

## Introduction

Welcome to Paul D. Coverdell World Wise Schools, the Peace Corps' innovative education program that seeks to engage U.S. students in an inquiry about the world in order to broaden perspectives, promote cultural awareness, appreciate global connections, and encourage service.

We appreciate your interest in expanding students' knowledge about other peoples and places. We hope that your correspondence will be as much fun and as interesting for you as it will surely be for the students.

The purpose of this guide is to help you make the most of your correspondence match. Think of it as a World Wise Schools starter kit. It introduces Peace Corps Volunteers and teachers to the program and provides suggestions for how to shape the exchange. To this end, we have included a list of national standards and identified essential questions that are central to the World Wise Schools exchange. It is our hope that, through your participation in this program, together we will fulfill the Peace Corps goal of strengthening Americans' understanding of the world and its peoples.

By corresponding with a Peace Corps Volunteer, students gain insight about what it is like to live and work in another country. Correspondence Match participants often find that by increasing students' awareness of cultural diversity around the world, the students come to value the rich heritage and broad representation of peoples within their own community.

"Big" questions, such as *How does culture shape how we understand ourselves and others?* and *How am I connected to the world?* become the focus of classroom discussions. The Correspondence Match program also tends to stimulate an interest in and appreciation for volunteerism. Students begin to ask themselves, *What does the "common good" mean and why does it matter?* and *How far am I willing to go to make a difference?*

## About Paul D. Coverdell World Wise Schools

The [Peace Corps](#) is an independent agency of the United States government, established through the vision and efforts of President John F. Kennedy. The Peace Corps Act of 1961 defined the Peace Corps mission—to promote peace and friendship by making available willing and qualified U.S. citizens to interested countries to achieve the following three goals:

- To help the people of interested countries in meeting their needs for trained workers;
- To promote a better understanding of Americans among the peoples served;
- And to help Americans develop a better understanding of other peoples.

It is the third goal of the Peace Corps that inspired the creation of World Wise Schools, a program that seeks to engage U.S. students in an inquiry about the world.

For two years, volunteers live with the people of the country in which they serve. They eat the same food, speak the same language, live in the same environment, and follow many of the cultural norms of their host country family and friends. Volunteers can share their experiences with U.S. students through the World Wise Schools Correspondence Match program.

In addition to this program that matches a Peace Corps Volunteer and a U.S. classroom, World Wise Schools also offers many other resources for U.S. educators.

- **[Multimedia Resources:](#)**
  - [Slide shows:](#) Peace Corps Volunteers talk about their experience through their own photographs and narratives.
  - [Videos:](#) See daily life in Peace Corps countries from Kyrgyzstan and Sri Lanka to the Dominican Republic and Paraguay.

- [Volunteer Voices podcasts](#): Tune in to stories from around the world, written and read by Peace Corps Volunteers.
  - [Language lessons](#): Learn languages that Peace Corps Volunteers are using around the world from Mandarin Chinese to Malian French.
  - [Peace Corps Challenge online game](#): This game gives students the opportunity to work in the fictional village of Wanzuzu as a Peace Corps Volunteer.
- **Stories**: Visit other cultures through letters, stories, folk tales, and poems written by the volunteers who have lived for two years among the peoples and cultures featured.
  - **Lesson plans**: Search by region, country, subject, or grade level. You'll find ready-made lessons ranging from cultural issues to practical challenges of obtaining water, from studying folk tales to understanding the norms of other peoples. All are standards-based and free.
  - **Print publications**: Some resources are available in bound form from World Wise Schools. All of our resources are available online.
  - **Speakers Match**: This program is designed to help schools and community groups find Peace Corps speakers, and to help returned volunteers find venues where they can share their experiences. To enroll as a returned volunteer speaker or to request a speaker, visit
  - **E-Newsletter**: Sign up to receive via email the program's monthly topical newsletter, the *World Wise Window*.
  - **Peace Corps Week**: Peace Corps Week celebrates the anniversary of the founding of the Peace Corps, usually around March 1. Teachers can celebrate with the Peace Corps community during Peace Corps Week or any time of year by hosting a returned Peace Corps Volunteer, while RPCVs can share their stories of service by speaking in classrooms or to other community groups. To see opportunities and resources for Peace Corps Week, visit [www.peacecorps/thirdgoal](http://www.peacecorps/thirdgoal), or contact us for guidance at [thirdgoal@peacecorps.gov](mailto:thirdgoal@peacecorps.gov).

## ***Match Handbook for Educators***

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### ***Welcome to Correspondence Match!***

You and your students are about to embark on a cross-cultural adventure. Through correspondence with a Peace Corps Volunteer living in a community overseas, your students will learn about a people and place to which they might never otherwise be exposed. Think of your volunteer as a cultural liaison. For two years he or she lives in the same conditions, speaks the same language, eats the same food, and respects the same cultural norms as host country family and friends. This experience equips your volunteer with a grassroots point of view and provides a wonderful learning opportunity for your students.

Your correspondence with a Peace Corps Volunteer and use of World Wise Schools resources can provide a rich and timely supplement to your lessons in language arts, social studies, history, environmental education, and almost any other subject. We encourage you to be creative in incorporating the program into all your classes, and hope that you will share your success stories with us.

Some students may have never heard of the Peace Corps, in which case their correspondence with a volunteer will introduce them to exciting new career options. Exposing students to the work of Peace Corps Volunteers may also instill a community-service ethic and motivate them to volunteer in their local communities.

Peace Corps Volunteers often serve as role models for World Wise Schools students. Those who are new to your school or community may relate well to your volunteer's experience of adjusting to a new place, especially students from other countries who are in the process of adapting to a new culture. Your volunteer may even be serving in or near the country from which some of your students come. Knowing that someone else is experiencing the same feelings and frustrations of cross-cultural adjustment may help to smooth their transition and make their peers more sensitive to the difficulties of assimilation.

Please click [here](#) for a sample activity incorporating the Correspondence Match program.

## ***The Correspondence: Getting Started***

No two matches are the same. Some classes write and receive 10 letters a year while others correspond less. It depends in large part upon the level of time and energy that you, your students, and your Peace Corps Volunteer put into it.

To get the most out of your exchange, help your students learn as much as possible about the country in which the volunteer is serving. This will provide a broader context in which to place the first-person perspective of the correspondence, and it will generate more interesting class discussions. Try to stimulate personal reflection and group discussion by asking students to compare life in the United States with life in your volunteer's host country. Point out similarities as well as differences. Ask questions that challenge stereotypes. Also be sure to explain to your students that the volunteer is sharing only a personal perspective of the country. Avoid making generalizations based solely on the volunteer's correspondence.

Getting that first letter written and sent is the first important step in developing your correspondence exchange. Your Peace Corps Volunteer will be excited to hear from you, even if it is just to introduce yourself. This first letter does not have to be long. Look at it as an opportunity for you and the volunteer to share background information and ideas for the direction of your correspondence. Include a brief description of your class, the degree to which you have or have not studied the particular geographic region, and themes you are interested in focusing on.

We encourage you to propose how often you and your students plan to write and, likewise, request the same information of your volunteer. One of the important things to establish at the beginning of your correspondence is a set of mutual expectations, so be direct and honest with your volunteer.

[Click here to see a sample first letter to a volunteer.](#)

The volunteer with whom you will be corresponding is one of more than 7,000 currently serving Peace Corps Volunteers in more than 70 countries. Volunteers live in cities as well as rural villages, and they work in projects ranging from small enterprise development to English education and agroforestry. They come from all 50 states and represent the United States in all of its diversity.

When introducing students to your volunteer, it is important that they understand that the volunteer is one of several thousand U.S. citizens living and working in countries around the world.

Explain to your students that they will be exchanging letters and information with a Peace Corps Volunteer who is currently serving overseas, and that this exchange is part of the World Wise Schools program. Ask your students what they know about the Peace Corps. Perhaps they have a relative or neighbor who is a returned Peace Corps Volunteer. The Peace Corps has a host of general information resources available online, and you can introduce your students to your volunteer's country and region of service through the hundreds of stories, lesson plans, and multimedia resources on the Coverdell World Wise Schools website.

After telling your students the name of their volunteer and the country in which he or she is serving, you may want to introduce journals or logs that the students can use throughout the year to record their exchange. An early assignment could be to have them write down their "predictions" about the volunteer's country and experiences. Where is it located? What language(s) do the citizens speak? How do they dress? What do they eat? Encourage students to use this journal to write down any thoughts they have about the overseas experience and work of the volunteer throughout the correspondence exchange. You may want to use these journals for students to react to issues expressed in your volunteer's letters as well as discussions that come up

within the class. Then, have the students write a letter to the Peace Corps Volunteer to introduce themselves and to ask questions of him or her.

## ***Tips for Communicating with your Peace Corps Volunteer***

A challenging aspect of your correspondence with a currently serving Peace Corps Volunteer will be simply sending and receiving communication successfully. Infrastructure, Internet availability, and postal systems vary widely from country to country, which makes it impossible to guarantee how long a piece of mail will take to arrive at its destination, and difficult to determine how often or how reliable your volunteer's access to email will be. We encourage you to be flexible and not to lose heart if several weeks go by without a letter or email.

Please see the sections below about email and mail communications to make the most of your match.

### ***Email***

As the world becomes more connected by technology, it is fair to expect that your Peace Corps Volunteer will have some access to the Internet. In fact, recent surveys of volunteers show that the vast majority has the ability to email with some regularity. A handful of Peace Corps countries even have universal wireless Internet, and some volunteers are using blogs, cell phones, text messaging, and online communication programs such as Skype with increasing frequency to communicate with friends and family back home. However, this shift is only a piece of the overall picture of communications between your classroom and your Peace Corps Volunteer partner.

In reality, only a percentage of overseas volunteers have speedy, affordable, reliable, and frequent access to email. Many volunteers' locations are remote, making it necessary for them to travel long distances to the next city or town to get access to email. Even in places where there is Internet availability, connections can often be slow and unreliable, and time spent on the Internet can be expensive. Many a Peace Corps Volunteer knows the pain of typing a lengthy email to family and friends, just to watch the Internet connection fail just before the "send" button was clicked.

For these reasons, World Wise Schools suggests that you communicate with your volunteer early on to establish a reliable communication schedule that will blend email and traditional letters. If your volunteer partner is in the capital city once every two months for business, maybe you can email during those times and exchange letters in the interim. As with most relationships, communication is the key to making the exchange a successful one.

Finally, please keep in mind that World Wise Schools' staff relies on email to keep in touch with you about your volunteer, our curriculum resources, and other important information. Please be sure to keep your email address up-to-date with us and add [wwsinfo@peacecorps.gov](mailto:wwsinfo@peacecorps.gov) to your school and personal email address books. Whenever possible, we would be happy to collect a school email address and an alternative email address, as we often see that schools' robust spam filters can block messages from World Wise Schools and Peace Corps Volunteers. If you have not heard from us in a while, please be sure to email us at [wwsinfo@peacecorps.gov](mailto:wwsinfo@peacecorps.gov), or call us at 800.424.8580, ext. 1450.

### ***Mail***

Postal systems in the countries where volunteers serve are generally slow, so please account for the fact that a letter to your volunteer may take weeks to arrive, and that the reply may take just as much time to reach you.

World Wise Schools will provide you with your volunteer's name and a mailing address. Please note that this initial address is for the Peace Corps office in your volunteer's country of service. It is not his or her local mailing address. The local mailing address, called the "site address," is where your volunteer receives mail on a more regular basis. Once you get a letter from the volunteer with a site address provided, please write it down in a safe place.

World Wise Schools does not have access to volunteers' site addresses, so if you lose it we will only be able to provide you the in-country Peace Corps office address. We emphasize this point because it is not uncommon for Peace Corps Volunteers to go several weeks or even months between visits to the Peace Corps office.

The following are some useful tips to consider when sending mail internationally.

***Postage Costs***

Ask your post office about how much it costs to send things to your volunteer's country. Usually, a standard letter requires one international airmail stamp. However, if you and your students include photographs or several letters in one envelope, it will probably increase the postage cost. Using the correct amount of postage is crucial to getting your letter delivered to your volunteer. The weight and size—even the shape—of envelopes and boxes will affect the cost of postage.

***Import Taxes***

Do not send a package without first asking your volunteer for permission. The volunteer may have to pay import taxes or travel a great distance to pick it up. If you send a package with the volunteer's consent, also send a separate letter or postcard reporting that the package is on its way.

***Postage Costs for the Volunteer***

Volunteers are on limited budgets, so if there is something specific you wish to have sent to you that incurs a significant cost, consider organizing a fundraiser to help cover the expense.

***Valuables***

Never send anything of value through the mail.

***Customs***

International mail is sometimes opened by customs officials, so keep in mind that what you and your students write may have a wider audience than your volunteer. Avoid language that might put the volunteer in a compromising position.

***Diplomatic Pouch***

Sorry, but you cannot use the diplomatic pouch (offered to overseas embassy employees) to send items to your volunteer.

## ***Frequently Asked Questions***

### ***How often should I correspond with my volunteer?***

World Wise Schools recommends that you exchange a letter or email with your volunteer each month. Try to avoid the “I will not write until I first get a letter” mentality, even if you simply send a short note to gently remind your volunteer that you are waiting for their response. This way you and the volunteer are ensured a lasting and productive correspondence.

### ***What do I do if I haven't heard from my volunteer for many months?***

If you have accounted for postal delays and still have not heard from your volunteer, contact World Wise Schools so you can explain your situation to a staff member. Email us at [wwsinfo@peacecorps.gov](mailto:wwsinfo@peacecorps.gov), or phone us at 800.424.8580, ext. 1450.

World Wise Schools staff are ready to assist you with any problems that may arise, but please remember, unless we hear from you we will not know that you are having communication difficulties with your volunteer.

### ***What happens to the correspondence during our summer months when U.S. teachers are on break?***

Though your school breaks for the summer months, the volunteer continues to live and work in the host country. We ask that you remember your volunteer by continuing to correspond with him or her over your summer months. You can use these months as a time to reflect on what worked and what did not, and plan for the coming school year.

### ***Does World Wise Schools assist educators in paying postage costs?***

No, World Wise Schools does not assist educators with postage costs.

### ***Will I receive any supplemental resources as part of the Correspondence Match program?***

Yes, you will receive the latest publications and posters from World Wise Schools. You will also receive our monthly e-newsletter, the *World Wise Window*.

### ***May I be matched with more than one volunteer?***

Yes, you may request as many volunteer matches as you like. Some educators request matches from many different regions or program sectors. Be sure to consider your goals for the match and time constraints as you decide how many volunteer matches you would like. Also, note that if there are few available volunteers at the time of your request, you may be limited to one match.

### ***What if I am unable to continue corresponding with my volunteer match?***

If you change schools or addresses, retire, take a sabbatical, or are otherwise unable to continue corresponding with your volunteer, please contact us at [wwsinfo@peacecorps.gov](mailto:wwsinfo@peacecorps.gov). You may also call 800.424.8580, ext. 1450.

### ***Can I help my volunteer with his or her projects?***

Yes, the Peace Corps Partnership Program, administered from Peace Corps headquarters, provides a convenient way for World Wise Schools educators and students to participate in Peace Corps work by combining project sponsorship and cross-cultural exchange. For information on the Peace Corps Partnership Program, email [pcpp@peacecorps.gov](mailto:pcpp@peacecorps.gov). You may also visit the program website, at [www.peacecorps.gov/contribute](http://www.peacecorps.gov/contribute).

### ***What happens when my volunteer finishes service?***

World Wise Schools will mail you a re-enrollment letter when your volunteer completes his or her overseas service. To continue with the program, simply mail the re-enrollment form back to us or email us at [wwsinfo@peacecorps.gov](mailto:wwsinfo@peacecorps.gov) verifying your contact information and your volunteer preferences. You can use this opportunity to connect with a new volunteer in the same country, or you can request a match from a different area. This is also a great time to invite your volunteer to visit your students in person.

## ***Sample Letters and Activities***

Dear Jeremy:

Greetings from your World Wise Schools class. I am Shawn Yarrow, and I teach math and economics to two classes of 10th graders, about 58 students in all. We are a small school in New Jersey. Are you familiar with New Jersey?

I've told my students we are going to correspond with a Peace Corps Volunteer in Moldova but haven't involved them too much yet. I wanted to first learn a bit about what you think this exchange should/could be.

Seeing as I teach math, I don't have a lot of information on Moldova at my fingertips. I've collected some general information on the country from some encyclopedias and plan to have my students search the Internet for more. What are the big imports and exports of Moldova? I have some lessons on imports and exports and think this would be a great tie-in.

If you could, also tell us a bit about how you shop and what things cost. Are there shopping malls like in the U.S.? There are also some lessons I have planned on supply and demand. Thinking back to 10th grade math, what else do you think makes sense?

Please tell me more about what you do and what it means to be a health education Peace Corps Volunteer. How often should we plan to hear from you? I was thinking of having my students work in groups and send a packet of four or five letters to you around the beginning of each month. Does that sound okay? Expect a letter soon as October 1st is approaching.

I look forward to hearing from you so we can plan a bit. I think there are a few different ways I can plug your letters into my curriculum. I hope to hear from you soon. Thanks in advance for helping to make my class more excited about math.

Talk to you soon,  
Shawn Yarrow

First letter from:  
Tatnuck Elementary School  
c/o Shawn Yarrow  
70 Pasnecoy Lane  
Kearny, NJ 07032

***Best Practices*** *The Suriname Rain Forest Summit*  
by Megan Baker NOVA School, Olympia, Washington

The Peace Corps Coverdell World Wise Schools program provided the impetus and inspiration for my sixth graders to try their hands at solving a real environmental dilemma: how to set aside a piece of tropical rain forest in Suriname for use by multiple interests.

My middle school students and I were linked to Peace Corps Volunteers Tony Kaperick and Carole Yahner through World Wise Schools. Tony and Carole were living and working in Suriname, and we frequently exchanged letters. They also made time to write personal responses to all of my students' postcards, drawings, and questions.

As our correspondence evolved, Tony and Carole responded to my idea of tying our growing interest in Suriname to the sixth-grade geography curriculum. Specifically, I asked them how I could make the study of Latin America's rain forests come alive for my kids. How could I give it depth and ground it in reality?

Our Peace Corps partners responded enthusiastically, writing narratives that vividly described the competing interests at work trying to influence their community: loggers, miners, huge financial

conglomerates, all promising gifts and wealth. The community was wary but had no access to information. “Please,” Tony and Carole requested, “help your students see that this is a complex story of poverty, development, displacement, and competing interests.”

Fueled by their insight, I designed an activity called the “Suriname Rain Forest Summit.” I placed students in pairs and asked them to work together to decide the fate of a given area of rain forest, and the people who had interests in it: agricultural researchers; board members of a corporate export conglomerate; members of a small, sustainable business cooperative; representatives of the logging and wood products industries; and the Suriname national parks commissioner. Students’ tasks included researching their designated roles, drawing a map of their plan for the huge tract of land, and writing and rehearsing an introductory presentation. This phase took at least a week.

Finally, all parties “met” in the capital of Paramaribo for the summit. As a representative of the Suriname government, I served only to call the meetings to order and keep discussion moving by asking questions. What I initially thought would be a one-day negotiation ended up taking four or five days. Students became very invested in the plans they had developed, and they needed time to present and clarify their work. In addition, the negotiation process became very intense, as competing interests worked together to reach a mutual preservation and land-use plan that satisfied the needs and wishes of most of the players.

What did my students get from this activity? Obviously, they honed their research and presentation skills. They also gained an understanding of the competing interest groups at work in the environment, and they learned that what might appear to be a simple issue of preservation versus development is in actuality very complex. Finally, they came away with an appreciation of the need for reasoned dialogue regarding the use and management of precious land: They had to listen to each other in order to arrive at a compromise.

Through our correspondence with Peace Corps Volunteers in Suriname, World Wise Schools provided us with the rich experience and the personal connection needed to make the “Suriname Rain Forest Summit” simulation come alive for my students in a classroom thousands of miles away.

## ***Curriculum Integration: Understanding by Design***

### ***'Essential Questions' How Am I Connected to the World?***

“Navigators use maps to chart a course,” writes Heidi Hayes Jacobs in her book *Mapping the Big Picture: Integrating Curriculum and Assessment K–12*. “Although unforeseen events and variables affect their journey, they begin by making important choices about their route to avoid a meandering, rudderless voyage. In a similar fashion, teachers must make critical choices as they plot a course for their learners. Essential questions are an exceptional tool for clearly and precisely communicating the pivotal points of the curriculum.” World Wise Schools staff worked with Jacobs to chart a course for Coverdell World Wise Schools for the 21st century. After much careful deliberation, the staff determined that the following questions drive the Correspondence Match program. These questions may be helpful as you begin your own classroom “voyage” with a Peace Corps Volunteer.

#### ***Geography***

- How does *where* you live influence *how* you live?
- How do changing environments change the lives of people?
- How do people change the environment?

#### ***Culture***

- What is culture?
- How does culture influence the way you look at the world?
- Are there cultural universals that bind us together?
- How do cultures evolve, migrate, and survive?
- What is my perspective on the world?
- What shapes my perspective on the world?
- How do those perspectives shape and affect action?

#### ***Service-Learning***

- What makes a community?
- What does it mean to be a citizen of my community? Of the world?
- What does “the common good” mean and why does it matter?
- Why serve? What have I got to give? What have I received from the service of others?
- How far am I willing to go to make a difference?

## ***Mapping the Big Picture An Interview With Heidi Hayes Jacobs***

Heidi Hayes Jacobs is the author of *Curriculum: Design and Implementation* and *Mapping the Big Picture: Integrating Curriculum and Assessment K-12* (both published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development). The staff of World Wise Schools met with Dr. Jacobs to discuss how World Wise Schools fits into the “big picture” of U.S. education.

*Is there a need in U.S. schools for what World Wise Schools has to offer—the experiences of Peace Corps Volunteers?*

**HHJ:** Most every state has approved public school standards. Among the specific requirements of these standards is that students should become aware, informed, and responsible future members of the global community. The experiences of Peace Corps Volunteers provide a living, breathing example of this. The need for a genuine and personal international experience is real. As it now stands in many schools, the curriculum that addresses this standard tends to be superficial.

*Superficial in what sense?*

**HHJ:** Well, first of all, materials are not always available. And often, in the rush to touch upon these standards before the school year ends, a teacher might create a token curriculum unit about a specific community or culture. This type of “quick fix” can almost create stereotypes. It is as if students receive information about a place that seems distant and reduced. They’re bombarded with media coverage that is consistently from a U.S. pop culture view. They see films and television imagery that distort other places and peoples while either mythologizing or vilifying Americans. The quick-fix approach to international standards coupled with the strong emphasis on U.S. history in the American school curriculum (which requires a tremendous amount of time) poses a problem. It is difficult to deal with the new demands for an informed generation about the very new world that awaits them in the 21st century.

*In your book **Mapping the Big Picture**, you write that “an essential question is the heart of the curriculum. It is the essence of what you believe students should examine and know in the short time that they are with you.” With that said, if a teacher is designing a course or unit that addresses this international standard—and, possibly, also involves a correspondence with a Peace Corps Volunteer—what’s the essential question?*

**HHJ:** For example, what does it mean to become a responsible citizen of my community? How can I become a responsible citizen of the United States and a citizen of the world? How do the media influence my view of peoples around the world?

*Those questions reflect an interdisciplinary approach ... another theme within your work.*

**HHJ:** The purpose of the essential questions is to create a cohesive learning experience, and the reason for designing an interdisciplinary curriculum is to create natural connections as opposed to forced—so the goals here are parallel. Many curriculums are plagued by a “potpourri” problem—a little of this, and a little of that—lacking a central focus. You don’t always know whether students understand a concept until they are able to apply it in another context. An interdisciplinary approach looks for commonsense linkages. It puts principles—whether it’s science, geography, or language arts— into a real-world context.

*Peace Corps Volunteers probably know a thing or two about putting classroom principles into a real-world context.*

**HHJ:** Yes, they do. And when a volunteer is linked to a U.S. class through a correspondence match, the learning experience itself is going to be interdisciplinary—combining language arts and geography with health or environmental issues. These are natural connections.

## ***A Word About Standards***

### ***National Education Standards***

We know that teachers everywhere are helping students master state and local content standards. Thus, we have made an effort to identify the key content standards that the Coverdell World Wise Schools Correspondence Match program can support in the areas of geography, social studies, behavioral studies, service-learning, language arts, and technology. These standards are listed below. It is our hope that you will view the correspondence exchange with a Peace Corps Volunteer not as a luxury to be squeezed into your curriculum, but as a vehicle for addressing content standards for which you and your students are already being held accountable.

### ***National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE) Standards***

#### ***Essential Element I: THE WORLD IN SPATIAL TERMS***

Geography studies the relationships between people, places, and environments by mapping information about them into a spatial context.

The geographically informed person knows and understands

Standard 1. How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.

Standard 3. How to analyze the spatial organization of people, places, and environments on Earth's surface.

#### ***Essential Element II: PLACES AND REGIONS***

The identities and lives of individuals and peoples are rooted in particular places and in those human constructs called regions.

The geographically informed person knows and understands

Standard 4. The physical and human characteristics of places.

Standard 6. How culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions.

#### ***Essential Element III: PHYSICAL SYSTEMS***

Standard 8. The characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth's surface.

#### ***Essential Element IV: HUMAN SYSTEMS***

People are central to geography in that human activities help shape Earth's surface, human settlements and structures are part of Earth's surface, and humans compete for control of Earth's surface.

The geographically informed person knows and understands

Standard 9. The characteristics and spatial distribution of ecosystems on Earth's surface.

Standard 10. The characteristics, distribution, and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics.

Standard 11. The patterns and networks of economic interdependence on Earth's surface.

Standard 12. The processes, patterns, and functions of human settlement.

Standard 13. How the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of Earth's surface.

Standard 14. How human actions modify the physical environment.

*Essential Element V: ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY*

The physical environment is modified by human activities, largely as a consequence of the ways in which human societies value and use Earth's natural resources, and human activities are also influenced by Earth's physical features and processes.

The geographically informed person knows and understands

Standard 15. How physical systems affect human systems.

Standard 16. The changes that occur in the meaning, use, distribution, and importance of resources.

*Essential Element VI: THE USES OF GEOGRAPHY*

Standard 18. How to apply geography to interpret the present and plan for the future.

***National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Standards***

*Culture (NCSS Theme I)*

Social studies curriculum should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

*Time, Continuity, & Change (NCSS Theme II)*

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time.

*People, Places, and Environments (NCSS Theme III)*

Social studies curriculum should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.

*Individual, Development, and Identity (NCSS Theme IV)*

Social studies curriculum should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity.

*Individuals, Groups & Institutions (NCSS Theme V)*

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions.

*Power, Authority, & Governance (NCSS Theme VI)*

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance.

*Production, Distribution, & Consumption (NCSS Theme VII)*

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people organize for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services.

*Science, Technology and Society (NCSS Theme VIII)*

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of relationships among science, technology, and society.

*Global Connections (NCSS Theme IX)*

Social studies curriculum should include experiences that provide for the study of global connections and interdependence.

*Civic Ideals, and Practices (NCSS Theme X)*

Social studies curriculum should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.

### ***Behavioral Studies Standards***

1. The learner understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity, and behavior.
2. Understands various meanings of social group, general implications of group membership, and different ways that groups function.
3. Understands that interactions among learning, inheritance, and physical development affect human behavior.
4. Understands conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among individuals, groups, and institutions.

### ***Service-Learning Standards***

#### *Meaningful Service*

Service-learning actively engages participants in meaningful and personally relevant service activities.

#### *Link to Curriculum*

Service-learning is intentionally used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards.

#### *Reflection*

Service-learning incorporates multiple challenging reflection activities that are ongoing and that prompt deep thinking and analysis about oneself and one's relationship to society.

#### *Diversity*

Service-learning promotes understanding of diversity and mutual respect among all participants.

#### *Youth Voice*

Service-learning provides youth with a strong voice in planning, implementing, and evaluating service-learning experiences with guidance from adults.

#### *Partnerships*

Service-learning partnerships are collaborative, mutually beneficial, and address community needs.

#### *Progress Monitoring*

Service-learning engages participants in an ongoing process to assess the quality of implementation and progress toward meeting specified goals, and uses results for improvement and sustainability.

#### *Duration and Intensity*

Service-learning has sufficient duration and intensity to address community needs and meet specified outcomes.

### ***Language Arts Standards***

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

10. Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.

11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

### ***Technology Standards***

1. Facilitate and Inspire Student Learning and Creativity

2. Design and Develop Digital-Age Learning Experiences and Assessments

3. Model Digital-Age Work and Learning

4. Promote and Model Digital Citizenship and Responsibility

5. Engage in Professional Growth and Leadership

## ***Match Handbook for Volunteers***

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### ***Peace Corps Volunteers: Sharing Your Stories***

We are delighted that you have chosen to incorporate the World Wise Schools match program into your overseas service. Not only will you be playing an important role in fulfilling the third goal of the Peace Corps, but you may also find that your correspondence with U.S. students enhances your experience abroad.

As a currently serving Peace Corps Volunteer participating in World Wise Schools, you will probably find that the match provides a nice balance to your work and experience of living in another country. Corresponding with young people back home can help you to recognize how much you have learned about the people and culture of your host country. It may give you a renewed appreciation for the difficult lessons that can only be learned firsthand. And it may inspire you to learn even more about the history, traditions, and culture of your host country families and friends.

For the students with whom you are corresponding, the benefits are immeasurable. Peace Corps Volunteers serve as excellent role models for U.S. students, and you should not underestimate the positive influence you can have on kids back home. The Correspondence Match program is an excellent way to help students to better understand countries and cultures that many Americans will never experience. Exposing students to the work of Peace Corps Volunteers may instill a community service ethic and motivate students to volunteer locally. Students who have recently moved to a school or community may relate well to your experience of adjusting to a new place, especially those from other countries who are in the process of adapting to a new culture themselves. You may even be serving in or near the country from which some of your World Wise Schools students come. Knowing that someone else is experiencing the same feelings and frustrations of cross-cultural adjustment may help to smooth their transition and make their peers more sensitive to the difficulties of assimilation.

In short, the World Wise Schools Correspondence Match program can have great benefits to both you and U.S. students—and it's fun!

One of the most important things to understand about your correspondence match with a U.S. teacher and his or her students is that it is up to both of you to determine the nature of your exchange.

By signing up to be matched with a class of U.S. students you are committing yourself to write them on a regular basis, so please honor that agreement. You may not realize it, but the students are likely to become quite attached to you and to look forward to your correspondence with great anticipation.

Also remember that you may very well be the first contact the American students have with your host country, so the way you describe things will invariably affect the impressions the students develop. Be alert to what you say and how you say it. Reinforce to both the students and the teacher that your letters show only one perspective of your host country. Letters are always better if you write when you are emotionally "up," and while we encourage you to share both your joys and frustrations, try to avoid writing if you are in a particularly negative mood. By the same token, be creative and try to make your letters personal. The more your students get a feel for who you are, the more they will be interested and the more they will learn.

Students will carry your stories home with them, so what you say will influence the way that many people perceive your host country and, more broadly, the way they perceive people from other places. Many children view those who are different from themselves as "weird." Although differences may be entertaining and sometimes important to illustrate, try to emphasize the similarities between the United States and your host country as well. What are some of the common concerns and joys that both peoples share?

In your first letter to your students, simply introduce yourself. Give the students an overview of who you are: where you come from, your interests and hobbies, the size of your family, why you joined the Peace Corps. This introduction will give your students a better picture of who you are, and make you more real. Sending a picture of yourself can also help students put a face on a name.

## ***Suggested Activities to Support Your Correspondence***

The activities listed below are some suggestions to get you started. Try to help U.S. students see and feel the rhythms, smells, and sounds of your host country. Work with them on projects. There are additional suggestions in the Correspondence Match Educator handbook, as well, if you are still looking for ideas. Be creative and have fun with it, and please share any success stories with us so that other participants can also benefit.

### ***A Day in the Life***

Describe an average day for a local woman in your area. Do the same for a man. Ask the U.S. students how this compares with the United States. Interview a child in your host country or describe an average day for a child the same age as the U.S. students. At what age do students in your host country go to school? How long are semesters? What classes do they take? Perhaps you can even send a picture of the local school. Ask your CWWS class the same questions and share the responses with children in your country of service.

### ***Photographs***

Take photos of your everyday life: your housing, the local market, your host country family and friends, roads and cars, musical instruments, clothing, the countryside, how people cook and how they do laundry. This may seem mundane to you right now, but it will be of great interest to your U.S. students, and you will definitely come to appreciate these pictures in the years after your service.

### ***Maps***

Draw a map of the community in which you live. By what types of landmarks do people orient themselves in your host country? Make a map of the entire country, showing regions characterized by different ethnic groups and languages, terrain, and crop production.

### ***Food, Glorious Food!***

Share your favorite recipes. Maybe your U.S. students can prepare them at home or in class. Include a description of what is involved in shopping for ingredients and how long it takes to prepare a meal in your host country.

### ***Communications***

Describe the different languages and forms of communication that people in your host country use. Do they have mobile phones, faxes, and computers? How does this affect work and general communication?

### ***A Funny Thing Happened...***

Have you had any funny language mistakes, where you thought you were saying one thing and, in fact, said another? Share these funny episodes with your U.S. students and describe how you felt.

### ***Artifacts***

Send small items that can easily fit into a padded envelope to keep your costs down: rubbings of small coins, paper money, food labels, newspaper clippings, stamps, and photographs. Remember to provide translations if needed. Try to explain the meaning of the stamps you use on your card or envelope. Stamps often have a historic context or relevance to a country.

### ***Audio Recordings***

Make audio recordings of common sounds in your community, such as people talking, animal noises, music and singing, and children playing. Send the recordings to your U.S. students and ask them to identify the sounds. Send recordings of local music. Is the music traditional, Western, or a hybrid of the two? What kind of music do young people in your host country listen to?

### ***Video Recordings***

Record an average day in your community.

***Passages of Time***

Do people in your host country wear watches? How are their perspectives on time similar to or different from those of people in the United States?

***Historical Perspective***

Make a timeline of your host country's history, marking significant events. You can stretch the timeline back as far as you want. Are there any similarities between your host country's history and that of the United States?

***Americans Abroad***

How do individuals in your community view people living in the United States? Try to collect stories, movie ads, TV listings, newspaper clippings (consider translating appropriate sections), and comments from people to provide clues to what factors contribute to these opinions of Americans.

***All in the Family***

If you have members of your own family near your CWWS class, see if the U.S. teacher would be interested in having one of them visit. The students would love to hear stories about you and see pictures. Likewise, if you send items to this family member, that person could share them with the class, thereby cutting down on your postage costs.

***Water: An Essential Element***

Describe the method by which you and your neighbors acquire drinking water. How much water do you use for various tasks, e.g., laundry, dishes, personal hygiene? Is your water usage similar to theirs? Are U.S. water-use patterns different? If so, how?

***Oral Histories***

Gather oral histories and stories of your host country family and friends (provide translation, if necessary). Ask grandparents how things have changed since they were young. Suggest to your U.S. students that they do a similar exercise with their grandparents. Describe the role of older people in your community. How are they treated? What role do they perform in the family and community? This would be a great opportunity to do informal interviews of some of the older community members.

## ***World Wise Schools And Your Project Area***

Providing insights into your main project can help U.S. students understand the culture of your host country. Below are some correspondence ideas for Volunteers working in various sectors:

### ***Health***

Every child studies health at some point in elementary school. Most often it's the human body systems and hygiene. In secondary schools, health issues may be included in biology, home economics, or family life classes. Try to relate your health work to the students, using simple language to explain the nature of the health issues you are working on.

### ***Small Business Development***

Volunteers working in this sector have a lot to offer U.S. students. By relating your stories of working with local entrepreneurs, you will give students a grass-roots look at what is involved in starting and running a small business. You can put abstract economic principles into simple terms by showing real-life examples. Try to illustrate how an idea can be transformed into a product or service. And try to show the constraints of running a small business in a developing country.

### ***Agriculture/Forestry/Environmental Education***

The experience you are gaining in this field can be of great interest to U.S. students. If you are working on a gardening project, describe it. How is it similar to or different from gardens in the United States? Discuss such issues as reforestation, soil erosion, and composting, and try to find connections to the community in which your students live. Describe an environmental problem in your region. Perhaps it is desertification, rain forest depletion, or industrial pollution. Share your work in this area, and ask your students to do some independent research to learn more about the issue. Is it unique to your region? What environmental problems exist in your students' hometown, city, or state?

### ***Education/TEFL Education/Youth Development***

World Wise Schools is a natural fit for Volunteers working in these sectors. With your education background and skills, you can easily adapt your experiences to your correspondence. Maybe there is a way for you to involve your host country students. We encourage you to refer to the Educator section of this handbook as well for ideas to supplement your correspondence.

### ***Tips for Writing Letters to Younger Children***

- Limit your vocabulary in your letters. Did you know that the Dr. Seuss classic *The Cat in the Hat* uses only 225 different words? Remember to phrase your experiences in terms youngsters are familiar with. Take your clues from the letters they write to you.
- A week can seem like a long time when you're seven years old—six weeks is forever! A speedy reply to your class's correspondence is especially appreciated by younger grades. Likewise, younger students can become attached to "their" Volunteer. Please let them know if you become medically separated, end your service early, or can't write for an extended period of time for whatever reason.
- Try to relate your experiences in your host country to everyday things your young correspondents might encounter. Describe an event or object, then ask them a question, such as, "Do you see dogs in the street on your way to school?" Think Mister Rogers!
- Not everything you experience while living overseas is appropriate for younger students. Your U.S. teacher may ask you to avoid certain topics, or you may wish to establish some topic guidelines together before you commence writing directly to the class.
- Younger students often ask the same kinds of questions. You may find it helpful to combine their questions for a group response to the class. Try mentioning individual names when possible in your responses.
- Think small. Even the paper you write on and the stamps you use to send your letters will be of interest to your young fans. Stories of how you make your breakfast or buy bread can be enough to start a long discussion in an elementary classroom.
- Linguistic differences can be explored by asking children in your host country what the words are for common animal sounds. Your U.S. students might be surprised to learn that "quack-quack" is far from universal!
- Observe and relate the sights, sounds, fragrances, and textures of your host country. Is there a children's game comparable to hopscotch? Or a song every child knows? A scrap of local cloth included in your letter will give the students a real "feel" for your environment overseas.

### ***You've Got Mail!***

We encourage you to write to your teacher as soon as possible to touch base and to provide your site address. Your CWWS teacher initially receives the address of your in-country Peace Corps office—not your specific site address. Please make a special effort to spell the address out clearly. It is not uncommon for letters to get lost simply because of an incorrect number or letter. If your site address is complicated, write it out clearly and encourage your teacher to photocopy the address as you wrote it and affix it to the envelope rather than attempting to write it by hand.

If you are corresponding by email, be sure to add your teachers email address to your address book; often times the teachers emails get filtered to a spam or junk mail folder. Additionally, your emails may be blocked or filtered out by a teacher's email server, so be aware of this potential pitfall to communication and remind your teacher to add you to their address book as well.

Try to come to an agreement early on as to how regularly you will write, and then stick to it. Even if it's only a short letter or a postcard in between longer letters, the students will love hearing from you. You are like their personal explorer and, in some cases, a mentor. Long periods of silence may lead them to worry about you.

Because postal systems in some countries can be unreliable, also try to avoid the pitfall of "waiting for a letter before responding." This sort of question and response can be quite difficult to maintain, and it may inadvertently lead to months of silence while both you and the teacher wait for the other's letter.

## ***Volunteer Frequently Asked Questions***

### ***What do I do if I lose the address of a person with whom I'm corresponding?***

Let your in-country contact know. He or she will then contact us in Washington, D.C.; if you have access to email, you can contact us directly at [wwsinfo@peacecorps.gov](mailto:wwsinfo@peacecorps.gov).

### ***Whom should I contact if I have a question or need more information about Coverdell World Wise Schools?***

You can always contact us directly by email at [wwsinfo@peacecorps.gov](mailto:wwsinfo@peacecorps.gov) if you have any questions.

Additionally, your in-country contact can answer questions concerning the World Wise Schools and Correspondence Match program. The World Wise Schools in-country contact (ICC) is a staff member or Volunteer leader in your local Peace Corps office. This person is in regular contact with CWWS. If you are having a problem with your match, please let your ICC know. This person's name is also listed in your match letter, which provided the name and address of your teacher.

### ***Can CWWS participants correspond with more than one person?***

Yes. As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you can be matched to more than one educator in the United States. But because of the limited number of Peace Corps Volunteers overseas, educators are usually only assigned to one Volunteer.

### ***Will I be reimbursed for postage costs?***

You are provided with a postage reimbursement for the cost of one letter a month for each educator to whom you write. This reimbursement is most likely included in your living allowance. If you do not think it is, talk to your ICC for details. Unfortunately, it is not possible to use the diplomatic pouch or APO to send or receive items or mail.

You should be aware that your U.S. match teacher does not get any postage reimbursement for the mail sent to you. Therefore, we encourage you not to request having large items sent. The teacher, on the other hand, does receive educational resources produced by World Wise Schools. These materials may not address your country specifically, but they do cover general themes that should be compatible with your correspondence.

The postage reimbursement policy can be found in the *Peace Corps Manual*, Section 835, paragraph 6.5.

### ***I haven't heard from my CWWS class. What should I do?***

While you are waiting to receive a letter or email, try to avoid the "I will not write until I first get a letter" mentality. Even if you simply send a short note to gently remind the teacher that you are waiting for their response. Also, because of irregular postal delivery times, mail can often be delayed in transit. If several months go by without your hearing from your teacher, let your in-country contact know, who will get in touch with CWWS or email us directly at [wwsinfo@peacecorps.gov](mailto:wwsinfo@peacecorps.gov). We will contact your teacher to see what is going on. We will do everything possible to get you and the educator in touch, but unless we know there is a problem there is nothing we can do to help.

### ***How does World Wise Schools determine which U.S. class I will correspond with?***

If you indicated on the enrollment form the name and contact information of a teacher with whom you wish to correspond, you should be matched to that educator. If you did not indicate a specific teacher with whom to correspond, we matched you with an interested educator from our database. We try to accommodate any preferences you indicated on your enrollment form; however, that is not always possible and we appreciate your flexibility.

***How old are the students who participate in World Wise Schools?***

Students range in grade level from kindergarten through twelfth. Occasionally we facilitate matches between Volunteers and pre-kindergarten and post-secondary school groups.

***What do I do if I don't have the time to participate in World Wise Schools once I get to my site?***

If you find that you cannot participate for any reason, inform your teacher and your ICC. Do not just stop writing. We fully understand that circumstances change, and that you may be unable to continue your correspondence. But we urge you to inform us of this decision so that we can work with the teacher to find another Volunteer. Please do not leave your students and teacher hanging; they may actually be worrying about you.

***Can I wait until I get to my site to enroll in the World Wise Schools program?***

You can sign up to be matched to an educator anytime before or during your service, but we recommend you enroll as early as possible to get the most out of your exchange. We prefer that U.S. students have the opportunity to correspond with a Volunteer for at least seven to eight months before you are scheduled to COS.

***What if I think that one of my letters has gotten lost in the mail?***

Number your letters so you and the teacher know if something has gone astray.

***What if I move?***

If you transfer sites or countries during your service, please contact your class with the new address and have your ICC report this information to CWWS.

***What should I do if my CWWS teacher changes schools?***

Teachers may retire or change schools without letting CWWS staff know. If we do learn that your teacher has moved, we will inform you. Likewise, if you learn that your teacher has moved or if they are unable to continue with the program for whatever reason, please have your ICC report this information to CWWS or contact us directly at [wwsinfo@peacecorps.gov](mailto:wwsinfo@peacecorps.gov).

## ***Correspondence Match in Action***

### ***Letters Home*** by Shawn Davis

*Shawn Davis served in Dologou, Mali, as a health Volunteer from 1996 to 1998. His letters reflect his genuine interest in and respect for the people, language, and culture of his host country.*

### ***Pre-service Training***

*Katibougou, Mali  
September 7, 1996*

The sounds of a thousand chirping birds slicing the air in their yellow jackets, then weaving their nests in the djella trees; the earth throbbing with crowds of insects that raise their voices like an orchestra of bamboo chimes; the roosters, so confused by the brightness of the stars, crowing restlessly through the blue-black night....

This is now my world. The sounds of Richford, Vermont, have been replaced. No more drone of engine, honk of horn, and buzz of busy bee. No more fire engines in the night. No more lawn mower to break my Sunday morning slumber.

In these letters I will paint a picture. And in the interest of truth, in which I think you are all interested, I will paint as freely as I can.

Peace Corps training continues until November, when we're sworn in as official Volunteers and go to post. I will be in the Mapti region up north toward Timbuktu. Check your map.

### ***The Road to Mapti***

*October 4, 1996*

The bus ride from Bamako to Mapti lasted a sweaty, non-air-conditioned 10 hours that was passed with countless games of Uno played on sweaty thighs. The bus was full. The center aisle had fold-down seats, so if you looked back, the bus was just a solid mass of people sweating bullets and waving their hand-held fans made of palm fronds. Every so often the bus would stop and everyone would pile out. The faithful would spread out their plastic multicolored mats toward Mecca to pray while the rest scrambled around for a stretch and some quick nourishment. On shorter stops, when only the driver got out, women and children would swarm around the bus to sell their goods through the window: corn on the cob roasted black; fried bananas and hot pepper sandwiches; green oranges; fried millet-dough balls; long, clear plastic bags of water; and more palm fronds at 20 cents apiece for those who had forgotten them at home, or for the extravagant, who wanted one in each hand....

### ***My Site Visit***

*Dologou, Mali  
October 11, 1996*

Dologou is situated on a small plateau that dips in the middle, forming the crease into which the town snugly fits. The tall, green millet fields lead up to the edge and frame the blank canvas of the sky. Blank, except for the huge baobab trees that look like elephants with a hundred trunks reaching up to drink the sky; and the acacias with their leaves perched so high that a giraffe with its neck stretched high would fit perfectly into the picture.

As soon as we arrived in the village that first day, we went to see the host family with whom John, another Volunteer, had previously made contact. We were greeted at the door by a beautiful woman with teeth that beamed white from her smooth ebony face and whose body was wrapped in a delicate indigo cloth. Nestled in her arms was a newborn wide-eyed baby with what seemed like six months' worth of black curly hair. John asked her what the baby's name was and then

looked ultimately puzzled at her response. "I've never heard of a baby named Tomorrow around here," he said. He asked again just to clarify and got the same response. "How old is she?" he asked. The baby was only six days old. With that response, it made sense. Tomorrow would be the one-week anniversary of the baby's birth, when the baptism and traditional name-giving ceremony would take place. She didn't have a name. We'd have to wait until "tomorrow."

Later that afternoon, after having visited the 90-year-old village chief and making the traditional offering of kola nuts to show respect, I was informed that tomorrow's big event would be a double baptism. I would be receiving my new Dogon name at the same time....

### ***Flying Canoes***

*Katibougou, Mali*  
*November 16, 1996*

After dinner one night, my neighbor, Samba, decided to tell one of his favorite cow-herder stories. He told of a time when he led his herd of over a hundred cattle on a two-and-a-half-month journey from Douentza, not far from Timbuktu in northern Mali, clear across Burkina Faso and into Ghana. To do this, Samba and his herd had to cross the expansive Niger River. "If you ever get tired swimming across the river with your cows," he said, "just grab onto one of their tails and float."

"Is America close to Ghana?" he asked, swinging the conversation back toward me. I explained that, no, it was very, very far away. "Did you have to cross a river to get from America to Mali?" "Yes, I crossed a very, very big river," I responded in my rudimentary Fula. "Did you swim across?" he asked sincerely. "No, I took a *lana ndiwoka*." *Lana ndiwoka* is "airplane" in Fula, or literally translated: flying canoe! He said he knew of them but didn't approve....

### ***Bringing Back the Moon***

*Katibougou, Mali*  
*November 30, 1996*

It was a Thursday night and the town was bathed in that eerie blue light of the full moon that casts midnight shadows and illuminates the town's many pools of stagnant water. I had turned in early that night after a full morning of language class, a long afternoon field trip, and a seemingly endless dinner of rice and heart.

Safely tucked beneath my mosquito net, covered in beads of sweat, I lay dreaming. It was a musical dream. In all honesty, it was another of my fanatically vivid food dreams. This time it was an upscale Italian restaurant in New York City. But in between my ravenous mouthfuls of mile-high lasagna, I was keenly aware of an African drummer positioned next to the bar. Just as my tiramisu was about to arrive, I bolted awake. All that delicious food was gone. But what was that? The drummer was still going strong.

I pulled open my mosquito net, slipped into my muddy flip-flops, and stepped outside to investigate. The family in the compound next to ours was going crazy, banging everything in their reach that was bangable and singing their lungs to a premature death.

Suddenly there was a lull in their concert and I realized, in that brief moment of silence, that the whole village was pulsating with hundreds of different irregular rhythms. Had the village chief died? I ran in to check my alarm clock: 3:30 a.m. What was going on?

My host father, Namorey, came out of his hut calling my Malian name, "Moussa! Moussa!" He stuck out his arms and clenched his two fists, which I could barely see, it had gotten so dark. "*Tile, kalo*," he said, as he slowly brought the two fists together until one covered the other. "*Amainye!*"

Whatever it was, it concerned the sun and moon and it was bad. I looked up at the overcast sky and, as the clouds parted, the dusty pink penumbra of the moon revealed itself to us. It was a total lunar eclipse.

With a pained expression on his face, Namorey repeated, “Bad moon. Tomorrow no sun, no moon.” The women and children continued to dent all of the pots and pans in the wailings of the faithful.

As I turned to go back to my hut, the whole village entered into a chaotic uproar unbelievably surpassing, with what seemed like an electrical surge, their already highly energetic state.

Their prayers had been answered; their sympathy heard. The moon was slowly beginning to reveal itself again, sliver by sliver. With this confirmation of their efforts they continued in full earnest, now accompanied by crowing roosters and braying donkeys confused by the sudden new source of light.

By 4:45 a.m. their celestial job was complete. The long-held tradition had worked again. They had brought back the moon.

***Sharing Our Stories*** by Beth Giebus, Teacher (Peace Corps Volunteer, Morocco, 1990–1993)

“You must have run out of everything at the same time,” said the pharmacy cashier, glancing down at my overloaded basket of lotions, pastes, creams, and gels. Embarrassed by my zeal for health and beauty aids, I started to explain.

“I just came back from Morocco,” I said. “I was a Peace Corps Volunteer.”

The cashier stopped. Putting down my bottle of Aussie Miracle shampoo, she looked me in the eye and said “God bless you!” with such earnest admiration it frightened me. She called out to another lady, who was inspecting a box of Altoids. Did you know this young woman just got back from the Peace Corps?!”

“My goodness,” the Altoids lady joined in. The two looked me over from head to toe, seemingly in search of some lingering Saharan sand. Suddenly conscious of my fingernails, I fumbled for my pockets.

“All that you must have been through! What was it like?” Before I could answer “It was great,” the Altoids lady shook her head and clicked, “Tsk, tsk. You poor thing! What a great sacrifice you made!”

After ringing up my \$42 purchase, the cashier picked up a Hershey’s chocolate bar from the candy counter and pressed it into my hand, saying, “That’s for you.”

For over a week—a record for me—I left the Hershey bar untouched. Then, in a fit of “reentry” depression, I ate it (for medicinal purposes only). As I suspected, it stuck in my throat, like the words I didn’t say.

The pharmacy ladies weren’t the only ones who considered my Volunteer service a “great sacrifice.” I didn’t see it this way, and I struggled to explain. Once I practically shouted, “Moroccans gave me much, much more than I ever gave them!” to my Aunt Ann. Judging from her beatific grin, I knew that, in her eyes, a golden halo was shining over my head, more brilliantly than ever before. This frustrated me immensely, since I sensed that underlying such good-hearted intentions was a misperception not only of me but of the developing world as well.

Growing up in middle-class suburbia, I got my introduction to the developing world from the evening news. According to Walter Cronkite’s reports, wars, famines, and natural disasters were

daily occurrences in the world beyond the Jersey shore. Later at college, I stumbled into an anthropology class and gained a larger worldview. For many of my relatives and childhood friends, however, the most vivid images of the developing world continued to be photographs and newsreels of devastation.

In *Another Africa*, Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe—concerned about the effect of such images on the world psyche—quotes a joint statement made by Amnesty International and the International Committee for Photography: “The apocalyptic vision of the newsmakers does not accurately document the world community. Nor are they particularly helpful in forming a picture of our common humanity.” Achebe then goes on to support their appeal to “document authentic humanity.”

“Documenting authentic humanity” is what Peace Corps Day is all about. For me, Peace Corps Day offered an opportunity to (finally) clear my throat; to answer all those questions that no one was asking; and to depict a personal portrait of the developing world that was alive with common joys and common sufferings....

At 9 a.m. on March 3, 1998, I traipsed up to the doors of the John Eaton Middle School in Washington, D.C. wearing a pink *djellaba* and toting my biggest, brightest *meeka* bag—bursting with baubles and teapots, veils and slippers—I felt like a Moroccan version of Mary Poppins. Once inside the sixth-grade classroom, I was unnerved to find the students sitting so quietly at their desks. With arms folded in front of them, they stared at me with wide-eyed passivity, suggesting that they had already tuned in to their own inner Nickelodeon channels. Luckily, my cassette tape of Berber music knocked Nick’s reception into static, causing the class to twitter and squirm.

“Is this the kind of music they listen to?” one boy asked, obviously unimpressed.

I gave him my Marrakeshi hand drum. Then, digging into my bottomless *meeka* bag, I passed out four sets of gourds and two tambourines. I divided the rest of the class into stompers and clappers. Soon, happily and noisily, we caught the Berber rhythm. And we were awake.

Although our virtual tour of Morocco ran the gamut from Arab history to the word *zweena*, I discovered that students were most curious about my own (minor) triumphs and (major) gaffes. I also found that, not only did I have a large collection of stories, I had recurring themes. There were animal stories (“The Camel With Indigestion” was a big hit); transportation stories (generally involving death-defying bus rides and chickens with indigestion); and food stories (here, I waxed poetic on the glorious wonders of couscous and Fez fish tagine). But the stories about my Moroccan neighbors, students, and friends sparked the greatest enthusiasm. Like the story about how my neighbor, Amina, and I chased runaway sheep during Ramadan; or the story about how a little Berber girl, living at the edge of the Sahara, insisted on giving me her doll, made from scraps of cloth and wood.

“A Berber girl made this?” asked one girl, holding the doll close. The doll’s raw beauty resonated with a spirit, joyful and content. “She’s so nice!,” said the girl, transfixed. I wondered if she was admiring the doll or the little Berber girl.

“Did you always know that you wanted to be a Peace Corps Volunteer?” asked a girl wearing fluorescent-green overalls.

I had to stop for a moment to think. My usual response to this question was either too standardized (“Anthropology has had a significant influence ...”) or too vague (“I think, maybe, I saw a commercial somewhere ...?”).

Then, it hit me. When I was 11, Huckleberry Finn and Harriet the Spy were my heroes. I liked Huck Finn because I understood what he meant when he said he didn’t want to be civilized. He wanted to find out about the world for himself and not be force-fed answers by “society.” I liked Harriet because she was smart and curious about people. One day, I heard about the Peace Corps

and was relieved to know that I could be true to the values of Huck and Harriet and not be imprisoned.

“... So, yes, I always wanted to be a Volunteer. It just took me a while to find the name for it.”

Staring straight ahead, one boy half-whispered, “Very, very cool!”

Yes. Very cool....

Distill it down to its most essential element: Peace Corps Volunteers are wordsmiths. We arrive in a country offering words about health, words about education, words about technology. We translate, trade, share, and weave words—enwrapping ourselves in dialogues and stories, histories and fables. If peace is a conversation, where words flow fresh and plentiful, then war is a painful silence, where words stop, and stagnate. In the face of ignorance and devastation, what is there to say?

[The third goal] is an opportunity for Volunteers—past, present, and future—to celebrate our medals of service: the words and stories given to us by neighbors, friends, and students.

Speak to clear your throat of the stories welling up inside. Speak for the sake of peace. Keep the conversation alive.

***Best Practices: The Suriname Rain Forest Summit by Megan Baker  
NOVA School, Olympia, Washington***

The Peace Corps Coverdell World Wise Schools program provided the impetus and inspiration for my sixth graders to try their hands at solving a real environmental dilemma: how to set aside a piece of tropical rain forest in Suriname for use by multiple interests.

My middle school students and I were linked to Peace Corps Volunteers Tony Kaperick and Carole Yahner through World Wise Schools. Tony and Carole were living and working in Suriname, and we frequently exchanged letters. They also made time to write personal responses to all of my students' postcards, drawings, and questions.

As our correspondence evolved, Tony and Carole responded to my idea of tying our growing interest in Suriname to the sixth-grade geography curriculum. Specifically, I asked them how I could make the study of Latin America's rain forests come alive for my kids. How could I give it depth and ground it in reality?

Our Peace Corps partners responded enthusiastically, writing narratives that vividly described the competing interests at work trying to influence their community: loggers, miners, huge financial conglomerates, all promising gifts and wealth. The community was wary but had no access to information. “Please,” Tony and Carole requested, “help your students see that this is a complex story of poverty, development, displacement, and competing interests.”

Fueled by their insight, I designed an activity called the “Suriname Rain Forest Summit.” I placed students in pairs and asked them to work together to decide the fate of a given area of rain forest, and the people who had interests in it: agricultural researchers; board members of a corporate export conglomerate; members of a small, sustainable business cooperative; representatives of the logging and wood products industries; and the Suriname national parks commissioner. Students' tasks included researching their designated roles, drawing a map of their plan for the huge tract of land, and writing and rehearsing an introductory presentation. This phase took at least a week.

Finally, all parties “met” in the capital of Paramaribo for the summit. As a representative of the Suriname government, I served only to call the meetings to order and keep discussion moving by asking questions. What I initially thought would be a one-day negotiation ended up taking four or

five days. Students became very invested in the plans they had developed, and they needed time to present and clarify their work. In addition, the negotiation process became very intense, as competing interests worked together to reach a mutual preservation and land-use plan that satisfied the needs and wishes of most of the players.

What did my students get from this activity? Obviously, they honed their research and presentation skills. They also gained an understanding of the competing interest groups at work in the environment, and they learned that what might appear to be a simple issue of preservation versus development is in actuality very complex. Finally, they came away with an appreciation of the need for reasoned dialogue regarding the use and management of precious land: They had to listen to each other in order to arrive at a compromise.

Through our correspondence with Peace Corps Volunteers in Suriname, World Wise Schools provided us with the rich experience and the personal connection needed to make the “Suriname Rain Forest Summit” simulation come alive for my students in a classroom thousands of miles away.