



Global Friendships

Exchanging messages with a kid in a faraway country is an easy way for your child to feel a connection to the rest of the world. BY CHERYL LOCK

In a schoolroom in Southeast Asia, Adria Cain, a fourth-grade teacher at the International School of Myanmar, is teaching her 24 students about life in the United States. A U.S. map hangs next to one of the world, and the curriculum includes stories about famous Americans like Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks. “The kids really liked the lessons, but I wanted them to understand what life is like on the other side of the world,” says Cain. So she started a pen-pal program via e-mail for her students.



Corresponding with a friend who lives in another country is a wonderful way for kids to explore another culture, explains James Banks, Ph.D., director of the Center for Multicultural Education at the University of Washington. “Research shows

that the earlier children are introduced to other lifestyles, the better they understand differences and view them more positively.” Some wonderful friendships have evolved for Cain’s students—including one between 8-year-old Yauk Yauk from Myanmar and 9-year-old Dylan Pollack from Long Lots Elementary School, in Westport, Connecticut.

Subject: hi
Date: Monday, Oct 13, 5:19 PM
From: yaukyauk
To: dylan

Dear Dylan,
 My name is Yauk Yauk, and I live in Yangon. Our teacher is very kind, and she lets us play a lot of games. My hobbies are swimming, reading, and playing DS. How about your hobbies?
 In Yangon it is very hot. How about your country? My favorite foods are chicken, pizza, and hot dogs. How about your favorite foods? I live in a big house with my family. We have two dogs that guard the house from thieves. How about you?
 Your key pal, Yauk Yauk

Subject: RE: hi
Date: Friday, Oct 24, 1:17 PM
From: dylan
To: yaukyauk

Dear Yauk Yauk,
 My name is Dylan, and I live in Connecticut. I have 3 people in my family including me. I am 9 years old. My hobbies are video games, reading, and the computer. I have 2 cats and 2 fish. My favorite foods are pasta, french fries, chicken nuggets, and pizza.

It's almost Halloween, and if you didn't know what Halloween is, it's a holiday that the USA celebrates every October 31st and you get to dress up as anything you want to be. The best part about it is you get to go to peoples' houses and get candy from them. I am going to be The Joker.

From your pen pal, Dylan

Subject: RE: RE: hi

Date: Friday, Nov 7, 2:23 PM

From: yaukyauk

To: dylan

Dear Dylan,

How are you? We know about Halloween, X'Mas, and all the other holidays.

At Thingyan holiday we go to the beach. We rode on the bus for 4 hours!

I even threw up.

Do you have Thingyan holiday there? Do you know Thingyan? Thingyan is a day that you play with water and splash it on others. I like that day the most!

From your key pal, Yauk Yauk

Dylan and Yauk Yauk wrote to each other throughout the entire school year, and the two boys continue to keep in touch via e-mail. □

WRITE AWAY!

How to get started? Ask friends and neighbors to see whether anyone has family in another country. No luck? Check out reliable Web-based programs. Organizations that work with schools are a good place to begin, says Anne Collier, codirector of connectsafely.org. "Check the terms of service and the 'about' pages to make sure certain safeguards, like e-mail privacy, are in place," she says. Some organizations we like:

■ ePals

(epals.com)

Kids as young as 5 can use this free site that links students, teachers, and parents in 200 countries and territories. Correspond with a child in another country, connect with a class, or join an online forum. All exchanges are monitored by teachers.

■ Circle of Friends

PenPal Club

(members.agirlsworld.com)

This all-girls pen-pal club operates something like an international Facebook—with parental controls. Kids 7 to 17 connect by special interests and age. Join for \$12 a year.

■ School-to-School International

(sts-international.org/pen_pals.html)

Students in grades 4, 5, 6, and 7 across the United States and Canada correspond with 30 partner schools in Guinea through this free pen-pal program. Kids who participate often find ways to help out their foreign friends.

