

Cultural Misunderstandings

There are some cultural misunderstands that we face when interacting with people of another country. We would like to make you aware of these cultural misunderstands between the U.S. and Zambia in order to support you in your letter writing.

- Be aware when using informal language or slang that those same words will not translate in their language and they may not understand what you are trying to communicate.
- Most holidays celebrated in the U.S. are not celebrated in Zambia. Be mindful when discussing an American holiday to also explain what the holiday means and its history.
- When talking about pets – The population of children we work with don't typically own pets. If you mention that you have pets, it's best to keep it short and simple. Refrain from comments about your pet telling the child "hello", as it can confuse the child. Remember when you refer to your pet by its name, to clarify that it is your dog, cat, etc. so it doesn't cause confusion.

We **don't** recommend saying, "Scout's girlfriend is coming over for a playdate today and they both say 'hi!'"

We **do** recommend saying, "Our dog, Scout, loves to run around and play in the cold weather."

- Be mindful of different places, foods, and experiences you talk about. If it is something they may not be familiar with in Zambia, explain more about what the place, food, or experience is like so they can get a better picture of what you are talking about.
- The children in our program live in Lusaka, Zambia, which is the capital city – paved roads, traffic issues, grocery stores, shopping malls, restaurants, etc. They do not primarily live in areas they would refer to as the bush or village, which is a more rural area outside of town. They may travel there to visit family.
- Zambia's official language is English. However, the native language is many different dialects of Nyanja. The primary way to learn English is through education/school.
- In Zambia, they refer to soccer as football, so if you're referring to American football, please include "American" so they understand which sport you are talking about in your letter. Also, when they refer to football, they are talking about soccer.
- When a child says he or she has "shifted," it means they have moved to another area of town.
- When talking about having breaks from school i.e. spring break, summer break, etc. be sure to explain what those breaks are as they are different in Zambia than in America.
- Zambia measures temperature in Celsius. If you mention that it is 100 degrees in Texas, it would be helpful to clarify that you mean 100 degrees Fahrenheit or even better, figure out what it is in Celsius as they will understand that the best.
- Silly - please refrain from using this word. While this word is appropriate in the US, in Zambia it means that someone is mentally unstable.
- Just fine/ just okay - These phrases are equivalent to good/doing well. So, when your sponsored child says they are just okay, it means they are well. It's the same as someone asking, how you are and you saying, you are good or doing well.
- "Knock off" means when they are finished with the school or work day. Kids might say something like, "When I knock off from school I like to play football with my friends."
- When you hear the word Cobra, you may think of a snake but in Zambia, they actually refer to Cobra as a floor cleaner that many of our caretakers sell at local markets.