



Overview

In this report, students from Arataki School describe how they are getting to know the residents at a retirement home by becoming their pen pals. Through letters, both groups enjoy finding out about each other's lives and discovering how some things, such as school life, recreational activities, and even word meanings, have changed over time. The article offers insights into aspects of ageing and friendship, as well as providing information about life in earlier days. It's a delightful starting point for further investigation.

"Pen Pals" requires students to "confidently use a range of processing and comprehension strategies to make meaning from and think critically about" text (from *The Literacy Learning Progressions*, page 14).

A PDF of this article and an audio version as an MP3 file are available at www.juniorjournal.tki.org.nz

Related texts

Texts that include information about life in earlier times: *The Way It Was* (Ready to Read, Green); *Pencils and Pens* (Ready to Read, Purple); *Red Rattlers* (Ready to Read, Gold); "Life Jackets" (*JJ 54*)

Text characteristics

"Pen Pals" includes the following features that help develop the reading behaviours expected of students reading at Gold.

A mix of explicit and implicit content within text and visual language features that require students to make connections between information in the article and their prior knowledge to track information, identify main ideas, and make inferences

Subject-specific vocabulary, some of which may be unfamiliar, including noun phrases, words with more than one meaning, and figures of speech, the meaning of which is supported by the context, the sentence structure, the visual language features, and/or definitions or explanations

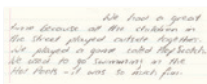
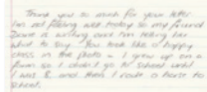
Ideas and information organised in paragraphs, and clear lead sentences to introduce main ideas

Our pen pals sometimes tell us about what life was like when they were children. Barbara wrote that she used to ride a horse to get to school. Glenys used to play hopscotch outside with the children in her street.

Ron wrote that at school they used pens they filled from inkwells, and Arthur said they had to say their times tables over and over until they got them right.

Inkwells

We found out that desks in schools used to have a hole in them for an inkwell. An inkwell was like a little bowl that you filled with ink. You dipped your pen into the ink. You could only write a few words, and then you had to dip it again.



Wilf told Michael about the movies he used to go to when he was young. We found out more about the movies in those days, too.

Old Movies

When our pen pals were young, there was no television but most New Zealand towns had a picture theatre (a place where movies were shown). As well as the main movie, there would be "shorts" (short films, such as cartoons and the news). Before the movie started, "God Save the Queen" would be played. Everyone had to stand up until it had finished. All the movies were in black and white. The first coloured movies came in the 1950s.

The King's Theatre in Wellington was one of the first picture theatres in New Zealand.



The structure of the article as a report, with an introduction, a series of main points supported by examples, and a conclusion

Historical information that may be unfamiliar

A variety of sentence structures so that students are required to notice and use punctuation and linking words and phrases to clarify the links between ideas

Changes in verb forms to distinguish between events occurring in the present day ("are", "is", "has", "calls", "wins") and events that have happened in the past ("used to", "were", "had", "was")

Visual language features such as headings, text boxes, photographs, captions, extracts from letters, speech bubbles, and cartoon illustrations

English (Reading)

Levels 1 and 2: Selects and reads texts for enjoyment and personal fulfilment.

Level 2 – Ideas: Show some understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

Social sciences

Level 2 – Understand how time and change affect people's lives.

Health and physical education (Relationships with other people)

Level 2 – Identify and demonstrate ways of maintaining and enhancing relationships between individuals and within groups.

Level 2 – Describe how individuals and groups share characteristics and are also unique.

Select from and adapt the suggestions below according to your students' strengths, needs, and experiences – their culture, language, and identity (*Reading and Writing Standards for Years 1–8, Knowledge of the Learner, page 6*).

Possible reading purpose

(What can the students expect to find out or think about as a result of reading this text?)

- To find out what the pen pals write about
- To find out about the residents in the retirement home
- To learn about what life was like when the residents were children
- To think about how life has changed since the residents were children

Possible learning goals

(What opportunities does this text provide for students to learn more about how to “read, respond to, and think critically” about texts?)

This text provides opportunities, over several readings, for students to:

- **make connections** between information in the article and their own experiences
- **identify main ideas** and supporting information
- **ask questions** and look for or think about possible answers
- **monitor** their own reading, noticing when something is unclear, and attempt to solve the problem, for example, by rereading a sentence or by looking for clues close by.



Text and language features

Possible supporting strategies

(Use these suggestions before, during, or after reading in response to students' needs.)

Vocabulary

Possibly unfamiliar words and phrases:

- subject-specific vocabulary (for example, “special”, “article”, “concerts”, “RSA”, “Housie”, “hopsotch”, “inkwells”, “dipped”, “sixpence”, “gears”, “industry”) and noun phrases (“pen pals”, “Somervale Retirement Home”, “indoor bowls”, “exercise classes”, “mobility scooter”, “different numbers”, “picture theatre”, “coloured movies”)
- words with more than one meaning (“shorts”, “dabbing”, “basketball”, “wrap”, “tablet”, “bridge”, “dairy”)
- figures of speech (“watch the world go by”, “full of beans”, “puts mine to shame”, “ripe old age”)

Prompt the students to remember the strategies they can use, often in combination, for example:

- when **decoding**:
 - recognising word chunks or syllables (for example, “Re-tire-ment”, “mo-bil-it-y”, “hop-sotch”, “ink-wells”, “six-pence”)
 - drawing on their knowledge of variations in the sounds of some letters and letter combinations (“special”, “article”, “concerts”, “theatre”)
 - using context and sentence structure to confirm decoding attempts
- when **working out meanings of words and phrases**:
 - using the context of the sentence and the paragraph
 - looking for supporting information, such as text boxes, explanations, photographs, or illustrations
 - making connections to their prior knowledge
 - reading on to look for further information, including looking at the next word or words to help clarify a noun phrase
 - noting terms they are not sure of.

Have a dictionary available for students to confirm or clarify word meanings, but remind them that they can make a best attempt at a word and come back to it later.

Note that readers are able to use strategies for working out unfamiliar words only when they know most of the vocabulary in the text. For English language learners who need support with vocabulary, introduce and practise selected items before reading. See suggestions in “Introducing the text” and “After reading”. For more ideas, see [ESOL Online: Vocabulary](#).

Text features

- Words and phrases, including pronouns, that connect ideas within and across sentences

To support students, in particular, English language learners, in tracking ideas within and across sentences, draw attention to the introduction on page 2, which identifies the Room 14 children as the writers. Select a short section of text and have your students track the use of pronouns such as “we”, “our”, and “us”, to refer to the Room 14 children, and pronouns such as “them”, “they”, and “their”, to refer to the older pen pals. (The students could do this using a printout of the PDF, or you could project the PDF and do it together.) For example:

“Our pen pals are a lot older than us. Many of them are more than eighty years old. Some are older than ninety! Our pen pals live at the Somervale Retirement Village.”

“We write our letters into our books, and our teacher takes the books to Somervale.”

“Housie is a game they play at Somervale, and if they win, the prize is usually chocolate.”



Introducing the text

A short video on the importance of introducing the text is available at <https://vimeo.com/142446572>

Use your knowledge of your students to ensure that your introduction to the text is effective in building or activating their prior knowledge and providing appropriate support for a successful first reading. **Select from and adapt** the following suggestions:

- Have the students read the title and discuss what they know about writing letters and the concept of pen pals. They could use the photographs on pages 2 and 3 to clarify their understanding (and to infer that the children's pen pals are elderly).
- Encourage the students to share any experiences they have of spending time with or writing letters to older relatives or other elderly people. Introduce the term "retirement home" and discuss what this means. Use the photograph of the home on page 3 to introduce the name "Somervale". (Although it is not used in this article, you could also introduce the term "residents".)
- Have the students look through the article, reading the main headings on pages 2 and 10 and noticing other visual language features, such as the photographs and text boxes, to confirm that this is a non-fiction text. Expect them to notice (from the headings) that the article is split into two main sections, and ask them to make predictions about what they will find out in each section. The students could think, pair, and share any specific questions they have as a result of this preview.
- Tell the students that there are several names in the article that may be unfamiliar and you will help them later if needed.
- Together, decide on the purpose for reading. Share the learning goal(s).
- Provide the students with sticky notes to mark aspects they are not sure about or to jot down any questions or ideas to return to later.

Reading and discussing the text

Suggestions for ways that you can support the students to achieve the learning goals are in the right-hand column of the table below. **Select from and adapt** the suggestions according to your students' needs. You may want to split the initial reading over two sessions to allow for plenty of discussion.

Encourage the students to read the text by themselves, intervening only if it's clear a student needs help. Much of the processing that they do will be "inside their heads" and may not be obvious until the discussion after the reading. There will be many opportunities to provide support with word-solving and comprehension on subsequent readings.

Student behaviours

Examples of behaviours that will help the students achieve their learning goal(s).

Deliberate acts of teaching


Examples of how you can support individual students (if needed).

The first reading

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The students keep the reading purpose (and any specific questions) in mind as they read. They note aspects to come back to that seem relevant or are of particular interest. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remind students of their reading purpose and that they can note things they want to come back to or investigate further. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• They use the lead sentences on pages 2, 4, 6, 9, and 10 to identify the main ideas.• As they read, they notice the link between the headings in the text boxes and what they are reading about in the body text. They use the text boxes to find further information.• They search for precise information and make connections to their own present-day experiences to help them visualise the explanations in the text boxes, for example, how to play Housie, how an inkwell was used, or what it would have been like going to the movies in the old days. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If necessary, draw their attention to the lead sentences.• Prompt the students to use the information in the text boxes to help them build understanding.• Encourage them to make personal connections to visualise how things would have been different in earlier times. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The students demonstrate self-monitoring and problem solving. For example:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– They reread the second sentence on page 4 and use the commas to break the sentence into shorter phrases to clarify meaning.– They use the speech bubbles and photographs on page 8 to clarify who is the child and who is the older person.– They reread page 11 to clarify their understanding of the change in the use of the word "basketball". | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remind the students of strategies they can use when meaning is unclear (for example, they can reread, look for supporting information in the visual language features, and/or refer to earlier pages to clarify their ideas). Provide support with names if required. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The students notice from the heading on page 10 that the focus of the article has changed from the pen pals to word meanings.• They explore the connections between the body text, the photographs, the excerpts from letters, and the cartoon pictures on pages 10–13 to build their understanding of the differences in word meanings and visualise how these could cause confusion.• On page 13, they infer which saying is illustrated in the final cartoon picture. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prompt the students to think about how the heading signals a change in focus (and to recall the introductory discussion).• Remind them that they have plenty of time to reread if they need to clarify their thinking.• Enjoy the students' reactions to the cartoon illustrations. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• As they finish reading, the students think about what they've found out. They may check and reread sections they have marked or jot down ideas or new questions they have thought of. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remind the students to think about their purpose for reading and to review any notes they've made. |

Discussing the text

You can revisit this article several times, focusing on different aspects and providing opportunities for the students to build comprehension and make connections to their own lives. **Select from and adapt** the suggestions according to what you have observed about your students' needs and responses to the reading. Many of the suggestions overlap and can be explored further as "After reading" activities.

 For some suggestions, you may find it helpful to project the PDF of the article so that you can zoom in on relevant sections.

- The students share their personal responses to the article.
- The students identify answers they have found to their questions or new questions they have.
- With support, the students use the lead sentences and key words to identify main ideas and supporting information. For example, when looking for information that supports the main idea of the residents being "very busy", they notice key words and phrases such as the lists of activities.
- The students identify information in the text boxes that helped them understand an aspect of the article.
- The students identify challenges or confusions they have marked in the text, including examples of "Mixed meanings" and how they worked them out (or tried to).
- The students think critically about similarities and differences between their lives and those of the older pen pals, drawing on their prior knowledge and experiences, for example, of older people and of changes in communication, school, and leisure activities.
- Remind the students of the reading purpose. Have them share one or two aspects they found interesting and explain why they found them so. You could do this as a think, pair, and share activity.
- Discuss the students' questions. (As well as answering their initial questions, the article is likely to have generated more.) Draw out the idea that reading non-fiction texts often leads to asking (and researching) further questions, for example, about the RSA or mobility scooters.
- Support the students in identifying main ideas. Have them read the first sentence on page 2. *What does this sentence tell us?* (Our pen pals are a lot older than us.) Clarify that this is the main idea and discuss how the following three sentences provide further information. Then have the students identify the lead sentence on page 4, (about being "very busy"). Draw out the link between keeping the "main idea" in mind and looking for key words that provide information about what makes the pen pals so busy. Follow up by having the students work in pairs to identify the lead sentences, main ideas, and supporting examples (and/or key words) on pages 6, 9, or 10. (See After reading.)
- Discuss the purpose of the text boxes in adding further detail about the activities.
- Enjoy discussing the examples of "mixed meanings" and the clues that students may have noticed in the article. Provide support as necessary, for example, clarifying the pronunciation of the names and clarifying the meanings of the figures of speech. You could use a dictionary to explore the words with multiple meanings.
- Encourage the students to reflect on some of the deeper themes suggested by this article, such as what life was like when the older pen pals were children and what their lives are like now or how aspects such as school life, movies, money, and technology have changed. Choose an example and ask the students to find evidence in the article. Record the information on a "Then" and "Now" chart. The students could add further examples using evidence from the article as an independent activity. Transferring information from one form to another gives students practice using new vocabulary and helps them to process the ideas on a deeper level.


How you can support your students to be metacognitive


Here are some ways you can build students' awareness of the processes and strategies they are using as they make meaning and think critically.

- With support, the students reflect on their learning.
- The students talk with a partner about challenges they had during reading and how they worked them out (or tried to), for example, by using word-solving strategies, rereading, and/or looking for supporting information in the text boxes.
- Remind the students of the reading purpose and learning goal(s).
- Ask the students to identify a challenge and explain how they solved or attempted to solve it. Note aspects that you might want to return to in a subsequent lesson.


After reading: Practice and reinforcement

After-reading tasks should arise from your monitoring of the students' needs during the lesson and should provide purposeful practice and reinforcement. Where possible, make links to other reading texts, including texts generated by the students, and to the wider literacy programme (oral language, writing, handwriting, word games and activities) and other curriculum areas.

- The students can reread the article as they listen to the audio version. Audio versions also provide students, including English language learners, with good models of pronunciation, intonation, and expression.
- Encourage the students to reread the article and others (see Related texts).
- The students could take this article home to discuss with their families, especially older relatives. Encourage the students to interview/ask questions about what older relatives' lives were like when they were young.
- Provide opportunities for the students to experience some of the activities mentioned in the article, such as Bingo, hopscotch, basketball, writing with ink, or rote chanting of times tables. They may compare these experiences to things they currently do.
- The students could explore further "Then and Now" examples as suggested in Discussing the text. Alternatively, they could find out more about other games and pastimes not mentioned in this article (for example, knucklebones, hoops, reading, and listening to the radio) or different foods. Ask the students to think about and discuss what they would most enjoy if they lived in the time that the residents were children.  The students could use Google Docs to record their ideas collaboratively.

- The students could work with a partner to do further research on an aspect of the text that interests them, for example, the RSA, mobility scooters, how to play hopscotch, or about New Zealand coins before decimal currency (as described in *Journal Journal 55*) and create their own “text box” explanation.  The students could use a Google Slide to create a text box explanation with images and text.
- The whole class could learn more about writing and sending letters. You could read books that involve letter writing (for example, *Jim’s Letters* by Glyn Harper and Jenny Cooper, *The Jolly Postman* series by Janet and Allan Ahlberg, *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type* by Doreen Cronin, or *Meerkat Mail* by Emily Gravett). Provide opportunities for the students to write letters to buddies, relatives, or students in other classes. Model how a letter is structured with greetings, body, and closing remarks. The students could find information on <https://www.nzpost.co.nz/about-us/education-for-kids/resources-for-kids>
- Have the students practise identifying main ideas and supporting detail. They could work in pairs to complete a table like the partially completed one below. Fill in the left-hand column but, depending on your students, you could either leave them to find their own examples for the right-hand column or you could provide one example in each of the rows as a guide (as shown here). [Text reconstruction activities](#) (where you cut the paragraph into sentences for the students to rebuild) can also help students to identify the lead sentence and notice the links between ideas.

Lead Sentence	Supporting detail or examples
(page 2) Our pen pals are a lot older than us.	Many of them are more than eighty years old.
(page 4) Our pen pals are very busy.	They play indoor bowls and table tennis,
(page 6) Our pen pals sometimes tell us what life was like when they were children.	Barbara rode a horse to school.
(page 8) Our pen pals are very friendly.	They encourage us.
(page 10) Sometimes our pen pals use words we don’t know or that have different meanings from what we’re used to.	dabbing

- Have the students work in pairs to identify and illustrate examples of the words in the article that have two meanings. Start a group (or class) chart of other interesting examples as you and the students come across them in your wider reading.  You could use Google Slides to provide the students with a template that they can insert images into and print out.
- Start a collection of interesting figures of speech and look for opportunities to include them in shared or individual writing. Place a daily example in a prominent place for the students to think about and discuss (for example, “Today it’s raining cats and dogs”).