

Destination: America Post Concert Activity
Oaxacan Pen Pals

This past August, musicians from the Dallas Symphony visited Oaxaca, Mexico and worked with many eager and motivated music students there for a full week of lessons, master classes, rehearsals, and performances. As part of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra's Soluna Festival this May, a number of these students will be coming to Dallas to be a part of the festivities.

Why Oaxaca? Because it is a city full of music. Oaxaca was also the musical home of former DSO conductor, Eduardo Mata. As a young boy, Mata had his first music lessons there. At the age of 16, he conducted his first concert there. His shared legacy creates a natural bridge between both cities.

This spring, your students have an opportunity to communicate with some of their counterparts in Oaxaca. Perhaps they will even get a chance to meet them when they come to Dallas! They will be performing in a free concert on May 7 at the Latino Cultural Center.

Pen-pal letters offer real-life hands-on experiences for students to use language. When writing their letters, students have an incentive to spell correctly, write in complete sentences, and use proper grammar and punctuation.

Pen-pal letters also offer many learning opportunities in social studies. By writing to a student from another part of the world, students can become aware of different cultures, religions, and languages.

If you are interested in having your students participate in a Pen-pal program with students from Oaxaca this spring, please contact DSO Education Director Jamie Allen at j.allen@dalsym.com. He will walk you through the process, and assign a student for your class.

Once you have been assigned a student from Oaxaca, you may use the following guidelines to implement the program in such a way that meets your school's curricular objectives.

1. Ask students to define what they think a "pen pal" is. Ask students if they have ever had a pen pal.
2. Check with your school's privacy policy in regard to Internet and e-mail access. If needed, complete a parental permission form for each student to participate in an e-pal program. Your technology administrator should be able to assist you with this task.
3. Determine a timeline for assignments. Make sure the timeline is agreeable to both you and the student in Oaxaca. It can be very frustrating for students to send messages and never receive any response.
4. Brainstorm with students regarding information that they would like to share about themselves to their pen pal. Have students write their ideas down.
5. Brainstorm with students questions that they could ask their pen pal, to learn a little about them as well. Make the first suggestion, then ask the students for further possibilities. Remind them that this student lives in Mexico, and may have never been to the United States. (Suggested ideas: hobbies, summer activities, interesting things about their town/state, etc.). Remind student that asking a pen pal questions gives them something to respond to.
6. Discuss with students that there are many different formats for writing letters, but that you will be using the "friendly letter" format. Review the format of a friendly letter. Create a large sample letter on the board or overhead; label the following: date, greeting, body, closing, signature (you may sign it on behalf of the class). Letters should also have at least two paragraphs and must include capital lettering and correct punctuation. Also discuss the form of writing letters through e-mail.