

Dear Teacher

Even a teacher sensitive to adoption may benefit from having words to say. Here is a sample letter to help you compose your own.

BY KATHY URBINA AND DEB LUPPINO

Dear Mrs. Jones,

I wanted to make certain you know that our family was formed through adoption, since it may come up in discussion this year in your class. Throughout the year I would like to share some terrific educational resources about adoption, family trees, positive adoption language, and more. In the meantime, I am sending you information and sample Q & As that may help you with responses to questions about adoption from kids in the classroom, should they arise.

Background on Adoption from China:

Adoption of children from China by American families began in 1992, when a law authorizing international adoption was passed by the Chinese government. Most of the children available for adoption from China are girls. To control its serious population problem, China actively discourages most families from having more than one child. Because it is traditional for a male child to support his parents in old age, the one-child policy creates a dilemma for parents to whom girls are born. As a result, some Chinese families make the decision to place girls for adoption. In China, adoption takes place anonymously, so we do not have any information about our daughter's birth family. **[EDITOR'S NOTE:** Readers will want to adapt this paragraph to their child's situation. For background information about why children are placed for adoption in the U.S., Eastern Europe, Guatemala, Korea, and China, see:

www.adoptivefamilies.com/articles.php?aid=467]

Here are some questions you may hear in the classroom, with appropriate answers suggested.

Q: Where are Emily's real parents?

A: Emily's real parents are the parents who are raising her, John and Kathy. She also has birthparents in China who gave birth to her.

OPTIONAL EXPANSION: Emily has two sets of "real" parents. Her birthparents are real, as she was born to them. Her American parents are real, as they are raising her and she is their daughter.

Q: Where's Emily from?

A: She's from Connecticut. She was born in China, but she is now a U.S. citizen.

Q: Why doesn't Emily look like her parents [mom] [dad]?

A: She was born in China and her parents adopted her when she was a baby. Her parents are European American; she is Chinese American.

Q: Does she speak Chinese?

A: No. Emily came to the U.S. when she was several months old. She was not speaking any language at the time! Children speak the language of the country they are raised in, just as you speak English and not the language your grandparents spoke before they immigrated to the U.S.

Q: Does she eat with chopsticks?

A: Chinese kids are not born knowing how to use chopsticks. In the same way that American kids learn to use spoons, forks, and knives, using chopsticks is learned by Chinese kids. Here in America Emily has learned to eat with a fork, spoon, and knife, and also with chopsticks.

Q: Will she be a Communist? Buddhist?

A: No. Belief systems are learned (whether by choice or not). We are not born with them.

Q: Did it cost a lot to adopt her?

A: This is like asking how much your parents paid for the doctor and hospital when you were born. In adoption, there are other costs involved, like fees to the adoption agencies, professionals, and attorneys to cover the legal and social work involved in completing an adoption.

Q: Why didn't her first family want her? Didn't they love her?

A: They probably loved her very much, but knew that they couldn't take care of any baby at that time. They wanted Emily to be raised by a family that would love her and could take care of her forever. Adoptions always happen for grownup reasons, and are never the result of anything a child does.

We want you, our child's teacher, to know that we believe that families are created through love, respect, and caring and not solely through genetic connections. Thank you for helping us communicate this to Emily's classmates.

Best,
Emily's Mom and Dad