



# International Pen Pals

## Teacher

*This Shorebird Sister Schools Program Pen Pal Exchange activity is from the Shorebird Sister Schools Program at <http://sssp.fws.gov>*

### Description

By exchanging letters through pen pals, students learn about other students, cultures, habitats, and shorebirds of other states and countries.

### Preparation

Note: Please keep in mind that once you commit to follow through, otherwise the children waiting for the pen pal exchange will be very disappointed.

#### 1. Set objectives for the students:

- Students will be able to describe two cultural similarities and/or differences between pen pal communities.
- Students will be able to name two shorebirds in English and Spanish (or their pen pal country language).
- Students will be able to describe how those 2 shorebirds look when they in their own community and when they are in their pen pal's community.
- Students will be able to describe the similarities and differences between the shorebird habitats in their pen pal's community.

#### 2. Align activities to help meet each of your objectives.

##### Introductory Activity:

Students will be able to describe two cultural similarities and difference between their community and their pen pal community.

- Pen pals can exchange pictures of their communities, activities, and descriptions of their daily life activities.
- Pen pals can describe sports they play and include pictures.
- Pen pals can describe their family and one family activity.
- Pen pals can describe a holiday in their community.
- Pen pals can describe weather and geography about their community.

##### Sharing about Birds and Wetlands:

Students will be able to name two shorebirds in English and Spanish or another language.

- Pen pals can exchange pictures of shorebirds from the SSSP web site with their common names at the bottom.

Students will be able to describe how those 2 shorebirds look when they are here locally and when they are in their pen pal country.

- Pen pals choose and describe one or two shorebird species and how they look when they see them (include picture if available).

Students will be able to describe the similarities and differences between the wetlands in their community and their pen pal community.

- Pen pals can include a drawing and description of invertebrates and wetlands in their community and exchange pictures.

### Procedure

#### 1. Request a Pen Pal Class. Send request to [Hilary\\_Chapman@fws.gov](mailto:Hilary_Chapman@fws.gov)

Send out an SSSP E-mail listserv posting asking for a pen pal class. Include in your posting:

1. Where your school is located, town, state, and flyway
2. How many students are in your class
3. If you do not have assistance to help with translation of international pen pal notes, you may want to specifically ask for a pen pal class in the United States and perhaps within your flyway.

#### 2. Establish communication with the pen pal exchange teacher:

1. Share your project objectives for the activity with your pen pal exchange teacher. They in turn will hopefully share their expectations as well. Sharing expectations will help broaden your understanding of your pen pal exchange class and improve communication and success.
2. Make sure each teacher involved knows up front how many exchanges will take place and what will be exchanged in each (see tips for pen pal exchange).
3. If there are not enough pen pals for each student to receive mail you may want to pair students or if there are more than you can respond to ask another teacher if they would like to participate. Each student in the class should get at least one letter.

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### 3. Help your students write their letters, especially the first letters:

Give them some ideas and guidelines on what to write and share based on the objectives you have established for the project. The first letters may just be introducing themselves, their community and culture. The following letters could then get into wetlands, birds, weather, and other activities. Please remember to follow through once you have committed to an exchange.

### 4. What to Send to Your Pen Pals

- Keep it simple.
  - If you have to question it, then don't send it.
  - Be conscientious of making a balanced exchange.
  - Don't send elaborate packages that can not be reciprocated.
  - Handmade items are the best.
  - Photos of children and local community, habitats, etc. are great.
  - Drawings, sketches can be exchanged if you want to do an international exchange but can't translate the letters.
  - Avoid expensive items or things that require high-technology.
- If you want to send a video or cassette tape, ask your pen pal teacher if they have the proper equipment before sending.
  - Crafts, drawings, and pictures are excellent items to send.
  - Patches, buttons, and pins are also easy and simple to send.
  - Maps, brochures, and pictures of the local community.
  - Comic strip or board game created by students to depict local birds and wetlands or other topics such as migration or conservation issues.
  - A mural that is started by one pen pal class and added to and finished by another.
  - A chart depicting the average weather by month in the community.
  - Student autobiographies.