

# THE PEACE CORPS

The Peace Corps was established when President John F. Kennedy issued an Executive Order on March 1, 1961. Since that time, thousands of Volunteers have dedicated two years of their lives in another culture to increase international understanding and to transfer valuable skills to the people of the country they are serving.

The Peace Corps, seeking to promote world peace and friendship, has three goals:

1. To help the peoples of interested countries and areas in meeting their needs for trained men and women;
2. To help promote a better understanding of the American people on the part of the peoples served;
3. To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of the American people.

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 and requests, Volunteers traditionally offer skills in the areas of education, agriculture, small business development, community development, the environment, and health. Before placement at their sites, Volunteers receive intensive training in the language and culture of their host countries, as well as in specific technical skills. Cross-cultural training, which includes the study of the history, customs, and values of the host country, prepares Volunteers to become part of a local community for the duration of their two years of service.

By living and working within their local communities, Peace Corps Volunteers not only learn about the people of their host countries but also offer citizens around the world a chance to learn about Americans.

## **Goals of World Wise Schools**

The World Wise Schools Program contributes to the Third Goal of the Peace Corps: to help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of the American people. World Wise Schools promotes this goal by creating opportunities for third through twelfth grade students to learn from the experience of currently serving and Returned Volunteers. The program promotes geographical and cross-cultural awareness while developing the spirit of volunteerism. Today, thousands of students from all 50 states participate in a correspondence program that matches currently serving Peace Corps Volunteers to classes in the United States. Students also benefit from Peace Corps Volunteer experiences as teachers use the World Wise Schools videos, study guides, Web site, speakers bureau, and other educational resources that reflect Volunteer experiences to bring the countries and cultures of the world into U.S. classrooms.



When Peace Corps Volunteers return from overseas, they bring intimate knowledge of other peoples and cultures. They understand that the ability of the United States to function in the world community depends on its understanding of other cultures. They know that global interdependence is a reality, not just a catchword. When Volunteers share their experiences with World Wise classes, the Volunteers help others to fashion a world view based on firsthand knowledge and grass-roots experience. As Bill Moyers, a prominent journalist and former deputy director of the Peace Corps, pointed out in a 1988 speech, "We have guides—[thousands of] Volunteers who have advanced the trip."<sup>1</sup>

To become a part of the World Wise Schools global learning community, please complete the enrollment form found at the back of this book. If you would like more information about the program, you may visit our Web site at <http://www.peacecorps.gov> or call us for more information at (800) 424-8580, extension 2283.

## **Goals of *Looking at Ourselves and Others***

During Peace Corps service, Volunteers look closely at the assumptions and values that shape their perspectives as Americans. They learn about themselves as individuals and as representatives of a multifaceted American culture. Similarly, the activities contained in *Looking at Ourselves and Others* will challenge World Wise students to become more conscious of the values they share with their families, friends, and communities. The materials also provide students with analytical tools that help combat stereotypical thinking and enhance cross-cultural communication.

As your students learn about other countries and cultures, they—like Peace Corps Volunteers—will begin to recognize that individuals and groups hold diverse views of the world. They will realize this diversity often stems from the unique systems of values, beliefs, experiences, and knowledge that link people within cultural groups. In “Neighbors”<sup>3</sup> (see below), Returned Volunteer Orin Hargraves illustrates the profound effect of looking at others from a new perspective. The activities in this guide are designed to help students develop the habit of viewing people and places from multiple points of view.

*Looking at Ourselves and Others*, a revision of an earlier World Wise Schools publication of the same title, introduces students to the concepts of perspective, culture, and cross-cultural relations. Specifically, the readings and activities in this guide are designed to help students:

1. Recognize and appreciate differences in perception among individuals and cultures;
2. Define culture and recognize its role in developing perceptions of ourselves and others;
3. Challenge assumptions, promote cross-cultural awareness, and provide opportunities to practice the behaviors that make cross-cultural communication possible.

### **Learning from the experience of Peace Corps Volunteers**

The personal experiences of Peace Corps Volunteers are included in the introduction to each section of this guide to help teachers prepare for the lessons that follow. But these also have value as educational resources for students. They could be used to supplement reading materials, to illustrate the use of various writing techniques, to spark interest in volunteerism, and to learn more about other cultures and the Peace Corps.

## **Neighbors**

*It was a hot, dusty afternoon in late August. I had just returned to El Hajeb, the village where I had taught English for a year. I'd been away for the summer: a few weeks of being surrounded by Volunteers old and new at that year's omnibus training program in Rabat, the capital. El Hajeb was a big comedown after all that. I was the only American in town, and though I'd been quite happy with that for a year, coming back to it all at once was a shock. I hadn't yet rediscovered any of the parts about it that I liked.*

*I spent most of the afternoon writing letters, catching up on correspondence that had piled up in my mailbox while I was away. I was also conveniently avoiding the heat and, to some degree, the village itself. At the moment it didn't feel like the place I wanted to be. I stayed inside the thick, cool, stuccoed walls of my fine house. You see, mine wasn't the mud-hut Peace Corps experience. I lived in the upstairs apartment of a beautiful colonial-period villa in the part of the town that had been built by the French. Walnut trees lined the avenue outside, and I could hear boys throwing stones up into them, trying to knock down the ripening fruit.*

*A cool breeze from the mountains picked up late in the afternoon, intimating that it might bring some clouds our way, along with a shower or thunderstorm. I took advantage of the cooler air to get a little exercise and walked to the post office. I felt fortified now after the hours of cool seclusion, ready to withstand the stares of the children, and the cries of “Christian! Christian!” that often accompanied me on my walks in the village.*

*The post office offered the usual experience: a cluster of people mashed together in front of the sullen clerk, all thrusting their business in his face, with a line of the less determined off to one side, standing patiently in the belief that they would be waited on sometime. I joined the line, not yet feeling up to the cluster experience. It took 10 minutes or so, but this way I could stay inside the thick American shell that I still wasn't willing to come out of. When I started back, the rain was looking like a sure thing. The breeze*

## **How to use *Looking at Ourselves and Others***

Arranged by topic, the guide includes teacher background information, activity outlines, and student worksheets. Many activities are similar to those used to help prepare Peace Corps Volunteers for their cross-cultural experiences.

The activities for each topic are further divided according to three suggested groupings: grades 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12. **Teachers are encouraged to review all the activities and to select or adapt the materials that are most appropriate for their students.** Each activity outline has at least six parts: an estimate of class time needed, materials, a statement of objectives, step-by-step procedures, debriefing exercises, and suggestions for extending the activity.

### **Promoting Community**

Many of these activities ask students to examine personal points of view and share opinions on a range of social issues with their peers. Therefore, it is essential that each activity is introduced within a classroom that tolerates diverse opinions, enhances self-esteem, and supports cooperation. In other words, the work and the spirit of the class is about building community as well as building knowledge.

The Peace Corps model of service acknowledges that building communities in which diverse points of view contribute to achieving common goals takes time and trust. What can schools do to begin this process? Alfie Kohn, educator and author, suggests that school communities can be forged by “. . . providing for numerous classwide and schoolwide activities in which students work together toward a common end; and weaving the goal of community through academic instruction.”<sup>2</sup>



*had become a wind. Little dust devils were whirling around in the dirt streets, and withered leaves twirled down from the sycamore trees that formed an arcade over the wide, dilapidated street. Dark clouds were bearing down from the mountains to the south. I picked up my pace, thinking that now I'd have to hurry to get in before the rain.*

*Down the street, coming towards me, was a woman wrapped up in a turquoise jellaba. I recognized her as my downstairs neighbor. She wasn't veiled and her hood was off: This was only a walk in the neighborhood and she wouldn't be subject to the prying eyes of students. As we continued toward each other, we were nearly jogging, trying to reach our destinations before the rain. Under these circumstances, the normal greeting rituals—which could run to a few minutes of chattering even with someone that you saw all the time—would be overlooked. We only exchanged the minimum smiles and hello, how-are-yous as we passed.*

*“Please tell Aisha to put the goats in the shed. It's going to rain,” she shouted at me over her shoulder as she continued on her way.*

*“OK,” I said.*

*In that moment, such a feeling of elation! And why, over something so small and trivial? Because she said it in Arabic, not in French. Because she didn't slow down or dress it up for speaking to a foreigner. Because she said it to me in the same way she would have said it to one of her own children, or one of her other neighbors: without formality, without any awareness that she was talking to someone from the other side of the world, but just saying it the way she would normally say it. Because after all I was only her neighbor, no one strange or special. I was just the guy who lived upstairs.*

- Orin Hargraves served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Morocco from 1980 to 1982.

Below are some questions that Kohn proposes teachers may want to consider as they work with their students to explore new ways of thinking about themselves and the world.

1. Are students aware that the adults in their school respect and care about them as individuals? What would a visitor to the school see and hear that exhibits genuine respect and caring for each student? Are student views and opinions considered as a matter of course?
2. Do the students know each other well enough to truly care about one another? Are they aware of the diverse perspectives represented in the class? Are students taught alternatives to name-calling and put-downs? How can class activities be reconstructed to allow students to develop collegial relationships with each of their classmates?
3. Are there opportunities for the entire class or school to work together? Do the students truly have a say in how such projects will be carried out? Are all students invested in the projects' success?
4. Are community-building activities used to support academic learning? Do students have opportunities to learn from each other? Does the academic curriculum point to cooperation and community as concepts that have meaning across disciplines?

Promoting community is a challenging task. But if students are to develop global relationships, they must also nurture local relationships. One way to teach them how is to model behavior that supports differences and builds communities.

### The Importance of Debriefing

Coming to closure is as important as providing a strong beginning. Students need the opportunity to reflect on the meaning of an activity, and teachers need to make sure that students have not misinterpreted new knowledge. Sivasailam Thiagarajan, a designer of cross-cultural simulation games, structures the debriefings that follow his intense games around six phases. His suggestions for games are applicable to any class activity. Many of the debriefing questions that appear in this guide are modeled on these phases.<sup>4</sup>

*Phase 1.* How do you feel? The purpose of this phase is to give students an opportunity to let off steam and be more objective as the debriefing continues.

*Phase 2.* What happened? The purpose of this phase is to collect data about what happened during the activity. Students are encouraged to compare and contrast their recollections and to recognize patterns of individual and group behavior.

*Phase 3.* What did you learn? The purpose of this phase is to encourage students to construct some general principles or hypotheses based on their experiences.

*Phase 4.* How does this relate to the real world? The purpose of this phase is to encourage a discussion of how the principles identified in Phase 3 can be applied to real life situations.

*Phase 5.* What if? The purpose of this phase is to encourage students to speculate what would happen if the activity were conducted in a different context or with another set of instructions.

*Phase 6.* What next? The purpose of this phase is to facilitate action. Students are encouraged to use their insights to come up with specific ways to use new information or behaviors.



These six debriefing topics can be addressed in a number of ways. The teacher can lead class discussions, or students can lead large or small groups in exploring the topics. Students can respond to individual questions on index cards and share selected responses during a large-group discussion. Panel discussions or role-playing can help students identify real-world applications of what they learn. If class time runs short, students can respond to a questionnaire as homework or the teacher can schedule an in-class debriefing for the next class meeting.

### Extending the Ideas

The activities in this book lend themselves to further development. Each suggested activity is followed by ideas for extending the concepts presented in the lesson through additional research or expanded projects. For example, service-learning projects can help students become actively involved in cross-cultural activities in their schools and communities. A “Service-Learning Rubric”<sup>5</sup> is reprinted here to help you reflect on what constitutes a quality service-learning project.

The activities contained in *Looking at Ourselves and Others* are designed to challenge assumptions, promote cross-cultural awareness, and provide opportunities to practice the behaviors that make cross-cultural communication possible. Presented in a supportive context with opportunities for reflection and application, these and other World Wise Schools materials can help students join Peace Corps’ exciting and essential mission—right in their own classrooms. We invite you to be creative in designing lessons built around them, and to share your lessons with us at:

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This guide contains materials written by Peace Corps Volunteers and others to represent their individual views. These views are not official opinions of the United States Government or of the Peace Corps. Please note that a video tape does not accompany this study guide.



## Service-Learning Rubric

Service-learning is integrating the regular classroom curriculum with a problem or issue to meet a community or school-based need. It is the method by which young people learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service projects. Dr. Mary J. Selke, UNI, devised the following rubric framework for determining what projects accomplish.

	<b>Strong Impact</b>	<b>Good Impact</b>	<b>Some Impact</b>	<b>Minimal Impact</b>
<b>1. Meet actual community needs</b>	Determined by current research conducted or discovered by students with teacher assistance where appropriate	Determined by past research discovered by students with teacher assistance where appropriate	Determined by making a guess at what community needs may be	Community needs secondary to what a project teacher wants to do; project considers only student needs
<b>2. Are coordinated in collaboration with community</b>	Active, direct collaboration with community by the teacher and/or student	Community members act as consultants in the project development	Community members are informed of the project directly	Community members are coincidentally informed or not knowledgeable at all
<b>3. Are integrated into academic curriculum</b>	Service-learning as instructional strategy with content/service components integrated	Service-learning as a teaching technique with content/service components concurrent	Service-learning part of curriculum but sketchy connections, with emphasis on service	Service-learning supplemental to curriculum, in essence just a service project or good deed
<b>4. Facilitate active student reflection</b>	Students think, share, produce reflective products individually and as group members	Students think, share, produce group reflection only	Students share with no individual reflective projects	Ran out of time for true reflection; just provided a summary of events
<b>5. Use new academic skill/knowledge in real world settings</b>	All students have direct application of new skill or knowledge in community service	All students have some active application of new skill or knowledge	Some students more involved than others or little community service involvement	Skill knowledge used mostly in the classroom; no active community service experience
<b>6. Help develop sense of caring for and about others</b>	Reflections show affective growth regarding self in community and the importance of service	Reflections show generic growth regarding the importance of community service	Reflections restricted to pros and cons of particular service project regarding the community	Reflections limited to self-centered pros and cons of the service project
<b>7. Improve quality of life for person(s) served</b>	Facilitate change or insight; help alleviate a suffering; solve a problem; meet a need or address an issue	Changes enhance an already good community situation	Changes mainly decorative, but new and unique benefits realized in community	Changes mainly decorative, of limited community benefit, or are not new and unique

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> “At Home in the World,” *To Touch the World: The Peace Corps Experience* (Washington, D.C.: Peace Corps, 1995), p. 156.

<sup>2</sup> *Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community* (Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> From *At Home in the World: The Peace Corps Story* (Washington, D.C.: Peace Corps, 1996), pp. 15-17.

<sup>4</sup> Adapted with permission from *Diversity Simulation Games* (Amherst, Massachusetts: HRD Press, 1995), pp. 6 - 7.

<sup>5</sup> From *Service-Learning Curriculum* (Iowa Service-Learning Partnership, 1996).