

# The postcard project

Do your pupils usually return from the summer holidays having forgotten most of their English? Do you sometimes wish they would do something over the summer to keep up their level of English? Mark Ormerod proposes a simple project which is easy to set up, fun to do and provides pupils with an authentic context for writing in English.

## What is the postcard project?

Over the years, I have assigned my pupils many different summer holiday projects. None, however, has been more successful than the postcard project. This project requires your pupils to write and send a postcard to you, at your school, during the holidays. It is an authentic writing task which pupils generally respond to enthusiastically. Not only does it recycle key structures and vocabulary from the Primary syllabus, but the end result can also provide you and your pupils with a classroom resource for the next school year.

## Steps to carry out the postcard project

### ○ Step 1 Generate interest in the project

Before the end of the summer term, explain to your pupils that you would like each of them to send you a postcard, written in English, during the summer holidays. Tell them that you will display the postcards around a map for when everyone returns to school in September.

### ○ Step 2 Focus the pupils on a model text

Bring a postcard into class. Enthusiastically tell your pupils that it is from one of their coursebook characters (Phil, for example). Write the following questions on the board:

*Where's Phil?  
What's the weather like?*

Check comprehension of the questions and then get your pupils to listen for the answers as you read the postcard aloud. Read it two or three times until you are satisfied that they have all heard the answers. Next, give them a copy of the text. Put a few gaps in it so that

in writing too family Dear a of sunny wishes

15<sup>th</sup> July

— Mark,  
I'm with my \_\_\_\_\_ in Valencia. It's \_\_\_\_\_  
great place. There are museums, shops  
and monuments. There's a small zoo, \_\_\_\_\_.  
This is a picture \_\_\_\_\_ the Science Museum.  
I am \_\_\_\_\_ this postcard in a park. The  
weather is very hot and \_\_\_\_\_.  
See you \_\_\_\_\_ September.  
Best \_\_\_\_\_,  
Phil

they have a reason to look closely at the language used.

### ○ Step 3 Develop text options with the pupils

Ask your pupils to suggest some of the information they might like to include in their postcards. Guide them towards the structures they have learnt in class and elicit a selection of vocabulary for them to choose from. Write the text on the board.

Dear teacher's name,

I am with my family /  
grandparents / friends in  
name of town.

It is a great / fantastic / boring  
/ horrible / very interesting place.

There are museums / shops /  
cinemas / monuments / cinemas.

There's a zoo / planetarium /  
beach / castle / football stadium,  
too.

This is a picture of name of  
monument or building.

I am writing this postcard on the  
beach / in the park / in a café /  
at home.

Today, it's hot / warm / cold and  
sunny / windy / rainy / cloudy.

See you in September.

Best wishes,

your name

Get your pupils to copy the text into their notebooks, along with the school's postal address (don't give your personal address!).

Remind them to take the notebook on holiday so that they can refer to the text when writing their postcards. Reassure them that they do not have to send a postcard from somewhere exotic or far away. A postcard from their grandparents' village or from their home town will be equally valid. Emphasize that you will be really pleased to receive their cards wherever they are from.



## Displaying and using the project

A display of pupils' postcards around a map can obviously bring colour to a classroom wall. It can also be exceptionally useful for contextualizing the past simple, as all the children will be able to look at their postcards and say, 'Last July I was in Granada with my grandparents,' or 'In the summer I went to Valencia,' etc.

### Teacher's tip!

Where possible, inform your pupils' parents about the postcard project. It is important that they encourage their children to complete the task and that they fully understand the reason for buying the postage stamp!

Have a great holiday!

Mark Ormerod is a teacher and teacher trainer. He is the co-author of *Find Out!* (Macmillan, 2007) and the author of *Holiday Time* and the *Superbus Celebrations and Festivals Pack* (both published by Macmillan).