

ENCOURAGING WRITING IN LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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In this article we would like to mention four of the ways we have used to encourage writing in our school. We hope that some or all of these ideas may be useful to other teachers who are looking for ways to encourage their pupils to write in English.

1. Penfriends

In our school we have about 100 pupils who are writing penfriend letters to friends in various parts of the world. Initially this scheme was started just with friends in England and with colleagues from earlier workplaces but latterly we have been using a commercial penfriend agency.

The reason why we decided to change to the commercial agency was mostly to save us time. The agency is much more speedy than our friends ever were. They can also offer penfriends in far more countries.

The system followed by the agency is that you fill in a form giving the personal particulars (age, address, interests) of the person wanting the penfriend. You also write the country from which the penfriend should ideally come (four choices) and the age and sex of the ideal penfriend. About four weeks later the names of the penfriends should arrive.

The agency charges \$2 for each penfriend supplied. Our pupils balked at this initially, but now that they realise that they actually WILL get a penfriend they don't mind paying the money. You can pay either in international reply coupons, cheque or money order. If you think that your kids can't afford two dollars, then it's always possible to make a penfriend a prize for a competition winner.

The address to write to if you are interested is:

I.Y.S.,
PB 125,
SF 20101,
TURKU 10,
FINLAND

or alternatively we still have plenty of extra forms if you contact us at:

S.M. BENUT,
BENUT,
PONTIAN,
JOHOR.

2. School Links

We originally wrote to VSO about this, and they put us in touch with an organisation dealing with school links in England.

The idea is that your link school sends you information and news from them, and you reply with similar information from Malaysia. Less individualistic than penfriends, it is good for activities like class projects. Sometimes individual pupils write to each other too.

At present we are writing to two schools in England: Eastfields High School, an all-boys school in Mitcham, Surrey and Bunleigh Community College in Loughborough. So far we have got information about the two schools, and they are interested in information about Malaysia's economy, a good chance to practise writing about rubber tapping, coconut farming and so on.

The address to write to about school links:

CENTRAL BUREAU FOR EDUCATIONAL
VISITS AND EXCHANGES
SEYMOUR MEWS HOUSE, SEYMOUR MEWS
LONDON W1H 9PE.

3. Newsletter

A school newsletter is a good way of encouraging the pupils to write. We produce five newsletters a year. Entitled UP TO YOU we printed 500 copies of each issue last year, and this year we printed 1000 copies and sent it to other schools in the Pontian district. Our newsletter is 24 sides in length.

We think it's safe to say that pupils are encouraged to write by having the newsletter. They know that work they do could be read by a wide audience, so they take care over their work. Class work can also be linked to the newsletter, with the best work being printed in it. So the pupils often do their class work more neatly and seriously too.

The main problem about having a newsletter is, of course, time. The time you have to spend collecting and correcting articles, typing them, duplicating them and finally stapling them together. Against that, preparing a newsletter is a good way to involve other colleagues; they can help with typing, illustration, in fact with all the stages of production, and so can save you a lot of time.

4. UNICEF Project

We first read about this project in the New Straits Times. The organiser was, we think, retiring and so there was a special article on him. The aim of the project is to encourage pupils to write down their

ideas of what other countries are like. These ideas are, of course, stereotypes. The letters are then sent to the country about which the letter has been written and a pupil from the country replies, giving another picture of what the country is like.

The idea seems an interesting way to try to combat national stereotyping, but unfortunately we never managed to get our pupils to put down their thoughts about other countries on paper.

The UNICEF office in Thailand is the main one of the Southeast Asia region, and they have agreed to act as the clearing house for these letters and to pass them on to the other countries.

Their address:

UNICEF,
EAST ASIA AND PAKISTAN REGIONAL
OFFICE,
19, PHRA ATIT ROAD,
BANGKOK, THAILAND,
(Information Officer: Sudchit Bhinyoying
(Mrs.)