

The journey of a letter

by Sue Taylor

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Background

This text explains how a letter gets from the writer to its recipient, which in some cases is a remarkable journey! Most children will have written and posted cards or letters to friends and family, giving this text a meaningful context. It would be most effective if used in conjunction with a visit to a post office or linked to a topic on people in the local community. The text is organised in clear steps, using subheadings to identify them, and the explanations use simple language while introducing key vocabulary. Illustrations show the first and last stages of the journey. The text offers opportunities for children to learn to read and write their own addresses for a real purpose and might be used in conjunction with the directory extract on page 54.

What's on the CD-ROM

The same process is presented visually here, with a picture for each stage, under the same subheadings as the core text. Less able readers can therefore explore the process and engage with the explanation with less challenging text. The text can be used in guided sessions for sequencing and writing simple captions for each illustration.

Discussing the text

- If possible, display a range of letters and cards with envelopes. Read the title of the text and ask the children what they understand by it. Then read the first sentence, which asks a question. Note that this addresses the reader directly and indicates what the text will explain. Share children's answers to the 'how' question and make notes on the board.
- Read the next two sentences, which give background information that 'sets the scene'. Ask the children why this journey is described as a story, noting that this makes it sound exciting and like an adventure.
- Look at the top picture, identifying each part of the address and comparing it to children's own addresses. Recall the importance of the postcode for sorting mail. Discuss the purpose of the stamp, sharing understanding of first and second class if appropriate, and noting that this is how we pay for the postal service.

- Read and list the subheadings. Ask the children what they understand by each word, and challenge them to use each one in a phrase or sentence. Note that the subheadings summarise the stages of the journey, in order.
- Now read each stage of the journey, clarifying ideas and vocabulary to ensure understanding. Ask the children to explain each stage to a partner as you read. Draw a picture of each stage and place these under their subheadings (or use the differentiated text). See how well the children's predictions match up with the text.
- Finally, look at the bottom picture from the differentiated text. Compare the house number with that on the original letter to see how this completes the journey – the letter has reached its destination. Add arrows to the sequence to reinforce the order of events and that one event is dependent on the previous one.

Talk, read and write

- Let the children practise writing their own and their families' names and addresses. Give this a context by asking them to address an envelope, for a newsletter to be sent home for example. If possible, take children to the nearest postbox to post the letters and ask them to tell you when the letters arrive home.
- Give the children pictures of the journey to sequence and match to the subheadings picked out earlier, adding arrows between the pictures. Model writing one or two sentences as a caption for each picture. Children can then continue this independently, with the more able adding interesting details.
- In guided writing, highlight key vocabulary and write definitions for a class glossary on this topic.

Extension

Ask children to bring in a range of letters, cards and envelopes from home, with permission. Use these to discuss the different types and purposes of letters, and for display. If possible, label the envelopes or cards to identify different parts of the address. Children could also gather a list of places that family and friends send letters and cards to and plot these on maps to show the journeys made. Whose letter has made the longest journey?