

SUCCESSFUL STORY

SLOVAKIA

MESSAGE IN THE BOTTLE

This activity came about after a discussion in class about travelling and a presentation of a student about Postcrossing, an international postcard-exchange platform. We considered this, almost archaic, yet very personal and real form of communication as an opportunity to involve students in an authentic language activity. The idea was creatively incorporate elements of adventure, geography, learning about cultures, use of ICT for research and practical skills of writing a real postal item with language students had learned so far.

We decided to call the activity „message in the bottle“, because the postcards were not directed to a concrete recipient but had only town, village or sometimes street on them. Instead the name there was written „to somebody“ or „for any nice person in“. There was this factor of randomness and no reply was guaranteed. On the one hand, we used this as a task for students to write a text that would motivate eventual recipient to write back on the other hand, it was a little bit like a lottery with possibility of possible surprise.

The activity was planned for students of all grades with language skills from A2 to B2. First, teachers explained the students what they were going to do and then students were asked to choose a place, using Google maps, on this planet where they would direct their postcard to. It was suggested to them to write to the countries where the language, mainly English, is a native or a second language, so they had greater chance of getting reply. However, they were free to choose any country if they liked.

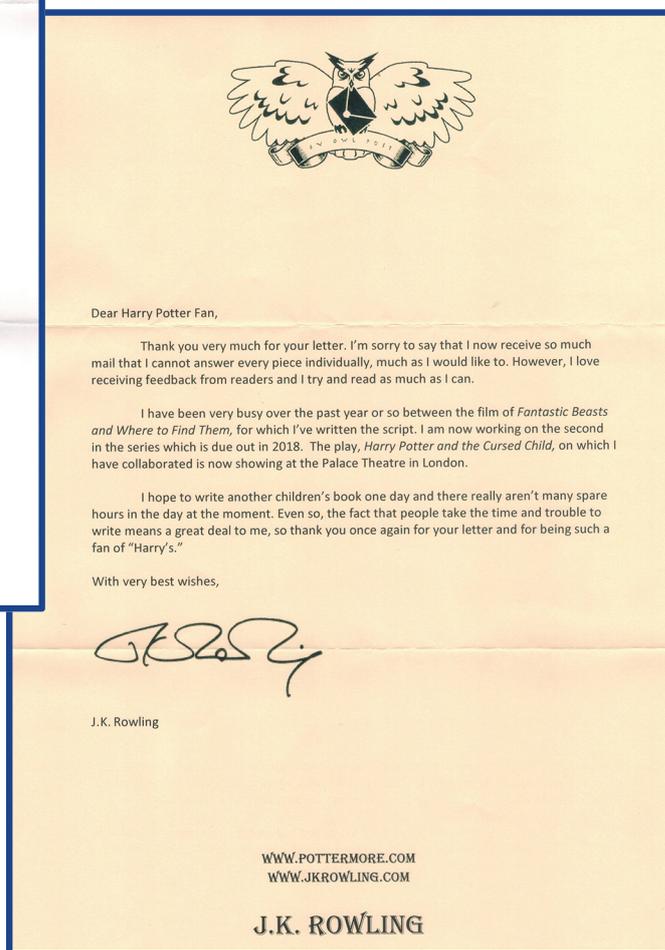
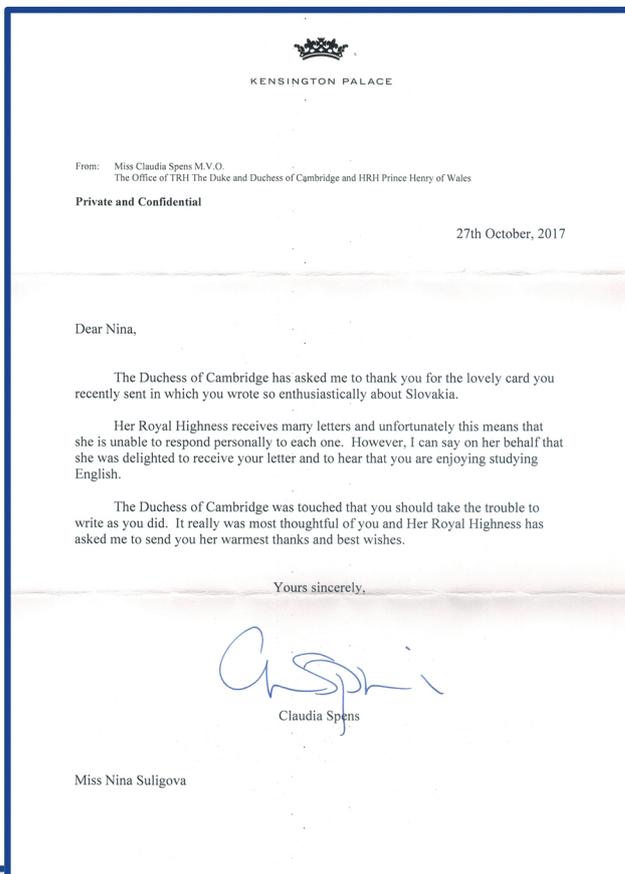
The second stage was to learn about the place they planned write to as much as possible and do a presentation in the class. Students were supposed to explain why they had chosen the particular town or village, show some pictures and tell their fellow students about the places of interest, lifestyle, nature or any other interesting facts they had found.



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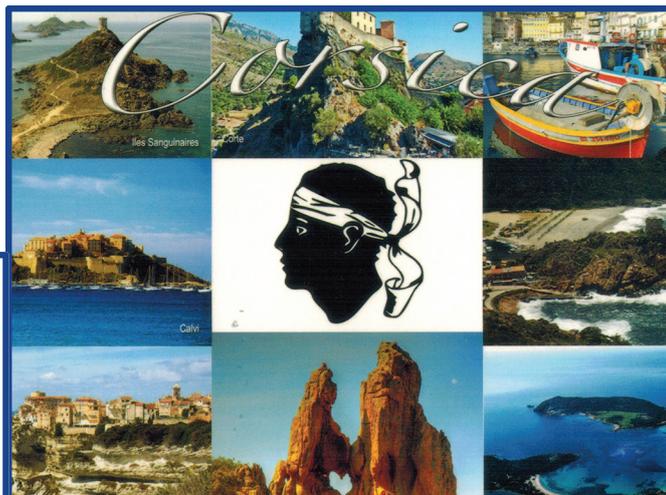
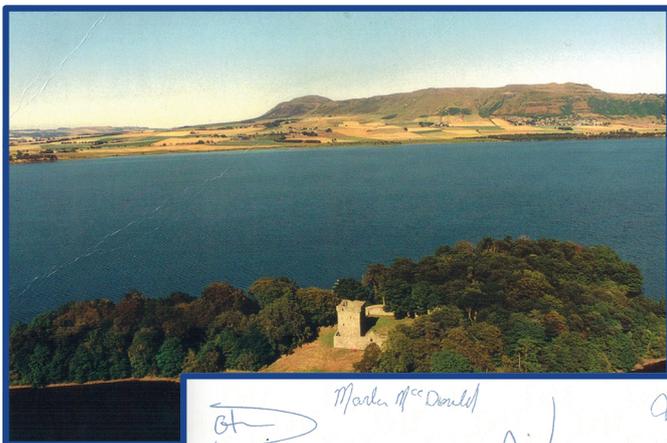
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Handwritten signatures and names on a white background, including: Marka, Angela H., Pat, Mark, Janice, and others.

Handwritten signatures and names on a white background, including: Catherine, Daniela, and others. A red Santa hat icon is placed over the text. The logo for 'English School Of Canada' is visible at the bottom.

I think it would be cool if we stayed in contact and kept writing letters to each other. You have very good English, do you learn it at school? What is your favourite subject at school? Mine is art and music. I play the keyboard and a little bit of guitar. Do you play any instrument?

England is a very wet country and it's very sport friendly. There is quite alot to do and lots of interesting places to go. I like to walk my dog Sprocket to the park and play with her. My school is quite big and all the teachers are nice! What is Slovakia like?

What do you want to do when you grow up? I really want to be a vet because I love animals and I would love to be able to take care of them. I hope you will write back soon.



Erasmus+



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Once these presentations were over students brought postcards of their choice and stamps to the classroom. Before they had been instructed by their teacher about the value of the stamp they need to buy for their particular destination. The postcards were supposed to depict Slovakia, the region or something they consider important themselves. We found out, that students had virtually no experience writing a real postal item so they had to be very carefully instructed where to glue the stamp, how to write the address. Afterwards they, on an individual basis consulted the short texts they had prepared in their exercise books with the teacher and eventually copied them on the postcards. To avoid any security issues connected with identity they only used their first names or nicknames to sign the postcard and as a return address a school address was used, alongside with a code for a particular class.

Judging by feedback, this activity was perceived very positively both by student and teachers. Both sides appreciated refreshing and multi-skill character of the activity. Creating their texts and choosing their destinations students were allowed to work in groups, which made it even more fun. By doing the presentations they inspired one another and in fact, many of them reconsidered and changed either their destination or text. The teachers were allowed to conduct the activity within the classroom in their own style according to their needs, experience and students. There was a main coordinator who advised teachers and ensured that activity is performed within common framework and submitted by agreed time.

In total, there were about 450 postcard written and sent. 96 cards have received a reply and 75 were returned by the post as undelivered or recipient unknown. The rest went missing and may get eventually answered one day. The latest reply arrived a year and a half after. We have received answers from the offices of the British Queen and Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, several schools and scientific institutions but also postmen and private individuals.

To sum up, the activity proved very attractive for both teachers and students. Many language skills were practiced in an authentic way and the language studied was put in broader cultural and geographical context.

