

Pen Pal Club

First Nations Stories and Culture

Letter Writing Activities



Overview

Australia Post is the major partner of the [Indigenous Literacy Foundation](#). We have created this Pen Pal Club teacher guide encouraging your students to investigate and share First Nations stories and culture through letter writing.

It has been created to support schools ahead of the **Children's Book Council of Australia Book Week** and [Indigenous Literacy Day](#). The resource contains letter writing activities for Stage 1, 2 and 3 teachers and their students. It can be used in conjunction with Australia Post's [Indigenous Literacy Day Classroom Activity Guide](#).

If you haven't already done so, register for The Pen Pal Club at www.auspost.com.au/penpalclub to arrange pen pals for your class!

Resources

- Envelopes, pens, writing paper
- Art and craft materials
- Stamps
- [Indigenous Literacy Day Classroom Activity Guide](#).

Differentiation

Teachers are encouraged to modify all activities to support the capabilities and interests of their class.

Acknowledgement of Country

Begin each of the lessons in this Teacher Guide with an 'Acknowledgement of Country' to respectfully recognise the Country/Place you are in and the traditional custodians of the land, sea, waterways and sky in your area. Discussing the meaning of the 'Acknowledgement of Country' provides an opportunity to introduce the themes of the lessons, including custodianship, respect and connection to Country.

Teachers' Note:

Use a map such as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) [Map of Indigenous Australia](#) to teach your students about the Traditional Owners of the land on which they live, learn and play. Explain that there are over 500 distinct First Nations cultural and language groups across Australia.



Foundation, Year 1 and Year 2

Learning Intentions

Students will:

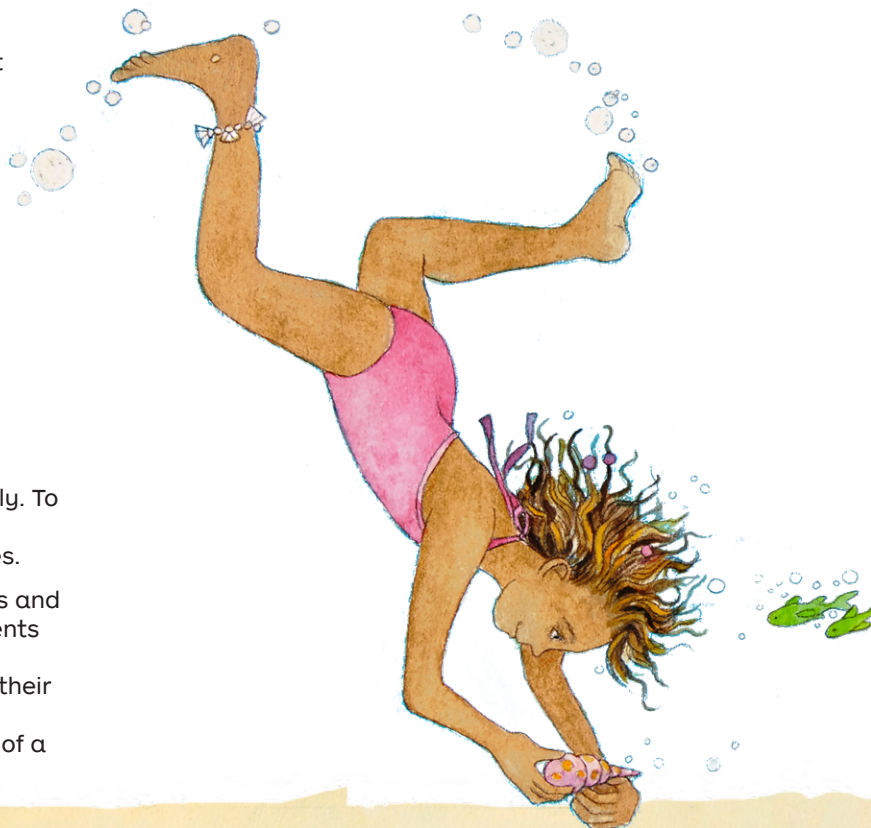
- read iconic First Nations stories about culture or spirituality
- learn about pen pals, with whom they can share their developing cultural knowledge
- learn the basic structure of a letter, using capital letters and full stops
- practice writing sentences, focusing on structure and meaning.

Activities

Write a letter to your pen pal sharing the First Nations stories you have read in class.

1. Select one or more First Nations stories authored by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples, and read together as a class. Borrow picture books such as [No Way Yirrikipayi](#) (by Alison Lester and students from Milikapiti School), [I Saw, We Saw](#) (by Yolŋu students from Nhulunbuy Primary School) or Dreaming stories about the Rainbow Serpent or Tiddalick the Frog. You can also explore resources such as [Common Ground](#) or [Resources-Koori Curriculum](#) to discover other stories shared by First Nations communities. If possible, try to include a story from your local area or region, or invite local Elders or members of local First Nations organisations into the classroom to share stories in person.
2. Discuss the characters, themes and plots of the stories with the class. Write and draw the main ideas on the board. Ask your students for their opinions on the meaning of the stories.
3. Explain to your students that they will be writing letters to their pen pals about their favourite First Nations story. The letters should discuss what happened in their favourite story and explain the story's deeper meaning.
4. Model sentences for the students' letters on the board. For example:
 - (i) "Today, we read..."
 - (ii) "My favourite story was called..."
 - (iii) "In the story... (explain what happened)."
 - (iv) "The meaning of the story is that..."
5. Students begin writing their letters. Depending on the interests and capabilities of your class, students might work in groups, pairs or individually. To support students in need of an extra challenge, encourage them to reference other familiar stories.
6. Encourage your students to include capital letters and full stops in their sentences, and ensure the students include a *greeting*, *closing* and *signature* in their letters. Help your students include information in their letters about which First Nations peoples are custodians of the land on which they live, as part of a sentence or in a drawing.

7. Conduct self and peer assessments of student work, ensuring each author has met the expectations for the outcome of their letter, e.g. capital letters, full stops, appropriate structure.
8. Post the letters to your students' pen pals!



Foundation, Year 1 and Year 2 Australian Curriculum Links

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Cross Curriculum Priority</p> | <p><u>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OI.2 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities maintain a special connection to and responsibility for Country/Place • OI.3 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have holistic belief systems and are spiritually and intellectually connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways |
| <p>English</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to and respond orally to texts and to the communication of others in informal and structured classroom situations (ACELY1646) • Create short imaginative and informative texts that show emerging use of appropriate text structure, sentence-level grammar, word choice, spelling, punctuation and appropriate multimodal elements, for example illustrations and diagrams (ACELY1661) • Re-read and edit text for spelling, sentence-boundary punctuation and text structure (ACELY1672) |
| <p>HASS</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How they, their family and friends commemorate past events that are important to them (ACHASSK012) (“Welcome to Country”) |



Year 3 and Year 4

Learning Intentions

Students will:

- read iconic First Nations stories
- consider First Nations peoples' connection to and responsibility for Country
- use specialist language and description to add interest to their writing
- learn how to format an informal letter.

Activities

Write a letter to your pen pal explaining what you have learned about First Nations culture and spirituality.

1. Select one or more First Nations stories authored by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples, and read together as a class. Borrow picture books such as [No Way Yirrikipaji](#) (by Alison Lester and students from Milikapiti School), [I Saw, We Saw](#) (by Yolŋu students from Nhulunbuy Primary School), or Dreaming stories about Rainbow Serpent and Tiddalick the Frog. You can also explore resources such as [Common Ground](#) or [Resources-Koori Curriculum](#) to discover other stories shared by First Nations communities. Alternatively, invite local Elders or members of local First Nations organisations into the classroom to share stories from your local area.
2. Write and draw on the board the main ideas of the stories you have read. Ask your students to explain the meaning of the stories using their own words. For more information and explanation of these themes, refer to resources such as [Narragunnawali Curriculum Resources](#), [NAIDOC](#) or the [Aboriginal Heritage Office](#).
3. Explain to your students that they will be writing letters to their pen pals about the First Nations stories they have read. They should aim to explain the stories' deeper meaning, specifically First Nations spiritual connection to the land. They may like to include artwork inspired by the stories and discuss places where they feel spiritually connected to nature. Help your students include information in their letters about which First Nations peoples are the custodians of the land on which they live, as part of a sentence or in a drawing.
4. Students start composing their letters to their pen pals. Students in need of additional support may need sentences modelled or scribed for them. Challenge your students to include as much detail from the stories as possible, developing their sentences until they are detailed and expressive.
5. Students self-assess and check each other's letters. Check for language conventions such as capital letters and full stops, and ensure the letters include a *greeting*, *closing* and *signature*. Check for clarity and the use of content words from the slideshow.

6. Post the letters to your students' pen pals!

Extension Opportunity

Create a map showing the lands of the First Nations communities in your state or territory.

In groups, students create and decorate large maps showing the lands of the different First Nations in your state or territory. Alternatively, assign each group of students a different state or territory for their First Nations map activity. Place the maps prominently on the classroom walls to use as a reference for future discussions about the distinct Aboriginal Nations and their languages and culture. Use a map such as the AIATSIS [Map of Indigenous Australia](#) as a guide. When decorating the maps, encourage your students to use colours or small drawings reflecting the climate, landscape, plants and animals in different parts of your state or territory. To extend this theme, investigate the totem for each First Nations group, or the First Nation names for the animals and plants they have identified, and incorporate these into the design.



Year 3 and Year 4 Australian Curriculum Links

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| <p>Cross Curriculum Priority</p> | <p><u>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OI.2 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities maintain a special connection to and responsibility for Country/Place • OI.3 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have holistic belief systems and are spiritually and intellectually connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways |
| <p>English</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw connections between personal experiences and the worlds of texts, and share responses with others (ACELT1596) • Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts demonstrating increasing control over text structures and language features and selecting print, and multimodal elements appropriate to the audience and purpose (ACELY1682) • Re-read and edit for meaning by adding, deleting or moving words or word groups to improve content and structure (ACELY1695) |
| <p>HASS</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of Country/Place to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples who belong to a local area (ACHASSK062) • The diversity of Australia's first peoples and the long and continuous connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to Country/Place (land, sea, waterways and skies) (ACHASSK083) |



Year 5 and Year 6

Learning Intentions

Students will:

- develop their understanding of First Nations communities and culture in their local area
- consider First Nations peoples' connection to and responsibility for Country
- consider unique aspects of their own culture and community
- use specialist language and description to add interest to their writing
- learn how to format an informal letter.

Activities

Write a letter to your pen pal about First Nations history and culture in your local area

1. Explain that there are over 500 distinct First Nations communities across Australia and that for this task, you will be investigating First Nations history and culture in your local area. Use a map such as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) [Map of Indigenous Australia](#) to confirm the Traditional Owners of the land on which your students learn and play. Brainstorm what your students *already know* on the board. Use a *think-pair-share* strategy to stimulate discussion. Brainstorm what your students *would like to know* about First Nations peoples in your area. Some research questions you might want to suggest include:

- What are the names of First Nations peoples in your area?
- Where are the boundaries of their land?
- What are the names of the neighbouring First Nations communities?
- What First Nations languages are/were spoken in your area?
- Where are significant sites located in the local landscape?
- What plants, flowers and animals are or were native to your area, and how were they used by First Nations communities?
- What are some First Nations celebrations/special events/significant dates/stories in your area?

Students write down their research questions on a wonder wall.

2. Start your research. Motivate the class by explaining that research is like detective work! Explain that they will be sharing the results of their research with their pen pals. Your local council's website is often a great place to start your search, but you can also search for local First Nations history websites, reconciliation councils, art centres and media groups, language and culture centres, land councils and more, to find further information, explanation and context. Encourage your students

to complete their research in groups, keeping an organised record of their findings.

3. Students compose their letters, telling their pen pal everything they have found out about First Nations history and culture in their local area. They should also ask about First Nations culture in their pen pal's region. Encourage your students to use as much specialist language in their letters as possible, such as using the correct names for First Nations communities, languages, events, people and practices.
4. Students self-assess and check each other's letters. Check for clarity and for language conventions such as capital letters and full stops, and ensure the letters include a *greeting*, a *closing* and a *signature*.

Extension Opportunity

Students create an animation or comic strip showing interesting and unique aspects of their own culture.

- (i) Students brainstorm different aspects of their own culture and heritage. Where is their family originally from? What food, clothes, special days, language and cultural practices do they cherish and celebrate? Why? What makes each student's culture and family background different and special?
- (ii) Students record their detailed observations in a mind map. Discuss (and celebrate!) their observations with the class. Reinforce the many ways in which we are similar as well as celebrating our differences.
- (iii) Students use their mind maps to create an animation communicating the unique aspects of their culture. Use digital tools such as Adobe Spark, ChatterPix Kids, Puppet Pals, Stop Motion Studio, or Toontastic 3D to create and share your animations. Alternatively, students can use their design skills, craft materials and coloured pencils to showcase the unique aspects of their culture and heritage.

Year 5 and Year 6 Australian Curriculum Links

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| <p>Cross Curriculum Priority</p> | <p><u>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OI.2 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities maintain a special connection to and responsibility for Country/Place • OI.3 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have holistic belief systems and are spiritually and intellectually connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways |
| <p>English</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify understanding of content as it unfolds in formal and informal situations, connecting ideas to students' own experiences and present and justify a point of view (ACELY1699) • Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive print and multimodal texts, choosing text structures appropriate to purpose and audience (ACELY1704) • Re-read and edit students' own and others' work using agreed criteria and explaining editing choices (ACELY1715) |

Going further...

Extension students and fast finishers could write letters to local First Nation peoples and heritage organisations to discover more about First Nations communities, places, events and practices in your area. What unanswered questions do they have about First Nations culture and history?

Help to facilitate an ongoing dialogue between these students and local First Nations organisations. If possible, organise an incursion or excursion to build upon your students' developing cultural awareness.

Note: Your local council's website is often a great place to start your search for the details of local First Nations communities. You can also search for local First Nations history websites, reconciliation councils, art centres and media groups, language and culture centres, land councils and more, to find further information, explanation and context.



We would like to acknowledge Koori Curriculum, an Aboriginal early childhood consultancy, for their support in the design and review of this teacher guide.



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