

& PROJECT

P.S. You Sound Like Someone I Can Trust

Session 1 of 7

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

In this session, students learn about the project, as well as their future pen pal's school, community, or organization, and respond to a few writing prompts with letter-writing themes.

YOU WILL NEED

- Paper, writing utensils
- “Match-Up Survey” — Handout
- [“Dear Brave People”](#) — pg 24*, Mentor Text Letter (from *Dear My Blank: Secret Letters Never Sent* edited by Emily Trunko, age 16)
- *If you're having trouble scrolling to page 24 of *Dear My Blank*, use these links to view [Page 1](#) and [Page 2](#) of “Dear Brave People”.

BEFORE YOU START

This project entirely depends on close collaboration with another educator and class/group, although many of the related activities can be facilitated without the exchange of letters between groups of

students.

If you are participating in a letter exchange, carve out some time to discuss shared objectives and a timeline with your partner teacher before beginning. Make sure you ask for any information (basic or otherwise) that will help introduce their group of students to yours—ages, location, key demographics, and their history are good places to start!

We highly recommend purchasing a class copy of [*Dear My Blank: Secret Letters Never Sent*](#) by Emily Trunko, if possible, or sharing a letter from the popular Tumblr that inspired the collection with your students (which Emily began when she was 15 years old!). The letter titled “[*Dear Brave People*](#)” is used in this lesson (available online), but this could easily be swapped out with any letter from the book’s collection or Tumblr. **Note that the Tumblr letters are submitted anonymously and some contain highly sensitive content that may not be appropriate to share with younger students.**

HOW TO BEGIN (10 MINUTES)

Start by introducing the partner group your students will be working with. Example questions to answer are below:

- How old are they?
- What are they studying?
- What are their demographics?
- Where are they located?

- What's the history of their school or community?
- How big is their school or community?

These are great basics to start with and, depending on how familiar your students might already be with some of these basics (if you're partnering with a school one neighborhood over, for example), ask your students what they know—or think they know—about their new partners.

Review the shared goals of this project with your class—the two largest goals are below; feel free to add on any that you and your partner teacher came up with as well:

- Learning the story of someone else while sharing your own story
- Reading and writing with empathy

If there's time, carve out a few moments for students to independently write their own, individual goals for this project. Their goals could be anything from “learn how to overcome my social anxiety with new people” to “find a new friend to play Fortnite with”—it's their project and their goal!

Remember that this is the launch of the entire project—you should definitely be laying down the foundation but also getting your students excited about this project and the prospect of making a new buddy outside of their community!

STEP 1 (10 MINUTES)**Spark Activity**

Give your students a writing prompt to get their creative juices flowing:

Picture the front door to where you live. Write about what you see when you look out the door.

This is a short activity—and it’s meant to be that way. There are so many ways to extend it if you find yourself with students clamoring to write about front doors and extra time (you could have them swap their writing and draw the door being described; you could have them draw their own door; etc.), but for this small sliver of class, just do these things:

- Have them write independently for a few minutes. They can write a full-on description, they can do a bullet point list, they can draw a quick illustration with captions describing everything, whatever works for them and their beautiful brain!
- Come back as a class and ask why this—a front door—is important. We’re short on time here, so keep your students from getting too poetic. The dream answer is that a front door is a threshold into someone’s house/community and is a physical representation of how the world sees you. Or, in this case, how, say, another student from across the city sees you.
- If you’ve been speeding along and have a few moments left, have a student or two share their front door with everyone.

STEP 2 (10 MINUTES)**Mini-Lesson: Why Letter Writing?**

As a class, read “[Dear Brave People](#)”. Read it straight through (it’s short!), using a ton of expression, and then discuss thoughts and reactions. Example guiding questions are below:

- Why do you think it’s addressed to “Brave People” instead of to someone in particular?
- What do you think the author means by “brave has a different meaning”? How do they define brave? Do you agree with them?
- The title of the book this is from has to do with letters never being sent—do you think the author intended for this letter to be sent or no? Why would someone write a letter they would never send?

STEP 3 (15 MINUTES)

Student Match-Up!

Now that we’ve considered the bravery of baring our souls to a total stranger, it’s time to move on to the match-up process!

The questions asked in the “Match-Up Survey” are designed to get at your soul—they’re a solid mix of silly and serious, and it’s important that your kids are as honest as possible when answering them. For this reason, have them tackle this survey independently—give them about ten minutes to work through it—if they really, really love a question (either to use as an introduction of who they are in their first letter or to ask their buddy later), they can either jot it down on a separate piece of paper or star it. Alternatively, you could keep a blank copy of the questions on hand for such a moment when the letter writing process begins.

Save the last few moments of this activity for students to share out any answers they’re particularly proud of—you could have them share in partners, whole class, or a combination of the two.

STEP 4 (15 MINUTES)

You and The Page

Throughout the course of this project, students will be writing letters to virtual strangers and will be showing who they are and what they care about through a series of letters. Below are multiple options for students to practice opening up and getting honest about how they view themselves and the world around them. Tell students to go with whichever one makes the most sense for your class, heart, and level of joy:

- **I Am:** get a blank piece of paper and tell that paper exactly who you are in whatever format you want: a list, a paragraph, words that scramble off the page, comic book panels, whatever you want! The only caveat is that you “talk” to the page until the time is up.
- **Tell It To the Moon:** get a blank piece of paper and write for as long as you can about something you’ve always wanted to tell the world. It can be a secret you’ve been holding onto, a dream you have, a funny story of what your little sister did at breakfast, anything you think the world might appreciate hearing.
- **Unsent:** get a blank piece of paper and, like the letter we read earlier, write a letter to someone that you would never send. Think about what you’d want to say if you had the chance—and write it.

With the last few seconds of class ticking, collect your students’ “Match-Up Survey” papers to peruse and play matchmaker with; use your discretion on if you want to collect their other activities from today.