

Peace Corps  
Paul D. Coverdell World Wise Schools

# **Match Handbook for U.S. Educators and Peace Corps Volunteers**



Paul D. Coverdell

worldwise  
schools



Peace Corps  
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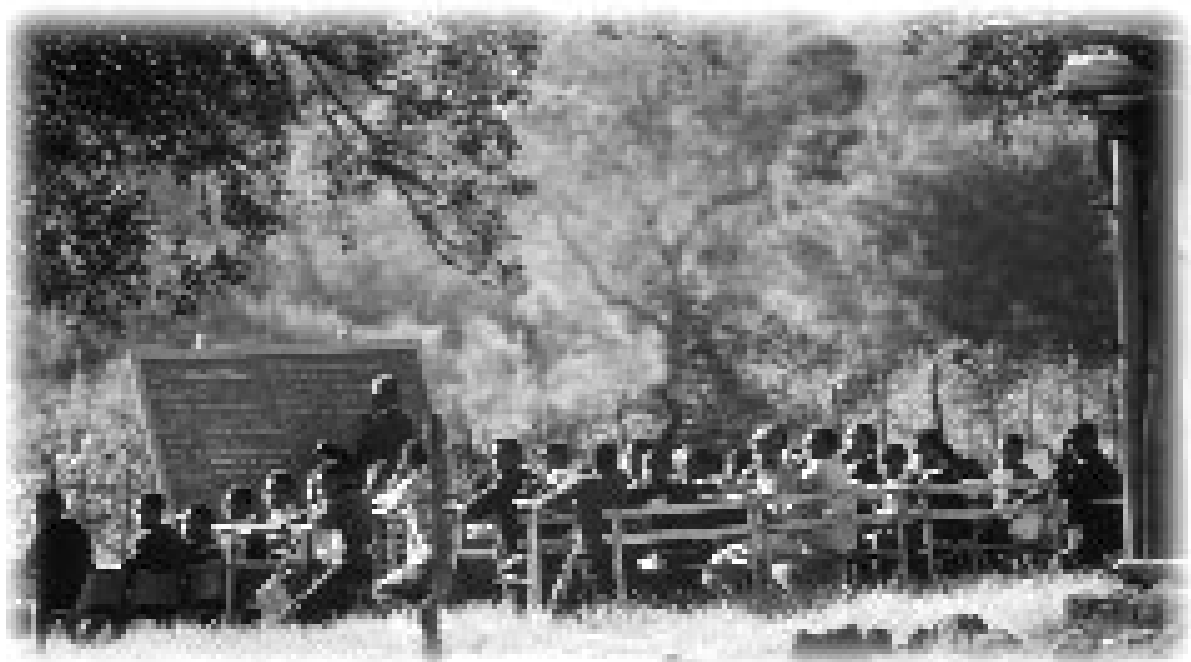
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*This handbook contains materials that represent individual views. These views are not official opinions of the United States government or the Peace Corps.*

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# Introduction

*America has a rendezvous ... with what my friend Joseph Campbell called “a mighty multicultural future.” But we are not alone and the stone is not at the bottom of the hill. We have guides—155,000 Peace Corps Volunteers who have advanced the trip. They have been going where our country is going. Out there in the world, as John F. Kennedy might say, is truly the new frontier.*

*Bill Moyers, journalist and former deputy director of the Peace Corps*

Welcome to Paul D. Coverdell World Wise Schools (CWWS), the innovative education program of the Peace Corps 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.*

Thank you for 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 CWWS 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, we will not only enrich students’ reading, writing, research, and analytic skills but also fulfill the Peace Corps goal of strengthening U.S. 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. World Wise Schools 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, others, and the world?* and *How am I connected to the world?* become the focus of classroom discussions. The World Wise Schools 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



*How should we begin? Exactly the way human beings always begin—by organizing ourselves. Into what? Into “communities of caring.”*

*R. Sargent Shriver  
Founding Peace Corps Director  
(1961–1966)*

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.

The cornerstone of the World Wise Schools program is the participation of current and returned Peace Corps Volunteers from more than 130 countries, and classroom teachers in the United States. For two years these 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 the same cultural norms as their host country family and friends. Through a series of unique educational resources, World Wise Schools shares with U.S. students the perspectives and skills acquired through this overseas experience.

In addition to the correspondence match between a Peace Corps Volunteer and a U.S. class, World Wise Schools offers several other resources to U.S. educators.

## **Videos & Teacher Guides**

Coverdell World Wise Schools offers teachers a variety of educational materials designed to introduce students in grades 3–12 to the geography and cultures of the world. Included in CWWS’s collection are the award-winning *Destination* video series and the print and Web versions of five classroom resources: *Looking at Ourselves and Others* (cross-cultural activities); *Insights From the Field* (lessons on geography, culture, and service); *Voices From the Field* (lessons on geography and culture based on writings of Peace Corps Volunteers); *Uncommon Journeys: Peace Corps Adventures Across Cultures* (11 essays by Peace Corps Volunteers accompanied by social studies and language arts lessons); and *Building Bridges: A Peace Corps Classroom Guide to Cross-Cultural Understanding* (a dozen lessons that help students become more aware of their own culture and better understand other cultures).

## **World Wide Web**

Check out [www.peacecorps.gov/wws](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws) for World Wise Schools’ online program information, teaching activities and lessons, country fact sheets, maps, essays, interviews, and photographs from around the world.

## **CyberVolunteer**

Interested in integrating the Peace Corps experience into your curriculum through technology? Each month, CWWS will e-mail you notification of a letter from a Volunteer in the field that’s posted on the Web, with accompanying classroom activities. Check out [www.peacecorps.gov/wws/cybervol](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/cybervol) for more information.

## **Peace Corps Week**

Find out how you and your students can be a part of World Wise Schools’ special events, such as Peace Corps Week, held annually about the first week of March. To see opportunities and resources for Peace Corps Week, visit [www.peacecorps.gov/pcweek](http://www.peacecorps.gov/pcweek).

## U.S. Educators:

# Integrating World Wise Schools Into Your Curriculum

*When I first went to Korea as a Peace Corps Volunteer in 1967, my world was configured by the grammar of English and I believed, without having ever thought about it, that everyone in the world saw “things” just as I did. As I started to learn Korean I began to see that language skewed actual reality around, and as I got better at it, I began to understand that it was possible to see everything differently.*

*Richard Wiley, Author (Peace Corps Volunteer, Korea, 1967–1969)*

**Y**ou 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 before have been exposed. Think of the Volunteers as cultural liaisons. For two years they live in the same conditions, speak the same language, eat the same food, and respect the same cultural norms as their host country family and friends. This experience equips Volunteers with a grass-roots point of view and provides a wonderful learning opportunity for your students. Not only will your students learn about other cultures; they will also learn from them.

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.

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.

Your correspondence with a Peace Corps Volunteer and use of CWWS resources can provide a rich and timely supplement to your lessons in language arts, social studies, history, and environmental education. 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.



## 'Essential Questions'

### How Am I Connected to the World?

*I can never again stir lumps of very cheap sugar into a cup of Irish breakfast tea without reflecting on the international relations of production and consumption that forced my old neighbor and friend, Bui ... at the age of 43 and following 15 pregnancies, to wrap a cloth around her head and shoulder a focie (sharp hoe) to work clearing sugar plantations for \$1.25 a day so that she could try to feed her children.*

*Nancy Scheper-Hughes  
Anthropologist  
(Peace Corps Volunteer,  
Brazil, 1967–1969)*



“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.”

The CWWS 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 CWWS 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 of the world?
- What shapes my perspective of the world?
- How do those perspectives shape and affect action?
- How big is my worldview?

#### **Service Learning: Learning Through Service**

- 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?



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.

*At CWWS, we speak of the “match”—that is, linking a Peace Corps Volunteer to a U.S. classroom. But is it really a match? Is there a common ground that the Peace Corps and U.S. schools share?*

**HHJ:** The Peace Corps is a complex and dynamic organization attracting people who have a calling. The same is true of U.S. schools. The Peace Corps demands much of its participants, and much is given back. The same can certainly be said of our schools. At the heart of the Peace Corps lies a notion of personal growth—something that teachers and students value deeply.

*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 common-sense 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.

## Mapping the Big Picture

An Interview With  
Heidi Hayes Jacobs

# **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 CWWS. Tony and Carole were living and working in Djibte, 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.

## National Education Standards

We know that teachers everywhere are grappling with the realities of 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 can support in the areas of social studies, geography, cross-cultural understanding, service learning, language arts, and life skills. 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 an already overcrowded curriculum, but as a vehicle for addressing content standards for which you are already being held accountable.

## National Geography Standards

### 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

1. How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools (e.g., charts and graphs), and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.
2. How to analyze the spatial organization of people, places, and environments on the Earth's surface.

### 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

1. The physical and human characteristics of places.

### III 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

1. The characteristics, distribution, and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics.
2. The characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth's surface.

### IV 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

1. How human actions modify the physical environment.

## A Word About Standards

*I was having doubts about my abilities as a science teacher until I found a diagram in the back of one of my students' notebooks. The diagram changed my perspective. In her notebook, my student had drawn the unlikely comparison of an animal cell to her homestead in Swaziland. She had given the grandmother of the homestead the role of the nucleus. The mitochondrion, the organelle which supplied energy to the cell, was represented by the sisters.*

*I called her into the staff room and asked her to explain what she had drawn. She said that she had given the grandmother the role of the nucleus because the grandmother decodes when and how things get done.*

*As she continued, I began to see that she had indeed understood the intimate workings of the cell. I was proud of her. "But, Miss," she said, "I don't know why you're happy. I only did this from my own mind to help me understand this better."*

*"I know," I said. "That's why I'm so proud of you."*

*Laura Stedman, Teacher  
(Peace Corps Volunteer,  
Swaziland, 1994–1996)*

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

### **CULTURE (NCSS Theme I)**

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity so that the learner can

1. Compare similarities and differences in the ways groups, societies, and cultures meet human needs and concerns.
2. Explain how information and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.

### **INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY (NCSS Theme IV)**

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity so that the learner can

1. Identify and describe ways regional, ethnic, and national cultures influence individuals' daily lives.
2. Identify and describe the influence of perception, attitudes, values, and beliefs on personal identity.

### **PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION, AND 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 so that the learner can

1. Give examples that show how scarcity and choice govern our economic decisions.
2. Explain how the scarcity of productive resources (human, capital, technological, and natural resources) requires the development of economic systems to make decisions about how goods and services are to be produced and distributed.

### **GLOBAL CONNECTIONS (NCSS Theme IX)**

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of global connections and interdependence so that the learner can

1. Explain how language, art, music, belief systems, and other cultural elements can facilitate global understanding or cause misunderstanding.
2. Explain conditions and motivations that contribute to conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among groups, societies, and nations.

### **CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES (NCSS Theme X)**

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic so that the learner can

1. Recognize and interpret how the “common good” can be strengthened through various forms of citizen action.
2. Examine strategies designed to strengthen the “common good,” which consider a range of options for citizen action.
3. Participate in activities to strengthen the “common good,” based upon careful evaluation of possible options for citizen action.



## **Behavioral Studies Standard**

The learner understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity, and behavior.

## **Service-Learning Standards**

The learner will be able to design an individual or group project that

1. Meets actual community needs.
2. Is coordinated in collaboration with a community.
3. Is integrated into the academic curriculum.
4. Facilitates active student reflection.
5. Uses academic skills and knowledge in real-world settings.
6. Helps develop a sense of caring for and about others.
7. Improves the quality of life for those served.

## **Language Arts Standards**

1. The learner will be able to demonstrate competence in the general skills and strategies of the writing process.
2. The learner will gather and use information for research purposes.
3. The learner will demonstrate competence in the general strategies of the reading process.
4. The learner will demonstrate competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of informational and literary texts.

## **Technology Standards**

1. Technology Productivity Tools: The learner will use technology tools to enhance learning, increase productivity, and promote creativity.
2. Technology Research Tools: The learner will use technology to locate, evaluate, and collect information from a variety of sources. The learner will use technology tools to process data and report results.



*In the mountains of Ethiopia, shortly after John F. Kennedy's death, I stopped my Land Rover to pick up an old man and give him a lift across the high plateau. On the side door, he read the Peace Corps name written in Amharic script as Yesalaam Guad. It meant Messenger of Peace.*

*I nodded and told him, yes, Yesalaam Guad. Kennedy's Peace Corps. He asked me then if I had known President Kennedy, and I told him how I had once shaken his hand on the White House lawn.*

*For a moment he looked out across the flat brown land at the distant acacia trees, and then he grinned and seized my hand and shook it, shouting "Yesalaam Guad. Yesalaam Guad." He was shaking the hand that had shaken the hand of John F. Kennedy.*

*We two, there on the highlands of Africa, as far away as one could possibly be from Washington and the White House, shared a moment, were connected by the death of a martyred president and his enduring legacy, the Peace Corps.*

*John Coyne, Author and Editor  
(Peace Corps Volunteer,  
Ethiopia, 1962–1964)*

## 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 mutual set of expectations, so be direct and honest with your Volunteer.

September 20, 1999

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

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 CWWS 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.

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.

If you have enough information about the Volunteer’s country to provide a brief overview, discuss what you know and use maps to supplement your presentation. If you don’t have much background information, one of your students’ first assignments can be to do research on the country, using maps, encyclopedias, and the Internet. Then, have the students write a letter to the Peace Corps Volunteer to introduce themselves and to ask questions of the Volunteer.

*The scene is a cafe in Tangiers, Morocco. Tomorrow is Sunday. I’ve just invited a Moroccan friend to a picnic at the beach. Will he come? “Perhaps,” he says in English, translating from the Arabic, inshallah, which literally means “God willing.” And I’m feeling hurt. What does he mean “perhaps”? Either he wants to come or he doesn’t. It’s up to him. He doesn’t understand why I’m so upset. Our two cultures confront each other across the teacups.*

*Only several years later do I understand. He would come, he meant, if Allah willed it. His wanting to come and his being able to come were not one and the same. In Morocco, unlike in America, where there’s a will, there’s not necessarily a way. So who was I to demand an answer to my question? And who was he to give one?*

*Craig Storti, Author  
(Peace Corps Volunteer,  
Morocco, 1970–1972)*

## Tips for Mailing Items Overseas



A challenging aspect of your correspondence with a currently serving Peace Corps Volunteer will be simply sending and receiving mail successfully. Infrastructure 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. We encourage you to be flexible and to not lose heart if several weeks go by without a letter.

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 keep track of 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.

### **Airmail**

Always write "airmail" on your envelope or package. Sending letters any way other than international airmail will greatly delay their arrival. Surface mail usually takes several weeks and in some instances up to a year. So play it safe and send it airmail.

### **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.

### **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 expenditure.

### **Valuables**

Never send money or anything else that is valuable through the mail.

### **Customs**

International mail is sometimes opened by customs officials, so 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.



## U.S. Educators: Frequently Asked Questions

### **How much does it cost to participate in World Wise Schools?**

Joining World Wise Schools is free. The only cost involved is the postage associated with your exchange if you choose to correspond with a Peace Corps Volunteer.

### **What do U.S. educators receive if they join the program?**

Each year, enrolled educators receive a free copy of the latest resources produced by Coverdell World Wise Schools.

### **Is it possible to be matched to a Volunteer with e-mail?**

Although access to the Internet is increasing in the countries where Volunteers serve, we cannot guarantee a Volunteer with e-mail. It is a good idea, however, to share your e-mail address with your Volunteer in case he or she gets access at some point or visits a friend who has access.

You might also consider joining the CyberVolunteer project. This project provides an opportunity to integrate the Peace Corps experience into your curriculum via technology by reading e-mails from a Volunteer each month. (See [www.peacecorps.gov/wws/cybervol/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/cybervol/).)

### **I will be changing schools next fall. What should I do about my CWWS match?**

Please let us know if your postal or e-mail address has changed, or if you have retired, taken a sabbatical, or are no longer the principal educator corresponding with the Volunteer to whom you were matched. *If you can no longer continue corresponding with your Volunteer, please contact CWWS immediately so that we can find another teacher with whom your Volunteer can correspond.*

### **I haven't received any letters lately from my Volunteer. What should I do?**

Problems with mail are not uncommon in many of the countries where Volunteers serve. Let us know if you are not receiving mail from your Volunteer. If a letter with the correct postage is returned to you, contact us. There may be a mail strike in your Volunteer's host country, or some other problem preventing the delivery of mail.

Just as you may find it hard to balance your teaching duties with participation in CWWS, Volunteers sometimes get overwhelmed with the responsibilities of their projects. We will let you know if your Volunteer can no longer participate in the CWWS exchange. If this happens, we will give you the opportunity to correspond with another Volunteer.

### **I am an educator who has chosen not to correspond with a Volunteer this year. Can I still be a member of World Wise Schools?**

Yes! We realize that corresponding with a Volunteer is not feasible for every educator. If you prefer not to participate in the correspondence match, you can still take advantage of World Wise Schools' free education resources.

## Waking Up, Stepping Out

by Steve Iams  
(Peace Corps Volunteer,  
Nepal, 2003–2004;  
China, 2005– )

I wake to chattering voices, a bus horn, bells ringing, an old man with a hacking cough, the squeak of a rusty latch opening across the hallway. A year ago, any of these noises would have been a disturbance, but now the morning ensemble is simply a part of my day. I push open the flaps in the mosquito net and step out into my bedroom. I stretch my arms upward to the ceiling and exhale a bearish yawn. It's six in the morning.

Meanwhile, the village has been up for several hours. At the tea shop two floors below my bedroom window, rush hour has arrived. When I walk downstairs to the ground floor, the shop's four tables are packed with village men dipping *sell roti*, a doughnut-like pastry, into their milk tea. Some of the men draw long breaths of cigarette smoke as their conversation hammers away above the shop's buzzing commotion. A rice-filled pressure-cooker whistles, spouting white steam like a miniature locomotive while the adjacent pot sizzles to life with the aroma of onions and garlic. Each customer has brought with him a silver bucket overflowing with milk, fresh from the barn. As the men pass time in the shop, the buckets await transfer to the street bazaars of Kathmandu, Nepal's frenetic capital city 10 miles down the road at the base of the valley.

In front of the shop, I sit down on a wooden bench between Janak, a short, amiable teacher at the school where I taught English last year, and Hajurbaa, my 104-year-old host grandfather. From the inside of the shop behind me, I hear someone calling my Nepali name, "Hare Krishna!" Gita, the shopkeeper, smiles and stretches her hand beyond the counter to hand me a cup of tea. "*Namaste!*" she says, and then "Good morning!" With this English phrase she lets out an excited giggle in anticipation of my approval. Over the course of my year in the village, Gita has been learning bits of English and practicing with me, although we rarely get past "Hello—How are you?—I'm fine" without her erupting into laughter. Gita is typical of many Nepali women in that she married young—in her case when she was 14—and never attended school. Now 30, she gave birth to her son when she was 16 and her daughter at 18. For the past eight years, she's worked alongside her husband at the tea shop, which opens before dawn and closes after dark. Since I arrived last year, I've never seen her take a day off, nor have I ever heard her complain about it.

Next to me, Hajurbaa asks a question I strain to comprehend, although with Hajurbaa I'm typically able to guess what he's asking. Our conversations tend to be an exercise in stating the obvious. When he sees me drinking tea, he'll ask, "Are you drinking tea?" "Yes! I'm drinking tea," I'll respond. It's a tacit agreement that helps to bridge our extremely wide lingual, cultural, and generational gap. Today he's wearing a light-blue *dowra surwal*, the traditional dress for Nepali men, a knee-length lightweight robe and pants with a matching cap. While I might be laughed at if I were to wear a *dowra surwal*, Hajurbaa wears the clothing naturally and gracefully. "Where are you going today, Hajurbaa?" I ask. I ask him this question every morning, and always get the same response. "Going? I'm 104 years old! I'm not going anywhere. I'll stay here."

A young boy stops his bicycle on the dirt road in front of us to deliver three copies of the daily newspaper. Janak gets a copy and buries himself in the front-page

headlines. The big news of the day is the king appointing a new prime minister, someone who, many people seem to agree, will fail to bring stability to the country's shaken political ground. Over the past seven years, the country has witnessed a deadly civil war responsible for more than 10,000 deaths, the massacre of the royal family in 2001, and the 2002 dismissal of parliament and suspension of elections. Very few people, including Janak, seem to be optimistic about the future of the country.

But Janak has other things on his mind. Today, like every other day for the past three months, he wears white clothing from head to toe in remembrance of his father, who passed away in early March. For the first 10 days after his father's death, Janak mourned his loss in the traditional Hindu way, by remaining at home in a corner of the house, draped in a white sheet. He shaved his mustache and his head, fasted all morning, and ate only rice and fruit in the evenings. One rainy morning I went to visit him. I wasn't allowed to touch him and had to sit on a chair several feet away from his makeshift grieving area. My instinct at the time was to reach out to him, to shake his hand or give him a hug, but this wasn't allowed. Janak needed this time to purge the grief from his body, after which time only the happy, warm memories of his father would remain.

Just above the tea shop, a group of women congregate at the base of the village *chaotara*, which translates in English to "resting tree." In rural Nepal, these giant trees mark the center of the village and provide a canopy of shade where the villagers relax and escape from the sun during the hot summer months. Today, as they wait for the bus to arrive, the women chat and stand over their *dokas*, handmade wooden baskets they're using to transport heaping loads of cucumbers and pumpkins for sale in Kathmandu. Among these women is Amma, my host mother. She wears a red sari with decorative gold trim; a sari is a long, flowing wrap worn by Nepali women. Amma is hauling nearly 50 pounds of pumpkins to Kathmandu, where she can earn about 20 cents a pound. If she can make 10 dollars today, she'll be happy; within a few weeks the markets will be flooded with pumpkins from all over the Kathmandu Valley and the going price for a pound of pumpkins could drop to 10 cents. When I ask if she'll bargain for a higher selling price, she lets out a hoarse cackle and waves off my suggestion. "I don't fix the price. What can I do?" she says with a smile.

Around 8 in the morning, the business of village life slows as people retreat to their homes for their morning meal. Steaming plates of rice, curried vegetables, and lentil soup await the men, women, girls, and boys of the village, many of whom have worked up an appetite in the surrounding fields, cultivating the soil for the coming rice season. The rituals and routine of village life—the work, the meals, even the conversation—are as unchanging as the seasons. The only thing that seems to be different here is me. But, after a year of living and working here, even I'm starting to fit in.



*Steve Iams with his host-family sister Onju*

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



*Whatever we were before, and none of us is quite sure, that's all gone. Peace Corps service tempers one by its sheer and irresistible intensity.*

*Richard Lipez, Novelist  
(Peace Corps Volunteer, Ethiopia, 1962–1964)*

**W**e 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 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. 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. Exposing students to the work of Peace Corps Volunteers may also instill a community service ethic and motivate students to volunteer locally.

In short, the World Wise Schools correspondence match 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 letters 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. 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.

When writing to your students, try to keep in mind the national education standards outlined on pages 9–11 of this handbook. Some of these may be useful brainstorming tools for your own writing. For example, take one day or week to reflect on examples of the essential question, “How does where you live influence how you live?” With this question in mind, describe your living situation, the food, the climate, and the local geography. Describe what a typical day is like for you.

*My worldview developed and solidified during my years as a Volunteer in Niger. That is to say, an innate curiosity toward exploring “differences” (for lack of a better term), and a belief that the world was designed for me to discover, were already a part of my life pre-Peace Corps or I wouldn’t have signed on for two years in Africa. My experiences showed these ideas to be true and confirmed that there is a definite place for me in the world beyond home.*

*Susan Rich, Poet  
(Peace Corps Volunteer,  
Niger, 1974–1976)*

# 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....

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....

### **Flying Canoes**

Katibougou, Mali  
November 16, 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.

### **Bringing Back the Moon**

Katibougou, Mali  
November 30, 1996

## You've Got Mail!

If several weeks have passed without a piece of mail from your World Wise Schools class, you may find it waiting for you at the Peace Corps office. Your CWWS teacher initially receives the address of your in-country Peace Corps office—not your specific site address. We encourage you to write your teacher as soon as possible to touch base and provide your 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.

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.

### 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 letters 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.
- 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 a first-grade 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.





## **Incorporating World Wise Schools Into Your Overseas Projects**

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:

*The Peace Corps experience stretched our view of the world, and then focused it, mightily precisely.*

### **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 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.

*P.F. Kluge, Novelist  
(Peace Corps Volunteer,  
Micronesia, 1967–1969)*

### **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 for ideas to supplement your correspondence.

## Suggested Activities to Support Your Correspondence

*I have never been to Tanzania, and yet I feel closely connected to life in a Tanzanian village. I have listened to people in Tanzania talking. I have listened to their music. I have listened to their laughter. I have even listened to their chickens squawking. This understanding has opened up the world to me in a way that simple textbook facts never could. I feel like I know people half a world away, in a place I've never been....*

*This opportunity to understand more fully the world I'm living in was made possible by an ongoing correspondence with Justin Frodella, a Peace Corps Volunteer in Tanzania....*

*This wasn't just my experience, though. I know that everyone in my class enjoyed the Tanzania project just as much as I did. When we talked about Justin's life, and Justin's letters, we didn't just connect to Tanzania, we connected to each other. Justin also seemed to enjoy the communication and the link between two very different worlds. In our letters, we shared with him not only our questions and comments but our thoughts about life, the universe, everything. This wasn't just obligatory letter writing, this was actual communication.*

*12th-grade student  
Horace Greeley High School  
Chappaqua, New York*

Try to help U.S. students see and feel the rhythms, smells, and sounds of your host country. Work with them on projects. The activities listed below are some suggestions to get you started. We encourage you to read the suggestions in this handbook's Educator section as well. Be creative and have fun with it, and please share any success stories with us so that other participants can also benefit.

### **Cassette Recordings**

Make cassette recordings of daily sounds such as people talking, animals communicating, music and singing, and children playing. Send the tape to your U.S. students and ask them to identify the sounds. Send cassettes with 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?

### **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 the country.

### **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.

### **Maps**

Draw a map of the community in which you live, and ask your local students to do the same. Exchange maps and compare important locations and landmarks. How do people orient themselves? Make a map of the country, showing regions characterized by different ethnic groups and languages, terrain, and crop production.

### **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 both groups of students.

### **Americans Abroad**

How do individuals in your community view people living in the United States? What factors contribute to their opinions? Collect stories, movie ads, TV listings, newspaper clippings (consider translating appropriate sections), and comments from people that provide clues. Try to explain the history of relations between the two countries.

### **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?

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

Share your favorite recipes. Maybe your U.S. students can prepare them at home or in home economics class. Also 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 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.

### **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 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?

### **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.

### **Oral Histories**

Use a cassette recorder to gather the 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.

### **Kalahari Desert: Sunset**

*The sun is slow. It settles  
its burning cornea into  
the womb of the earth*

*as camels, shadowed against a bath  
of blood, shuffle across the fading eye  
toward the kraal, and sleep,*

*and smoky birds begin their night songs  
and insects, their soft  
and various chitterings.*

*Heat, savage and blind,  
slinks away, like an old dog  
finding a place to lie down, die.*

*And when the slow eye closes last,  
tinier eyes, silver and shining,  
awaken: blood becomes balm;*

*and everywhere, slow darkness  
is a phoenix; and cradle-pink clouds  
are the skeletons of fish.*

*Christopher Colon, Poet  
(Peace Corps Volunteer,  
Botswana, 1988–1990)*

## Volunteers: Frequently Asked Questions

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

If you indicated on the enrollment form the name and mailing address 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.

### **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.

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

Students range in age from 8 to 17. But it is possible to correspond with younger students, as long as the U.S. educator is willing to take on the extra effort that may be involved in explaining the issues and experiences of the Volunteer to his or her students.

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

Your in-country contact. 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. Your ICC can provide you with information faster than if you write to Peace Corps headquarters.

Please find out who your ICC is the next time you are in your local Peace Corps office. This person's name is also listed in your match letter, which provided the name and address of your teacher.

You can also contact us directly at Peace Corps, World Wise Schools, 1111 20th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20526, or by e-mail at [wwsinfo@peacecorps.gov](mailto:wwsinfo@peacecorps.gov).

### **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 materials such as videos and teacher guides from the World Wise Schools program. 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, try to avoid the “I will not write until I first get a letter” mentality. Because of irregular postal delivery times, mail will often get delayed in transit. If several months go by without your hearing from your teacher, let your in-country contact know. Your ICC will get in touch with CWWS and we will contact your teacher to see what is going on. Sometimes it is something as simple as a misspelled word. 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.

***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.

***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 in the next month?***

If you transfer sites or countries during your service, please send a letter to 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, please have your ICC report this information to CWWS.

***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. Or, if you have access to e-mail, contact us directly at [wwsinfo@peacecorps.gov](mailto:wwsinfo@peacecorps.gov).

***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 may write to only one Volunteer.



## Sharing Our Stories: Peace Corps Day\*

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?

Peace Corps Day 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.

*Peace Corps Day recognizes important work by the Peace Corps to provide U.S. teachers, students, and others with a better understanding of the people, cultures, languages, and customs of other countries.*

*Richard Riley  
Former U.S. Secretary of Education*

*\*In 2003, the celebration of the Peace Corps anniversary in early March, originally known as Peace Corps Day, became Peace Corps Week. To find out how to participate in Peace Corps Week, visit [www.peacecorps.gov/pcweek](http://www.peacecorps.gov/pcweek).*

Paul D. Coverdell

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