

I Will Always Write Back: How One Letter Changed Two Lives

By Caitlin Alifirenka & Martin Ganda with Liz Welch

Grade Levels:

- 6-9

Synopsis:

- The power of a friendship crossing half the globe all started with one letter. This true tale of pen pals begins when Caitlin, a twelve-year-old living in a small town in Pennsylvania, sends a letter to an unknown student in Zimbabwe. Martin, a student working hard to maintain his placement at the top of his class, in addition to finding the resources to even stay in school, responds to Caitlin's letter and an unlikely friendship is forged. Caitlin writes of her American issues with boys and popularity and soon Martin eventually begins to unveil the daily financial struggles that his family encounters. Students will enjoy this read told in alternating chapters between Martin's and Caitlin's perspective.

Curricular Connections:

- Students spend time learning about Africa and its governments, exports/imports, population and religions in Social Studies class.
- ELA focuses on writing in multiple forms and for multiple purposes – students could research Africa and Martin's home country of Zimbabwe and propose arguments about how to improve or sustain the country's forward momentum. Students could also write appropriate formal and informal letters for a variety of demands.

Lesson Ideas:

- Students could be paired with pen pals on any scope or scale – within the classroom, with another ELA classroom, across grade levels within the school or the school's feeder pattern. International or domestic pen pal resources are easy and free to access for teachers and students as well.
 - <http://www.penpalworld.com/>

Common Core Standards:

- RI.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- RI.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- RI.3 Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of text.

Additional Materials:

- New York Times Sunday Book Review
http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/10/books/review/i-will-always-write-back-how-one-letter-changed-two-lives.html?_r=0

- How their Friendship grows still today
<http://www.mnn.com/leaderboard/stories/i-will-always-write-back-a-life-changing-promise>

Suggested Companion Titles:

- *Outcasts United: The Story of a Refugee Soccer Team that Changed a Town* by Warren St. John
- *A Long Walk to Water: Based on a True Story* by Linda Sue Park

Professional Reviews:

- *Library Media Connection* (11/01/2015)
- *New York Times* (05/10/2015)
- *Publishers Weekly Annex* starred (03/166/ 2015)
- *School Library Journal* (02/01/2015)