

October 8, 2019

Dear [REDACTED]

Greetings! My name is Victoria, and I live in Evanston, Illinois. Evanston is a town very close to Chicago. It usually takes me about 30 minutes to travel to the city on the train. I have a lot of friends who work in Chicago, and sometimes we go to see the Cubs play at Wrigley Field. Here's a picture of the stadium from when the Cubs won the World Series in 2016:



**Paragraphs
separated
by pictures
- easier to
read.**

I live in an apartment with my cat, Petunia. She is 13 years old and is a calico, which means her fur has lots of stripes. She stays inside all of the time, but she likes to watch people walking their dogs on the street outside the window. Sometimes when I am watching TV she thinks the screen is a window, too, and will watch with me! Once in a while she will forget that it's just a TV and try to pounce on an animal on screen. I am happy she hasn't knocked over the TV yet! Here is a picture of her sleeping:



**Students love getting to
know their pen pals
with details about pets
and family.**

I have one sister named Olivia. She is a fashion designer in New York City. She decides how the clothes in stores like Target and Kohl's should look, from how they are sewn to what pattern is

on the fabric. My parents live down south in Florida. My mom is a nurse and my dad is a scientist like me. He is a professor at Florida State University in the state capital of Tallahassee. He teaches about really powerful magnets.

Now let's get to what I do! I went to high school in a suburb near Chicago, which is where my family used to live. Then I went to college at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which is in Wisconsin. Here is what the school looks like from the air:



I worked in a lot of different labs, but my favorite was a biology lab where we made vaccines. Before people like you and me can get a shot or medicine from a doctor, the medicine has to go through a lot of tests to make sure that it works and is safe. These tests are called clinical trials. The treatments that my lab made went to clinical trials all over the country. It was really exciting news when something we made helped a man with cancer get better! I loved working there, and my favorite part was teaching new students how to do something in the lab.

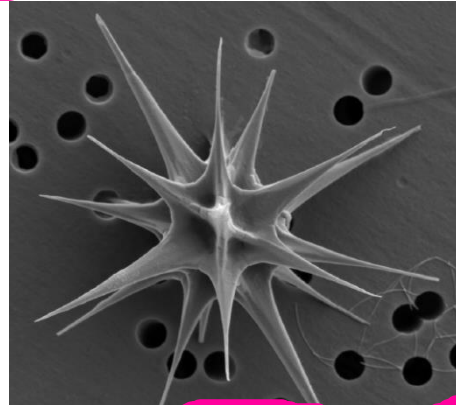
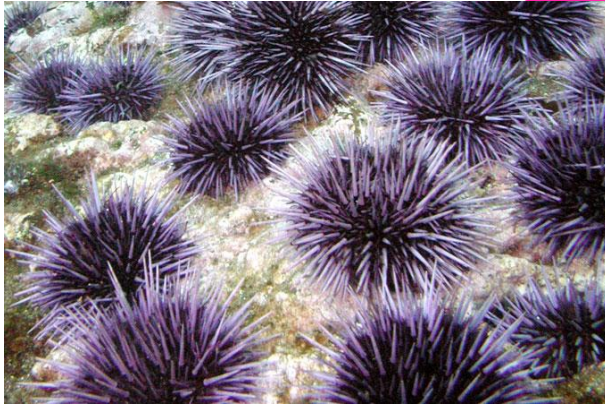
Now I am a graduate student at Northwestern University. I am in the Materials Science and Engineering department. A lot of materials scientists study how to make metals like the ones in airplanes stronger, or how to make batteries last longer. My research is very different from most materials scientists, though. I study tooth enamel (the white, hard part of your tooth) in mice and rats. These animals are in the rodent family and have really strong teeth—they are cousins with beavers, who can even chew through wood! My research group wants to know what makes their teeth so strong and how we can use this information to stop humans from getting so many cavities. Here's a picture of a beaver with some big, orange teeth:

**Different
ways to
explain
unfamiliar
vocabulary**



Pictures help students understand unfamiliar science concepts.

Other people in my group look at sea creatures. We have live sea urchins in our lab, and we study how they grow their spikes (these spikes are called spicules). My favorite part of working with sea urchins is feeding them bits of seaweed—they grab onto the seaweed with their spicules and munch on it slowly. We also study really tiny ocean critters called Acantharia (A-can-there-ee-a). These guys like to hang out with plankton in the water and are so small you can only see them with a microscope. They don't like to grow in the lab, so to collect them we go out on boats all over the world. Right now we have Acantharia from Norway, Hawaii, and the Solomon Islands, which are in the Pacific Ocean. Here is a picture of some purple sea urchins and one Acantharia:



When I am not in the lab doing research, I like to do yoga and compete at trivia nights with my friends. I am great at answering the science questions, but not so good with questions about sports. My friends and I also do a lot of hiking. This summer we hiked 26 miles in one day!

I want to learn more about you, too. Do you have any pets? What do you like to do with your friends? What are your favorite classes in school? What is the coolest thing you've learned so far this year?

I look forward to hearing back from you soon! You can ask me any more questions of what you want to know about me, too. I hope you're having a great school year!

Sincerely,

Victoria

Includes questions the student can respond to next time