

Dear [REDACTED]

I was excited to receive your letter! Nice to meet you. As you know, my name is Kristen and I will be your pen pal for the year. I live in Seattle, in a neighborhood called Capitol Hill. This is the view from my apartment building's rooftop deck:



There was an amazing rainbow that day!
Can you see the Space Needle?

Both my mom and brother live nearby, so I get to spend a lot of time with my family. My mom loves to garden and has a cat and two dogs:

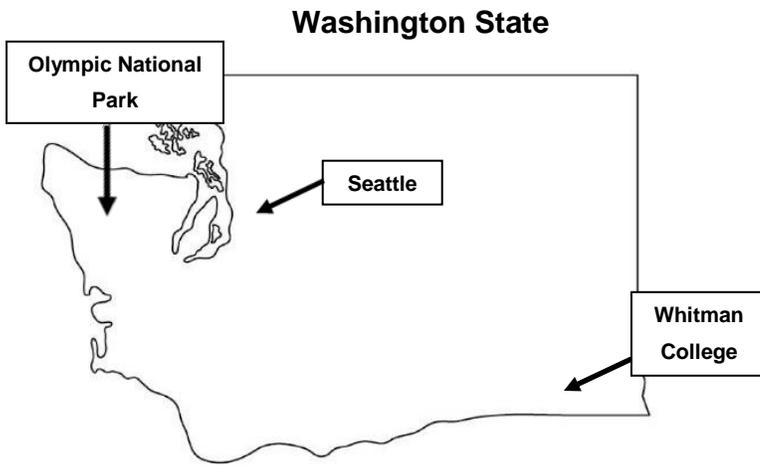


Sage is a golden retriever. Carmel is a tortoiseshell cat. We don't know what kind of dog George is but he loves food and chasing his ball.

My brother, his wife, and my nephew who is 8 years old also live in the area. My brother is a mechanic, which means he fixes big machines to make sure they work properly.

It sounds like we have a lot in common! I love drawing, listening to music, and playing soccer too. I play on two soccer teams right now and also enjoy hiking and running. I also had an amazing teacher when I was younger. He inspired me to want to study science in college and ultimately pursue a career in science. We got to do some really cool projects in his class. For example, we raised salmon from eggs in a huge aquarium right outside our classroom. We all took turns feeding the growing fish, cleaning the tank, and making sure the water temperature was just right. When they were big enough, we released the salmon into a creek that ran by our school. It was part of a statewide project called "Salmon in the Classroom."

After high school, I went to Whitman College, which is in eastern Washington state. I studied biology and also got some experience working in a research lab. After graduating, I wasn't sure I wanted to work in a research lab, so I tried out different jobs in science. For one job, I worked outside, or "in the field." I was part of a team of biologists that kept track of all the spotted owls in Olympic National Park.



Northern Spotted Owl



I really enjoyed working with owls, but I started to miss lab research. Now I am a graduate student at the University of Washington in Seattle. I study the immune system, which is an important system in our bodies that fights off infections (like the common cold). Specifically, I study a protein (one of the building blocks of cells) called ICOS and have found that the presence of this protein in certain immune cells is important for them to develop and work correctly. This information can be useful for scientists who design treatments for different diseases where the immune system is important – for example: infections, cancer, and other diseases like type 1 diabetes.

It would be great to learn more about you too! What kind of music do you like to listen to? What kinds of things do you like to draw? It sounds like you've thought a little bit about college in the future – do you know what you might want to study? Do you have any pets or siblings? What's the coolest thing you've learned in school so far this year?

Please feel free to ask me more questions, about myself, my job, school, or anything else! I'm looking forward to receiving your next letter. I hope you're enjoying the school year so far!

Sincerely,

