addresses including number, street name, city and state name and zip code.

## **Project Timeline**

<i>September – October</i>	Introduce project through relevant children’s literature and class discussion. Begin literacy instruction through repetitive sentences. Model form of a friendly letter. Emphasize alphabetic letter formation and spacing. Compile class book of simple writing to be given to LPCH School or library.
<i>November</i>	<p>Orient students in small groups to fundamentals of computing such as keyboard, mouse, and monitor usage. Discuss reasons why people use computers and briefly compare and contrast life with and without computers.</p> <p>Unit on “Our Neighborhood at Work.” Discuss healthcare careers and invite representatives from these professions to come to classroom.</p>
<i>December</i>	First field trip to Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital. Have students formulate interview questions for when they meet their pen pals. Students will meet pen pals, health care workers, and other professionals. Students and pen pals will share life experiences, etc. After this initial meeting, students will send cards and make small gift for pen pal.
<i>January</i>	Students and pen pals will exchange one letter each. The goal will be for students to use complete sentences with capitals and periods and correct friendly letter format. Also, discuss ideas of addresses and postal systems. Teach technicalities of writing envelopes.
<i>February</i>	Students will exchange Valentines with pen pals. There will be continued emphasis on handwriting, sentence formation and structure, increased vocabulary and complexity of thought.
<i>March – April</i>	Increase number of letters to pen pals. Begin typing letters on computers. Teach students to format text by changing font size and color.
<i>May</i>	Final field trip to meet pen pals. Take tour of Stanford University campus. Host end of the year celebration with pen pals. Have students report what they learned and how they feel having a friend.
<i>June</i>	Assessment of project using quantitative and qualitative data. Compile student portfolios which will include copies of their sent letters as well as received letters and pictures. Discuss improvement in writing and the growth of pen pal relationship.

## How to Replicate This Project

It may not be possible for other teachers to connect with classrooms within Lucile Packard Children's Hospital. Nevertheless, I feel like building a relationship and communicating with a peers teaches students valuable social and academic skills. In order to do this project, I have found a contact person at the LPCH site. This person has agreed to collect and mail all the letters to my students. She is the coordinator who will ensure that the patients are writing letters and that the letters reach my students. She states a deadline by which all letters must be turned into her. She collects them all, puts them in a larger envelope and mails them to me. I distribute these letters to my students. I, in turn, follow the same procedure when sending letters to her. This ensures that all students can receive a letter, and it can be used to cut down on postage costs. Another advantage is that it ensures all letters arrive as planned. First graders have trouble using legible handwriting and placing addresses and stamps in the correct position. This method will ensure that all the envelopes arrive as planned.

## Assessment and Evaluation

### Writing Rubric

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
No words are intelligible	Incorrect letter formation, but words are discernable	Good handwriting and spacing	Excellent handwriting and spacing
No capitals and periods.	Few capitals and periods.	Some capitals and periods	All sentences with capitals and periods
No elements of friendly letter are discernable.	Some elements of friendly letter in correct positions.	Most elements of friendly letter in correct positions.	Correct friendly letter form
No complete sentences.	Short simple sentences without descriptive words.	Some extended sentences with descriptive words.	Thoughtful grammatically correct sentences with descriptive words