

Pen Pals: Michigan's weather and water

SUMMARY: Students can discuss differences in weather and climate, groundwater and surface water sources, and water uses with pen pals in various geographic areas of Michigan.

OBJECTIVE: To make students aware of water and weather situations in other locations.

VOCABULARY WORDS: pen pal, climate, location, region

TIME REQUIRED: Six 20-minute periods, over 2-9 months

MATERIALS NEEDED:

Pen pal(s) through the Ecology Center or other source

Writing paper, pencils

Drawing materials

Map of Michigan

Postage stamps

Funnel (optional)

Coffee can, plastic milk jug with top cut off, or mason jar (optional)

PROCEDURE:

1. Contact the Ecology Center of Ann Arbor at 417 Detroit St., Ann Arbor, MI 48104, (313) 761-3186 to arrange for one pen pal for your class or one pen pal for each student. Ask for a class from a different region in Michigan. Below are some ideas for topics on which to correspond.

a) For a first contact, have students draw a simple map of Michigan, locate their community on it, and introduce themselves to their pen pals.

b) Students draw a picture of where their water comes from and/or goes after use. Does it come from under the ground (groundwater) or the surface (a lake, river, or impoundment)? Send this to pen pals and request a similar picture back.

c) Students describe this week's weather to their pen pals, and request that their pen pals describe the weather that they are experiencing.

d) Students make lists of who uses water in their community (farmers, industries, residents, corporations, etc.), and where they get their water from (groundwater or surface water). Send the lists to the pen pals, and ask them to send a list of water users and sources in their community.

EXTENSIONS:

1. Set out a simple "rain gauge" in an area with no roofs or overhanging trees, and out of the way of children at play or walking to and from school. Have students record the amount of rainfall they get on every rainy school day for a month. At the end of the month, they can draw bar graphs of the rainfall amounts, and ask their pen pals how much it rains where they live.

2. Pen pal communication could eventually be expanded to include students from other parts of the country or from around the world.

