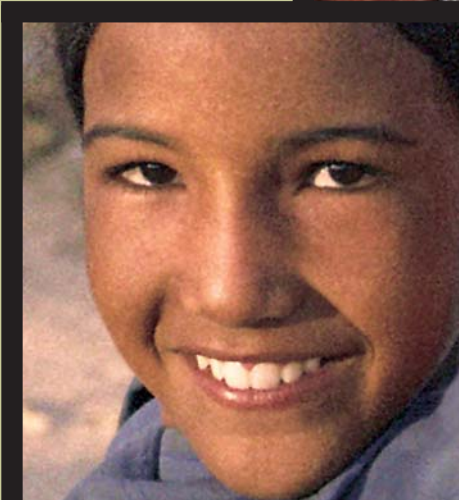
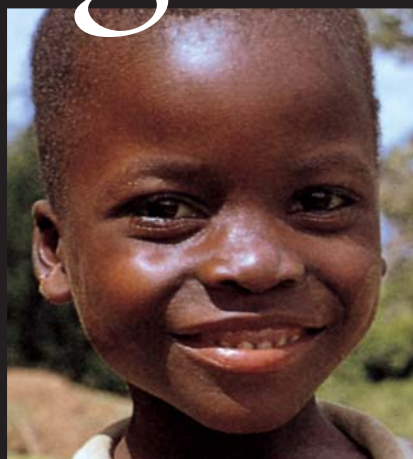


# Building Bridges

A Peace Corps Classroom Guide  
To Cross-Cultural Understanding



## The Peace Corps

The Peace Corps is an independent agency of the U.S. government that was established through the vision and efforts of President John F. Kennedy, who challenged Americans to dedicate two years of their lives to helping people in developing countries. The Peace Corps mission is 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 need for trained men and women
- To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served
- To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans

Since the first group arrived in Ghana in 1961, Peace Corps Volunteers have served in more than 130 countries. Although programs vary from country to country based on the host nation's needs, Volunteers traditionally offer skills in education, agriculture, small-business development, community development, the environment, and health.

## Coverdell World Wise Schools

An innovative global education program of the Peace Corps, Coverdell World Wise Schools (CWWS) seeks to engage U.S. students in inquiry about the world, themselves, and others, in order to

- Broaden perspectives;
- Promote cultural awareness;
- Appreciate global connections; and
- Encourage service.

Since the program's inception in 1989 at the initiative of late Peace Corps Director and U.S. Senator Paul D. Coverdell, more than 2 million students in all 50 states have communicated directly with Peace Corps Volunteers all over the world. Initially set up as a correspondence match program between Volunteers and U.S. classes, CWWS has expanded its scope by providing a broad range of resources for educators—including award-winning videos, teacher guides, classroom speakers, a newsletter, an array of curriculum resources, and a website. For more information about Coverdell World Wise Schools, see [www.peacecorps.gov/wws/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/).

## National Geographic Society Education Foundation

The National Geographic Society Education Foundation works to prepare children to embrace a diverse world, succeed in a global economy, and steward the planet's resources. It grants more than \$5 million a year toward hands-on learning opportunities, teacher training, enhancement of geography in curricula, and employment of educational technology. For more information, go to [www.nationalgeographic.com/foundation](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/foundation).

## Credits and Acknowledgments

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*This publication contains materials written by educators and others that represent their individual views. These views are not official opinions of the U.S. government or of the Peace Corps.*



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## Introduction

### Why This Workbook?

The lessons in this book will

- Help students better understand their own culture and how it has shaped them.
- Help students begin to understand the perspectives of other cultures, leading to increased respect for those who are different from them—in the classroom and worldwide.
- Provide an increased awareness of the value and practicality of social service within and beyond the bounds of schools.

### Why Culture-Related Lessons?

Simply put, understanding the concept of culture facilitates living with others of different backgrounds—within the classroom, in the local community, and on the worldwide scale of political, social, and economic interaction.

### Who Is This Book For?

This book is designed for easy adaptation by teachers in grades 6 through 12.

### Where Did the Lessons Come From?

The lessons are adapted from the Peace Corps' cross-cultural training workbook *Culture Matters*, designed for Peace Corps Volunteers; and from *Insights from the Field*, *Looking at Ourselves and Others*, and *Voices from the Field*, all of which are Coverdell World Wise Schools curriculum resources designed for classroom use. These publications are available for free downloading from the Web. We hope that you will use them to build on the lessons offered here. For a complete list of these publications and their Web addresses, see page 6.

### What's the Peace Corps' Role?

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy launched the Peace Corps to promote understanding between the predominant culture in the United States and cultures around the world—in addition to providing assistance to developing countries.

Since then, almost 200,000 Americans have lived and served overseas in more than 130 countries. With its cumulative experience and its ongoing mission, the Peace Corps is uniquely positioned to offer lessons that promote cultural understanding.

### Quotes for Thought

*Each night I sit with these four old men and learn their language. We go over simple phrases like, "How is the body?" "The body is well." "I tell God thank you." But it is this small effort that brings us together.*

—Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, Sierra Leone

*If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart.*

—Nelson Mandela, Former President, South Africa



### What’s for Younger Students? For Older Students?

- Middle school: Teachers may find lessons 1–5, 7–9, and 13 more suited to students in grades 6–8.
- High school: All lessons in this workbook can be adapted easily for use in grades 9–12.

### Terms in the Margins

Throughout this book, two terms—*enduring understandings* and *essential questions*—are used to focus lessons on the “big ideas” about culture. They are derived from the curriculum design framework *Understanding by Design*, developed by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development [ASCD], 1998).

**Enduring understandings** are important ideas or core processes that have lasting value beyond the classroom. An enduring understanding is what we want students to understand and be able to use years from now, after they have forgotten the details. Example: —*Understanding someone from another culture can be difficult because people see the world, themselves, and others in fundamentally different ways.*

**Essential questions** are provocative queries designed to guide teaching and provoke students’ interest. They are open-ended and do not have obvious right answers.

Examples:

- Why doesn’t everyone see things the way I do?*
- How do my beliefs and values influence the way I behave?*
- Is there a set of common American beliefs and values?*

### The Major Enduring Understandings Addressed in This Book:

- Everyone has a culture. It shapes how we see the world, ourselves, and others.
- Culture is like an iceberg. Some aspects are visible; others are beneath the surface. Invisible aspects of culture influence and cause the visible ones.
- Understanding someone from another culture can be hard. People really do see the world in fundamentally different ways. People behave as they do because of the things they believe in and value.
- It’s easy to misinterpret things people do in a cross-cultural setting. To keep from misunderstanding the behavior of others, you have to try to see the world from their point of view, not yours.
- Crossing cultures isn’t easy. It’s a complex process in which understanding the context is everything.
- Understanding and respecting cultural differences can lead to greater harmony in school, the community, and the world.

See *Insights from the Field*, Unit 2: Culture, for an in-depth treatment of these enduring understandings ([www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/insights/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/insights/)).

**Standards:** The lessons in this workbook can be used to help students achieve the social studies standards and the national geography standards listed below.

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

### ■ *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

- Compare similarities and differences in the ways groups, societies, and cultures meet human needs and concerns.
- 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

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

### ■ *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

- Explain how language, art, music, belief systems, and other cultural elements can facilitate global understanding or cause misunderstanding.

## **National Geography Standards**

### ■ *Places and Regions (Essential Element II)*

The geographically informed person knows and understands

- How culture and experience influence perception of places and regions (Standard 6).

### ■ *Human Systems (Essential Element IV)*

The geographically informed person knows and understands

- The characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth's surface (Standard 9).
- The characteristics, distribution, and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics (Standard 10).
- The patterns and networks of economic interdependence on Earth's surface (Standard 11).

- The processes, patterns, and functions of human settlement (Standard 12).
- How the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of Earth's surface (Standard 13).

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The following publications, produced by the Peace Corps, may be downloaded free from the Coverdell World Wise Schools website ([www.peacecorps.gov/wws/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/)).

- *Insights from the Field: Understanding Geography, Culture, and Service*, on the Web at [www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/insights/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/insights/)
- *Culture Matters: The Peace Corps Cross-Cultural Workbook*, on the Web at [www.peacecorps.gov/wws/culturematters/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/culturematters/)
- *Voices from the Field: Reading and Writing About the World, Ourselves, and Others*, on the Web at [www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/voices/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/voices/)
- *Looking at Ourselves and Others*, on the Web at [www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/looking/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/looking/)





# Unit I

## Culture in the United States

### Lesson 1: Introducing Culture

#### Materials

- Paper and pencils

#### Objective

- Students will be able to describe how the concept of culture relates to their own experience.

#### Introduction

When teaching about culture, keep in mind that culture is just one of numerous influences on behavior. People can differ from each other in many other aspects, e.g., personality, age, gender, level of education, abilities, and any other personal features that make each individual a unique human being. We need to be careful of overgeneralizing or making statements like: “She’s an American, so that explains why...”; or “He’s from New York, so that explains why...”; or “He’s a Canadian, so that explains why...” Cultural groups do have certain characteristics in common. But within each group, there is always a broad range of individual differences.

Students might ask why people from the United States would need to have their culture revealed to them—isn’t their own culture pretty obvious? But people within a culture are in many ways the least able to see it. Cultural beliefs, values, and behaviors are so ingrained that we are often unaware of our own.

#### Instructions

1. Ask students to imagine that they are extraterrestrials—peaceful, intelligent creatures from another planet who have been given the mission of spending a week researching life in your community and school. Their mission is to find answers to the following questions: What is unique, different, or interesting about your school and community? What explains why humans in your community and in your school think and act the way they do? The extraterrestrials are expected to return to their home planet to report their observations and findings.
2. Ask students to work in groups of three or four to discuss and write down observations extraterrestrials would make about life in their community. Provide several examples, such as:

#### ● Enduring Understanding:

- Everyone has a culture. It shapes how we see the world, ourselves, and others.

#### ● Essential Questions:

- How does culture shape the way we see the world, ourselves, and others?
- How does my culture shape me?
- Why is it important to understand culture?

## Lesson 1: Introducing Culture (continued)

- “People live in small groups in houses or apartments. Children live with older people.”
- “Young people spend their days together in buildings in large groups.”
- “Young people dress in several styles that are different from each other.”
- “Older people dress differently from kids.”
- “Older people teach younger people what is expected.”
- “People eat together, usually sitting around a table.”
- “People look at watches and clocks a lot.”
- “There are lots of cars. They drive on the right side of the road. People seem to know when to stop and go by obeying colored lights.”
- “When people meet, some hold hands and shake them up and down. Others put their arms around each other.”

Tell students that an important part of the extraterrestrials’ mission is to answer these questions:

- What is important to human beings?
  - Why are some things about human beings the same, and why are some things different?
  - Why don’t all people think and act the same way?
  - What are the rules? How are they learned?
  - What shapes how human beings see the world, themselves, and others?
3. Once students have shared their observations and questions in class discussion, ask them to step out of their role as extraterrestrials and now think about themselves. Ask students to take home the following questions and discuss them with their families. What explains
    - How and why they dress the way they do?
    - How and why they celebrate certain holidays?
    - The foods they eat and the way they’ve been taught to eat them?
    - What is the polite thing to do?
    - The traditions in their family?
    - What is important to them?
    - What influences and shapes the way they think and act?
  4. The following day, have students discuss their answers in class. Explain to the students that we call these types of influences in our lives “culture.” Introduce students to the enduring understanding: *Everyone has a culture. It shapes how we see the world, ourselves, and others.*

## Lesson 2: Features of Culture

### Materials

- Worksheets #1 and #2 for each student

### Objectives

- Students will be able to explain some of the features of their own culture.
- Students will be able to describe their impressions of how the culture of the United States has shaped them.

### Instructions

1. Write the following statements on the board:
  - No one is exactly like me.
  - I have many things in common with the members of my family and community.
  - Every person in the world needs some of the same things I need.
2. Point out to students that people in various groups often look at people in other groups as “different.” Ask students whether they have seen this occur in their school or community. If so, why has it happened?
3. Ask students to describe some of these differences. Then ask why people in one group might behave differently from people in another group.
4. Explain that many differences are related to *culture*—beliefs and ways of living that are handed down from one generation to the next.
5. Working from the statements on the board, explain that all people share basic needs, and ask students for several examples (e.g., food, shelter, love, respect). In addition, each of us learns a set of behaviors and beliefs from the people we grow up with. Ask students for examples (e.g., the manners we’re taught, the way we celebrate holidays, how we are expected to behave toward neighbors). Finally, each individual has unique talents and preferences. Again, ask students for examples (e.g., I’m good at math, I’m good at soccer, I don’t like chocolate).
6. Explain that when we talk about behaviors and beliefs that a group of people have in common (not individual talents and preferences), we are talking about culture.
7. Now have students look at some of the features of culture. Provide each student with a copy of Worksheet #1, *Features of Culture*. Ask the students to complete the worksheet by filling in an example for each feature of culture. Work through a few of the features with the students to ensure they understand that they are being objective observers of their own taken-for-granted customs.

### ● Enduring Understanding:

- Everyone has a culture.  
It shapes how we see the world, ourselves, and others.

### ● Essential Questions:

- How does culture shape the way we see the world, ourselves, and others?
- How does my culture shape me?
- Why is it important to understand culture?

8. Take the five features of culture that follow and ask students to discuss the following questions about these features:
  - Celebrations: What kinds of celebrations are important in your family? In the United States?
  - Greetings: How do you generally greet people you don't know? People you do know?
  - Beliefs about hospitality: How do you show hospitality in your community? In your school? In your home?
  - The role of family: Is there a particular age at which you celebrate an important event in your life with your family or community?
  - Attitudes about personal space and privacy: How important do you feel it is to have personal space and privacy?
9. Conduct a class discussion:
  - What conclusions can you begin to draw about the culture of the United States?
  - What are your impressions about how U.S. culture has shaped you?
10. Review Worksheet #2, *Everyone Has a Culture—Everyone Is Different*, with students. For homework, ask students to complete Worksheet #2. This will help them identify unique aspects of their own culture. Students will follow up on this worksheet in class in Lesson 3.



## Worksheet #1: Features of Culture

**Directions:** For each feature of culture, think of one example common to people in the United States or in the country where you were born. Use another sheet of paper if you need more space to write.

1. Styles of dress	16. Concept of fairness
2. Ways of greeting people	17. Nature of friendship
3. Beliefs about hospitality	18. Ideas about clothing
4. Importance of time	19. Foods
5. Paintings	20. Greetings
6. Values	21. Facial expressions and hand gestures
7. Literature	22. Concept of self
8. Beliefs about child raising (children and teens)	23. Work ethic
9. Attitudes about personal space/privacy	24. Religious beliefs
10. Beliefs about the responsibilities of children and teens	25. Religious rituals
11. Gestures to show you understand what has been told to you	26. Concept of beauty
12. Holiday customs	27. Rules of polite behavior
13. Music	28. Attitude toward age
14. Dancing	29. The role of family
15. Celebrations	30. General worldview

## Worksheet #2:

### Everyone Has a Culture—Everyone Is Different

**Directions:** Respond to each question. Use another piece of paper if you need more space.

1. What languages do you speak?

2. What music do you listen to? What dances do you know?

3. What foods do you eat at home?

4. In your family, what is considered polite and what is considered rude? What manners have you been taught? (Think about such things as table manners, behavior toward guests in your home, what to say when answering the telephone, how to say thanks for a meal.)

5. What do you wear on special occasions?

6. How often do you see your extended family (for example, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins)? What role do they play in your life?

7. What holidays and ceremonies are important in your family?

8. Describe something very important to you. It could be a value, such as respect or honesty. It could be a person, such as a parent, brother, sister, or friend. It could be a goal, such as going to college or designing a website. It could be a hobby.

9. Based on what you've written, how would you describe the characteristics of the culture you're a part of?



## Lesson 3: Defining Culture

### Materials

- Paper and pencils

### Objectives

- Students will be able to further describe how their culture has shaped them.
- Students will be able to define the concept of culture.
- Students will be able to explain some of the attributes of culture.

### Instructions

1. If students have not done Lesson 2, ask them to take Worksheet #2 home and fill it out for this lesson.
2. Have students form small groups and compare their homework responses to Worksheet #2. After the groups compare their responses, ask:
  - Were your responses to the questions exactly alike?
  - What differences did you find among responses?
  - How can you explain the differences?
3. Explain to students that their responses to the worksheet questions were partially shaped by the culture in which they were raised. Make the point that if these questions were given to students from another culture, their answers would be different because they have grown up in a different culture. Perhaps they have already found significant differences among their small groups.
4. Write the enduring understanding for this lesson on the board: *Everyone has a culture. It shapes how we see the world, ourselves, and others.* Ask students now to address these questions:
  - What is culture?
  - How does it shape the way we see the world, ourselves, and others?
5. Write the word “culture” in bold capital letters across the board. Ask students as a class to come up with a definition. They may find it easier to list aspects of culture—different elements that are true of culture—than to come up with a full definition. Such a list might include:
  - Culture has to do with values and beliefs.
  - Culture involves customs and traditions.
  - Culture is collective, shared by a group.
  - Everyone has a culture.
  - Culture is learned.
  - Culture influences and shapes behavior.
  - Culture is transmitted from generation to generation.
  - Culture is often unconscious; people are sometimes not aware of how their behaviors and attitudes have been shaped by their culture.
  - People in all cultures have common needs.

### ● Enduring Understanding:

- Everyone has a culture. It shapes how we see the world, ourselves, and others.

### ● Essential Questions:

- How does culture shape the way we see the world, ourselves, and others?
- How does my culture shape me?

### Quote for Thought

*Reality is a product of language and culture; that's what I learned.*

—Richard Wiley, Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, Korea

6. Then provide the following definition:
  - Culture is a system of beliefs, values, and assumptions about life that guide behavior and are shared by a group of people. It includes customs, language, and material artifacts. These are transmitted from generation to generation, rarely with explicit instructions.
7. Use the following questions to focus discussion on the role culture plays in forming our behaviors and beliefs:
  - How do you think you learned your culture?
  - How do you think your culture has shaped you? How has it influenced your values, preferences, and beliefs?
  - Despite the differences in culture in our classroom, what are some things that everyone in our classroom has in common?
  - How does culture shape the way we see the world, ourselves, and others?

### Taking Action

If you have a multicultural class or have international exchange students in your school, help your class develop a project to foster better understanding and communication among the students. Have students research the customs and culture of the groups that are represented in your classroom or school. Invite the students to plan ways to help students from other cultures feel more welcome.



## Lesson 4: Culture Is Like an Iceberg

### Materials

- Outline drawing of an iceberg for each student
- Worksheet #1: Features of Culture

### Objectives

- Students will be able to distinguish between the visible and invisible aspects of culture.
- Students will be able to explain how the invisible aspects of culture influence the visible ones.

### Instructions

1. Before beginning this lesson, remind students that
  - Culture is a complex concept.
  - Everyone has a culture.
  - It shapes how we see the world, ourselves, and others.
2. Explain that metaphors often help us understand big ideas by relating something we don't know to something we do know. A useful metaphor for culture is an iceberg. Ask students what they know about the size and shape of icebergs. How much of an iceberg is above the water? How much is underwater?
3. Make the point that only about one-eighth of an iceberg is visible above the water. The rest is below. Culture is very similar to an iceberg. It has some aspects that are visible and many others that can only be suspected, guessed, or learned as understanding of the culture grows. Like an iceberg, the visible part of culture is only a small part of a much larger whole.
4. Ask students to look back at Worksheet #1, *Features of Culture*. Review with students that the numbered items on the list are all features of culture. If students haven't completed the worksheet, make sure that they understand all the features on the list. Ask them for examples, or provide examples if needed.
5. Provide students with a copy of an outline drawing of an iceberg with a clear line delineating the part of the iceberg that is above the water's surface and the larger part that is below the surface.
6. Divide students into groups of four. Ask them to bring the *Features of Culture* worksheet with them. Have them discuss in their groups which features of culture they think are visible and which are invisible.

### ● Enduring Understandings:

- Everyone has a culture. It shapes how we see the world, ourselves, and others.
- Culture is like an iceberg. Some aspects are visible, and others are beneath the surface. Invisible aspects influence and cause the visible ones.

### ● Essential Questions:

- How do the invisible aspects of culture influence the visible ones?
- Why is it important to understand the relationship between the two?

#### Lesson 4: Culture Is Like an Iceberg (continued)

7. Ask students to look at both their outline drawing of the iceberg and their *Features of Culture* worksheet. Have them review the features one by one and decide as a group if a particular feature belongs above the line (i.e., is “visible”) or below the line (i.e., is “invisible”). Have students write above the water line the numbers of those features of culture that they, as a group, consider to be observable features. They should write the numbers of the “invisible” features below the water line. Do the first few features with them. Provide examples, e.g., styles of dress are visible; beliefs about hospitality cannot be directly observed.
8. After students have had time to work in groups on the remaining features, have each group pair with another group and compare their placement of features. Students must be prepared to say why they placed a particular feature where they did. (Note: In the list of features, the numbers that should appear *below* the water line are #3, #4, #6, #8–10, #16–18, #22–24, #26–30.)
9. Ask students whether they see any item below the water line that might influence or determine any item above (e.g., ideas about modesty might affect styles of dress; religious beliefs might influence holiday celebrations, painting, and music).



# Unit II

## Culture Beyond the United States

### Lesson 5: On Being Seen as Different (Part 1)

#### Materials

- Paper and pencils

#### Objectives

- Students will be able to explain why understanding someone from another culture can sometimes be hard.
- Students will be able to give examples of how people see the world, themselves, and others in fundamentally different ways.

#### Introduction

This lesson and those following are designed to guide students to the understanding that individuals from other cultures may not see the world in the same way that Americans do. What Americans may regard as different or strange may be considered perfectly normal in another culture. Students will realize that understanding someone from another culture can sometimes be hard because people see the world, themselves, and others in fundamentally different ways. Students will explore answers to the questions: How does it feel when others see you as different or as an outsider? How do others feel when you see them as different? How do beliefs, values, and cultural upbringing influence the way people behave? What is cultural stereotyping, and how can it be avoided?

As they explore these questions, students will achieve a broader perspective on their own culture and an increased sensitivity to the customs, values, and beliefs of other cultures. This new awareness should help them become more understanding of students in their own school who may have come from a culture other than their own.

#### Instructions

1. Give students about 15 minutes to write answers to the following:
  - a) How does it feel to be seen by others as different—as an outsider? Describe such an experience.
  - b) Describe an instance when you considered someone else to be different—or an outsider. Explain what led you to that judgment.



#### ● Enduring Understandings:

- Understanding someone from another culture can be hard. People really do see the world in fundamentally different ways. People behave as they do because of the things they believe in and value.
- To understand another culture, you first have to understand your own.
- Beliefs vary from person to person and culture to culture.

#### ● Essential Questions:

- How does it feel when others see you as different—or as an outsider?
- How do your beliefs, values, and cultural upbringing influence the way you behave?
- How do others' beliefs, values, and cultural upbringing influence the way they behave?

### Quote for Thought

*Remember that just as you judge others from your cultural standpoint, you are being judged from theirs.*

—Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, Fiji Islands

2. Ask students to compare their written responses to question (b) with those of a partner.
3. Ask for volunteers to share their responses with the whole class. Summarize the responses on the chalkboard. Remain nonjudgmental about the responses students give.
4. Explain that people in one culture—the United States, for example—often think someone from another culture is different because of differences in language, clothing, customs, behavior, or beliefs. However, people from the other culture may think U.S. citizens are different for the very same reasons.

One easy example may serve to make the point immediately. Ask students if they know someone from another country who has an accent. Point out that each person who *hears* an accent in someone else will likewise be perceived by the other person as having an accent herself or himself. For example, an American student talking with someone from Scotland and hearing a strong Scottish accent will be *heard* as having a strong American accent, even if it is not a particularly regional American accent.

5. Read aloud the anecdote “Where There’s a Will,” below. When you are finished reading, ask the students to try to sum up what was occurring in the communication between the two people.
6. Read aloud or have students read the dialogue “Interview With a Peace Corps Volunteer: On Being Viewed as Strange,” on page 21.
7. Make the point that to understand another culture, you first need to understand your own—and see yourself as others might see you.

### *Where There’s a Will*

The scene is a cafe in Tangiers. Tomorrow is Saturday. 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 “If God is willing.” I’m feeling hurt. What does he mean, “Perhaps”? Either he wants to come or he doesn’t. It’s up to him. If he doesn’t want to come, he only has to say so. He doesn’t understand why I seem upset, and I don’t quite grasp “Perhaps.” Our two cultures confront each other across the teacups.

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

—Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, Morocco



## Lesson 5: On Being Seen as Different (Part 2)

1. Read “Home Alone in the Dominican Republic” (on page 20) aloud to your students. Explain that the anecdote, told by a Peace Corps Volunteer, illustrates how American behavior can be seen as different or strange in another culture.
2. Ask students to describe what they think are one or more cultural values in the Dominican Republic, based on what they learned from this passage.
3. Ask students to imagine that they are Peace Corps Volunteers in Krystal Williams’ situation. How would they handle the cultural differences respectfully? List students’ responses on the chalkboard. Elicit a number of alternatives for handling a delicate situation with respect.
4. Ask students to write and perform a brief skit about some aspect of Krystal’s situation. Have them form groups of four. Ask a volunteer from each group to play the role of Krystal or someone like her. The other three members of each group will play the role of Dominicans. Have all four members of each group write the skit together.  
Give students the following guidelines:
  - The skit should illustrate exactly what the cultural differences are and why.
  - The skit should contain a respectful resolution of the conflict caused by individuals from each culture seeing the same situation in a different way.
  - The skit should not oversimplify the problem.
5. Give students 15–20 minutes to prepare their skits. Then ask for volunteers to act them out.
6. Debrief the students by asking what they have learned from their skits. Ask them to list in writing things they realized from their skits that they hadn’t thought of before.

### Taking Action

If you have a multicultural class or have international exchange students in your school, help your class develop a project to foster better understanding and communication among the students. Some ideas for action:

- Conduct a survey to determine what communication difficulties, if any, exist among students of different cultural backgrounds. Have students devise ways to resolve these difficulties.
- Invite returned Peace Corps Volunteers or parents of international students to speak to your students and share information about the language, culture, and customs of their countries. For a source of more ideas, to get in touch with individual guests, to join the correspondence match program of the World Wise Schools program, or to subscribe to correspondence from the Peace Corps’ CyberVolunteer program, visit the Coverdell World Wise Schools website at [www.peacecorps.gov/wws/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/).



### *Home Alone in the Dominican Republic*

I was sometimes considered odd or strange in the Dominican Republic in terms of my being used to having private space. For example, there would be times when I would want to sit down by myself in my own room and just read a book. And anytime I was reading a book, my Dominican neighbors always assumed I was studying. It was completely outside the realm of possibility for them that anyone would choose to sit alone, all by themselves, and read for pleasure. Often they would stop by with some food to “help me study.” This would inevitably lead to long conversations. From the Dominican point of view, this was a gesture of hospitality. And Dominicans place a great value on hospitality. Another example of my being considered “odd” was the fact that I lived alone and that, at times, I wanted to be by myself. It was hard for my Dominican neighbors to understand this. Very few, if any, people live by themselves in the Dominican Republic. Everyone has a family or is connected to a family or lives with a family or an extended family. If I wanted to be alone, they would think I was sick and send someone over to stay with me. If I wanted to be alone much of the time, they would think I was rude or ignoring them, and their feelings would be hurt.

—Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Krystal Williams, Dominican Republic

## Interview With a Peace Corps Volunteer: “On Being Viewed as Strange”

Use this interview in Lesson 5, Part 1. Adapted from the Peace Corps publication *Culture Matters*. You can find the full text of this publication on the Web: [www.peacecorps.gov/wws/culturematters/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/culturematters/).

**Interviewer:** When you went to the Dominican Republic, were there any surprises?

**Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV):** Not really. I mean, you're not prepared for every little thing, for all the particulars. But you know the people are going to be different, so you expect that. You may not know all the ways they're going to surprise you, but you do know you're going to be surprised when you go to a foreign culture.

**Interviewer:** How did the Dominicans react to you?

**PCV:** It's funny you should ask that, because that was surprising.

**Interviewer:** What do you mean?

**PCV:** Well, we thought we were prepared for going into a culture different from ours, but we weren't. After all, if you go in knowing these people aren't like you, then of course you also know that you aren't like them. But we had trouble believing that they found us strange sometimes. Doesn't make sense, does it?

**Interviewer:** So it's easy to accept that other people might be strange, but hard to believe that you could be perceived of as strange?

**PCV:** That's what I experienced, anyway.

**Interviewer:** I wonder why.

**PCV:** I think it has to be that while you are actually having the experience of their strangeness, they are the ones having the experience of yours. You never really experience yourself as strange, of course, so it just doesn't seem real. You know it must be real, but you have to take their word for it.

**Interviewer:** So you think it's hard for Peace Corps Volunteers to believe that the local people don't always understand them?

**PCV:** Despite all our training, I think we unconsciously tend to believe that we are the “normal” ones and the people in the other country are going to be the “strange” ones. Then, when you get to the other country, you realize that people see the world, themselves, and others in fundamentally different ways. The hard thing is learning to see things from their point of view.

**Interviewer:** Why is that hard?

**PCV:** Because before you go to another country, you tend to believe that your point of view is the only point of view—and that it's the right point of view. It's hard to realize that there may be two equally reasonable ways to view a situation, depending on your culture.

### ● Enduring Understandings:

- To understand another culture, you first have to understand your own.
- Beliefs vary from person to person and culture to culture.

### ● Essential Questions:

- How does it feel when others see you as different—or as an outsider?
- How do your beliefs, values, and cultural upbringing influence the way you behave?
- How can you avoid cultural stereotyping?

### Quote for Thought

*Coming from brash America, we have to look hard to pick out the subtle feedback we don't even realize we're being given.*

—Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, Fiji Islands

## Lesson 6: Americans (Part 1)

### Materials

- Worksheets #3 and #4 for each student

### Objectives

- Students will be able to explain how people from other cultures may view Americans as a group as being different from themselves.
- Students will be able to explain why understanding their own culture can help them better understand another culture.

### Instructions

1. Ask students: “What are some things about our lives that you value? How do these important things shape your behavior?” Then explain that people behave as they do because of the things they believe in or value. On the chalkboard, write the following values that some people from other cultures have noticed are common to many Americans:
  - Informality (being casual and down-to-earth)
  - Self-reliance (not looking to others to solve your problems)
  - Efficiency (getting things done quickly and on time)
  - Social equality (treating everyone the same)
  - Assertiveness (saying what’s on your mind)
  - Optimism (believing that the best will always happen)
2. Explain that not everyone in the world shares these values. Ask students whether they think every person in America shares these values. Does everyone in the *classroom* share these values?
3. After a brief discussion, tell the students that they will read about behaviors that others have noticed about Americans. In some sense, these behaviors are examples of stereotypes that others harbor about Americans.
4. Provide each student with a copy of Worksheet #3, *Americans*. Explain that each of the seven statements may be true for all Americans, for some Americans, or for no Americans. It is the students’ job to decide whether each statement is fully accurate, partially accurate, or false.
5. Have students work in pairs to complete Part 1 of Worksheet #3 in writing.
6. Ask students to complete Part 2 of Worksheet #3. Then have students share their responses to Part 2 in small groups.
7. Lead a class discussion. Explain that the students may not like or agree with some of the stereotypes others have of Americans, but they should at least be aware they exist. For an explanation of each of the seven statements, you may want to provide students with Worksheet #4, which presents the reasons that some cultural anthropologists give as to why Americans may come across to others the way they do.

## Worksheet #3: Americans

(Adapted from the Peace Corps publications *Culture Matters* and *Insights from the Field*. You can find the full texts of these publications at [www.peacecorps.gov/wws/culturematters/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/culturematters/) and [www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/insights/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/insights/).)

**Part 1:** Working with a partner, read each of the seven comments below that a non-American might make about an American. For each of the comments, give a good reason, in writing, for why you think this comment might be true for all Americans, true for some Americans, or true for no Americans.

1. Americans are always in such a hurry to get things done!
2. Americans insist on treating everyone the same.
3. Americans always have to say what they're thinking!
4. Americans always want to change things.
5. Americans don't show very much respect for their elders.
6. Americans always think things are going to get better. They are so optimistic!
7. Americans are so impatient!

**Part 2:** Now, looking at one of the comments above, answer the following questions:

- How would you feel if this statement were made about you?
- What would be a polite response if someone said it to you?

## Quote for Thought

*It's just not in their culture to tell or even suggest what they think you should do. Even when you are asking for advice, I don't think they feel comfortable giving it. The direct American style is often taken as impolite.*

—Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, Papua New Guinea

## Lesson 6: Americans (Part 2)

1. Explain that Worksheet #4 provides explanations that some scholars have given for why Americans often behave and think the way they do. No statement in this lesson is true of all Americans. Within any culture there are wide variations of behavior simply because there are so many factors—in addition to culture—that can cause an individual to behave in a certain way (e.g., age, gender, personality, experience).
2. It's important to remember that no one American is quite like any other American, but core values and beliefs do underlie and permeate the national culture. These values and beliefs don't apply across the board in every situation, and Americans may, on occasion, even act in ways that directly contradict them. But they are still at the heart of cultural beliefs of many people in the United States.
3. Explain that if the statements about “Americans” were actually meant to apply to all Americans, this would be an example of cultural stereotyping. Ask students: How would you feel if someone from another country had stereotypes about you before the person even knew you?

### Taking Action

1. Have students in your class teach or tutor younger children who are from a different culture—including language skills, math, reading, or craft work. Tutoring non-English-speaking students in English is always helpful and a great way for your students to serve others while building self-esteem.
2. Encourage students to interview local immigrants about aspects of American culture that the immigrants have found different, strange, or tough to adjust to while living in the United States. Ask students to include any concepts from this booklet that have played a role in the immigrants' lives. Have the students present their findings to the class. Then have them develop a plan for helping the immigrants they interviewed become more comfortable in the United States. The report could also be prepared for online or print distribution, with sensitivity to protecting the privacy of the interviewees. (You may wish to consult *Insights from the Field*, pages 127–129, for a step-by-step guide for students who want to undertake this project. *Insights* can be downloaded free from the Coverdell World Wise Schools website at [www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/insights/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/insights/).)





## Worksheet #4:

### Explanatory Notes for “Americans”

**Directions:** Below are reasons some cultural anthropologists have offered to explain why Americans may come across the way they do to people from other cultures. As you are reading each explanation, think about whether or not you agree with it. Is the explanation true of all Americans, some Americans, or no Americans?

**1. Americans are always in such a hurry to get things done!**

Americans often seem this way because of their tendency to use achievements and accomplishments as a measure of a person's worth. They're in a hurry to get things done because it's only then that they feel they have proven their worth to other people. The more Americans accomplish, the more they feel they are respected.

**2. Americans insist on treating everyone the same.**

Americans do this because of our cultural roots as a free nation (e.g., “All men are created equal”). Americans have a deep cultural instinct toward social equality and not having a class system. This is a reaction to the European class system as well as the feudal system that existed in Europe. In cultures where inequality between social classes is more accepted, American insistence on egalitarianism, or social equality, may be annoying.

**3. Americans always have to say what they're thinking!**

Americans believe that being direct is the most efficient way to communicate. It's important to “tell it like it is” and “speak your mind”—to say what you mean and mean what you say. Being direct is often valued over “beating around the bush.” Americans value assertiveness and being open and direct about one's thoughts and feelings. Not all cultures have this same value. In some cultures, the normal way to disagree or to say no is to say nothing or be very indirect.

**4. Americans always want to change things.**

Americans think things can always be better, and that progress is inevitable. The United States is a little more than 200 years old, and American culture tends to be an optimistic one. Older cultures are more skeptical because they have been around longer, have experienced more, and have been in situations in which progress was not always made. In American businesses, being open to change is a strong value, because things really do change quickly, and it is necessary to adapt. Many Americans believe it is “good” to initiate change and “bad” to resist it.

**5. Americans don't show very much respect for their elders.**

Americans believe people must earn by their actions whatever regard or respect they are given. Merely attaining a certain age or holding a certain position does not in itself signify achievement.

**6. Americans always think things are going to get better. They are so optimistic!**

America, because of its resources and successes, has always had a culture of optimism. Americans believe that they are in control of their own destinies, rather than being victims of fate. Many Americans tend to believe that “the American dream” can be achieved by anyone who is willing to work hard enough. Many Americans believe that the only obstacle to things getting better is “not trying hard enough.” Americans also believe that a personal lack of determination or effort can be fixed. Other cultures may believe more in fate (“what will be will be”). When something bad happens, some members of these cultures believe it was fated to happen, must be accepted, and cannot be changed.

**7. Americans are so impatient!**

Americans believe that if things take a long time to do, they won't be able to do enough of them. Many Americans believe that more and faster is better. They do not like to stand in line and wait, and they originated fast food. Americans believe that getting things done (and doing them quickly) may be more important than other things. Many other cultures believe that slower is better and that building and maintaining relationships takes priority over getting things done at the expense of relationships.

### ● Enduring Understanding:

- Understanding the importance of qualifying a generalization can help prevent stereotyping.

### ● Essential Questions:

- What do we gain from qualifying a generalization? Why bother doing it?
- What are some ways we can avoid stereotyping other people who are different from us?

## Lesson 7: Generalizations: How Accurate Are They?

### Materials

- Worksheet #5 for every two students
- Pencils and paper

### Objective

- Students will learn to recognize and modify generalizations.

### Introduction

This lesson introduces students to the concept of generalization as it applies to cultural stereotyping. The goal is to have students challenge generalizations made about people, insist on knowing the evidence that supports these, and be willing to modify their own generalizations when confronted by evidence showing them to be false. It is important for students to understand that almost all generalizations, particularly those about people and other cultures, need to be qualified. The lesson also asks students to practice using qualifying language. You may want to relate this lesson to Lesson 6, on making generalizations about Americans.

### Instructions

1. Explain the meaning of “general” and “specific” using objects in the room or pictures to illustrate your point (e.g., “This horse is black” versus “All horses are black”).
2. Write this statement on the board: “Snakes are harmful.” Ask students to write at the top of a sheet of paper whether they agree or disagree with the statement. Then read each of the following questions aloud. Have students number 1 through 7, then write “yes” or “no” in response to each question.
  1. Are all snakes harmful?
  2. Are most snakes harmful?
  3. Are many snakes harmful?
  4. Are some snakes harmful?
  5. Are a few snakes harmful?
  6. Do you know everything about snakes?
  7. Is the statement “Snakes are harmful” true?
3. As a class, address the following questions:
  - How many students agreed with the statement on the board at first? How many students answered no to the seventh question? If you changed your mind, what made you do so?
  - What words can you add to the statement “Snakes are harmful” to make it more accurate (e.g., some snakes, many snakes, a few snakes in Asia, many snakes in Australia)?
  - What can you add to the statement to show that you don’t have a lot of factual information about snakes (e.g., as far as I know, I’m not sure, in my experience)?

4. Have students work in small groups to evaluate the accuracy of the generalizations listed on Worksheet #5. Encourage them to discuss their reasoning and come to consensus on each statement. Then have students work in pairs to rewrite each statement using qualifying phrases like those suggested above so that each statement is accurate.
5. As a class, discuss the conclusions of each group, paying close attention to how the statements were qualified.

### Debriefing

Use the following questions to guide a brainstorming session to help students recognize generalizations and begin using qualifying language.

1. Have you ever heard anyone use a generalization to describe you or another person? How does it feel when someone does that?
2. What happened when we used a generalization to describe snakes? Was the statement accurate? What happened when we used qualifiers to describe snakes? When you filled out the worksheet, which statements were more difficult to evaluate—the statements about things or the statements about people?
3. What are some ways we could complete the following sentences?
  - We should try not to use generalizations because \_\_\_\_\_.
  - It is important to use qualified statements because \_\_\_\_\_.
4. What can you do if you hear someone using generalizations to describe a person or a group of people? (Help students articulate some nonconfrontational ways to respond to generalized descriptions.)
5. How can being alert to generalizations help us avoid stereotyping individuals from other cultures—or individuals different from ourselves?

### Taking Action

Invite students to challenge generalizations in their daily lives. Ask students to think about generalizations and stereotypes they might use sometimes in casual conversations with friends. List some words that often appear in students' casual conversations that can be hurtful to others. Ask students to substitute more accurate and qualified statements for these words. Challenge the students to model culturally sensitive behavior for their friends and family. Ask them to observe how many of their friends and families modify their word choices.



## Worksheet #5: How Accurate Are They?

**Directions:** Read each of statements 1–10 carefully. Then, for each statement, ask yourself questions like the examples below and put a check in the appropriate column to indicate which column best applies to each statement.

- Are all (or almost all) baseballs white?
- Are most baseballs white?
- Are some baseballs white?
- Are few baseballs white?

	All or almost all	Most	Many	Some	Few	Don't know
1. Baseballs are white.						
2. Elephants are strong.						
3. Fish have gills.						
4. Spiders are poisonous.						
5. Candy is bad for your teeth.						
6. Babies cry.						
7. Politicians are dishonest.						
8. Teachers are smarter than children.						
9. People who are quiet are shy.						
10. Poor people are lazy.						

## Lesson 8: Interpreting Behavior: Expanding Our Point of View

### Materials

- Worksheets #6 and #7 for each student

### Objectives

- Students will know that understanding another culture involves being able to interpret behaviors, customs, actions, and practices from more than one point of view.
- Students will know that any behavior has to be interpreted in two ways: the meaning given to it by the person who does the action and the meaning given to it by the person who observes the action.
- Students will be able to explain how various people may interpret the same reality in different ways.
- Students will practice the skill of interpreting a situation from two different points of view.

### Introduction

This lesson and the next ones are designed to help students see a situation from two points of view. In doing this, they will begin to understand the importance of being able to see things from another culture's point of view. They will learn that understanding another culture involves being able to interpret behaviors, customs, actions, and practices from that culture's perspective, not their own. In the process, they will learn that no two people see the same thing in exactly the same way—even if they are part of the same culture. Students will practice viewing a situation from another culture's point of view.

### Instructions

1. Ask students whether they have ever had the experience of going to a movie or watching a video with a friend and, at the end of the movie, each person thought different things in the movie were important, funny, sad, boring, or interesting.
2. Ask students how two people can watch the same movie and see different things.
3. Now, on an overhead projector, if possible, show the class a complex scene with many things happening—from a painting, advertisement, book illustration, or other source that none of the students has seen before. Ask the students to concentrate carefully, and expose them to the scene for exactly 10 seconds, and not longer. Then ask several students, in turn, to report what they saw. Ask them to be specific about details, and invite other students to offer their recollections or interpretations if they saw things differently. Students are likely to see and interpret different details—just as witnesses to crimes and accidents often differ as to the details of what they saw fleetingly.
4. Follow these first two activities with a class discussion. Lead students to the awareness that no two people see the same thing in exactly the same way. All people bring to a situation their own values, beliefs, and life experiences—and powers of observation.
5. Explain that we all believe that we observe reality—things as they are. But what actually happens is that the mind interprets what the eyes see and gives it meaning. It is only at this point,

### ● Enduring Understanding:

- It's easy to misinterpret things people do in a cross-cultural setting. To keep from misunderstanding the behavior of individuals from another culture, you have to try to see the world from their point of view, not yours.

### ● Essential Questions:

- Why might it be possible for me to misunderstand individuals from another culture?
- How can I learn to see things from another culture's point of view? Why is it important?

### Quote for Thought

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

—P.F. Kluge, Novelist and returned Peace Corps Volunteer, Micronesia

when meaning is assigned, that we can truly say we have *seen* something. In other words, what we see is as much in the mind as it is in reality. If you consider that the mind of a person from one culture is going to be different in many ways from the mind of a person from another culture, then you have the explanation for that most fundamental of all cross-cultural issues: the fact that two people looking upon the same reality, the same example of behavior, may see things very differently.

6. Make the point that any behavior observed by two people from different cultures has to be interpreted in two ways:
  - The meaning given to it by the person who does the action
  - The meaning given to it by the person who observes the actionOnly when these two meanings are the same do we have successful communication—successful in the sense that the meaning that was intended by the doer is the one that was understood by the observer.
7. Now have students participate in a lesson that will help clarify these concepts. Distribute copies of Worksheet #6, *Understanding Cultural Viewpoints (Part 1)*, and have the students complete the worksheet.
8. Ask students to discuss their answers to the questions in groups of three. Have them note similarities and differences in their responses to each question. After five minutes of small-group discussion, ask students whether all three students in each group shared exactly the same response. Were their viewpoints similar, was there some variation, or were they quite different? Explain that it is rare that three people will have exactly the same opinion on a subject. Opinions might be similar, but not identical—or, depending on the makeup of your class, they might be distinctly different.
9. Reinforce the idea that if two people from the same culture often view a situation in different ways, it is even more likely that two people from different cultures will view a situation differently. Culture exerts a powerful influence on our point of view.
10. Now have students complete Worksheet #7, *Understanding Cultural Viewpoints (Part 2)*. In their same groups of three, ask the students to compare their responses to the same questions, but now with the knowledge of the cultural context. Ask how their responses changed.
11. Explain to students that if they were to go to another culture, they would need to be careful not to make judgments about a particular behavior or custom until they understood the cultural context—and the reasons that behavior was accepted as “normal.”
12. Remind students of the point made in Lesson 6, *Americans*: We always view something as “normal” based on a certain standard. In the case of Americans, the standard is American culture. When in the presence of another culture, we have to set aside what the standard for normal is in our own culture and try to understand the reasons something is accepted as normal in another culture (according to *that* culture’s standard).

### Taking Action

Have students choose a current world event or a historical event and write articles on the event or issue from two perspectives, representing opposing points of view or points of view that represent different countries. One topic might involve students adopting Native American versus Euro-American perspectives on an issue, past or present.

## Worksheet #6:

### Understanding Cultural Viewpoints (Part 1)

(Adapted from the Peace Corps publications *Culture Matters* and *Insights from the Field*. You can find the full texts of these publications at [www.peacecorps.gov/wws/culturematters/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/culturematters/) and [www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/insights/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/insights/).)

**Directions:** Read the description of the seven behaviors below and write down your immediate response or interpretation. (This will reflect your own cultural values, beliefs, or perceptions.) The first one offers an example of a possible answer.

1. A person comes to a meeting half an hour after the scheduled starting time.

**Your response or interpretation:**

(Sample response: This person is late and should at least apologize or give an explanation.)

2. Someone kicks a dog.

**Your response or interpretation:**

3. A woman carries a heavy jug of water on her head while her husband walks in front of her carrying nothing.

**Your response or interpretation:**

4. A male guest helps a female host carry dirty dishes into the kitchen.

**Your response or interpretation:**

5. A young man and young woman are kissing each other in public.

**Your response or interpretation:**

6. While taking an exam, a student copies from the paper of another student.

**Your response or interpretation:**

7. A guest at a dinner party belches aloud after the main course.

**Your response or interpretation:**

## Worksheet #7:

### Understanding Cultural Viewpoints (Part 2)

**Directions:** In this part of the lesson, imagine how some of the same behaviors would be perceived or interpreted by someone from a culture different from your own. A different cultural trait is described in each case. Read each behavior and the description of the culture, and then write in the space provided how you think a person from such a culture would interpret that behavior. If you need more space, use the other side of this page.

1. A person comes to a meeting half an hour after the scheduled starting time. How would this act be interpreted . . . by someone from a culture where it is normal to arrive half an hour—even two hours—after the scheduled starting time?

**The response or interpretation:**

(Sample response: It's no big deal. We'll start when everybody's here.)

2. Someone kicks a dog. How would this act be interpreted . . . by someone from a country where dogs tend to carry disease and food is scarce?

**The response or interpretation:**

3. A woman carries a heavy jug of water on her head while her husband walks in front of her carrying nothing. How would this be interpreted . . . by someone from a culture where carrying water is a woman's responsibility?

**The response or interpretation:**

4. A male guest helps a female host carry dirty dishes into the kitchen. How would this act be interpreted . . . by someone from a culture where men are not expected to clean up after a meal?

**The response or interpretation:**

5. A young man and young woman are kissing each other in public. How would this act be interpreted . . . by someone from a culture where men and women never touch in public?

**The response or interpretation:**

6. While taking an exam, a student copies from the paper of another student. How would this act be interpreted . . . by someone from a culture where it is expected that you help a friend succeed, and sharing is the norm?

**The response or interpretation:**

7. A guest at a dinner party belches aloud after the main course. How would this act be interpreted . . . by someone from a culture where belching is the normal way to express pleasure about food?

**The response or interpretation:**



## Lesson 9: Resolving a Cross-Cultural Misunderstanding

### Materials

- Worksheet #8, paper, and pencils
- Copy of the checklist (page 34) for each student

### Objectives

- Students will understand that cross-cultural misunderstandings are common occurrences.
- Students will identify a solution to a cross-cultural misunderstanding.

### Instructions

1. Tell students that they will now read about the way in which individuals in the Dominican Republic misunderstood an American Peace Corps Volunteer who was doing something that in the United States is perfectly normal.
2. Give students a copy of Worksheet #8, *Jogging Alone*. (The anecdote describes an incident involving a Peace Corps Volunteer, who had one way of looking at a situation, and her neighbors, who interpreted the situation differently.)
3. Ask students to read the Peace Corps Volunteer's account. Ask them to think about how they might solve the dilemma as they read. Then ask students to work in pairs to respond to the questions on the worksheet.
4. When students have had sufficient time for discussion, elicit responses to each question. Allow time for differing responses to be considered.
5. Ask each of the students to pretend they were the Peace Corps Volunteer in the jogging incident. Have each student (in the role of a Peace Corps Volunteer) write a letter home to a parent describing the incident and how it was resolved.
6. Provide students with a checklist of what to include (sample, page 34) before they begin writing their letters. Have students exchange the first draft of their letters with another student for peer review and feedback. (The review and feedback should be based on the criteria in the checklist.) Then have students revise and polish their letters.
7. Have students share their letters with a new partner. Then ask for volunteers to read their letters to the class.

### ● Enduring Understanding:

- It's easy to misinterpret things people do in a cross-cultural setting. To keep from misunderstanding the behavior of others, you have to try to see the world from their point of view, not yours.

### ● Essential Questions:

- How can I learn to see things from another culture's point of view? Why is this important?
- If you did develop this skill, how could it lead to greater harmony and understanding right in your own school?

### Quote for Thought

*Expect to feel embarrassed, foolish, and sometimes inadequate. It's all part of the experience. These trying times are what we eloquently call "adjustment." They're difficult, natural, and useful.*

—Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, Kenya

8. Students have just had practice in trying to see the world from another culture's point of view. Ask them in what ways developing this skill might lead to greater understanding right in their own school.

Note: To give students additional experience in resolving cross-cultural misunderstandings, use *Voices from the Field* on the Web at [www.peacecorps.gov/wvs/guides/voices/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wvs/guides/voices/). Under Peace Corps Stories, have students read "Cross-Cultural Dialogue," by Roz Wollmering (page 33), and follow up under Reading and Responding to Literature with the lesson plan for this story (pages 106–117).

### Taking Action

Help your class develop a project to foster better understanding and communication among the students in your school. Conduct a survey to determine what communication difficulties, if any, exist among students of different cultural backgrounds within your school. Invite students to devise ways to resolve these difficulties. Examples:

- Students facilitate a cross-cultural communications workshop with the help of interested teachers and community members.
- Students role-play a cross-cultural misunderstanding and its thoughtful resolution at a school assembly.

### Checklist for Letter Home

- You have described the jogging incident in a factual manner.
- You have described your own needs and feelings.
- You have described the needs and feelings of the Dominicans in a way that is respectful of their culture.
- You have explained what you did to resolve the problem in a way that is respectful of the Dominican culture.
- Your letter is organized into paragraphs in logical order, and you have used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

## Worksheet #8: Jogging Alone

*An account of a Peace Corps Volunteer serving in the Dominican Republic*

When I first arrived in my village in the Dominican Republic, I began to have a problem with my morning jogging routine. I used to jog every day when I was at home in the United States, so when I arrived in my village in the Dominican Republic, I set myself a goal to continue jogging two miles every morning. I really liked the peaceful feeling of jogging alone as the sun came up. But this did not last for long. The people in my village simply couldn't understand why someone would want to run alone. Soon people began to appear at their doorways offering me a cup of coffee; others would invite me to stop in for a visit. Sometimes this

would happen four or five times as I tried to continue jogging. They even began sending their children to run behind me so I wouldn't be lonely. They were unable to understand the American custom of exercising alone. I was faced with a dilemma. I really enjoyed my early morning runs. However, I soon realized that it's considered impolite in Dominican villages not to accept a cup of coffee, or stop and chat, when you pass people who are sitting on their front steps. I didn't want to give up jogging. But, at the same time, I wanted to show respect for the customs of the Dominican Republic—and not be viewed as odd or strange.

**Directions:** Use the back of the worksheet to write answers to the following questions.

1. What was the American's point of view here?

4. What was the Dominicans' point of view here?

2. What American cultural norm, or custom, did the American think would be viewed as perfectly normal in the Dominican Republic?

5. What was the reason for the Dominicans' point of view? What cultural norm did the Dominicans have that made them view the American's behavior as strange?

3. Describe a way you think that the American could respect the Dominican need to show hospitality to a stranger and, at the same time, not have to give up jogging.

6. How might the Dominicans begin to understand and respect American cultural norms and, at the same time, satisfy their own need to show hospitality to strangers?

### ● Enduring Understanding:

- To keep from misunderstanding the behavior of others, you have to try to see the world from their point of view, not yours.

### ● Essential Questions:

- How can I learn to see things from multiple points of view? Why is this important?
- If you did develop this skill, how could it lead to greater harmony and understanding right here in our own school? How about in the world?

## Lesson 10: Seeing Both Sides of an Issue

### Materials

- Chart paper

### Objectives

- Students will practice the skill of seeing an issue from different points of view.

### Instructions

1. Explain that, as shown in Lesson 9, there are often two or more equally reasonable ways to view a situation, depending on your culture. Being able to see multiple sides of an issue is an important skill. Ask why this may be so. Explain that actively listening to another's viewpoint with an open mind is sometimes the most powerful thing one can do to avoid misunderstandings.
2. Suggest to students that active listening is one of the most underrated communication skills. Review with them the rules of active listening. (Maintain direct eye contact. No interruptions. Keep an encouraging facial expression and utter acknowledging sounds, like "uh-huh." Use positive body language. If the person who is speaking gets stuck, ask: Is there more you would like me to know? and then resume listening.) Ask for two student volunteers to model the skill of active listening in a brief conversation about "Something surprising that happened to me this week." One student will be the speaker and one student will be the active listener. (It may be instructive to have a role player deliberately violate the rules of active listening—by whistling, looking around, interrupting, or remaining utterly silent—to demonstrate how uncomfortable the speaker becomes.)
3. Tell students that they will now practice seeing an issue from different points of view.
4. On each of four pieces of chart paper write one of the following: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Tape each paper on the wall in a different corner of the room.
5. Explain that you will state a controversial issue and students will express their opinion by moving to one of the four corners of the room.
6. State the issue: *My way of doing things is the best way of doing things.* Have students move to their desired corner.
7. Ask students to form pairs and explain to each other the reasons behind their opinions (using active listening). Then ask spokespersons from each corner to state the reasons behind their pairs' positions.

8. Next, tell students that they will have a chance to see the issue from another point of view. Ask the “Strongly Agree” group to move to the “Disagree” group’s corner and the “Disagree” group to move to the “Strongly Agree” corner. Then ask the “Strongly Disagree” group to move to the “Agree” group’s corner, as the “Agree” group moves to the “Strongly Disagree” group’s corner.
9. After students have moved to their newly designated corners, ask them to put their first opinion aside for a moment, to keep an open mind, and to try to think of all the reasons they might take the opposite position on the same statement: *My way of doing things is the best way of doing things.*
10. After students have discussed the reasons for their new position with a partner (again, using active listening), ask spokespersons from each corner to state the reasons behind their pairs’ new positions.
11. Ask the students how it felt to let go of their original positions and see the issue from another viewpoint.
12. When the discussion has ended, explain that the discomfort the students may have felt having to take a position opposite from their true feelings is somewhat like the discomfort they might feel when they are in another culture that sees some things differently from the way they do.
13. Conclude by reminding students of the enduring understanding: *To keep from misunderstanding the behavior of others, you have to try to see the world from their point of view, not yours.*
14. Ask students how putting this idea into practice might make our world a better place—or the school a better place. In asking students, provide them with real-life examples from world events, past or current. Have them respond to this question first in a class discussion and then, perhaps, in writing.

### Taking Action

Have students search on the Web or in the library for political cartoons from newspapers and magazines, including cartoons from other countries. Have them prepare a presentation, skit, or multimedia project for the class on how American views seem to differ from each other as well as from views from other countries.

### ● Enduring Understandings:

- There are aspects of culture that are fundamental but subtle, and important to grasp if one is to function effectively within a new cultural context.
- Crossing cultures isn't easy. It's a complex process in which understanding the context is everything.

### ● Essential Question:

- What is meant by cultural context, and why is it important to understand?

## Lesson 11 : A Fundamental of Culture—Cultural Context

### Objective

- Students will be able to explain cultural context.

### Instructions

1. Post on the board the enduring understandings of this lesson.
2. Discuss with the class the meaning of “context.” Generally speaking, context means the circumstances in which a particular event or action occurs. In reference to culture, context refers to the often unwritten rules or norms that have evolved and become a part of a group's expected behavior in various situations. Provide some examples:
  - In an American movie theater, people are expected to line up quietly to buy their tickets. It is considered rude to cut into that line.
  - On public transportation, such as buses and subways, people rarely talk to others they don't know. This is considered to be a way of respecting people's right to privacy.
  - Teens behave differently when they are at home with their families than they do when they are with friends at school.

In the examples above, the context is:

- Unwritten rules about behavior in a movie theater.
  - Unwritten rules about behavior in public transportation vehicles.
  - Acceptable behavior at home vs. acceptable behavior with friends.
3. Ask students for some examples of things they would never want their friends to do in the presence of their parents. Ask why a particular behavior would be considered unacceptable. Ask if this rule is written down anywhere, or whether one just knows it.
  4. Ask students for examples of things they would never want their parents to do when they were in the presence of the students' friends. Ask why a particular behavior by their parents would be considered unacceptable. Ask again if this rule is written anywhere, or whether they and their friends just know it.
  5. Explain that if you “just know” a rule, it is a cultural norm. This norm guides behavior and lets everyone know what's right and what's rude, for example, when one is in the presence of someone's parents.
  6. Explain that just as there are cultural norms at home, in school, in the community, or in the country, there are cultural norms in other countries. Stepping out of one culture and stepping into another one is called crossing cultures. Crossing cultures is not an easy thing to do. It's a complex process in which understanding the context is fundamental to getting along effectively within the new culture. For a full version of this lesson, which addresses cultural context compared between two different cultures, see the Peace Corps publication *Insights from the Field*, pages 113–121, also available free on the Web at [www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/insights/culture/module5/module5.html/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/insights/culture/module5/module5.html/).

### Taking Action

Ask students to develop a poster, multimedia presentation, or radio spot that illustrates how misunderstanding the cultural context of a situation at school or in the community can cause problems. Have students include strategies in their final products that might help those trying to understand the cultural context of a situation.

## Lesson 12: Brief Encounters

### Materials

- Cultural-norms sheets for the Pandya and Chispa cultures (half of the players will receive Pandya sheets and the other half, Chispa sheets)
- Recorded music

### Objectives:

- Students will gain skills in observing and describing behaviors.
- Students will develop an understanding of how our cultural values influence the way we view other groups.

### Introduction

Science fiction fans will recognize a familiar theme as they participate in this simulation. Many science fiction authors have explored how humans will behave when we meet an alien race for the first time. “Brief Encounters” brings the question closer to home and asks students to explore the interaction of two cultures—one outgoing and casual, the other more reserved and formal—with different social norms.

### Instructions

1. Remove all furniture from the center of the classroom. Students will need space to move around. Explain to the class that they will adopt the cultures of two unfamiliar groups, interact with each other, and then examine their reactions.
2. Divide the participants into three groups. Two groups should be about the same size and should have roughly equal numbers of males and females, if possible. A smaller group of two or three students will act as observers.
3. Ask the observers to watch closely as two different cultural groups—the Pandyas and the Chispas—interact. They may move among the participants, but they may not touch or speak to them. Their observations will help the class view the lesson with a wider perspective during debriefing.
4. Send the Pandya and Chispa groups to opposite corners of the room. After cutting the sheets in half, distribute copies of the Pandya cultural-norms sheet (on page 42) to one group and the Chispa cultural-norms sheet to the other group. Ask the members of each culture to read these sheets and to discuss their norms among themselves.
5. Visit the Pandyas and clarify their values. Stress the importance of staying in character. Emphasize that the male students should be chaperoned at all times. Remind them of the Pandyas’ reluctance to initiate contacts with people of other cultures.
6. Visit the Chispas and clarify their values. Emphasize the importance of making several brief contacts rather than a few lengthy ones. Define a contact as eliciting a verbal or a nonverbal response from a member of the other culture. Remind them of their friendly, outgoing nature and their eagerness to meet people from other cultures.
7. The simulation: Announce that the two student groups from imaginary countries have been invited to a party sponsored by an international student-exchange organization. The

### ● Enduring Understandings:

- Everyone has a culture. It shapes how we see the world, ourselves, and others.
- Behavior is affected in large part by cultural beliefs and values.
- Culture is like an iceberg. Some aspects are visible; others are beneath the surface. Invisible aspects influence and cause the visible ones.

### ● Essential Questions:

- How does my culture shape the way I see the world, myself, and others?
- How do my cultural values and beliefs influence the way I personally behave?
- Why is it important to be aware of the invisible aspects of culture?

party organizers hope the two groups will get acquainted and learn about each other. When students return to their home schools, they will present culture reports to their classmates. The students are welcome to mingle, dance, and talk.

8. Start the music and let the two cultures interact. The teacher and student observers should walk among the groups, looking for behaviors that can be described and discussed during debriefing.
9. After 10 to 12 minutes, call time and end the party. Ask the students to meet once more in opposite corners of the room and to make notes for their culture reports.
10. Give each group about 10 minutes to create a brief report. The Chispas' report will describe Pandya behavior and the values that their classmates could expect to encounter if they visited the Pandya nation. The Pandyas will create a similar description of the Chispas' culture.
11. Ask a representative from the Chispas to present the group's report to the class. Then, after providing the Chispas with a copy of the Pandya cultural norms, ask a representative from the Pandyas to read that group's norms sheet. Ask the Chispas to note how their report compared with the Pandyas' cultural-norms sheet.
12. Repeat with a Pandya representative sharing the group's report on the Chispas (and provide the Pandyas with the Chispas' norm sheet).

### Debriefing

Use questions such as the following to guide discussion of how our own cultural biases influence the way we view other groups. Be sure to ask the small group of observers for their views on the participants' attempts to communicate across cultures and to maintain cultural norms.

1. How did you feel about the behavior of the members of your own group? Of the other group? Did your group's culture report use positive, negative, or neutral terms to describe the other group?
2. How well did your group members observe the norms of their assigned culture? During the party, what did you do if a member of your culture did not observe a particular norm?
3. What are the real-world advantages of following cultural norms?
4. Ask students to discuss whether they agree or disagree with each of the following statements:
  - People have difficulty describing the behaviors of other groups in nonjudgmental terms.
  - People acquire cultural norms fairly quickly.
  - Most of the group's norms are maintained through peer pressure.
  - Americans tend to feel uncomfortable without eye contact, even though in many parts of the world, eye contact is considered to be rude and impolite.
  - A particular behavior can be perceived differently depending on your group's norms. For example, what appears friendly to Chispas seems pushy to Pandyas.



5. What are some real-world situations that were illustrated during the game?
6. Pandya women were instructed to speak for the Pandya men. In what real-world situations does one group speak for another?
7. How would the game be different for players if the Pandya men dominated the women?
8. What lessons from this activity would you want to keep in mind if you were going to spend time in an unfamiliar culture?
9. Ask students to list as many examples of cross-cultural experiences as they can. Remind them that not all cross-cultural experiences take place in other countries or between people who speak different languages or come from different ethnic backgrounds. Attending worship services, for example, with a friend who holds different religious beliefs is a cross-cultural experience. It's possible that going to a new school could be a cross-cultural experience. Brainstorm ideas about what students can do to encourage clear communication in such situations.

### Taking Action

If you have a multicultural class or have international exchange students in your school, help your class develop a project to foster better understanding and communication among the students. Ask students to develop a feature article or regular column for the student newspaper that introduces students from other cultures.



## You are a Pandya.

### *Pandya Cultural Norms*

- Pandyas prefer to interact with members of their own culture.
- Pandyas do not initiate conversation. They speak only when spoken to.
- Pandyas have very formal speech patterns. For example, they always use “sir” and “ma’am.”
- Among Pandyas, women have more status than men. Men are chaperoned by Pandya women.
- Pandya men avoid eye contact with women from other cultures.
- Pandya men do not talk directly to women from other cultures. They respond through their chaperones.
- Pandya men can talk to men from other cultures. They can maintain eye contact with men from other cultures.

## You are a Chispa.

### *Chispa Cultural Norms*

- Chispas are informal and friendly.
- Among Chispas, there are no gender roles. Men and women behave the same way.
- Chispas are outgoing. They love to make contact with people from other cultures.
- Chispa contacts are brief and casual.
- Chispas are democratic and call everyone by his or her first name.
- Chispas value cross-gender contacts more than same-gender contacts.

## Lesson 13: Window Into Another Culture

### Materials

- Copies of the essay “A Single Lucid Moment” for all students, if they are to read it as homework

### Objective

- Students will grasp the vastness of the gulf that can lie between two cultures—both in values and in communicating those values.

### Instructions

1. Discuss with students the meaning of “lucid” as “extremely clear.” Ask students to think about the meaning of the story’s title as they read.
2. Read the essay “A Single Lucid Moment” to the class, or have the students read it for homework. Then discuss the essay with them, addressing the following questions:
  - What is it about American culture that allows homelessness to occur? (Students might consider laws that prohibit incarceration for mental illness alone; the existence of agencies that provide food or shelter enabling people to survive on the streets; the largeness of sufficient numbers of passersby to allow homeless people to eke out a living; the drug addiction or mental illness of many homeless people that prevents them from functioning productively in society.)
  - What is it about Maimafu culture that does not allow homelessness to occur?
  - At what point in the essay did the author have his “single lucid moment”?
  - What was it that suddenly became clear in that moment? How do you know? Does the author say explicitly? Have students review the text, if necessary, to answer.
  - Why does the author believe that the idea for the homeless men will not work, while the Maimafu believe it can?
  - If the Maimafu had succeeded in bringing the homeless men from Chicago to Papua New Guinea, would their idea for the welfare of the homeless men have worked? Why or why not?

*Note:* For additional lesson plans to use with this story, see Reading and Responding to “A Single Lucid Moment,” in *Voices from the Field* (pages 162–172) at [www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/voices/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/voices/).

For additional stories by returned Peace Corps Volunteers, visit the Web at [www.peacecorps.gov/wws/stories/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/stories/) and [www.peacecorpswriters.org/](http://www.peacecorpswriters.org/).

### Taking Action

Students can take advantage of a number of programs that have been set up to help them communicate with and learn from other students and teachers overseas. For information on these programs, see the Appendix, page 47, number 10.

### ● Enduring Understandings:

- A “single lucid moment” can challenge and change our worldview.
- In some cultures, people believe that the group is responsible for the well-being of each individual. In other cultures, people believe individuals are primarily responsible for themselves.

### ● Essential Questions:

- In what ways can a “single lucid moment” challenge and change our worldview?
- When is taking care of the individual more important than taking care of the group? When is taking care of the group more important than taking care of the individual?

*Note:* The Peace Corps Coverdell World Wise Schools program has published *Voices from the Field: Reading and Writing About the World, Ourselves, and Others*, a volume of writings by returned Peace Corps Volunteers about their experiences overseas. Lesson plans accompany each selection. This essay is excerpted from that volume, which is available for free downloading from the Web at [www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/voices/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/voices/).

By Robert W. Soderstrom

Returned Peace Corps  
Volunteer, Papua New Guinea

## Reading: *A Single Lucid Moment*

As the plane buzzed back over the mountains, it was now just us and the villagers of Maimafu. My wife, Kerry, and I were assigned to this village of 800 people in the Eastern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea. It looked as if we were in for a true Indiana Jones adventure!

The mountains were dramatic and thick with rain forest. No roads had ever scarred them. We had loaded a four-seater plane with cargo (we would fly out every three months to re-supply) and flew for 30 bumpy minutes southwest to the mountain ridges. From the plane, the village looked very much like a shoebox panorama from a grade-school science project.

My wife and I were the first Peace Corps Volunteers ever in Maimafu. We had been greeted by a large group of beautiful people, all wearing gorgeous, curious smiles. Giggling, naked children hid behind trees during the trek down the mountain to our new home, and a lively entourage followed using their heads to carry our boxed supplies through the muddy trails. It was quickly becoming clear that we had just been adopted by a very large and unique family.

The basic culture of subsistence living had not been replaced; there were no cars, electricity, or telephones—just grass huts, large gardens, and a whole lot of rain forest. The women spent the day in the gardens planting, weeding, and harvesting. The men grew coffee, from which they generated their sole income of about \$200 a year. The village had lived in harmony with its natural surroundings for millennia.

The villagers had built us a beautiful bamboo-thatched hut on short stilts. Planted behind the house was a three-acre garden, carefully tended and ready to harvest. Its bounty included corn, greens, tomatoes, beans, peanuts, onions, potatoes, and pineapples. To top it all off, the path to our new home was sprinkled with flower petals the day we arrived.

It quickly became clear that Maimafu was a preserved example of communal living. Men rallied to the building of a new home, the elderly worked and lived with their families, and mothers breast-fed their neighbors' children. In fact, the one parentless, Down's syndrome man in our village was fed, housed, and clothed by everyone; he would spend a few days with one family before happily wandering in to work or play with the next.

It was when we had settled in that it happened. We were sitting in a circle on the ground with a large group of villagers to "*tok stori*," Papua New Guinea's favorite pastime of "telling stories." I had passed around photos I had snapped back home in Chicago. A villager was staring intently at one of the photos. He had spotted two homeless men on a Michigan Avenue sidewalk with crude signs propped between their legs.

"*Tupela man wokem wanem?*" he asked. (What are these two men doing?)

I attempted to explain the concept of homelessness to the group, and the desire of these two men to get some food. Crowding around the photograph for a good stare, the villagers could not comprehend how the men became homeless, or why the passersby in the photo were so indifferent. They bombarded me with questions and I did my best to make sense of the two ragged beggars in the midst of such glittering skyscrapers. I read from their questions and solemn mood

that they had made an important observation—these two men must lack not only food and shelter but also a general sense of affection and purpose in their community.

Early the next morning, we were startled to hear a sharp rap at the door. Opening it, I was greeted by Moia, Kabarae, Kavalo, and Lemek. Kerry and I went out into the bright, beautiful day and sat with them in a circle. Each man gave us a pineapple. Moia spoke: “After you left last night, all of us men on the village council had a very big meeting. For a long, long time we discussed the two men in your picture. We have reached a conclusion and have a proposal for you.”

“What could this possibly be?” we wondered.

“Please contact those two men as well as your government. Ask the government if they will fly those two men to Maimafu, just like they did for you. We have marked two spots of land where we will build houses for those two men, just like we built for you. Our men will build the houses and the women will plant the gardens to feed them.”

They were offering to do what? I was stunned and overwhelmed. Their offer was bold and genuine. It was innocent and naive. It was beautiful. And, like the twist of a kaleidoscope, my worldview had completely changed.

What does one say to such an offer? We stammered for a response and stumbled over explanations of difficult logistics, scarce money, and government bureaucracies. But the councilmen would not accept no for an answer. In their simple lives, it was impossible to comprehend that humanity was host to such an injustice. They wanted action.

The villagers were serious. They were offering everything they had. We reluctantly matched their enthusiasm with a few letters to America and long conversations with the village council. We toured the sites where the homes were to be built. We listened to the women discuss the types of gardens they would plant, which would even include coffee trees to generate a small income. And we answered numerous questions over time from villagers amazed with this foreign thing called homelessness. The plan could not work, we told them. Their hearts sank, and I could see in their eyes that this dream would not die easily.

“*Sori tru, sori tru we no inap wokem dospela samting,*” they told us (We are sorry this can’t happen). They clicked their tongues and shook their heads in disappointment.

Initially inspired by the episode, I began mulling questions over and over in my mind. Fetching water in the ink-black night and looking up the hill at our small hut, light from the lantern inside splitting the bamboo-thatched walls, I would think of the spiritual wealth of Maimafu and the material wealth of America: Can a community reach a balance of material wealth and spiritual wealth? Why do these two societies exhibit so much of one and not much of the other? Do those two ends interfere with each other? How much spiritual wealth can we have? How much material wealth do we need? How has the world evolved so that some people own mansions and others lack shoes? How many people have love in their souls but diseased water in their drinking cups?

The villagers worked with us on newer projects. And, I discovered, like many Peace Corps Volunteers before me, that the world’s purest form of brotherhood can often be found in the smallest of villages.

## Quotes for Thought

*Preserving civilization is the work not of some miracle-working, superhuman personality but of each one of us.*

—Bill Moyers,  
Former Deputy Director,  
Peace Corps

*Through service, we have only our communities to build and ourselves to discover.*

—Returned Peace Corps  
Volunteer, Fiji Islands

## Appendix:

### Taking Action—Additional Ways to Become Involved

To help students become more involved in the norms and sensitivities of other cultures, you may wish to guide them to real-life experiences that employ what they have learned in this booklet's lessons. These experiences may occur in the classroom, in the school at large, at home, in the local community, or in communities worldwide.

Following are some activities, projects, and opportunities for taking action, in addition to those provided at the ends of some of the lessons under the heading "Taking Action":

1. Modify the lessons in this booklet and have students lead younger children through the activities.
2. Have students create a serious or funny book about real-life examples of cultural misunderstandings that occurred because of differences in language or behavior. Display these books in your school or local library for all students to read.
3. Invite students to participate in the Peace Corps Partnership Program. Many U.S. classes have joined the Peace Corps Partnership Program by providing assistance to Peace Corps Volunteer projects that aid students and communities worldwide. For information on how to participate, visit the Coverdell World Wise Schools website at [www.peacecorps.gov/wws/partnerships/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/partnerships/).
4. Encourage students interested in performing community service in their school, community, and beyond to visit the website of the Corporation for National and Community Service at [www.cns.gov](http://www.cns.gov). Students can choose from a database of service activities in their local community, participate in a Learn and Serve project in their school or community, or sign up to serve as an AmeriCorps member after graduating from high school.
5. Organize a school program in which your students can help second-language speakers enroll their children in school or in other important community activities. Part of this project could include the preparation of fliers for the community announcing the services of your students.
6. Participate in a local construction project through Habitat for Humanity or other community-assistance organizations. Invite students to document the building process—including short interviews with the volunteer participants—using videotape. Present the completed videotape to the local chapter of the service group being assisted.

7. Invite students already serving their school or community to record their service experiences on the USA Freedom Corps website at [www.usafreedomcorps.gov](http://www.usafreedomcorps.gov). USA Freedom Corps offers service opportunities to Americans of all ages who are looking for ways to serve their community, their country, and the world.
8. For extensive resources and ideas about how students can become involved in their communities and beyond in promoting cross-cultural understanding, see the Coverdell World Wise Schools website at [www.peacecorps.gov/wws/service/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/service/). Learn how to incorporate service into your curriculum by following World Wise Schools' step-by-step service-learning guide and lesson plans.
9. Have students keep a journal documenting instances in which they were able to apply concepts in this booklet to promote cross-cultural understanding in your school.
10. Making Connections Overseas
  - Invite the class to participate in the Peace Corps' World Wise Schools *Correspondence Match Program*. As a class, you and your students can correspond with a Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) serving overseas. Your students can learn through the PCV's firsthand experience about the people, geography, environment, and culture of the country in which the Volunteer lives and works, and your students can help their peers overseas learn about the United States. Find information about the program on the Web at [www.peacecorps.gov/wws/correspond/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/correspond/). If no Volunteer is available for a match at the time of your inquiry, you may be placed on a waiting list.
  - Have students sign up for the Peace Corps' World Wise Schools *CyberVolunteer Program* listserv. Participants receive nine e-mails over the course of the school year from three Peace Corps Volunteers serving overseas. You can find information about the program on the Web at [www.peacecorps.gov/wws/cybervol/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/cybervol/).
  - Invite students to use e-mail and the Internet to begin collaborative online educational projects, pen-pal relationships, and cross-cultural friendships with students in other countries. You can visit the website *Friendship Through Education* to make such contacts. Find information about the initiative on the Web at [www.friendshipthrougheducation.org](http://www.friendshipthrougheducation.org).

