

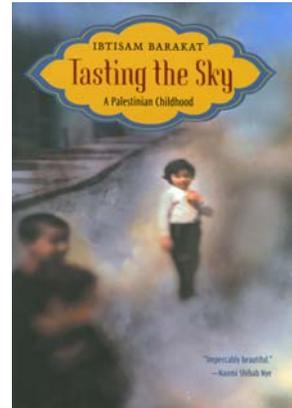
FARRAR STRAUS GIROUX

## **INFORMATIONAL GUIDE FOR INTERCULTURAL PEN-PAL PROGRAMS**

**TASTING THE SKY:  
A Palestinian Childhood**  
by Ibtisam Barakat

**Reading Level**  
Grades 7 up

*“Post Office Box 34 is the only place in the world that belongs to me . . . Having this box is like having a country, the size of a tiny square, all to myself. I love to go there, dig the key out of my pocket, turn its neck around, open the door, then slowly let my hand nestle in and linger, even if the box is empty. I wish I could open my postbox every day. I feel that my hand, when deep inside it, reaches out to anyone on the other side of the world who wants to be my friend.”* —From *Tasting the Sky*



As a young person, Ibtisam Barakat used letter writing to communicate with her peers around the world. While writing was a form of escape for her, this communication also allowed her to learn about other cultures and share her own experience with her friends around the world.

The following information is intended to aid teachers who wish to initiate pen-pal programs in their own classrooms. The listed organizations and programs are appropriate for students in grades 7–12.

### **ePals Classroom Exchange**

**Web site:** [www.epals.com](http://www.epals.com)

ePALS Classroom Exchange, begun in 1996 as an idea to create a place where teachers and their students could connect with other classes interested in using technology to assist collaborative learning, is a large Internet community of collaborative classrooms engaged in cross-cultural exchanges, project sharing, and language learning. The program connects over 100,000 registered classrooms in 191 countries for classroom-to-classroom pen-pal exchanges and cross-cultural learning projects. There is a fee for this service.

### **Intercultural E-mail Classroom Connections**

**Web site:** [www.iecc.org/](http://www.iecc.org/)

IECC helps teachers link with partners in other cultures and countries for e-mail classroom pen-pal and other project exchanges. The program was created in 1992 by three college professors interested in establishing an e-mail exchange program in their classrooms. There are now more than 7,000 teachers in 82 countries participating in this program. There is no fee for this program.

### **SAPE**

**Web site:** [www.michander.com/sape/menu-e.html](http://www.michander.com/sape/menu-e.html)

SAPE—begun by two pen pals, an American and a Russian—matches people from the United States with pen pals in the Baltics and the former Soviet Union (including Russia and other former Soviet republics). SAPE’s goal is to foster international understanding. The

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program has been used by more than 850 schools as well as several youth organizations, including the Boys & Girls Club and the YMCA. Pen pals write to each other by postal mail; e-mail is not used. There is no fee for this program.

### **Student Letter Exchange**

**Web site:** [www.pen-pal.com](http://www.pen-pal.com)

The Student Letter Exchange was begun by a teacher in 1936 with the goal of stimulating learning and curiosity as well as a better understanding between cultures. The program matches English-speaking pen pals with students ages 9–18 across the United States and around the world. Each year, the program links over 500,000 students in over 100 countries. There is a fee for the program.

### **Coalescing Across the Globe / Tolerance.org**

**Web site:** [www.tolerance.org/teach/activities/activity.jsp?ar=658](http://www.tolerance.org/teach/activities/activity.jsp?ar=658)

Not a pen-pal program, but a lesson plan for grades 6–8 to explore global differences through pen pals. Developed by teachers at a school in California, the teachers established contact with the Friends School in Ramallah, Palestine, and the two schools created a magazine project that enabled the students to write and illustrate stories about themselves and share them with the students in the other school.



### **About the Author**

Ibtisam Barakat is a poet and educator who has worked with organizations such as the United Nations to facilitate a dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis. This is her first book. She currently lives in Columbia, Missouri.

### **For more information on Ibtisam Barakat:**

**Web site:**

[www.fsgkidsbooks.com](http://www.fsgkidsbooks.com)

Includes a biography of the author and additional information about her novels.

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