

Voices

From the Field

Second Edition

Paul D. Coverdell

worldwise
schools



READING AND WRITING ABOUT THE WORLD, OURSELVES, AND OTHERS

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INTRODUCTION

Years ago, I woke to look out the window of a plane I had been riding all night, and in the still-dark morning knew I was home. Minutes later, the pilot announced that we were beginning our descent, and I watched as the black shadows slowly dissolved into mountains and trees, roads and houses. The sun, hiding beneath the horizon, cast the city in a pink-orange light. The plane swooped down closer, and I could see a patch of huckleberries by the railroad tracks, a gnarled log floating down the Susquehanna, and a stack of coal outside the old, abandoned church. We hit the ground with a dull thud, and I turned away from the window and gathered my bags. But a sensation stayed with me for days, months, and even years after: Peace Corps service had given me new eyes.

And ears. Because everything around me spoke, whispering of other possibilities.

Peace Corps service can have this effect. For two years you struggle to say words in a little-known dialect—simple words like “water” and “teacher”—and one day you wake up to realize that the words for “dream” and “intention” are there, at the back of your throat, waiting for the moment when you need them. And one day, you need them. Words like these can change the way you see and the way you hear, and conversations like these can cause your heart to beat in a different rhythm....

—Beth Giebus

Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, Morocco

Voices From the Field

“Our classrooms ought to pulsate with multiple conceptions of what it is to be human and alive,” writes Maxine Greene in *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, Art, and Social Change*. “They ought to resound with the voices of articulate young people in dialogues always incomplete because there is always more to be discovered and more to be said. We must want our students to achieve friendship as each one stirs to wide-awakeness, to imaginative action, and to renewed consciousness of possibility.”

Voices From the Field: Reading and Writing about the World, Ourselves, and Others is a response to Greene’s challenge. And it is a celebration of, and an invitation to, “wide-awakened” lives.

*It takes a thousand voices
to tell a single story.*

Native American saying

Peace Corps Literature

For the past 42 years, a quiet revolution has been taking place in the minds and hearts of 169,000 Americans. One by one, they travel thousands of miles to villages seldom found on any map. There, they live and work with the people of their host communities—eating the same food, speaking the same language, living in the same environment, and adopting some of the cultural norms. And somewhere, somehow, at some point, something happens:

*My Peace Corps service was a watershed experience.
It is the single most important event in my life.*

*I see my life as divided into two parts,
before Peace Corps and after Peace Corps.*

*Peace Corps shaped me, transformed me—
shaking me out of the deep fog that was my life.*

Long after Volunteers return home, they struggle to answer the question, What happened? Everyday speech proves inadequate; it is too fleeting, too trite. Only the written word—the creative outlets of poetry, memoir, and fiction—can capture the nuances and grasp the complexities of their experience.

These creative endeavors have not gone unnoticed. The *Washington Post* (September 9, 2001) reports that the Peace Corps community is “churning out enough works—thousands of memoirs, novels, and books of poetry—to warrant a whole new genre: Peace Corps literature.”

Ripples of Hope

Voices From the Field is, as the name suggests, a collection, or chorus, of voices. Although the voices of Peace Corps writers resound loud and clear, it is the voices of the Volunteers’ friends and neighbors that will no doubt linger in the minds of readers long after the stories have ended. This is as it should be, for the Peace Corps experience is never the Volunteer’s alone; it is yours, it is ours. As such, there is much to be learned from it—lessons that can affect us all.

“Every time a man or woman acts to improve the fate of others,” Charles Baquet, former deputy director of the Peace Corps, once remarked, “they send a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from many similar efforts, these ripples build a current that can sweep away what ails us all.”

Peace Corps literature is a ripple of hope. And we invite students to join their voices in this dialogue that is always incomplete because there is always more to be discovered and more to be said. Together, we can stir one another to wide-awakeness. Together, we can build a current that can sweep away what ails us all.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS COLLECTION

Voices From the Field: Reading and Writing About the World, Ourselves, and Others is designed for use by language arts teachers in grades 6–12. The collection is divided into two sections: Peace Corps Stories and Curriculum Unit.

The **Peace Corps Stories** section contains nine texts written by Peace Corps Volunteers, on which the lesson plans are based. Representing a variety of genres (personal narratives, fiction, and folk tales), the texts are grouped under three themes: *Heroes & Friends*, *Perspectives*, and *No Easy Answers*.

The **Curriculum Unit** contains language arts lessons focused on *Reading and Responding to Literature*. The lesson plans are standards-based and use the *Understanding by Design* curriculum framework (see Appendix A). They can be adapted for use in grades 6–12. The lessons are especially useful for increasing students' reading comprehension and writing skills. They are designed

- To engage students' minds in the content of the story.
- To stir their hearts with the author's unique message.
- To encourage them to identify and explore the questions the story inspires.
- To increase their reading comprehension skills.
- To enhance their writing skills.
- To invite them to find connections between the author's experience, the story's content, and their own lives.

ABOUT 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 needs for trained men and women
- To promote a better understanding of the American people on the part of the peoples served
- 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 136 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.

PAUL D. COVERDELL WORLD WISE SCHOOLS

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

- To broaden perspectives.
- To promote cultural awareness.
- To appreciate global connections.
- To encourage service.

Since the program's inception in 1989 on the initiative of Peace Corps Director 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, World Wise Schools has expanded its scope by providing a broad range of resources for educators—including award-winning videos, teacher guides, classroom speakers, a website, and printed materials. For more information about Coverdell World Wise Schools, see www.peacecorps.gov/wws.



PEACE CORPS STORIES

Throughout time, there have been many eloquent calls to service. In his inaugural address, John F. Kennedy spoke words that stirred the minds and hearts of a generation: "... Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.... Ask not what America can do for you, but together what we can do for the freedom of man."

A call to serve can take many forms—something you hear or read or see. You can't respond to every call, but in your lifetime there will be at least one that moves you to action. For more than 169,000 Americans, the call came from the Peace Corps.

Bill Moyers, former deputy director of the Peace Corps and a contributor to this collection, sums up why people join. "It was said that the urge to join the Peace Corps was passion alone. Not so. Men and women, whatever their age, looked their lives over and chose to affirm. To affirm is the thing. And so they have—in quiet, self-effacing perseverance."

In the more than four decades it has spanned, the Peace Corps has held a special attraction for Americans—a way of serving their country and helping others. Peace Corps Volunteers are different from other Americans who go overseas. They are not missionaries. Or tourists. They are not intelligence agents or academics. They are not there on business trips or to advise foreign governments.

Peace Corps Volunteers are invited by developing countries to come and share their skills. They live the way the people in that country live—not in big houses or behind high walls. They don't drive fancy cars. In fact, they don't even own cars.

Most visitors to developing countries will never venture outside of the capital city or an isolated vacation spot. Peace Corps Volunteers live and work in villages and cities that may never be tourist sites, and towns at the ends of the Earth. They unpack their belongings. They settle down. They set about to do a job. And they make some lifelong friends along the way.

Two or three things I know, two or three things I know for sure, and one of them is that to go on living I have to tell stories, that stories are the one sure way I know to touch the heart and change the world.

Dorothy Allison
Author



In many of the stories you're about to read, you will see how the Peace Corps changed the lives of these Volunteers. As Mike Tidwell, a Volunteer in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, writes, "For two years, I lived among the Kalambayan people. I spoke their language and taught many of them how to raise fish. My goal was to increase protein consumption. But what I gave these people in the form of development advice, they returned tenfold in lessons on what it means to be human. There, at the center of the continent, they shared with me the ancient spirit of Africa's heart."

Peace Corps Volunteers have served in over 130 countries—in Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Pacific, the Middle East, Eastern and Central Europe, and the former Soviet Union. They're working on education, business development, technology, and the environment. They are working in health and agriculture. But as many schools and roads and wells as Volunteers have built, perhaps the most important thing they have built is hope. It's a very American sensibility—to think that with hard work you can improve your life. And it's a very Peace Corps sensibility to go out and actually help people do it.

With all the problems and challenges facing us today, one person's work may seem insignificant. But perhaps Robert Kennedy said it best: "Few will have the greatness to bend history itself, but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation."

What you have here, then, is history—with many more generations still to be written.

Sometimes the soundtrack of memories deep in my mind begins to play back the Sixties, with the echoes intercut by the incongruities of those years.

I hear the sounds of crowds cheering and cities burning; of laughing children and weeping widows; of nightrides, nightmares, and napalm; of falling barriers and new beginnings and animosities as old as Cain and Abel.

... But something survived those years that bullets could not stop. An idea survived, embodied in the Peace Corps Volunteers who are now 140,000 strong and still coming. This idea survived the flawed stewardship of those of us who were its first and amateur custodians. And it survives today. This is a testimony to the power of the idea.

Of the private man John Kennedy I knew little. I saw him rarely. Once, when the 1960 campaign was over and he was ending a post-election visit to the LBJ Ranch, he pulled me over into a corner to urge me to abandon my plans for graduate work at the University of Texas and to come to Washington as part of the New Frontier.

... So I remember John Kennedy not so much for what he was or what he wasn't but for what he empowered in me. We all edit history to give some form to the puzzle of our lives, and I cherish the memory of him for awakening me to a different story for myself. He placed my life in a larger narrative than I could ever have written. One test of a leader is knowing, as John Stuart Mill put it, that "the worth of the state, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it." Preserving civilization is the work not of some miracle-working, superhuman personality, but of each one of us. The best leaders don't expect us just to pay our taxes and abdicate, they sign us up for civic duty and insist we sharpen our skills as citizens.

... In his public voice John Kennedy spoke to my generation of service and sharing; he called us to careers of discovery through lives open to others.

... The theologian Karl Barth was five years old when he first heard the music of Mozart. It would delight him all his life. In 1955 Barth addressed a letter to the long-deceased Mozart, thanking him for all the pleasure of the music—all the pleasure and discovery. "With an ear open to your musical dialectic," wrote Barth, "one can be young and become old, can work and rest, be content and sad; in short, one can live."

The music of discovery. It was for us not a trumpet but a bell, sounding in countless individual hearts that one clear note that said: "You matter. You can

AT HOME IN THE WORLD

*By Bill Moyers,
Former Deputy Director,
Peace Corps*

signify. You can make a difference.” Romantic? Yes, there was romance to it. But we were not then so callous toward romance. The best Volunteers waged hand-to-hand combat with cynicism, and won. They kept winning, until today the Peace Corps has earned a reputation (to quote the *Washington Post*) as one of the world’s most effective grass-roots development organizations.

It was said that the urge to join the Peace Corps was passion alone. Not so. Men and women, whatever their age, looked their lives over and chose to affirm. To affirm is the thing. And so they have—in quiet, self-effacing perseverance.

They come—these men and women—from a vein in American life as idealistic as the Declaration and as gritty as the Constitution. I was reminded of this the other day when I interviewed the octogenarian dean of American historians, Henry Steele Commager. Reviewing the critical chapters of our story, he said that great things were done by the generation that won independence and then formed our government. Great things were accomplished by the generation that saved the union and rid it of slavery. Great things were won by the generation that defeated the fascists of Europe and warlords of Japan and then organized the peace that followed. And—said Dr. Commager—there are still great things to be won ... here at home and in the world.

So there are. But if we are to reckon with the growing concentration and privilege of power; if from the lonely retreats of our separate realities we are to create a new consensus of shared values; if we are to exorcise the lingering poison of racism, reduce the extremes of poverty and wealth, and overcome the ignorance of our heritage, history, and world; if we are to find a sense of life’s wholeness and the holiness of one another; then from this deep vein which gave rise to the Peace Corps must come our power and light.

The idea? Herman Melville got it right. We Americans are not a narrow tribe of men. We are not a nation so much as a world. And these Volunteers have shown us how to be at home in the world.

... America has a rendezvous with what my late friend Joseph Campbell called “a mighty multicultural future.” But we are not alone.... We have Peace Corps guides—140,000 Volunteers who have advanced the trip. They have been to where our country is going. Out there in the world, as John F. Kennedy might say, is truly the new frontier.

Heroes & Friends

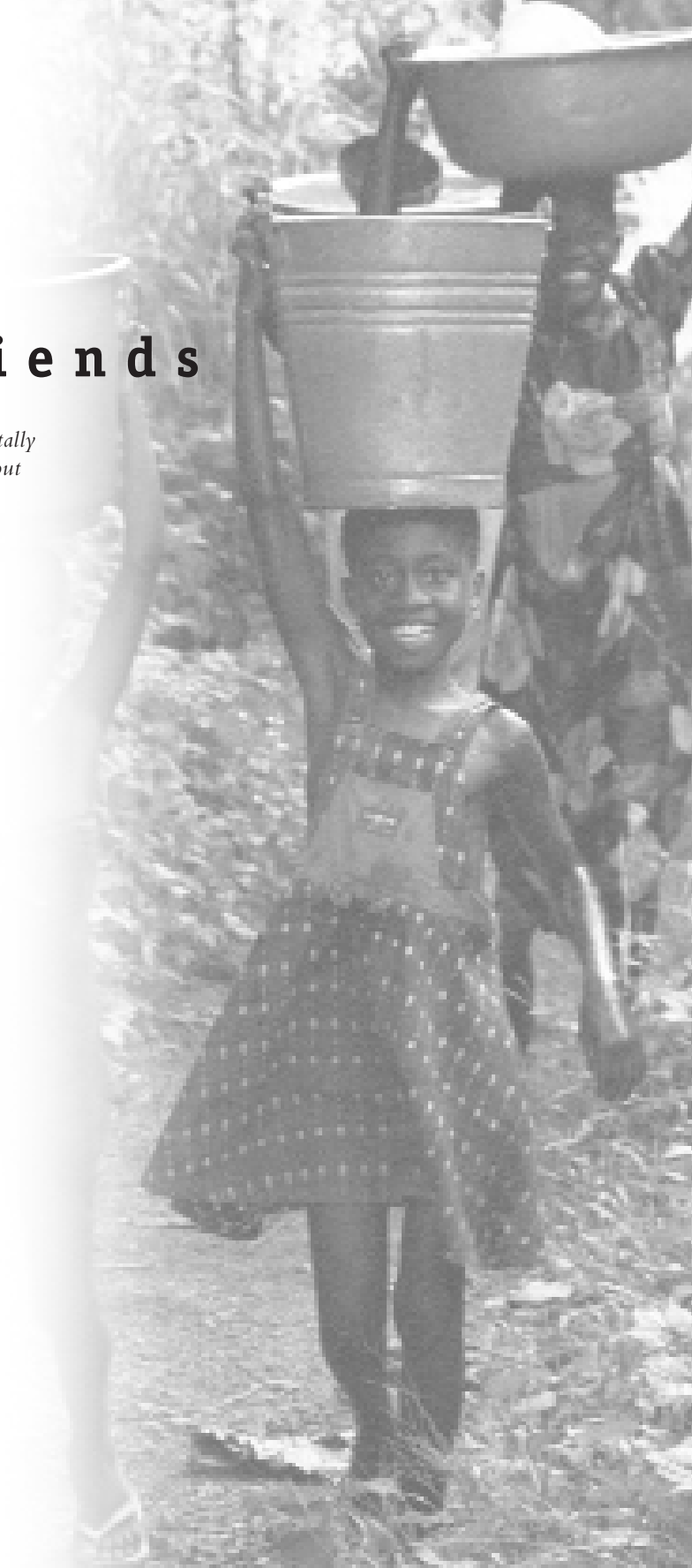
For a moment we just kept gawking, Ilunga and I, mentally circling each other, both of us deciding whether to burst out laughing or to run for safety. In the end, we did neither.

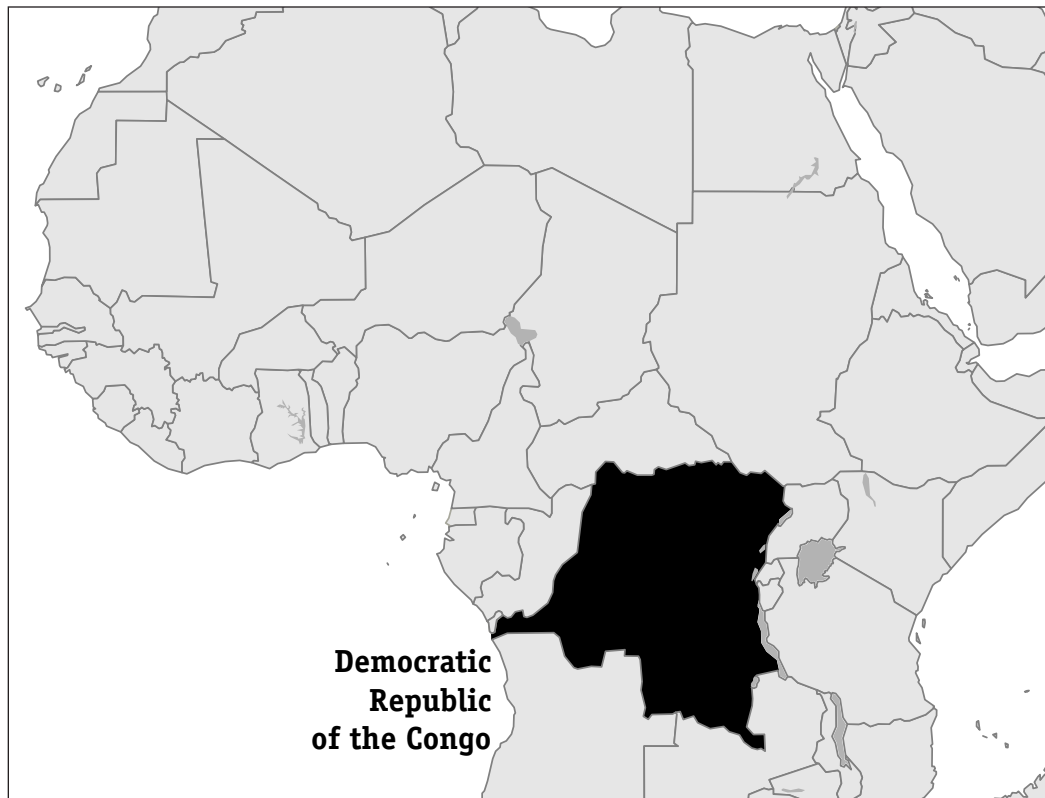
We became friends.

“My name is Ilunga,” he said, extending his hand.

“My name is Michel,” I said, shaking it.

From “I Had a Hero”





About the Setting

Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central Africa

“I Had a Hero” and “Ilunga’s Harvest” (see page 54) both take place in the remote chiefdom of Kalambayi in the heart of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, formerly Zaire (and before that, the Belgian Congo). Lying on the Equator, almost in the middle of the continent of Africa, Congo has experienced ethnic strife and civil war since the late 1990s, with forces from neighboring countries integrally involved. Congo includes the Congo River Basin, which covers an area of almost 400,000 square miles. The author, Mike Tidwell, served in Kalambayi as a Peace Corps agriculture extension agent from 1985 to 1987. The Peace Corps has had a strong partnership with the people of Africa since its inception. Volunteers currently work in more than 20 African countries in the areas of education, health, business, agriculture, and the environment. (Note: Mike Tidwell was known in French-speaking Zaire as “Michel,” French for Michael.)

I HAD A HERO

By *Mike Tidwell,*
Returned Peace Corps
Volunteer, Zaire
(now the Democratic
Republic of the Congo)

Equipped with a motorcycle from the United States Agency for International Development and administrative support from the Zairian Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, I set out to really show the people of Kalambayi something about fish culture. I was an extension agent for the government's *Projet Pisciculture Familiale*, or Family Fish Project.

Six days a week, I left my house around 7 a.m. and rode as much as 40 miles over unspeakably eroded dirt roads and down narrow paths. I visited villages and expounded the virtues of fish culture to anyone who would listen.... "No thanks. We've got enough work to do already." Around 6 o'clock, exhausted from equal parts of sun ... and foreign language, I'd return home.

It was after a few weeks of this ... that I met Ilunga Mbumba, chief of the village of Ntita Kalambayi. I was riding my Yamaha 125 Enduro through an uninhabited stretch of bush when he appeared from out of the 10-foot-tall grass along the trail, signaling for me to stop. Had he not waved, I'm pretty sure I would have stopped anyway. Ilunga had been out hunting antelope and he presented a sight worth inspecting. In one hand he carried a spear, in the other a crude machete. On his head was a kind of coonskin cap with a bushy tail hanging down in back. Around his neck was a string supporting a leather charm to ward off bad bush spirits. Two underfed mongrel dogs circled his bare feet, panting.

When I stopped and saw Ilunga for the first time, I saw a man living, it seemed to me, in another century. Inside the tall grass from which he had just stepped, the clock ran a thousand years slow, if it registered any time at all. Unable to help myself, I stared at him openly, taking him in from head to toe. He, meanwhile, stared back at me with the same wide-eyed incredulity. And no wonder. With my ghost-white skin and rumbling motorcycle, with my bulging safety goggles and orange riding gloves, with my bushy brown beard flowing out from under a banana-yellow crash helmet—with all this, I suppose I had a lot of nerve thinking of him as a museum piece.

For a moment we just kept gawking, Ilunga and I, mentally circling each other, both of us trying to decide whether to burst out laughing or to run for safety. In the end, we did neither. We became friends.

"My name is Ilunga," he said, extending his hand.

"My name is Michel," I said, shaking it.

We smiled at each other another moment before Ilunga got around to telling me he had heard my job was to teach people how to raise fish. It sounded like something worth trying, he said, and he wondered if I would come by his village to help him look for a pond site. I said I would and took down directions to his house.

... [The next day] into the bush we went, hunting for a pond site.

“The first thing we need,” I told Ilunga, “is water. Do you know a good spot where there’s a small stream or a spring?”

“Follow me,” he said.

Machetes in hand, we stomped and stumbled and hacked our way through the savanna grass for two hours before finding an acceptable site along a stream about a 20-minute walk from Ilunga’s village. Together, we paced off a pond and staked a water canal running between it and a point farther up the stream. Then, with a shovel I sold him on credit against his next corn harvest, Ilunga began a two-month journey through dark caverns of physical pain and overexertion. He began digging. No bulldozers here. The task of carving out a pond from the valley-bottom floor was left to the farmer himself.

There is no easy way to dig a fish pond with a shovel. You just have to do it. You have to place the tip to the ground, push the shovel in with your foot, pull up a load of dirt, and then throw the load 20 or 30 feet to the pond’s edge. Then you have to do it again—tip to the ground, push it in, pull it up, throw the dirt. After you do this about 50,000 times, you have an average-size 10-by-15-meter pond.

In many ways, the work is like a marathon. If you go too fast, you invite physical ruin. If you go too slow, you may never finish. You have to pace yourself. You have to dig a few hours each day, carefully spreading out the pain over time. But no matter what, you can’t take a break. You can’t stop. Not even for a week. To do so is to risk losing the rhythm of the fight and so become suddenly overwhelmed by the task at hand. Once the shovel enters the soil the first time, the work must continue every day—tip to the ground, push it in, pull it up, throw the dirt—again and again, meter by meter, 50,000 times, until the marathon is over.

But Ilunga, being a chief and all, wasn’t content with an average-size pond. He wanted one almost twice that size. He wanted a pond 15 by 20 meters. I told him he was crazy as we measured it out. I repeated the point with added conviction after watching him use his bare foot to drive the thin shovel blade into the ground.

“A pond this big is too much work for one person,” I said. “It’ll kill you.”

“See you next week,” he said.

“It’s too much, Ilunga.”

He started digging.

“Okay,” I said. “*Bonne chance.*”

I left him at the pond site and began heading toward the village, hearing every 10 seconds as I walked away the sound of a shovel-load of dirt hitting the ground after traveling 20 feet through the air.

For me, it was painful visiting Ilunga each week. This was the part of the fish culture process I had been dreading ever since arriving. I'd come to check on the pond's progress and find Ilunga grunting and shoveling and pitching dirt the same way I had left him the week before. I winced each time his foot pushed the shovel into the ground. I groaned inwardly at the sight of his clothes, ragged, full of yawning holes that revealed a glistening, overworked body. I calculated that to finish the pond he would have to move a total of 4,000 cubic feet of dirt. Guilt gnawed at me. This was no joke. He really was going to kill himself.

One week I couldn't stand it any longer. I found Ilunga at the pond site with his body covered with the usual mixture of dirt and sweat.

"Give me the shovel," I told him.

"Oh no, Michel," he said. "This work is too much for you."

"Give it to me," I repeated, a bit indignantly. "Take a rest."

He shrugged and handed me the shovel. I began digging. Okay, I thought, tip to the ground, push it in, pull it up, throw the dirt. I did it again. It wasn't nearly as hard as I had thought. Stroke after stroke, I kept going. About 20 minutes later, though, it got hot. I began wondering how, at 8:30 in the morning, the sun had suddenly reached noontime intensity. I paused to take off my shirt. Ilunga, thinking I was quitting, jumped up and reached for the shovel.

"No, no," I said. "I'm still digging. Sit down."

He shrugged again and said that since I was apparently serious about digging, he was going to go check on one of his fields. "Good idea," I said.

Shirtless, alone, I carried on. Tip to the ground, push it in, pull it up, throw the dirt. An hour passed. Tip to the ground, push it in, pull it up... throw... throw the... dammit, throw the dirt. My arms were signaling that they didn't like tossing dirt over such a great distance. It hurts, they said. Stop making us do it. But I couldn't stop. I had been digging a paltry hour and a half. I was determined to go on, to help Ilunga. How could I expect villagers to do work I was incapable of doing myself?

Sweat gathered on my forehead and streamed down my face as I contin-

ued, shoveling and shoveling. About 30 minutes passed and things started to get really ugly. My body buckled with fatigue. My back and shoulders joined my arms in screaming for an end to hostilities. I was no longer able to throw the dirt. Instead, I carried each load 20 feet and ignobly spooned it onto the dike. I was glad Ilunga wasn't around to see this. It was embarrassing. And God it was hot. The hottest day I could ever remember. Even occasional breezes rustling through the surrounding savanna grass didn't help. And then I looked at my hands. Both palms had become blistered. One was bleeding.

I took a short break and began digging again. The pain resumed, cracking out all over my body. Fifteen minutes later, my hands finally refused to grip the shovel. It fell to the ground. My back then refused to bend down to allow my arms the chance to refuse to pick it up. I was whipped. After just two hours of digging, I was incapable of doing any more. With a stiff, unnatural walk, I went over to the dike. Ilunga had just returned, and I collapsed next to him.

"I think I'll stop now," I managed, unable to hide my piteous state. "Take over if you want."

He did. He stood up, grabbed the shovel, and began working—smoothly, confidently, a man inured to hard work. Tip to the ground, push it in, pull it up, throw the dirt. Lying on my side, exhausted, I watched Ilunga. Then I looked hard at the spot where I had been digging. I had done nothing. The pond was essentially unchanged. I had moved perhaps 30 cubic feet of dirt. That meant 3,970 cubic feet for Ilunga.

After the brief digging experience, my weekly visits to the pond became even more painful and my awe of Ilunga grew. Day after day, four or five hours each day, he kept going. He kept digging his pond. He worked like a bull and never complained. Not once. Not when he hit a patch of gravel-size rocks that required a pickaxe and extra sweat. Not when, at the enormous pond's center, he had to throw each shovel-load twice to reach the dikes. And not when he became ill.

His hand was on fire one morning when I arrived and shook it.

"You're sick," I said.

"I know," he said and resumed digging.

"Then quit working and get some rest."

"I can't," came the reply. "I've got to finish this pond."

Several weeks later, Ilunga drove his shovel into the earth and threw its

load one last time. I never thought it would happen, but there it was: Ilunga's pond, huge, 15 by 20 meters, and completely finished. We hollowed out a bamboo inlet pipe and positioned it in the upper dike so canal water could enter the pond. Three days later, the pond was gloriously full of water. Using my motorcycle and two 10-liter carrying *bidons*, I transported stocking fish from another project post 20 miles to the south. When the last of the 300 tilapia fingerlings had entered the new pond, I turned to Ilunga and shook his hand over and over again. We ran around the banks hooting and hollering, laughing like children, watching the fish and marveling at what a wonderful thing a pond was. Where before there had been nothing, just grass and scrub trees, had come watery life.

To celebrate, I had brought a bottle of *tshitshampa*, the local home-brew, and Ilunga and I began pouring each other shots and slapping each other on the back and talking entirely too loud for two men sitting alone on a pond bank in the middle of the African bush. A warm glow spread from our stomachs to our limbs and soon, strongly our heads. Ilunga expressed his dream of digging three, no six, no 12 more fishponds, and I concluded that there was no biological reason why, if fed properly, tilapia couldn't grow to be the size of Land Rovers. At one point, we decided to assign names to all of Ilunga's fish. Straight-faced, signaling each other to be quiet, we crouched next to the water and began naming the first few fish that swam by. After four fish, though, we lost track of which fish had which names. This struck us as absolutely hilarious for some reason, and we fell on our backs and stamped our feet and laughed so hard we couldn't stand it.

Oh, sweet joy, the pond was finished. Ilunga had done it. He had taken my instructions and accomplished a considerable thing. And on that day when we finally stocked the pond, I knew that no man would ever command more respect from me than one who, to better feed his children, moves 4,000 cubic feet of dirt with a shovel.

I had a hero.

'I HAD A HERO' GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Bidons: Containers

Bonne chance: French for "Good luck"

Fingerlings: Young fish

Fish culture: Raising of fish

Incredulity: Disbelief

Indignantly: Angrily

Inured to: Accustomed to

Kalambayi: A chiefdom in rural Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo)

Machete: A large knife used for cutting brush

Paltry: Small, measly, insignificant

Projet Pisciculture Familiale: The French name of the fish-raising project in Zaire. Due to earlier colonization by France, many people in the country speak French.

Stocking fish: A few small fish used for building a fish population

Tilapia: A kind of fish in Africa



About the Setting

Guatemala, Central America

“Magic’ Pablo” takes place in the town of Santa Cruz Verapaz, in the Central American republic of Guatemala. The most populous of the Central American republics, Guatemala has a population of over 12 million people living in an area about the size of Tennessee. The author, Mark Brazaitis, was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Santa Cruz Verapaz from 1991 to 1993, serving as a teacher and an agricultural trainer. The Peace Corps program in Guatemala, which began in 1963, is one of the Peace Corps’ oldest. Since 1963, close to 4,000 Volunteers have served in Guatemala, focusing their efforts on aiding rural communities in the areas of agriculture, the environment, health, and business development.

'MAGIC' PABLO

By Mark Brazaitis,
Returned Peace Corps
Volunteer, Guatemala

Pablo and I liked to play “Let’s imagine.” We’d be walking down the street, a basketball cradled under one of our arms. Clouds would be gathering in the east, as they tended to do in early evening. A light rain—*chipi-chipi* is what everyone in town called it—might even be falling.

“Let’s imagine,” Pablo would say, “that Michael Jordan is walking with us.” He would smile. “What would these people say?” he would ask, pointing to the women in dark blue *cortes* and white *húipiles*, the native dress in this town in the northern mountains of Guatemala. “What would they do?”

“They’d be amazed,” I’d say. “They wouldn’t know what to do.”

Pablo would agree. “They’d probably run. But we’d just keep walking down the street, the three of us, to the basketball court.”

Then Pablo would ask, “And how would we divide the teams?”

“Michael Jordan versus the two of us.”

Pablo would consider this. “No,” he’d say, “it’d be you and Michael Jordan versus me.”

Pablo was 16 when I met him, another indistinguishable face in my English class of 45 students.

I was 25 when I arrived as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Santa Cruz Verapaz, a town of 4,000 people. I was prepared to be alone during my entire two-year service. I figured this was the way my life was supposed to be: silent sacrifice. I wasn’t, at any rate, expecting to make a friend my first night in town.

But the night after my first English class, Pablo knocked on my door. I invited him in, and he entered, looking around shyly. On a table in my dining room, he saw a copy of *Sports Illustrated* that my stepfather had sent from home. He pointed to the cover photo.

“Robert Parish,” he said. “The Chief.”

Pablo, it turned out, knew as much about basketball and the NBA as I did, and I was a former sportswriter.

I don’t know where he got his information. *El Grafico*, the only newspaper from the capital sold daily in our town, rarely had stories about American basketball. A Mexican TV station that reached Santa Cruz showed NBA games on Saturday mornings, but the town’s electricity was so unpredictable—occasionally it would be off for three or four days in a row—that I wondered how many of these games he could have seen. Pablo just seemed to know, and he was familiar not just with Robert Parish and other All-Stars; he could talk about obscure players like Chris Dudley and Jerome Kersey as if he

were an NBA beat reporter.

Pablo would come to my house at night and we would draft imaginary lineups. Pablo liked non-American players. Hakeem Olajuwon was his favorite. He liked Mark Aguirre because he'd heard that Aguirre's father was born in Mexico. Dikembe Mutombo. Manute Bol. Drazen Petrovic. Selecting our imaginary teams, he'd always draft these players first.

I didn't get it. Why would he pick Vlade Divac instead of Charles Barkley? But the longer I lived in Guatemala, the better I understood.

The American presence in Guatemala is about as subtle as a Shaquille O'Neal slam-dunk. Pepsi covers entire storefronts with its logo. In Santa Cruz, the town basketball court is painted with a Coca-Cola motif, right down to the backboards. In remote villages, children wear "Ninja Turtles" T-shirts.

We had long arguments about who was the best player in the NBA. Hakeem Olajuwon versus Michael Jordan. Hakeem versus Patrick Ewing. Hakeem versus Magic Johnson.

Pablo stuck by his man.

Pablo and I played basketball on the court next to the cow pasture. Pablo was taller than Muggsy Bogues but shorter than Spud Webb, both of whom played in the NBA. When we first began playing, I could move him around with my body, backing him close to the basket. If I missed, I was tall enough to get the rebound. In games to 21, I would beat him by nine, 11, 13 points.

Pablo was the first to tell me about Magic Johnson. He came over to my house one night, late.

"What is it?" I asked.

His head was bowed.

"What is it?"

He looked up. He wasn't crying, but he looked like he might need to. He said, "Magic has the AIDS virus."

We mourned together. Feeling sentimental, Pablo admitted, "Magic might be better than Hakeem."

Pablo's dream was to dunk a basketball. We calculated how many feet he would need to jump—about four.

Pablo drew up a training plan. He would jump rope two hours a day to build his leg strength. Every other day, Pablo would ask his younger brother to crouch, and he would leap over him, back and forth, for half an hour.

Two weeks later, Pablo came to my house and asked me to set up a hur-

dle in my courtyard. I stacked two chairs on top of each other, then another two chairs a few feet away. I placed a broom across the top chairs and measured: The broom was four feet off the ground.

“I’m going to jump it,” Pablo said.

“You sure?” I asked.

“Yes, I’m sure.”

We stood there, gazing at the broom.

“You sure?” I asked again.

“I’m sure.”

More gazing.

Then he backed up, took a few quick steps, and jumped. His knees shot into his chest. He leapt over the broom like a frog.

“You did it!” I yelled.

“I can dunk now,” he said, grinning.

The next morning, we went to the basketball court. Pablo dribbled from half court and leapt. The ball clanked off the rim. He tried it again. Same result.

“I don’t understand,” he said.

I didn’t have the heart to admit I’d misled him: to dunk, he’d have to jump four feet without bending his knees.

As a player, though, Pablo was getting better. He couldn’t dunk, but he’d learned to use his quickness to drive by me and score. He had grown stronger. I could not back into him as easily.

Also, he had developed a jump shot.

“Let’s imagine,” Pablo would say, “that David Robinson came to visit us.”

“All right,” I’d say.

“Where would he stay?”

“I don’t know. At a hotel, probably.”

“No,” Pablo would say, “he’d stay at your house. You’d let him sleep in your bed.”

“Yeah, that would be better.”

“And you’d make him dinner.”

“Sure.”

“And at night,” Pablo would say, “we’d sit around and talk about basketball.”

Pablo was not my best student. He was more interested in basketball than books. But he knew how to make his teacher laugh.

When he missed a quiz, I allowed him to make it up by writing five sentences—any five sentences of his choice—in English.

He wrote:

1. Charles Barkley sang a song in my house.
2. I beat Patrick Ewing in slam-dunk.
3. I beat David Robinson in block.
4. Hakeem Olajuwon is my brother.
5. Magic and Pablo are the best friends of Mark.

Despite his interest in basketball, Pablo’s best sport was soccer. He played for San Pedro Carcha, a nearby town. Pablo was known as a good play-maker. Quick dribbler. Good passer. Soccer’s equivalent of a point guard, not a power forward.

I’d seen several of Pablo’s games and had watched him make gorgeous passes, beautiful sky-touching passes that his teammates batted into the net for goals.

My last week in Guatemala as a Peace Corps Volunteer, I attended a game Pablo’s team played against San Cristobal, a town nine kilometers west of Santa Cruz. The game was tied 1-1 going into the final minutes. Pablo’s team had a corner kick. The crowd, about a thousand strong, was silent.

The ball soared into the air. A mass of players, including Pablo, gathered to receive it. Pablo jumped, his body shooting up like a rocket off a launcher. His timing was perfect. His head met the ball and the ball flew past the goalie.

Pablo’s teammates paraded him around the field on their shoulders. People from the crowd, per custom, handed him money.

When I talked to him later, I didn’t need to point out why he’d been able to jump that high. He said it himself: “It’s basketball. I learned that from basketball. From trying to dunk.”

We played our last game the day before I left Guatemala. We played in the evening, as a light rain—a *chipi-chipi*—fell.

He had learned to play defense. I tried to back him toward the basket, but he held his ground. I was forced to use my unreliable jump shot. I could no longer get every rebound because he'd learned to block out. And, of course, he could jump now.

I got lucky and hit two straight jumpers to pull ahead by four. But he countered with a reverse layup. He scored again on a long jump shot, a shot he never would have made when we first played.

The rain fell harder now. Puddles were beginning to form on the court. Pablo and I were both panting. It was getting dark; we could hardly see the basket.

"Let's quit," I said. "Let's leave it like this."

"If you want," he said.

"Yeah, let's leave it like this. A tie."

"All right," he said. "A tie. Good. Let's leave it."

We hugged each other.

"Let's imagine," Pablo said, as we walked to my house for the last time, "that you and I played against Michael Jordan. Who would win?"

"Jordan," I said.

"No," Pablo said. "We would. Believe me, we would."



P e r s p e c t i v e s

*“Gud marn-ning, Madame,” Musa said, the only English he knew, phrasing the words in a lilt-
ing tone that he thought sounded friendly. He alternately galloped and tiptoed as he spoke, try-
ing to maintain a strategic position at her side. The woman ignored his greeting, gave him a look
of impatience, and made her way through the crowd, heading into the center of the market.*

*He watched her go. She was tall and slender as a young girl, with hair yellow and straight
as millet stalks. She wore pants the same as her husband’s—washed-out blue and tight as skin.
The shirt she wore was no finer than those he’d seen on boys coming back from the capital city.
How strange it seemed. These people would spend on one bottle of beer what a man in his vil-
lage couldn’t earn in a day’s work, yet they spent no money on the clothes they wore, and the
women dressed as plain as the men. He glanced down at her shoes. With sudden excitement he
almost turned to shout at one of his friends. She was U.S.A.! The white cloth shoes she wore
had a bright blue symbol on both sides, shaped like the blade of a butcher’s knife, curved back
at the end. Only Americans wore those shoes.*

From “On Sunday There Might Be Americans”



About the Setting

Guinea-Bissau, West Africa

“Cross-Cultural Dialogue” is set in Guinea-Bissau, a small country of 1.2 million inhabitants, on the West African Atlantic coast. Guinea-Bissau is one of the poorest countries in the world, with approximately 88 percent of the population living on less than the equivalent of one U.S. dollar a day. It is here that the author of this story, Roz Wollmering, served as a Peace Corps Volunteer teaching English. The Peace Corps has long been active in Guinea-Bissau, providing elementary and secondary students with access to quality education, teaming with local health committees to identify priority health needs, educating groups and schools about preventive health care practices, including HIV/AIDS prevention, and increasing awareness about the importance of environmental preservation.

CROSS-CULTURAL DIALOGUE

*By Roz Wollmering,
Returned Peace Corps
Volunteer, Guinea-Bissau*

I entered the school doors brimming with ideas, innovative teaching methods, and the desire to have an effect. Today was the first day of school in Guinea-Bissau, the tiny West African country where I had been assigned as an English teacher with the Peace Corps. After completing an exhausting and demanding 12 weeks of training in language as well as cross-cultural and technical skills, I felt more than adequately prepared for the challenge of teaching in an under-resourced school system designed on a colonial model.

Even as I entered the pastel pink building, I noticed a strange absence of noise, considering it was the first day of school. A few isolated students wearing white school jackets rambled about in the dimly lit hallway. As I climbed the stairway to the administrative office, I heard a distant mango drop to the ground with a thud and a chorus of children's voices break out in glee. Hoping to catch a glimpse of the fastest one carrying off the ripe prize being pursued by the others, I looked out into the schoolyard and saw instead piles of old desk fragments, broken bricks, and tree branches.

They must be cleaning the school grounds, I thought to myself. When I entered the office, the principal and his assistant were looking at a class schedule posted on the wall and discussing the large number of teachers that still needed to be hired by the Ministry. After greeting me warmly by inquiring about my health, my family back in America, and my life in general, they informed me that my teaching load had been increased by eight hours since the previous week. "No problem," I joyfully responded, "I love to teach."

The classroom where I was to teach was located a short walking distance behind the main building. Three lines of classrooms were arranged in rows much like military barracks. Since today was the first day of classes, I hopped on my bicycle and coasted right up to the door of classroom number 19—my classroom. "Always wiser to be punctual and prepared than be tardy and unequipped," I told myself. Two students were sitting inside the classroom playing cards when I entered. I looked at the official enrollment number of 47 and asked earnestly, "Where are the other 45 students?" The cardplayers faltered a bit and then mumbled, "They'll come, by and by." "Well, let's begin without them," I suggested, with a disapproving stare at the cards.

They shrugged their shoulders and offered instead to go and find the students. It certainly didn't seem reasonable to me to teach two students and then have to teach the same material again when the others showed up later. Be flexible, I reminded myself, and so I agreed.

One week later, there were 26 students outside my classroom still waiting for the rest of their classmates to appear, by and by. I noticed that not only were students absent, but teachers as well. Meanwhile, the principal and his assistant were still discussing the schedule on the wall, moving multicolored pins, and deliberating how best to resolve the shortage of teachers. That morning I had stopped by the administrative office again just to make sure that I had understood correctly the radio announcement made by the minister of education the previous evening. I thought that he had announced that classes were in session and was quite relieved when the principal verified my assessment. He assured me that I had understood the minister's announcement to the word and then asked me to teach an additional two hours a week. Lacking the experience to rebut his statement, "When there's a lack of teachers, we all need to pitch in a few extra hours," I nodded my head in consent. Considering that I wasn't actually teaching any students at the time, two extra hours didn't seem to be much of a burden, and I left, feeling only the slightest premonition that I might regret it later.

By the end of week three, I had managed to convince, cajole, and beg my students to enter the classroom. What other teachers did was their decision, I figured, but as for me, I was itching to do something other than wait on shore like a seafarer's wife. Once the students had entered, I discovered to my amazement that I couldn't get them to quiet down. Heedless of my requests to pay attention, they continued to socialize. Daisy painted her nails and chatted with Aminata about the new discotheque called Temptation that had just opened across from the mosque. Bebe took Nanda's notebook and wouldn't return it. Fatu gave me the peace sign and went outside to urinate.

A few others followed. Students wandered in late with irrelevant excuses like "It's hot" or "I'm tired." Nelson and Marcelino held competitive jive talks while their classmates gathered around encouraging first one and then the other. Other students, whose teachers were absent, hung around the open windows, throwing crumpled-up bits of paper to their friends. Others simply came to stare at me, a white woman who rode a bicycle to school. They shoved up against the outside wall, clambered over each other's backs, and stuck their heads in for a peek, yelling, "White woman, white woman, there she is!" The next day, still more "window students" appeared to torment me.

Such behavior continued daily and eventually I began to yell at them—"Get away from the windows!"—and resorted to pushing them out of viewing range. After one month at my new post, I reigned over 30 hours a week of complete disorder in a pseudo-classroom kingdom. This is madness, I thought.

For the next month, I devoted the first 20 minutes of class solely to establishing order and quiet. I was determined. I did this with gentle coaxes at first, but gradually evolved to using threats (“I’ll call the school disciplinarian”) and offering sweet enticement (“If you’re good, I’ll let you out early”). Late students were not allowed to enter, regardless of their excuses. It seemed the only way to control the chaos. Once I had my students’ attention, I made them copy page after page of notes from the blackboard into their notebooks. I planned to inundate their minds with grammar rules and vocabulary lists so they wouldn’t have time to talk. Other times, I made them repeat sentences in unison as if they were Berlitz parrots. Audio-lingual theorists suggest that language is acquired through repetition of recurring patterns, a proposition effectively demonstrated when I overheard my students mimicking me: “Be quiet! Go sit down!”

When the drudgery of memorization and repetition bored even me to death, I resorted to playing Bingo, Simon Says, or Do the Hokey-Pokey. I went to elaborate lengths to make nifty prizes for positive reinforcement and spent numerous hours designing creative educational posters to hang on the walls. For a time, I concentrated on visual stimulation and drama to reinforce right-brain learning, but the posters disappeared overnight and the drama idea erupted one day during a production of a local folk tale. I rather enjoyed their drama productions myself, and I figured they were reviewing English grammar and vocabulary by playing the games, but deep inside arose a persistent, nagging voice: “Surely, you can do more than baby-sit.”

Gradually, as my disciplinary measures evolved to resemble boot camp philosophy, my classes began to develop a catatonic personality. Somber students stared back at me or out into space.

Apathy replaced the boisterous noise I had become accustomed to combating. They refused to open their notebooks until I had repeated the request three times. Orders and instructions mollified them, sure enough, but now they didn’t seem to have opinions, concerns, or even interests. Some simply put their heads down and slept. Sit and listen they did, but participate and discuss and collaborate they didn’t. I wrote in letters to my friends back home that paper plates had more personality than these kids. Their passive resistance soon infuriated me, and I yelled in frustration at them, “I am here to help you. Don’t you understand that?” They stared at me in a dazed disbelief. “What do you want?” I implored them with open hands: “Do you want me to entertain you? To treat you like military recruits? To punish you?” They shrugged their shoulders and sighed, “Teacher, we are pitiful. That’s life.” “Go,” I told them. “Go home. Get out.” They refused, of course.

Against my usually discerning judgment, I finally called in the school disciplinarian. The moment he arrived, every single student in the classroom jumped up on tiptoes to attention. They greeted him in perfect unison with a resounding “Good morning, Mr. Disciplinarian.” When he ordered them to sit down, an immaculate silence spread throughout the classroom like a divine fog. I was astounded. They looked so serene and innocent as they waited attentively for his words. Their pristine, woeful eyes and composure made them appear as mere harmless babes, and I began to imagine that they would convince him of their purity and that I was the evil abuser. I began to wonder, in fact, if this wasn’t perhaps partially true.

The disciplinarian picked out several students who were not wearing school jackets. In addition, he selected students who were wearing jackets, but had not buttoned the top button. He accused and convicted them of intent to belittle their American teacher and expelled them for two weeks, dismissing them with a disparaging comment. He then read a list of seven students’ names. Since these students had registered for classes but had not yet paid their school fees, he expelled them for the year, adding yet another insult as they crept out of the classroom. He then turned to me and said, “If any one of these students ever gives you a problem, even the smallest problem, you tell me and I will expel the entire class for the entire year. Not one of them will pass, and they will all have to repeat the year next year.” As I struggled to come up with an appropriate response to his comment, he turned back to the students, held up one finger, and challenged them, “Just one of you try it. Just one and I’ll whip your ass.” He left, but not before making an attempt to reassure me with a vindictive smile. I stood in horrified shock and embarrassment. I had just lost 13 students. The students said nothing. They stared at me and waited to see what I would do next. I felt angry and stupid and offered a feeble apology. I fumed all the way home.

That night I dreaded ever going back into the classroom again. I contemplated terminating my Peace Corps service and going home. I was sure I could find a justifiable excuse to allow me a graceful exit. It was now the third month of teaching and quarterly grades were due in 10 days. All I had managed to teach were two review units. Two review units! My God, I realized looking at their grades. Most of these students couldn’t even meet the standards of the previous year’s curriculum! How did they manage to pass? I was tempted to flunk them all myself this time around, but what would that accomplish? I looked in dismay at the stack of 25 lesson plans I had diligently prepared during the late night hours of the past two months and realized that I would never implement them.

So I switched strategies. That night I drew up a “No More” list. No more colorful visual aids to catch their attention. No more fancy vocabulary and

grammar handouts for them to grab eagerly. No more games and no more prizes. No more school disciplinarian to resolve the ongoing state of classroom crisis, either. My next unit began with the following dialogue.

Teacher: I am angry. I cannot teach because you do not respect me.

Students: No, no, Teacher. Please, Teacher, please.

Teacher: I don't want to teach you. I'm leaving.

Students: No, Teacher, no. Please, Teacher. You see, you don't understand our situation.

Teacher: Well, tell me, just what is your "situation"?

This time the dialogue was theirs to complete and resolve.

Her Students' Perspective

It was Tino and Mando who came and told us that a skinny, sickly white woman had jumped off a bicycle, run into our classroom, and tried to teach them English that morning. Tino and Mando weren't even in our class: They were just sitting there waiting to use the soccer field when she rushed in like the rains. They weren't sure what to say because she looked so strange. Her hair was all falling down, and she wore a dress that looked like an old faded bed covering that one might have bought from a Mauritanian vendor in the used-clothing market. We all walked over to Nito's house and found a few more of our classmates sitting out back drinking frothy tea. We decided, even though school hadn't really started yet, that we'd go the next day to see what this new American teacher looked like. Tino and Mando assured us that she was as ugly as a newly hatched, greedy-eyed vulture.

We knew that practically no one would be at school yet. Most students were still on the farms finishing the harvest, and others were still trying to register and pay their fees. The Ministry had changed the admission rules again. All registrations completed at the end of the last year were now declared invalid, and so we had to wait in line, get new photographs, show our papers, and pay fees all over again—either that, or pay some official to put our names on the list, which actually was much easier than completing the registration process. We listened to the radio broadcasts by the minister at night reminding parents of school and smiled. Everybody knew he sent his children, for good reasons, to the private, elite Portuguese School. Teachers at the public schools never showed up until the third week. Didn't she know that?

As it turned out, we agreed to enter the classroom just when everyone else did. We always say: "Cross the river in a crowd and the crocodile won't eat you." From that first day, she never demanded our respect. She didn't seem

to care if we wore our school jackets or not. She didn't write the teaching summary on the board like our other teachers, and she was always in the classroom before the bell rang. That meant we could never stand up and honor her entrance. She should have known not to enter until after the bell rang. And she never took roll call first, as she should have, and so we continued chatting and doing our homework. Of course, by this time, other students had heard about our white woman teacher and were coming by to look at her and watch our class. We couldn't resist joining in the fun. At times, we believed she was serious, for example when she told the students outside class to leave. But where were they supposed to go?

The area in front of her classroom was the designated student recreation area. Instead of ignoring them and us, she berated them with gestures and scolded us in Portuguese. Her Portuguese wasn't bad, but it sounded so amusing when she said "spoiled brats," you just had to laugh. We laughed even harder every time she said "Peace Corps" because in our Kriolu language "Peace Corps" sounds like "body of fish." We called her the "fish-body teacher" after that.

Classes were interesting because they were so confusing. She kept switching her methods, and we were never sure what to expect next. For a while she insisted that the mind equips itself and a teacher must not interfere in the process. She called it "The Silent Way." After "The Silent Way" came "Total Physical Response." We gave actions to everything and pretended to be desks, pencils, and other classroom articles. We contorted our bodies into their defining characteristics and played "What am I?" Then we role-played imaginary dialogues between, for example, two books fighting to get into a book bag at the same time. One day she taught us the song "In the Jungle." We loved that song and still sing it after school when we walk home. No, you couldn't really call her a consistent person, but we all have our little ways. Even so, "a cracked calabash can still be mended." Obviously, she cared about us because she worked so hard to prepare for class.

Most of our teachers were so busy at home or working a second or third job, they often missed class, and when they did show up, they never prepared anything. It's true that we've already learned more English this quarter than we learned all last year.

We always wanted to do more activities and play new games, but she seemed to think we needed to write. Because we didn't have books, she kept demanding that we copy information down on paper. But Guineans are oral people. We learn by talking; we make discoveries by sharing our experiences; and we help others by listening and contributing to conversations. Our his-

tory is a collective memory, and we are continually passing our knowledge on to others in our speech. She wanted us to raise our hands, one by one, and then talk individually. That to us seemed artificial and disruptive to the storytelling flow of human conversation. Only wolves howl individually.

She confused us even more by saying pointless things with vigor—“Wake up!” “Discover yourselves!”—or asking questions that had no obvious answers: “Why are you here?” or “What are you going to do?” Then she’d wait with such an intent expression on her face that we’d say almost anything to try to please her. We always enjoyed her facial expressions because they foretold what was soon to follow in speech—anger, joy, disappointment, praise, or contentment. She really should have learned by then how to hide and disguise her reactions in order to suit her goals more effectively, but she didn’t seem to care. In some ways, she was just like a child.

We just didn’t understand why it was our thinking that needed to change, and never hers. She wore a “bad eye” charm around her neck, so we thought she believed in superstition, but when we asked her, she said she wore it not because she believed in superstition but to show respect and affirmation for our culture. We asked her if that was why foreigners always wanted to buy our ritual masks and initiation staffs, but she didn’t respond. She told us we didn’t need World Bank handouts and International Monetary Fund debts. What we needed, she said, was to learn how to grow fish. Was she crazy? We need computers, not fish! Balanta women always know where to find fish. “Teacher,” we told her, “you will come and go, but we stay here.” How could she understand our culture? She had only seen the rains fall once.

After a while, the novelty wore off, and we got tired of even a white woman’s ways. It’s hard—waking up at daybreak, doing morning chores, and then going to school for five hours without eating breakfast. Her class was during the last hour and we were as hungry as feral street cats by that time. Some of us lived far from school, and if our stepuncle or older cousin-brother told us to go to the market before school, we had no choice. We were forced to run to her class with only a bellyful of worms because we knew she wouldn’t listen to our misfortunes even if we arrived two minutes late. It’s true! In America, time is money, but here we don’t respect time. Time is just now, nothing more.

It wasn’t only that we had responsibilities at home that came before school—sometimes we were sick. If we had malaria, we’d put our heads down and sleep. And if we had “runny belly,” we’d just run out of class when the cramping started. The dry season was so hot we faded away like morning songbirds. One day she yelled at us. We admit, we weren’t cooperating, but

'CROSS-CULTURAL DIALOGUE'
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Innovative: New; original; inventive

Premonition: Hunch; feeling; suspicion

Mosque: Temple; a building used for public worship by Muslims

Catatonic: Appearing to be in a daze or "out of it"

Mollify: Calm down; appease

Apathy: Indifference; lack of interest; boredom

Pristine: Perfect; like new

Woeful: Unhappy; sorrowful

Disparaging: Disapproving; reproachful

Vindictive: Nasty; unkind

Calabash: A round gourd, the hard shell of which is often used as a utensil

Impervious: Totally resistant; impenetrable

Fatalistic: A defeatist attitude assuming that nothing can be done to improve the status quo

Pedagogy: The art of teaching

people are like that. We forgive each other and just go on. "That's life," we'd tell her. "A log as long as it stays in the water will never become a crocodile." Many things we just accepted as natural and impervious to change, but she considered such an attitude "fatalistic."

Finally, she called the school disciplinarian on us. She should have done that much earlier, in our opinion. We played our roles by allowing him to throw out a few students, because we all knew they'd be back as soon as he got some cashew wine money from them. Anyway, that's the right of elders in our culture, and we're taught in the bush school to abide by the established hierarchical roles. We didn't understand why she apologized after he left, and we couldn't believe it when she undermined his authority by apologizing for his "poisonous pedagogy," as she called it. Like a Guinean woman, she certainly had courage.

Today she did something different again. She came in and wrote a dialogue on the board. She asked questions about the dialogue that made us disagree. We had a lively discussion in English and then got into our groups and began designing some resolutions for the problem presented in the dialogue. We always say, "When the ants unite their mouths, they can carry an elephant."

We know she'll stay, too. We saw it in her eyes.



About the Setting

Niger, West Africa

The story “On Sunday There Might Be Americans” is set in remote villages in Niger, West Africa. A country of 10 million people, many of them members of nomadic tribes, Niger is located in sub-Saharan Africa south of Algeria and Libya and east of Mali. The Sahara extends into Niger’s northern regions. Close to the Equator, Niger has extremely high daytime temperatures, with little rainfall in many regions. Droughts are the main threat to food production, and malnutrition is a persistent health problem. According to Peace Corps data, roughly 25 percent of children under the age of two are malnourished, resulting in one of the world’s highest infant mortality rates. Since 1962, over 2,600 Peace Corps Volunteers have served in Niger, the majority working in rural communities, where 80 percent of Niger’s population lives. Their main goal is to provide sufficient nutrition for all families. (Niger is pronounced either NY-ger or nee-ZHAIR.)

ON SUNDAY THERE MIGHT BE AMERICANS

*By Leslie Simmonds Ekstrom,
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Musa sat up on his mat and he knew he was done with sleep. He strained to see a sign of light beyond the door of his mother's hut. The muscles in his legs were jumping already and he had to stand. He walked to the door and pressed his eye against the crack in the straw. There above the rim of the compound wall he could see a sliver of blue. It was Sunday morning.

Each night the family began their sleep outside, the suffocating heat of day lingering long past sunset. But in the chill Sahara dawn, one by one, they dragged their mats back inside the thick mud walls of the huts, where Musa shivered now though he'd wrapped himself in his blanket. He pulled back one side of the door and looked into the compound. Only his uncle, Old Baba, still lay asleep in the middle of the compound, stretched out like a crane skirting the edge of the river, his arms spread like wings and his cracked, spindly toes almost pointed. Old Baba slept soundly whenever he closed his eyes, warmed by the dreams of the cities he'd seen when there had been work on the other side of the desert.

Musa turned back to look at his mother. She lay on her mat with his baby sister, Fatouma, folded into the curve of her body. He knew his mother's dreams. Sometimes when she first awoke she called him by another name. Then she would tell him a story about one of his brothers or sisters who'd died of spots, a cough, or a mysterious fever the village doctor couldn't cure. He remembered some of their faces.

He stepped out of the hut, pretending not to notice the other wives of the compound emerging from the doors of their huts, kneeling to light fires where they would cook the morning meal. One or two had already gone to the center of the compound to pound millet and, soon after, the thunk of their heavy wood pestles joined in a rhythm that reverberated through the village. The sound of the pestles made him hungry for porridge, but today he could leave without food—it was market day. The cars would drive up from the capital city, full of Europeans looking for things to buy. There might be one who would let him follow in the market and be the go-between when they wanted to bargain with a merchant for something to buy. Maybe this would be an American. Americans would pay 10 or 20 times what anything was worth, and then they'd give you a tip so foolish and large that you could buy food and a pair of sandals on the same day.

Musa slipped out through the forecourt, hoping the other wives wouldn't see him and gossip that his mother never fed him. He stood for a moment in the narrow door of the entrance hut, listening for the sound of his name; but he had not been noticed. He pulled the blanket up over his head and walked

**The author later lived in Niger.
See page 118 for her background.*

out into the village, staying close to the wall, following it around to the rear where he could face the eastern sky. The sky changed slowly, veiled by a dull brown haze. Rain had fallen only three times this year and the slightest wind stirred the arid earth into the sky, where it stayed.

Musa's compound was at the back of the village. From where he stood against the wall, he could watch people on their way to the market, treading the wide, worn path that ran through the uncleared bush. They moved almost silently in the early light. He heard the bells of a train of camels before they emerged out of the haze, bringing in salt from the desert. The gray-white slabs hung in rope slings on either side of the camels' humps, bobbing heavily with each long, loose stride. The drivers, seated high above their cargo, swayed forward and back, forward and back. As they came nearer, Musa could hear the clucks of the drivers urging the beasts on and the deep, irritable growl the animals gave in reply. The men might have been half asleep, but they kept their feet pressed against the base of the camels' woolly necks, pushing hard into their flesh to keep them moving forward when they smelled the river and strained to turn toward it.

The women who scurried along the path carried large calabash bowls on their heads and babies tied against their backs. Musa knew the bowls would be laden with roasted groundnuts, dried okra, guinea corn, or locust bean cakes. His mouth watered, although even if he had the money, he wouldn't stop them now. They had to hurry. From his village it was only three more kilometers to town, and some of these women might have left their villages two hours before dawn, to arrive early at the market grounds, hoping to get a good place where there would be shade at midday. The Europeans could arrive at any time of day, taking shelter from the dust and heat in the machine-cooled rooms of the hotel.

He saw a woman on the path whom he recognized and ducked his head into the blanket. She had been a wife in his compound, the second of his father's younger brother, but she'd quarreled too much so he divorced her, sending her back to her village with all her belongings tied in a bundle on her head. She had been industrious but the other wives called her greedy, and they were glad when she was gone. He saw her glance up at the compound wall, her neck askew from the weight of a tray of bottles on her head. She could only roll her eyes toward the wall to take in as much of her former home as there was to see in the flat, cracked surface. When Musa's father had been prosperous, he'd had four wives. Long ago, his mother had been the favorite, and Old Baba once told him that she had been the most beautiful.

Musa pressed his back against the wall, let his knees bend and his buttocks slide to a seat on his heels. From here, he would watch the new sun as it rose

above the horizon. When it had come between the earth and the first branch of the gao tree, he would check his mother's hut. If she had not awakened, he would leave without food.

"So you have not yet gone, Ugly One," his mother said, seated at a fire near the door of her hut, her eyes squinted with sleep.

"It's still early."

"Baba's goat has milk," she said. "You can have milk if you want it." She held out a small, round gourd. Now the wives would say she spoiled him.

"Give mine to Fatouma." Musa squatted near the fire to feel the heat of the coals. In a few hours the air would be as hot.

"Eat porridge at least." She handed him a bowl full of yesterday's pounded millet. It had not been heated through.

Fatouma toddled out of the hut on her fat baby's legs, hurrying to sit near him. "Moo-SA," she called. He opened his blanket to set her on his lap and wrapped her up beside him so that only their faces peeked out.

"You look like two morning flowers," his mother said with pleasure, "waiting for the sun to open your leaves." Abruptly she lowered her eyes and stirred the fire, poking it too much, fearful of what she had just said. Tempting Allah.

"But Fatouma is so ugly," he said, easing his mother's anxiety. "Allah would never want to take this ugly child." He felt his sister's body warm against him and gave her his porridge. He pulled her closer to him, looking down into her clear, dark eyes. Seeing her brother's face so near, she reached up and touched his chin, twisting up her mouth in the way she knew would always make him laugh. He laughed to please her and pressed his cheek against the soft down on top of her head.

Musa joined the stream of people on the path that led into town. A group of Bela women, grunting like beasts of burden, came up behind him, pushing past anyone in their way, eager to reach the market and unload the wood racks they balanced on top of their heads. Each rack held a half-dozen clay jars, but these women, their shoulders deep and muscular as men's, could bear the precarious weight of the load. Their dark skin, black as a cooking pot, already shone with sweat. Musa had to jump out of the path to avoid the tilting racks.

Three Fulani girls, sisters most likely, rode by on donkeys alongside the path. Each wore an identical head cloth, brilliant green and woven with golden threads—too fine for a bush market. These were girls whose fathers might wear a watch. They laughed and talked too much as they passed the others, who traveled on foot, and one of them looked at Musa, turned her head to

stare at him, speaking to him with her eyes. Uneasily, he looked away. This had begun to happen often, even with girls in his own village. He had grown tall for his age, but he was still too young to answer back.

The path ended at the river where the market grounds made up half the town. The hotel sat on a rise above the river, surrounded by flame trees and high white walls. When he came within sight of the hotel, his stomach contracted, as it always did, seeing that there were at least a dozen boys milling around, expectant, hovering near the hotel gates. He saw no cars there yet. The road at the post office, by which the cars always came, was quiet and empty. The morning air still felt cool. The sun barely showed through the murky sky.

Musa walked near the group of boys, keeping his distance, cautious of their intensity. Many of these boys were his friends with whom he studied the Koran at the malam's house, but no one wanted competition when the Europeans arrived from the capital city. Like a pack of hunting jackals, each was on his own. Perhaps many Europeans would come today and there would be enough for all of them. If they were lucky, there would be Americans.

A tall, green car came fast around the corner at the post office, making a dust storm, and the boys ran, frenzied, straight out in its direction. They met it head on and jumped out of its way to run wildly at its sides, back toward the hotel. Musa joined them, shouting at the Europeans who sat cool and impassive inside the enormous car. The hotel gate swung open and the guard leaped out from behind the wall. He came after the boys with his cattle whip, beating them away. The leather snapped against Musa's thigh and he swallowed a yelp of pain.

There were six men in the green car. Six opportunities to be the go-between. They got out and dropped money into the palm of the guard. The guard followed behind them so none of the boys could get to them before they entered the hotel. Musa knew they would have coffee and bread before they went into the market. He tried to see beyond them, to the inside of the hotel. He had heard stories of the wondrous tables there, covered with crisp, white cloth and spread with sugar and butter set out to be eaten at will.

A small gray truck came more hesitantly around the corner, stopped, then turned away from the hotel and drove directly into the restless throng of animals tethered for sale at the market's outer edge. A man with pumpkin-colored hair and skin speckled like eggs stuck his hands and arms out of the truck, taking photographs, one after another, of the bawling baby camels tied in clusters on the open grounds. The boys left their position at the hotel gate,

tearing toward the gray truck. Musa stayed where he was, rubbing the flesh that still stung from the snap of the guard's whip.

Now a white sedan appeared at the post office road. A Peugeot. Musa could name the car. He felt the thrill of self-importance, as though he alone possessed secret knowledge of the world outside his village. The Peugeot moved slowly into the large open space that separated the market from the hotel.

Inside the Peugeot, he could see one man, one woman, and their child, a little boy leaning out the window, whose hair seemed to shine with silver light. Musa touched his own head, pressed his fingers down into his dull black, tightly curled hair. The woman in the car held her child as he stretched out the window. "Cow," he shouted, pointing his finger at a wild-eyed bull rocking its head against ropes that tied it to a tree. Musa thought he recognized the little boy's word. Was it English? These might be Americans, and the others hadn't heard.

Instead of going through the hotel gates, this car drove up next to the wall of the hotel compound. The swarm of boys ran back to the Peugeot, and the guard came at them again with his whip, cursing their mothers because he stumbled and nearly fell. The man locked the car and walked with his wife and child toward the market, the guard hovering around them until they had gone too far from the hotel. Musa ran with the pack, circling the couple to offer help in the market.

"Leave us alone," the man shouted in the boys' own language. "We don't need you," he bellowed, his white man's accent falling hard on the wrong syllables. But none of the boys wanted to be the first to give up. "Get away from us!" He raised his arm threateningly. The boys moved back, more amused than afraid. Many Europeans who came up to the market were like that. They wanted to be on their own and wouldn't ask for help even if you followed them around all day.

One of the boys sent up a shout and the rest of them turned like a herd of sheep and stampeded toward the hotel, bursting into the dust of another car. Musa watched them go and turned to look toward the market. He could already see a shimmering mirage hanging above the market stalls. The heat of the day had already begun. The sky had cleared and the sun seemed to be eating the air. This might not be the Sunday he had hoped for. He should have taken some porridge.

The young couple were walking into the cattle lot, moving cautiously around the nervous, long-horned animals. Their little boy pointed his finger again and again, twisting in his father's arms, excited, his eyes wide. The

woman stopped to watch a Tuareg man paint yellow lines on the backs of his bulls, to identify them and mark them for sale. Her husband placed the boy on his shoulders, spoke a few words to her, and he left her. She was alone. Musa's legs moved before his mind had made its plan.

The woman walked briskly into the marketplace without the usual hesitation of a European. She seemed at ease in the noise and clutter of an African market.

"Gud marn-ning, Madame," Musa said, the only English he knew, phrasing the words in a lilting tone that he thought sounded friendly. He alternately galloped and tiptoed as he spoke, trying to maintain a strategic position at her side. The woman ignored his greeting, gave him a look of impatience, and made her way through the crowd, heading into the center of the market.

He watched her go. She was tall and slender as a young girl, with hair yellow and straight as millet stalks. She wore pants the same as her husband's—washed-out blue and tight as skin. The shirt she wore was no finer than those he'd seen on boys coming back from the capital city. How strange it seemed. These people would spend on one bottle of beer what a man in his village couldn't earn in a day's work, yet they spent no money on the clothes they wore, and the women dressed as plain as the men. He glanced down at her shoes. With sudden excitement he almost turned to shout at one of his friends. She was U.S.A.! The white cloth shoes she wore had a bright blue symbol on both sides, shaped like the blade of a butcher's knife, curved back at the end. Only Americans wore those shoes.

The American woman stopped at the stall of a Hausa merchant and knelt down to examine a pile of his painted glass beads. The merchant ceremoniously opened a box to show her more beads, then another, and when she didn't react, another and another, making grand movements with his arms, like a storyteller, pouring out the beads on the mat where he sat on the ground. They formed little pools of color all around him. He thrust his hand under her face to show her a necklace, which seemed to irritate her, and she stood up to move on, the merchant shouting at her to come back and buy something—look at the mess he'd made for her.

Musa followed her, staying close, guarding his claim, pretending he'd been hired. They were walking through the pottery lot, Musa noiselessly on her heels, when the woman stopped suddenly. She stepped aside, out of the path that separated the grain pots from the water jars, and stood there waiting, her back to him. Musa froze. He turned around and walked the other way. Then she stepped back into the path and continued in the direction she'd been

going. He turned again to follow her. After a few more minutes she whipped around and looked him straight in the eye. Musa lowered his head and passed her, as though on his way to some purpose. She walked off in the opposite direction, disappearing into the dense, noisy crowd.

Musa maintained his ploy for only a minute, then spun on his heels and darted into the rows of fragile clay containers. He craned his neck to find her, then anxiously looked down to watch his feet, taking small, careful steps between the pots and jars, avoiding the disaster of a debt he couldn't pay.

The American woman was not far away. He saw her. No other boy had found her. But he leaped too quickly into the next narrow path, and his foot hit the top of a long-necked water jar. It fell over on its side. He heard an old woman screaming at him—a shrill, toothless voice that made people turn and look. Musa stopped in the path, wishing he'd never left his mother's hut.

The old woman stood up, shaking her hands at him, imploring Allah to strike down this dangerous boy. She lifted the jar to show a gathering group of market women the damage that had been done. Miraculously, the jar came up off the ground in one perfect piece. The cackling old voice stopped in surprise. Musa lifted himself into the air and galloped down the path in search of his American.

She had stopped in a path that wove through a field of enameled tinware—dozens of bowls, pots, cups, and trays displayed on the ground, brightening the hard-baked dirt with their painted fruits and flowers. Among the tinware, a half-dozen Bela girls stood in front of his American. They giggled and pressed against each other, holding their henna-dyed fingertips delicately over their mouths. The girls were all dressed the same, wrapped in indigo cloth that gave up some of its inky color on their skin. Plastic rings and beads covered the girls' heads, woven into the thin, intricate braids they wore hanging down stiffly on all sides. They smelled of honey.

One of the Bela girls wanted to sell the American woman a bracelet, and a small crowd had formed to watch. The woman was interested in the bracelet, but she couldn't understand what they were saying about the price. Now she would need him.

Musa spoke up in careful French. "How much would you like to pay, Madame?"

"Five hundred francs," she answered.

Musa addressed the girls in their own language. The people of his village looked down on the Belas, whom they considered coarse and low, but one of

the girls had large, soft eyes, gentle as a calf's and full of words. She turned from Musa's glance and lowered her eyes to the ground. He was distracted by his need to look longer at this shy Bela girl.

"The white woman will pay five hundred," he said. The Bela girls rolled their eyes and giggled; they tilted their heads and whispered. They loved the crowd and were taking their time. "Five hundred," Musa repeated, almost inaudibly. His mouth felt full of dust and he longed for a drink of the river.

At last one of them answered him, holding her fingertips over her mouth like a little red-orange cage, feigning modesty. "Not less than seven hundred and fifty," she said firmly.

Musa looked up at the woman. "They want one thousand francs, but I'm sure I can help you. I will tell them seven hundred and fifty."

She listened to him and repeated the amount he would offer. He nodded. "All right," she said. "Good."

"She has agreed to pay seven hundred and fifty," Musa said. The girls squealed and leaned on each other in a haphazard circle. They studied Musa, flashing their eyes at him. Bold girls. He had to look away from them, but his eyes darted irresistibly back to the shy one, who was watching him, too, her head down, stealing a glance sideways.

The American woman counted out the coins, took the bracelet, and slipped it on her arm. The golden white brass lost some of its radiance against her pale skin. But she seemed pleased. As she walked away from the Bela girls, she was smiling. And he had helped her. He looked around to see if anyone noticed, staying close to her, making helpful comments. Which she seemed to ignore.

Suddenly Musa saw Aliyu. Sly Aliyu with the angel face who saw Musa's American.

"*Bonjour, Madame,*" sang Aliyu, and held out both his hands, filled with rough clay beads. "My mother made these," he said in French.

The liar! "Your mother eats with hyenas," Musa muttered, his head turned away. If his American understood what he'd said, she might disapprove.

Aliyu ignored the insult and looked up appealingly at the woman. "My mother made them yesterday in our village."

"How much?" she asked. She spoke directly to Aliyu, ignoring Musa, her go-between.

"Seven hundred and fifty francs," smiled Aliyu.

The woman was furious. "Your mother eats with hyenas!" she snapped at

Aliyu with the angel face, and Musa was staggering back and forth, holding his stomach, shrieking with laughter. This was *his* American!

She turned her back to Aliyu and walked away. Musa followed, suppressing his triumph for the business at hand. He could see that her shirt was wet and stuck to her back; she would be done with the market now. If she gave him 25 francs, he would buy rice and sauce. If 50, he would buy rice and sauce with meat. Today he would have meat.

She took off the heavy Bela bracelet and put it in the bag that hung over her shoulder. She looked at her watch, lifting her hand to shield her eyes from the glare of the sun. "It's too hot." She looked at him now, spoke directly to him, using words in his own language. He held his breath. "I will eat at the hotel. Then I want to go back into the market. Can you help me buy a Tuareg ring?"

"Yes," he said, trying to appear serious and mature.

"I will be back soon." She walked away then, heading for the hotel. She took out a cloth and wiped her face. She did not take out any money.

Musa followed her to the hotel, taking no chances. He would wait there until she came out again. Somewhere in the shade on the other side of the wall, he could hear the guard sleeping noisily. One half of the double gate stood open and Musa looked inside, all the way to the wide glass doors of the hotel. He watched the woman disappear behind one shining panel of glass and for a moment he saw his own reflection—an almost beautiful, too-thin boy in rumpled khaki shorts and a T-shirt that hung awry at the bottom. He thought again of the Bela girl. He imagined himself a young man coming back from the capital city, bringing her a gift the likes of which she would never see in this bush market. By then he would be living in "the hut of the unmarried sons." He would wear new creased pants and a shirt as crisp and white as the hotel tablecloths.

He looked into the sky to judge the time. It was midday. The sun seemed to have ridden on wings that were closing down around him, suffocating him. He felt his head grow light, as though it would separate from his body. Other boys who had followed a European in the market might already be paid by now, sitting at a food stall under a thatched roof, eating rice and sauce. Rice and sauce. He would be satisfied with stale porridge. Musa slid down into the thin shade against the wall and set his swelling head against his knees, wondering why Allah had made the world unevenly.

He woke at the sound of a car's engine. He opened his eyes to see that the

sun had left the top of the sky. He had slept too long. Shadows dropped from the trees around the market grounds. He looked out behind the hotel where the afternoon sun made a hundred thousand mirrors dance on the surface of the river. Boys his age, some of them naked, dived and rose up through the cool, sparkling water, rolling and turning on the surface like hippos. He would join them soon.

He heard the creak of dry hinges and looked over to see the guard walking the gate open. The guard saw Musa and slashed the air with his whip. Then he bowed absurdly low as the tall green car drove out through the gate. Large black letters marked the car: RANGE ROVER. Who had followed the white men in the Range Rover? Which of his friends there in the river had received more than 25 francs?

The sound of laughter came from behind the wall, a child's. The little boy with the silver hair ran out through the gate and turned to look behind him, bending his legs with his hands on his knees, as though to brace for a run. Musa's American came out after him, let her son run a few paces, then grabbed him up in her arms. The husband walked out after her, held out his hand to the guard. Musa heard the sound of more than one coin.

The husband took the little boy and walked to the car. She followed behind, taking a cloth out of her bag and tying it around her hair. The guard bowed and smiled, leaning toward her, his brown teeth coming too close to her face, and she hurried past him.

Musa stood up.

The woman did not see him, took quick steps along the wall toward the white Peugeot. She opened the car door, got inside, and rolled down the window. She was not going back into the market.

The car moved back toward Musa, passing the guard, who doffed his dirty hat and bowed again. When the car stopped in its backward path, his American twisted her head around to take a last look at the market. "Oh," she called, seeing Musa there. "I forgot about you." The Peugeot turned its wheels and sped away from the wall, making a long dust cloud that flared wider and higher at the post office road.

Musa looked again out behind the hotel. A herdsman was forcing his cattle into the river, smacking their hindquarters with a strip of curled hide to get them across the shallow water. Musa's friends stopped their play to whoop at the timid cows. He decided not to join them. He could swim just as well farther down the river, near his village.

“There you are, Ugly One,” his mother said. “It’s late. What did you do in the market all day?”

“I helped a woman from the capital city. An American. She wanted to buy a Bela’s bracelet.”

“You bargained with a Bela?”

“Yes, but only for her. My American.”

“And did she give you something for your work?”

“Two hundred francs.”

“So much!”

“I bought you a fine new water jar. And red bracelets for Fatouma.”

“Did you eat in the market?”

“I ate rice and meat. I ate so much meat I can barely move.”

“But you are moving very well, I see. You can’t eat a little more?”

“Maybe some porridge. A little.”

His mother filled his bowl to brimming with pounded millet. It was fresh and hot. He breathed in the steam as it rose to his face, clearing his head of the market dust.

“So where is our new water jar?” she asked. “The old one is frail as Baba’s bones.”

“It was too big. I had to leave it in town.”

“With Fatouma’s bracelets?”

“Yes. I’ll get them next week.”

“You will try again next week?”

“Americans come every Sunday,” he said, and he stretched out his legs to make a place for Fatouma.

‘ON SUNDAY ...’

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Compound: A walled living area consisting of a courtyard and huts where a man lives with his wives and children and often other relatives

Go-between: In Niger and other African countries, a young boy who helps tourists barter for produce, crafts, or the work of artisans selling their wares at large, native markets

Calabash bowls: Gourds of various shapes and sizes that are cut in half, scraped out, and used as bowls or cups

Ugly One: In Musa’s culture, people try to understand why children die so easily. To make sense of it, they assume Allah enjoys the company of children in heaven. Mothers therefore try not to call attention to anything special about their children that might cause Allah to take the children to join him in heaven.

Bela women: Women from the nomadic tribe named Bela. Women and girls from this tribe often bring produce and crafts to sell at Sunday village markets.

Fulani girls: Girls from the nomadic tribe named Fulani. Women and girls from this tribe often bring produce and crafts to sell at Sunday village markets.

Ploy: Trick

Henna-dyed fingertips: Fingertips that are dyed a reddish-orange, a custom for young girls of the Bela tribe

No Easy Answers

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?

From "A Single Lucid Moment"



ILUNGA'S HARVEST

By Mike Tidwell,
Returned Peace Corps
Volunteer, Zaire
(now the Democratic
Republic of the Congo)

My wife has left me, and I've got to harvest my pond," Chief Ilunga said. It was two o'clock on a Sunday afternoon and he was breathing hard. He had just walked the five miles from his village of Ntita Kalambayi to my house in Lulenga. He had walked quickly, stopping only once to drink *tshitshampa* with friends along the way. Now his speech was excited, full of the fast cadence of personal crisis. "My wife has left me, and I've got to harvest my pond. I've got to harvest it tomorrow and use the money to get her back."

It was a dowry dispute. Ilunga's father-in-law claimed Ilunga still owed 30 dollars in bridewealth from the marriage to his daughter five years earlier. To emphasize the point, he had ordered his daughter home to their village 30 miles away. She had obeyed, taking with her all the children. Now Ilunga was humiliated and alone, with no one to cook his food or wash his clothes. He needed money fast.

The development was something of a blow to me, too. Never had I expected the first fruits of my extension work to go toward something as inglorious as roping in a runaway wife. But that's what the Fates had snipped off. I told Ilunga I would be at his pond the next morning to help with the harvest.

Ilunga's wife had picked a bad time to leave him. His pond was in its fifth month of production, one month short of the gestation period considered best for harvesting. Still, after only five months, things looked good. Ilunga had fed his fish like a man possessed, and as far as we could tell a considerable bounty waited below.

Part of the pond's success was due to a strategy I had developed not long after arriving in Kalambayi. The plan was simple: Get Ilunga and the other farmers to feed their fish with the same intensity they fed me fufu, and they would surely raise some of the biggest tilapia ever recorded.

"Imagine a fish is like an important visitor who has traveled over mountains and through rivers to see you," I had told Ilunga after he finished his pond. "If, when you set a meal down in front of that visitor, he finishes all the food in two or three minutes and then stares back at you from across the table, how do you feel?"

He grimaced. "Terrible," he said. "The visitor is still hungry. He should always be given more food than he can eat. He shouldn't be able to finish it. That's how you know he's full."

"Exactly," I said.

Exactly. Every day for five months, Ilunga dumped more food into his pond than his fish could possibly eat. He covered the surface with sweet potato leaves and man-

*For a description of the setting,
see page 16.*

ioc leaves and papaya leaves, and the fish poked and chewed and started to grow.

Helping things out was an unexpected gift. Two months after we stocked the pond, an official of the United Nations Children's Fund in Mbuji Mayi donated two sturdy wheelbarrows to the Kalambayi fish project. The wheelbarrows were blue with "UNICEF" painted neatly on the sides in white. When I called all the farmers together to present the tools, the shiny steel basins and rubber tires inspired a great amount of whistling and head-shaking. I felt as if I had just delivered two mint-condition Mack trucks. The men ran their hands along the rims and grew dizzy contemplating the wealth the tools might bring. Using the village of Kabala as a dividing point, the farmers split up into two committees representing the upper and lower stretches of the Lubilashi. After establishing rules for their use, the men took possession of the wheelbarrows.

Ilunga, as much as anyone, parlayed the UNICEF largess into bigger fish. He used the upper Kalambayi wheelbarrow to gather leaves and termites for fish food. To fill his pond's stick compost bins he went most Thursdays to the weekly outdoor market in Ntita Konyukua. There, he used the wheelbarrow to collect manioc peels and fruit rinds and the other rubbish village markets leave scattered about the ground. These materials rot quickly in pond water, stimulating a plankton growth essential for intensive tilapia culture. But to get the goods, Ilunga had to swallow his pride. He had to hunt through the crowd of marketers and bend over and compete with hungry dogs and goats and chickens along the ground. It was something of a spectacle. Ilunga was 30 years old and the chief of a village—and he was shooing away goats to get at banana peels in the marketplace dirt. People started to talk. After a while, one of Ilunga's brothers tried to dissuade him from the practice.

"You're embarrassing yourself," he said. "The pond isn't worth this."

But Ilunga didn't listen, just as he hadn't listened back in the beginning when I told him he was digging a pond so large it might kill him. He kept going to the market. Stares and whispers didn't stop him.

Most amazing was the fact that Ilunga was doing all this work in addition to tending his fields every day like everyone else. He was squeezing two jobs from the daily fuel of protein-deficient fufu. Eventually it started to show. I walked to his house one afternoon and found him outside, fast asleep in the coddling embrace of the UNICEF wheelbarrow. He had lined the basin with a burlap sack and reposed himself, his arms and legs drooping over the edges. From the trail 50 feet away, I watched. The imagery was potent, almost unbearable with its themes of hope and struggle and want all bound up in that exhausted face, those closed eyes, those

dirty black limbs hanging down to the ground.

God, how I had set Ilunga's soul ablaze with my talk of rising out of poverty, of beating back the worst aspects of village life with a few fishponds. He had listened to me and followed every line of advice and now he lay knocked out in the hold of the donated wheelbarrow. Deciding it would be criminal to wake him, I walked away, praying like hell that all the promises I had made were true.

And now we would find out. It was time for the denouement: the harvest. Five months had passed since Ilunga's wife had left him, and we would soon discover what had been happening all this time under the pond's surface. I was anxious because, in a way, owning a fishpond is like owning a lottery ticket. Unlike corn, which you can watch as it grows, or, say, chickens, which you can weigh as they get big, there is no way to positively assess the progress of a pond until you harvest it. The fish are underwater, so you can't count them or get a good look at them. You just have to work and work and wait. You hang on to your lottery ticket and wait for the drawing, never sure what number will come up until you drain the pond.

Ilunga and I had a pretty good idea his fish were big, of course. God knows they had been given enough to eat. We also had seen lots of offspring along the pond's edges. But the water was now so well fertilized and pea-green with plankton that neither of us had seen a fish in nearly two months. (Ilunga had refused to eat any fish in order to maximize the harvest.) We knew the tilapia were there but how many exactly? How big? And what about the birds? How many fish had the thieving kingfishers taken? We would soon know all the answers. An unacknowledged, icy fear ran through both of us as we agreed that Sunday afternoon at my house to harvest his pond the next day.

It was just past 6 a.m. when I arrived for the harvest. Ilunga and his brother Tshibamba were calling and waving their arms as I moved down the valley slope towards the pond. "Michel, Michel. Come quickly. Hurry Michel." I had driven my motorcycle to Ilunga's house in the predawn dark, using my headlight along the way. Now as I finished the last of the 20-minute walk to the valley floor, the sky was breaking blue and a crazy montage of pink and silver clouds lay woven on the horizon. The morning beauty was shattered, however, by the cries of the men waiting for me at the pond. They were yelling something I didn't want to hear. It was something my mind refused to accept.

"There are no fish, Michel," they said. "Hurry. The fish aren't here."

I reached the pond and cast an incredulous stare into the water. They were right. There were no fish. The men had spent most of the night digging out a vertical section of the lower dike and slowly draining the water until there now remained only a muddy, five-by-five pool in the lower-most corner of the pond. The pool was about six inches deep. And it was empty.

Tshibamba was screaming, running along the dikes and pointing an accusing finger at the pond bottom. “Where are they?” he demanded of the pond. “Where are the fish?”

Ilunga was past the yelling stage. He gazed at the shallow pool, his face sleepy and creased, and said nothing. He was a wreck, as forlorn and defeated as the pond scarecrow 10 feet to his left with its straw limbs akimbo and its head splotted with bird excrement.

“Wait a minute,” I said to the men, suddenly spotting something at one end of the pool. “Look!”

I pointed to a fan-shaped object sticking out of the water and looking a lot like a dorsal fin. We all looked. It moved. A fish. Before we could celebrate, other fins appeared throughout the pool, dozens of them, then hundreds. The pond water, which had continued all the while to flow out through a net placed over the cut dike, had suddenly reached a depth lower than the vertical height of the bottom-hugging fish. The fish had been hiding under the muddy water and were revealed only at the last moment and all at the same time, a phenomenon of harvesting we eventually became nervously accustomed to in Kalambayi. Ilunga’s fish—big, medium, and small—had been corralled by the dropping water into the small pool where they waited like scaly cattle. They looked stupid and restless. “Yeah, now what?” they seemed to ask.

Ilunga showed them. He threw off his shirt and made a quick banzai charge into the congested fray, his arms set to scoop up hard-won booty. There ensued an explosion of jumping fish and flying mud, and Ilunga absorbed the rat-tat-tat of a thousand mud dots from his feet to his face. By the time his hands reached the pool, the fish had scattered everywhere into the surrounding mud like thinking atoms suddenly released from some central, binding force. Ilunga raised his empty hands. He looked up at us—his face covered with mud dots, his feet sinking into the pond-bottom gook—and flashed a wide smile. The harvest had begun.

“The small ones,” I yelled, hurriedly discarding my shirt and shoes. “Get the small fish first to restock with.”

I jumped into the pond and, like Ilunga, was immediately pelted with mud. Two more of Ilunga’s brothers had arrived by then, and together, five

strong, we gave battle with the tenacity of warriors waging *jihad*. We chased the flapping, flopping, fleeing fish through the pond-bottom sludge. When we caught them, we stepped on them and throttled them and herded them into tin buckets. Ilunga took charge of capturing and counting 300 thumb-sized stocking fish and putting them in a small holding pond. The rest of us collected the other fish, segregating the original stockers, which were now hand-sized, from the multitudinous offspring. The work was dirty and sloppy and hypnotically fun.

So engrossed was I in the harvest, in fact, that I barely noticed the tops of the pond dikes were growing crowded with onlookers. By the time we finished capturing all the fish, people had surrounded the square pond bottom like spectators around a boxing ring. A quarter of the men, women, and children in the village had come to see the harvest. I was impressed by their show of support for Ilunga's work.

Ilunga ordered the crowd to clear back from a spot on the upper dike. Filthy like pigs, we carried the fish out of the pond in four large buckets and set them down at the clearing. We rinsed them off with canal water and began weighing them with a small hand-held scale I had brought. The total came to 44 kilos. It was an excellent harvest. After only five months, Ilunga had coaxed 300 tilapia fingerlings into 44 kilos of valuable protein. It was enough to bring home his wife and then some.

Whistling and laughing, I grabbed Ilunga by the shoulders and shook him and told him what a great harvest it was. I had expected a lot of fish, but not this many. It was marvelous, I told him, simply marvelous. He smiled and agreed. But he wasn't nearly as happy as he should have been. Something was wrong. His eyes telegraphed fear.

Tshibamba made the first move.

"Go get some leaves from that banana tree over there," he told a child standing on the pond bank.

When the child returned, Tshibamba scooped about a dozen fish onto one of the leaves and wrapped them up.

"I'm going to take these up to the house," he said to Ilunga. "It's been a while since the children have had fresh fish."

"Yes, yes," Ilunga said. "Take some."

"I'll have a little too," said Kazadi, Ilunga's youngest brother, reaching into a bucket.

"Go ahead. Take what you need."

Then a third brother stepped forward. Then a fourth. Then other villagers. My stomach sank.

It was suddenly all clear—the crowd, the well-wishers, the brothers of Ilunga who had never even seen the pond until that morning. They had come to divide up the harvest. A cultural imperative was playing itself out. It was time for Ilunga to share his wealth. He stood by the buckets and started placing fish in the hands of every relative and friend who stepped forth.... He was just giving the harvest away.

There was no trace of anger on his face as he did it, either. Nor was there a suggestion of duty or obligation. It was less precise than that. This was Ilunga's village, and he had a sudden surplus and so he shared it. It just happened. It was automatic. But the disappointment was there, weighing down on the corners of his eyes. He needed the fish. Getting his wife back had depended on them.

Caked in mud, I sat on the grassy bank and watched an entire bucket of tilapia disappear. Fury and frustration crashed through me with the force of a booming waterfall. All that work. All my visits. All the digging and battling kingfishers. All for what? For this? For a 20-minute free-for-all giveaway? Didn't these people realize the ponds were different? Ilunga had worked hard to produce this harvest. He had tried to get ahead. Where were they when he dug his pond? Where were they when he heaved and hoed and dislodged from the earth 4,000 cubic feet of dirt?

I knew the answer. They had been laughing. They had been whispering among themselves that Ilunga was wasting his time, that moving so much dirt with a shovel was pure lunacy. And they laughed even harder when they saw him bending over to pick up fruit rinds in the marketplace in competition with goats and dogs. But they weren't laughing now. Ilunga had proved them wrong. He had raised more fish than any of them had seen in their lives, and now they were taking the spoils.

The fish continued to disappear, and I began bursting with a desire to intervene. I wanted to ask Ilunga what the hell he was doing and to tell him to stop it. I wanted to turn over the bucket already emptied of fish and stand on it and shoo everyone away like I had shooed Mutoba Muenyi those first few times she came to my door. "Giving is virtuous and all that," I wanted to tell the crowd. "But this is different. These are Ilunga's fish. They're his. Leave them alone. He needs them."

But I said nothing. I summoned every ounce of self-restraint in my body and remained silent. This was something between Ilunga and his village. My job was to teach him how to raise fish. I had done my job. What he did with

the fish afterward really was none of my business. Even so, I didn't have to watch. I went over to the canal and washed up. Ilunga was well into the second bucket when I told him I was leaving.

"Wait," he said. "Here."

He thrust into my hands a large bundle of fish.

Oh no, I thought. Not me. I'm not going to be party to this gouging. I tried to hand the bundle back.

"But these fish are for you," he said. "You've taught me how to raise fish, and this is to say thank you."

"No, Ilunga. This is your harvest. You earned it. You keep it."

He gave me a wounded look, as if I had just spit in his face, and suddenly I wanted to scream and kick and smash things. I couldn't refuse his offer without devastating him. I took the fish and headed up the hill, feeling like a real parasite.

"Wait for me at the house," he said as I walked away.

It was 8:30 when I reached the village and stretched out, dizzy with disappointment, on a reed mat next to Ilunga's house. He arrived about 30 minutes later with his sister Ngala who had helped at the harvest. Both of their faces look drained from the great hemorrhaging they had just gone through. Without even the benefit of loaves of bread, they had fed a mass of about 50 villagers, and now Ngala carried all that was left of one big tin basin. I estimated there were about 25 kilos. To my dismay, though, Ilunga wasn't finished. He scooped out another couple of kilos to give to older relatives who hadn't made it to the pond. Then he sent Ngala off to the market in Lulenga with roughly 23 kilos of fish, barely half the harvest total.

At the going market price of a hundred zaires a kilo, Ilunga stood to make 2,300 zaires (\$23). It was far short of what he needed to get his wife back. Far short, in fact, of anything I could expect village men to accept as fair return for months of punishing shovel work and more months of maniacal feeding. The problem wasn't the technology. Ilunga had produced 44 kilos of fish in one pond in five months. That was outstanding. The problem, rather, was generosity. It was a habit of sharing so entrenched in the culture that it made me look to the project's future with foreboding. What incentive did men like Ilunga have to improve their lives—through fish culture or any other means—if so much of the gain immediately melted into a hundred empty hands? Why work harder? Why develop? Better just to farm enough to eat. Better to stay poor like all the rest.

After Ilunga's sister left for the market, I couldn't hold my tongue any

longer. We were alone at his house.

“I can’t believe you gave away all those fish, Ilunga. Why did you even bother digging a pond if all you were going to do with the harvest was give it away?”

He knew I was upset, and he didn’t want to talk about it.

“Why did you dig a pond?” I repeated.

“You know why,” he said. “To get more money. To help my family.”

“So how can you help your family if you give away half the fish?”

“But there’s still a lot left,” he said. “You act like I gave them all away.”

I suddenly realized he was about 10 times less upset by what happened than I was. My frustration doubled.

“What do you mean there’s still a lot left? There’s not enough to get your wife back, is there? You gave away too much for that. Your pond hasn’t done you much good, and I guess I’ve wasted my time working with you.”

The last sentence really annoyed him.

“Look,” he said, “what could I have done? After I drained my pond, I had hundreds and hundreds of fish. There were four buckets full. You saw them. If my brother comes and asks for 10 fish, can I say no? For 10 fish? That’s crazy. I can’t refuse.”

“No, it’s not crazy, Ilunga. You have six brothers and 10 uncles and 50 cousins. And then there are all the other villagers. You’re right. Ten fish aren’t very many. But when you give 10 to everyone you have little left for yourself.”

“So what would you have done?” he asked me. “Would you have refused fish to all those people?”

“Yes,” I said, and I meant it.

“You mean you would have taken all the fish and walked past all those people and children and gone up to the house and locked the door.”

“Don’t say it like that,” I said. “You could have explained to them that the pond was your way of making money, that the harvest was for your wife.”

“They already know I need my wife,” he said. “And they know I’ll get her back somehow.”

“Yeah, how? You were counting on the harvest to do that and now it’s over. You gave away too much, Ilunga. You can’t keep doing this. You can’t feed the whole village by yourself. It’s impossible. You have to feed your own children and take care of your own immediate family. Let your brothers

worry about their families. Let them dig ponds if they want to. You've got to stop giving away your harvests."

Thus spoke Michel, the agent of change, the man whose job it was to try to rewrite the society's molecular code. Sharing fufu and produce and other possessions was one thing. With time, I had come around to the habit myself, seen its virtuosity. But the ponds were different, and I had assumed the farmers realized that. Raising fish was meant to create surplus wealth, to carry the farmers and their immediate families to a level where they had more for themselves—better clothes, extra income. That was the incentive upon which the project was built. It was the whole reason I was there.

So when Ilunga harvested his pond that early morning and started giving away the fish, I wanted to retreat. I wanted to renounce my conversion to the local system and move back to the old impulse I had arrived with, the one that had me eating secret, solitary meals and guarding my things in the self-interested way prized by my own society.

"Stop the giving"—that was the real, the final, message I wanted to bring along to Ilunga and the other fish farmers. "Stop the giving and the community-oriented attitude and you can escape the worst ravages of poverty. Build a pond and make it yours. And when you harvest it, don't give away all the fish. Forget, for now, the bigger society. Forget the extended family. Step back and start thinking like self-enriching entrepreneurs, like good little capitalists."

But Ilunga didn't fit the plan. Nor did any of the other farmers who harvested after him. "If my brother comes and asks for 10 fish, can I say no?" he had asked. His logic was stronger than it seemed. Like everyone else in Kalambayi, Ilunga needed badly the help fish culture could provide. What he didn't need, however, were lessons on how to stay alive. And that, I eventually grew to understand, was what all the sharing was really about.

It was a survival strategy, an unwritten agreement by the group that no one would be allowed to fall off the societal boat no matter how low provisions ran on board. No matter how bad the roads became or how much the national economy constricted, sharing and mutual aid meant everyone in each village stayed afloat. If a beggar like Mutoba Muenyi came to your house in the predawn darkness, you gave her food. If you harvested a pond and 50 malnourished relatives showed up, you shared what you had. Then you made the most of what was left. If it was \$23, that was okay. It was still a lot of money in a country where the average annual income is \$170 and falling. It might not pay off a marriage debt, but \$23 satisfied other basic needs.

In the end, despite my fears, sharing didn't destroy the fish project. Farmers went on building and harvesting ponds, giving away 20 to 50 per-

cent of their fish, and selling the rest to earn money for their wives and their children. It was a process I simply couldn't change and eventually I stopped trying.

And perhaps it was just as well Ilunga and the others weren't in a hurry to become the kind of producers I wanted them to be. They might develop along Western lines with time, but why push them? The local system worked. Everyone was taken care of. Everyone did stay afloat. Besides, there were already plenty of myopic, self-enriching producers in the world—entrepreneurs and businesses guided by the sole principle of increasing their own wealth above all else. So many were there in fact that the planetary boat, battered by breakneck production and consumption, was in ever-increasing danger of sinking, taking with it the ultimate extended family: the species. There seemed to be no survival strategy at work for the planet as a whole as there was for this small patch of Africa, no thread of broader community interest that ensured against total collapse. Indeed, sitting in my lamplit cotton warehouse at night, listening to growing reports of global environmental degradation over my shortwave radio, the thought occurred to me more than once that, in several important respects, Kalambayi needed far less instruction from the West than the other way around.

At the moment, however, no one needed anything as much as Ilunga needed his wife. He had given away nearly half his fish and now the opportunity had all but vanished. I stopped back by his house after the market closed in Lulenga and watched him count the money from the harvest: 2,000 zaires. Even less than I had thought. I reached into my pocket and pulled out all I had, 200 zaires. I handed it to him. He was still short.

“What are you going to do?”

“I don't know,” he said, “I've got to think about it.”

Three days later on my way to Tshipanzula, I pulled up to Ilunga's house to see what solution he had come up with. I was surprised when he wasn't there and his neighbors said he had gone to Baluba Shankadi, his wife's tribe.

Another week went by before I saw Ilunga again. It was in the market in Ntita Konyukua and he was standing under a mimosa tree, gesturing and talking with two other fish farmers. As I made my way through the crowd of marketers, getting closer, I saw Ilunga's wife standing behind him, carrying their youngest child.

“How?” I asked when I reached him, shaking his hand, delighted by the sight of mother and child: “How did you do it?”

At first he didn't answer. He talked instead about his pond, telling me he had returned the day before and now was trying to track down the UNICEF

'ILUNGA'S HARVEST'
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Tilapia: The kind of fish Ilunga raised in his pond

Manioc: A plant grown in the tropics, also called cassava

Parlay: To increase into something of greater value

Largess: Gift; generosity

Plankton: The minute animal and plant life of a body of water

Denouement: Grand finale; conclusion; culmination

Montage: Mosaic; mixture

Incredulous: Disbelieving

Booty: Treasure; prize; reward

Ensued: Followed

Cultural imperative: Something a particular culture requires and expects to be done

Gouge: To overcharge or cheat

Myopic: Narrow-minded

wheelbarrow to start feeding his fish again.

“But your wife,” I said. “How did you get her back?”

“Oh yes, she’s back,” he said. “Well, I really don’t know how I did it. After you left my house that day I still needed 800 zaires. One of my brothers gave me a hundred, but it still wasn’t enough. I tried, but I couldn’t come up with the rest of the money, so I decided to leave with what I had. I walked for two days and reached my wife’s village and handed the money to my father-in-law. He counted it and told me I was short. I told him I knew I was but that I didn’t have any more. Then I knew there was going to be a big argument.”

“Was there?”

“No. That’s the really strange part. He told me to sit down, and his wife brought out some fufu and we ate. Then it got dark and we went inside to sleep. I still hadn’t seen my wife. The next morning, my father-in-law called me outside. Then he called my wife and my sons out from another house. We were all standing in the middle of the compound, wondering what to do. Then he just told us to leave.

“That’s it?” I said. “It’s over?”

“He told me yes, that I could go home. I didn’t think I understood him correctly, so I asked him if he was sure he didn’t want any more money.”

“No, you’ve done enough,” he said. “Go back to your village.”

“I was afraid to say anything else. I put my wife and my sons in front of me and we started walking away before he could change his mind.”



About the Setting

Liberia, West Africa

“The Talking Goat” is based on an African folk tale recounted by John Acree, a Peace Corps Volunteer who served in Liberia. Located on the tropical coast of West Africa between Sierra Leone and Cote d’Ivoire, Liberia is home to many indigenous tribes that have been through a recent civil war and still are enduring economic hardships and political strife. According to Acree, who served in Liberia as a fisheries Volunteer, it was during a village meeting that the village chief told the tale of “The Talking Goat.” Acree notes that the chief was trying to explain to his people that “although they had waited a long time for a health clinic to be built they would soon be rewarded. They must be patient.”

THE TALKING GOAT

*By John Acree,
Returned Peace Corps
Volunteer, Liberia*

Once there was a rich man named Tugba who dressed in fine and fashionable robes. Every day he strolled through the village, arm-in-arm with his elegant wife. The villagers held their breath as the two passed: Never before had they seen such a handsome couple.

But Tugba wasn't admired only for his good looks and pretty wife. Farmers would travel many miles to Tugba's village just to catch a glimpse of his fields. Tugba's corn was more golden, his tomatoes more plump, and his cassava more abundant than any other in the land. His animals, too, were fat and strong. He had two cows, five chickens, two roosters, three donkeys, and four goats.

Now Tugba's fortune wasn't just a matter of luck. He was a good and hardworking man who always remembered to thank the seeds for growing and the sky for raining. And Tugba took extra care to ensure that his animals were well fed and content. He kept his eye on one goat in particular, and always brought a special bundle of hay for her to chew on. This goat was Tugba's favorite. He had found her when she was just a kid, lost and wounded in the forest.

One year, little rain fell. Throughout the land, crops wilted and animals died of thirst. Tugba's fields alone remained fertile. But Tugba no longer strolled through the village each day, since the villagers now rushed upon him, begging for food. Although Tugba always gave the villagers whatever cassava or corn he could spare, his wife was not so generous. Angered by his inability to say "no" to the villagers' pleas, she left Tugba, taking with her all the gold she could carry.

Meanwhile the hungry villagers devoured Tugba's crops and, one by one, they ate his animals, too.

Except for his favorite goat. Tugba refused to let the villagers eat the goat that he had found in the forest many years before.

One day, when his fields were completely wasted and his stockroom empty, Tugba threw a cloak across his shoulders and walked out of his house. With only his favorite goat as a companion, Tugba left the village and journeyed into the forest.

After traveling many miles, Tugba and the goat found a home for themselves inside a cave. During the day, Tugba gathered berries and nuts for the two to eat; at nightfall, he would lie beside a mountain stream, staring up at the sky to admire the stars.

Seven years passed. From time to time, Tugba would remember the life he had known in the village. Once he wore elegant robes; now he wore a rotting sheepskin. Once he slept each night with his beautiful wife at his side; now his only companion was a goat. Once he harvested the most delicious

crops in the land; now he survived on little more than nuts. Still Tugba remained a good and hardworking man, who always made sure that his favorite goat had the choicest leaves to chew on.

One day, as Tugba was gathering nuts, the goat spoke. “Thank you for saving me, Tugba,” said the goat in a clear, deep voice. “You are a good man.”

Tugba turned around in surprise. Even in the forest, goats didn’t talk. “Did you just say something?” Tugba asked the goat.

“I said that you are a good man,” the goat repeated. “And I thanked you for saving me.”

“But a goat ... talking?” Tugba asked incredulously.

“It is so,” the goat replied calmly. “Again, thank you.” With this, the goat turned her attention to a pile of leaves.

Tugba could not contain his excitement. “My luck is changing!” he shouted as he danced through the forest. “A talking goat!” he laughed.

Sitting down next to a tree, he sketched out a plan. “If I take the goat to the village, I will be rich again,” he reasoned. “The villagers will certainly pay to hear my goat talk. Soon I will have enough money to buy a house and field once more.”

The next morning, Tugba tied the talking goat to a tree and hastened to the village that he had left behind seven years before.

When Tugba arrived in the village square, he discovered that all of the villagers he had once known had died in the drought. A different tribe had settled there—none of whom remembered hearing any stories about a rich man named Tugba. Although disappointed that no memory of him had survived, Tugba remained in good humor and asked to speak with the village chief and elders.

Within the hour, the chief and elders, dressed in richly textured ceremonial robes, entered the village square to greet the stranger. Overlooking the rotted sheepskin draped across his waist, the elders offered Tugba a cool drink of water. As soon as Tugba finished the water, he joyfully announced, “My goat can talk!”

The chief and the village elders listened carefully as Tugba told them of his talking goat, and his seven years in the forest. When Tugba finished, the chief deliberated with the elders for a few moments. Then, he stood up to deliver his verdict.

“If your story is true, this is a great fortune,” said the chief. “But if it is not true, you have wasted our time and have made us fools for listening to you.” The village elders nodded in agreement.

“If your goat can talk,” the chief continued, “we will give you half of everything in the village. If your story is false, we will arrest you, tie you, and beat you until you are dead.” Looking Tugba in the eyes, the chief announced, “Bring your goat to the square!”

Tugba promptly returned to the forest and, as quickly as he could, ran back to the village center, carrying the talking goat in his arms. The entire village was waiting for him.

“Speak to them, sweet goat,” Tugba urged. But the goat was silent. The chief and elders raised their brows skeptically.

“Please, goat, speak!” Tugba asked again. The goat, however, was busy chewing on the chief’s robe.

Tearing his robe from the goat’s teeth, the chief roared, “You have made us all fools for listening to your story. Now you must die.”

Immediately, the elders tied Tugba’s arms and feet, and beat him with a whip. They then dragged his body up a mountain where a large tree grew. Along the way, everyone who saw him spit at him and threw stones. But just before they were about to tie a lasso around Tugba’s head and hang him from the tree, the goat ran up the mountain and, at the foot of the tree, said in a loud and clear voice, “You must not kill him. Let him go.”

The villagers were stunned. It was true! The goat could talk.

The elders released Tugba, and carried him back to the village center. There, the chief lay a carpet on the ground for Tugba to rest on, and ordered the women to attend to Tugba’s bloody wounds.

“Gather up half the goods in the village,” the chief further declared, “and bring them here as an offering to Tugba.”

As Tugba lay on a carpet, he fell into a dazed sleep. When he finally opened his eyes, the goat was standing beside him, watching him.

“How could you act that way?” Tugba said to the goat as he slowly rose to his feet. “Look at me. They beat me. They almost killed me. What took you so long to speak?”

“What you do not suffer for,” the goat replied, “you do not enjoy.”



About the Setting

Poland, Eastern Europe

“The Extra Place” is by Susan Peters, a Peace Corps Volunteer who served in Poland from 1990 to 1992, in the heart of Eastern Europe. Poland’s capital, Warsaw, dating back to the Middle Ages, has a population of more than 1.6 million people. Active in Poland from 1990 to 2001, the Peace Corps worked to ease the country’s return to democracy after decades of Communist rule. More than 950 Peace Corps Volunteers served in communities throughout Poland in programs focusing on English education, environmental education, and small business development. Peace Corps Volunteer Cindy Bestland, who served in Poland from 1996 to 1998, reports that the Polish have a saying that they take to heart: “A guest in the house is God in the house.”

THE EXTRA PLACE

By Susan Peters,
Returned Peace Corps
Volunteer, Poland

I am talking with Kasia, a woman I met a couple of years ago. Kasia works for a Western firm, at a salary lower than that of an expatriate but still quite generous by Polish standards. She's a bit younger than I am, slender, with finely etched features, blue-gray eyes. There's a quiet voice, a certain reserve in her manner: what I think of as the "Polish aristocrat" look. We are in her office, drinking tea. She is amazed at the number of Americans, ex-Peace Corps and others, who have returned to Poland after a brief stay in the United States.

"But the same thing happened to me, years ago," she says thoughtfully. "I thought that the West would be wonderful, and then I lived there for a year; I started thinking about Poland, and something inside me wanted to come back. And you know, when I came back it seemed that Poland was perfect." She looks at me. "But now I think it is time for me to leave again."

"Is it because you've changed, or Poland has changed?"

"I think both." She pauses, glances out the window. Across the street, the renovations on the Sezam department store are under way, and the new McDonald's next to it is doing a brisk business.

"I will tell you about something that happened a few months ago. It was Wigilia—Christmas Eve—and my husband and I were in our apartment. We heard someone at the door. Not our apartment door, but the door to the outside, downstairs."

"On the *domophon*," I say. The existence of an intercom system in a building is a definite plus in security-conscious Warsaw.

"Yes, on the *domophon*. I asked who it was. We were not expecting anyone at just that time, but my husband's family—his mother, his brother and wife and children—were coming over later for dinner. My daughter was putting the plates on the table, and my husband was helping me with the dinner. I remember when I heard the *domophon*, I said to him: 'This is your mother, I know it, and she will be coming in the kitchen and telling me how to fix the dinner.'

"But it was a man, a stranger. He was a refugee from Yugoslavia, he said, and he was looking for someplace where he could spend the night. He had no money; he had no place to go. He didn't know anyone in Warsaw. Before I could say anything, my husband told him that we were sorry. We couldn't help him."

"That seems the reasonable thing to do," I tell her. "After all, you didn't know who it was."

She shakes her head. "You know, we have a tradition here, on Christmas, to set an extra place for the stranger who might come. I looked at our table

and I remembered the extra place. I wanted to ask the man in, and I told my husband, 'Let him in, it's Christmas.'

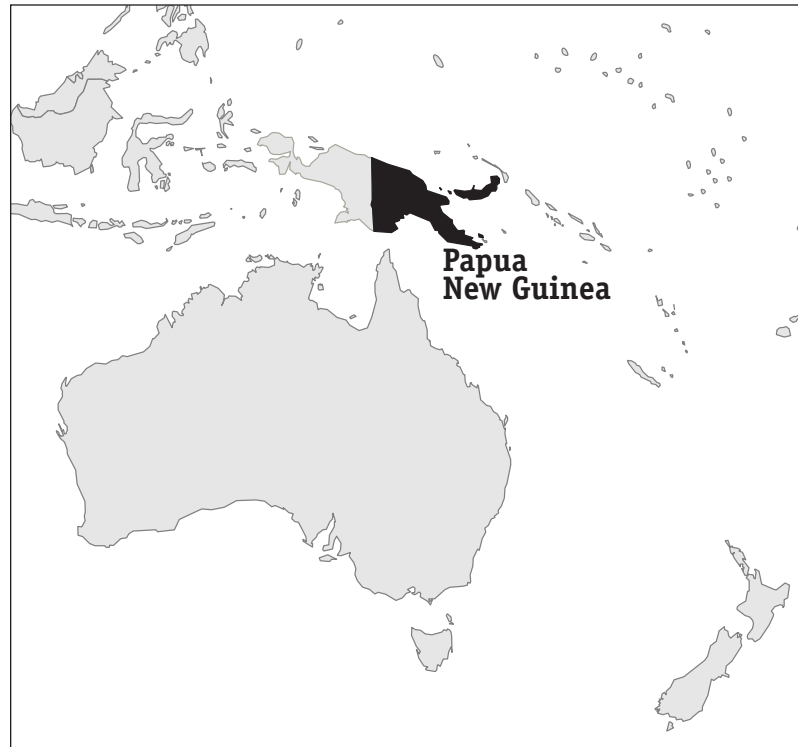
"'No,' he said, 'how do we know that this person does not have two others behind him with guns?'

"'Marek,' I said, 'it's Christmas! There is the extra place!' But he still said no. So we quarreled a little bit—yes, I quarreled with my husband on Christmas. I was angry, but I knew that he was right. And we didn't open the door.

"So I am thinking now that maybe I do not want to live in Poland for a while. I know that the old system was bad, but I think now that we are losing our soul, and that the problem we have in Poland is not just the inflation that people complain about. It is something else, and I don't know what to call it. But we are losing ... a part of ourselves."

She pauses. "I don't want to live in this country if we are so afraid that we do not even open our door on Christmas to a stranger. If we are so busy that we forget what it means, the extra place."

We sit for a moment, not speaking. What can I tell her? I remember last winter; I was living in an American city, in the Northeast, where an elderly woman locked herself out of her house and froze to death on her neighbor's porch. The neighbor was afraid to answer the knock on the door. I think about the millions of dollars in aid, the hundreds of advisors sent here to help the Poles change their system, and I wonder if we ever thought to warn them of the losses that come with the gains, of the extra places that are only empty plates.



About the Setting

Papua New Guinea, South Pacific

“A Single Lucid Moment” was written by Peace Corps Volunteer Robert Soderstrom, who served in Maimafu, a remote, rural village of approximately 800 people in Papua New Guinea. Spreading out over more than 600 islands just below the Equator in the southwest Pacific, Papua New Guinea is one of the most diverse countries in the world. It is a country of 4 million people and 800 languages. Because 85 percent of this mountainous country has dense rain forests, many of its indigenous tribes have little contact with each other, and rarely with the outside world. For most people living in the rural villages of Papua New Guinea, traditions and customs remain the same from one generation to the next. More than 700 Peace Corps Volunteers have worked in Papua New Guinea since the first group arrived in September 1981. Their focus has been on education, agriculture, health, and natural resources management.

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 resupply) 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 millenniums.

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.

A SINGLE LUCID MOMENT

*By Robert Soderstrom,
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer,
Papua New Guinea*

“*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, Kavalu, 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 type 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 begin 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.

**‘A SINGLE LUCID
MOMENT’**

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Entourage: A group that follows along—in this case, the Maimafu villagers who accompanied the Peace Corps Volunteers back to their village

Subsistence living: Living only on what is absolutely necessary to survive, and no more

Communal living: Group living, in which each member of the group is cared for by the other members of the group



CURRICULUM UNIT

The **Reading and Responding to Literature** section that follows contains lesson plans designed specifically to help students delve deeply into the content of the Peace Corps stories. The lessons reflect the common denominators of language arts learning as outlined by the National Council of Teachers of English (Tchudi, 1995), namely:

- Language learning instruction is linked to critical thinking.
- Language learning is social and interactive.
- Language learning is a process of constructing meaning from experience.
- Language learning is based on and emerges from students' prior knowledge.
- Language learning is linked to problem solving.
- Language learning is a means of empowering students as functioning citizens.

Flexible Use

We've designed this curriculum unit to provide maximum flexibility for classroom use. You can use all or part of the lessons and adapt them to meet students' needs.

Standards

We know that teachers everywhere are faced with state and local requirements—and the challenge of helping all students reach specified content standards while keeping a love of learning alive. Thus, we've made sure that

To believe in a child is to believe in the future. Through their aspirations they will save the world. With their combined knowledge the turbulent seas of hate and injustice will be calmed. They will champion the causes of life's underdogs, forging a society without class discrimination. They will supply humanity with music and beauty as it has never known. They will endure. Towards these ends I pledge my life's work. I will supply the children with tools and knowledge to overcome the obstacles. I will pass on the wisdom of my years and temper it with patience. I shall impact in each child the desire to fulfill his or her dream. I shall teach.

Henry James
Author

each story in this collection is accompanied by a set of lesson plans that can help you address the language arts standards of the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association. Because our lesson plans have an interdisciplinary component, they also address standards set forth by the National Council for the Social Studies.

Curriculum Framework

We've created this curriculum by adapting the *Understanding by Design* curriculum development framework (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998), published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). The Understanding by Design framework suggests that teachers begin the curriculum design process by identifying the enduring understandings, essential questions, and performance tasks they want to use to drive the unit's instructional activities.

Identifying enduring understandings and essential questions at the outset gives a unit's instructional activities greater focus and coherence. The enduring understandings we suggest for each story represent our best thinking about the big ideas and important life messages the author was trying to express. You may wish to adapt them for your students. For more information on the Understanding by Design curriculum framework, see Appendix A (page 174).

Reading and Responding to Literature

The lesson plans in the Reading and Responding to Literature section of *Voices From the Field* are designed to engage your students in the personal stories written by the Peace Corps Volunteers in this collection. Use these lesson plans to help your students find personal meaning in the content of the stories while, at the same time, broadening their perspectives and strengthening their reading comprehension skills.

Lesson Organization

In Reading and Responding to Literature you'll find a set of lesson plans for each of the stories in this collection. Each set of lesson plans is guided by

- Specific language arts and social studies standards.
- Enduring understandings and essential questions about the story's content.
- An exploration of the story's theme.

The lesson plans begin with an overview, information about the author, and a brief introduction to the story content and theme. You'll find information about the story setting and how it influenced the story the Peace Corps Volunteer tells. The instructional activities are differentiated to meet the needs of both experienced and remedial readers. Their goals are

- To engage students' minds in the content of the story.
- To encourage students to identify and explore the questions the story inspires.
- To increase students' reading comprehension skills.
- To invite students to find connections between the author's experience, the story content, and the students' lives.

Each lesson plan begins with pre-reading activities to help students link their new learning to what they already know. These are followed by activities to help students interact with the text and explore its meaning. At the heart of the lessons are opportunities for students to respond to the text through group dialogue, coop-



erative learning activities, role-playing and dramatizations, journal writing, and extended written responses to each text.

Questions for Individual and Group Inquiry

We've included questions to stimulate personal inquiry. These are questions students can take to any text, such as:

- What is really important about this story?
- How did it make you feel?
- What did it make you wonder about?
- How did it surprise you?
- Which mental images were the strongest?
- What did this story teach you about the world, yourself, and others?

You'll find questions such as these recurring throughout the lessons. Some of our suggested questions and journal prompts stem directly from the enduring understandings. Others are designed to stimulate individual interpretation and divergent thinking about what the story might mean.

At the center of the curriculum are not the works of literature ... but rather the mind as it meets the book.... When we invite readers' minds to meet writers' books in our classrooms, we invite the messiness of personal response.... And we also invite personal meaning.

Nancie Atwell
Educator

Research-Based Reading Comprehension Strategies

We recognize the challenges you face in working with groups whose reading abilities can vary dramatically. Thus, we've embedded in our lessons explicit research-based reading comprehension strategies that students can use with a variety of texts. These strategies include: "talking to the text"; creating detailed mental images; developing comparisons, metaphors, and analogies; creating nonlinguistic representations of key ideas; and using story frames and other graphic organizers. As students become familiar with these strategies, their comprehension will increase, and they will begin using them on their own. You will find a more detailed description of each comprehension strategy and its source on pages 175–177.

Learning Is a Social Act

Learning is a social act, and language arts classrooms, above all, are communities of inquiry. Students can best explore the meaning of a text through dia-

logue that honors divergent points of view. As their different interpretations are voiced and weighed, students create new knowledge—knowledge that is shared. You’ll find many ideas for stimulating dialogue about each story—and for leading students to trust the integrity of their own interpretations.

Using Journals to Broaden Students’ Thinking

We believe that journal writing is a productive way for students to respond to a text. The lesson plans in Reading and Responding to Literature use journal writing extensively—to provide students an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of each text, to identify and explore the questions it raises, to make personal connections, and to think about how the author’s message relates to their own lives. Thus, journal prompts and student journal entries are an important part of each lesson.




Culminating Activities



The lesson plans culminate with ideas for extended responses to the text through the writing of personal narratives, memoirs, vignettes, fictional accounts, and letters.

RESEARCH ON READING




- Reading is an active process. Skillful readers interact with the text by making connections between the new information and what they already know and by making inferences and interpretations about what they read (Knuth and Jones, 1991).
- How well a reader constructs meaning depends in part on metacognition—the reader’s ability to think about and control the learning process (Baker and Brown, 1984).
- Comprehension is a process that can be taught directly. When students have been taught and given the opportunity to use a comprehension strategy repeatedly, they eventually will use it automatically and independently (Fielding and Pearson, 1994).
- Reading comprehension is enhanced through social interaction (Fielding and Pearson, 1994).
- Competent readers are not only skilled but also strategic. They have a repertoire of reading behaviors that they can consciously apply in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes (Jones, 1986; Calkins, 2001).
- Reading comprehension is enhanced when strategy instruction is embedded in text reading (Brown et al., 1989).
- Reading and writing are integrally related processes. Readers increase their comprehension by writing. Good readers write, and good writers read (Tierney, 1986).

**The Unit at a Glance:
Reading and Responding to Literature**

Story/Theme	Enduring Understandings	Essential Questions	Comprehension Strategies
 <p>“I Had a Hero” (Friends & Heroes)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The potential for heroism lies within each of us. • Friendships sometimes develop unexpectedly, in unlikely ways and places. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does it take to be a hero? • How do heroic individuals influence our lives? • How can we become open to unlikely friendships? Why bother? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating detailed mental images of information • Graphic representations of similarities and differences/Graphic organizers • Comparison matrix • Mixed-ability grouping and cooperative learning strategies
<p>“‘Magic’ Pablo” (Friends & Heroes)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heroes can kindle our imaginations, inspire us to dream, and influence our lives. • Hard work and strength of character can bring dreams to life. • Friendships sometimes develop unexpectedly, in unlikely ways and places. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can heroes influence our lives? • How can dreams become a reality? • How do unexpected friendships begin and develop? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graphic, nonlinguistic representations of key ideas • Mixed-ability grouping and cooperative learning strategies
<p>“Cross-Cultural Dialogue” (Perspectives)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two or more people can have the same experience but see it in entirely different ways. • To avoid misunderstanding others, you have to try to see the world from their perspective, in addition to your own. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can two people have the same experience and see it differently? • How do you learn to see things from another person’s—or another culture’s—perspective? Why bother? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graphic organizers: story frames • Mixed-ability grouping and cooperative learning strategies • Analyzing perspectives

Story/Theme	Enduring Understandings	Essential Questions	Comprehension Strategies
 <p>“On Sunday There Might Be Americans” (Perspectives)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes we are so caught up in our own world that we really don’t see others—or realize how they might see us. • To avoid misunderstanding—or possibly hurting—others, we need to see the world from their perspective, in addition to our own. • Reading enables us to see the world from many different perspectives and expand our worldview. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you learn to see things from another person’s—or another culture’s—perspective? Why bother? • What does it take to put ourselves in another’s shoes? Why bother? • How does reading help you expand your perspective about the world, yourself, and others? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating detailed mental images of information • Graphic representations of similarities and differences/ Graphic organizers • Graphic organizers: story frames • Mixed-ability grouping and cooperative learning strategies
 <p>“Ilunga’s Harvest” (No Easy Answers)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone has a culture. It influences how we see the world, ourselves, and others. • In some cultures, people believe the group is responsible for the well-being of each individual. In other cultures, people believe individuals are primarily responsible for themselves. • Life can raise questions with no easy answers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does our culture influence how we view the world, ourselves, and others? • 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? • Why are some life questions so hard? • How do you handle tough life questions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance organizer questions • Mixed-ability grouping and cooperative learning strategies • Literature circles • Role-playing

**The Unit at a Glance:
Reading and Responding to Literature**

Story/Theme	Enduring Understandings	Essential Questions	Comprehension Strategies
 <p>“The Talking Goat” (No Easy Answers)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Folk tales occur in all cultures and teach important life lessons. • Folk tales contain universal themes that transcend their culture of origin. • In folk tales and in life, people deal with setbacks and adversity in many different ways. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What life lessons can we learn from folk tales? • When facing adversity, how patient should one be? • What does this folk tale teach me about the world, myself, and others? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prediction • Mixed-ability grouping and cooperative learning strategies • Pattern recognition/ Abstracting
 <p>“The Extra Place” (No Easy Answers)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultures and people change. • Change can sometimes make us feel we are losing a part of ourselves and prompt questions that have no easy answers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you hold on to the good in the midst of change? • What is it “to lose a part of yourself,” and how do you know it’s happening? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed-ability grouping and cooperative learning strategies • Pattern recognition/ Abstracting
 <p>“A Single Lucid Moment” (No Easy Answers)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A “single lucid moment” can challenge and change our worldview. • In some cultures, people believe the group is responsible for the well-being of each individual. In other cultures, people believe individuals are primarily responsible for themselves. • Life can raise questions with no easy answers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is a “single lucid moment,” and how can it 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? • Why are some life questions so hard to answer? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed-ability grouping and cooperative learning strategies • Creating detailed mental images • Close analysis of selected text passages • Dramatization of key story events

Overview

This lesson plan explores the meaning of the personal narrative “I Had a Hero,” by returned Peace Corps Volunteer Mike Tidwell. Tidwell is the author of a number of books, including *Amazon Stranger*, *In the Mountains of Heaven*, and *The Ponds of Kalambayi*, a book about his Peace Corps experience, which won the 1991 Paul Cowan Prize given by RPCV Writers and Readers. A former National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellow, Tidwell has written for *National Geographic Traveler*, *Washingtonian*, *American Heritage*, and *Readers Digest*. He is a frequent contributor to the *Washington Post*, where his writing has earned him three Lowell Thomas Awards, the highest prize in American travel journalism. Tidwell’s story “I Had a Hero” appeared in his memoir, *The Ponds of Kalambayi*, and also in *To Touch the World*, a collection of essays by Peace Corps writers, inspired by personal encounters in their service abroad.

“I Had a Hero” is a memoir about cross-cultural friendship and personal heroism. In it, Tidwell writes about his friendship with the African village chief Ilunga during his service from 1985 to 1987 in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), in central Africa. Like other Peace Corps Volunteers who have been moved to write about their friendships with people from other cultures, Tidwell discovered that his friendship with Ilunga caused him to confront important life issues and examine his prior assumptions about individuals in developing countries.

Tidwell met Ilunga when he was assigned by the Peace Corps to work in the chiefdom of Kalambayi, in rural Zaire, to teach villagers how to build and stock ponds for raising fish. The goal of the fish-raising project was to increase the amount of protein in the villagers’ diet, thereby reducing one of the causes of their malnutrition. When Tidwell taught the villagers how to move water from one place to another, build ponds, and stock them with fish, he worked with them to learn survival skills that they would be able to use for the rest of their lives.

We interviewed Tidwell, who provided us with insight into why he wrote “I Had a Hero”:

*I wrote this essay to honor Ilunga and the dozens of other village men and women I knew in Africa who every day work with tireless commitment to make the future of their children just a little bit better. To this day, all of those people are my heroes. I respect them as much as any people I’ve met before or since. I respect them twice as much now that I have my own child.... I sent Ilunga a copy of my book *The Ponds of Kalambayi*, from which “I Had a Hero” is adapted, but Ilunga speaks only Tshiluba, the local*

READING AND RESPONDING TO *I HAD A HERO*

STANDARDS

National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association

- *Standard 1:* Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world.
- *Standard 2:* Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions of human experience.
- *Standard 3:* Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts.
- *Standard 5:* Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

National Council for the Social Studies

- *Theme 1: Culture.* Social studies programs should provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity so that the learner can explain how information and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.

language, so he will never be able to read the original essay. Some day I hope to travel back to my Peace Corps site and sit down with Ilunga under a mango tree and translate the story for him, line by line. That would give me great pleasure.”

About the Setting

To help your students understand the impact of the story, we’ve provided a bit more information on its setting, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DROC), formerly Zaire (and, before that, the Belgian Congo). Lying on the Equator, almost in the middle of the continent of Africa, the DROC has the third-largest population and the second-largest land area in sub-Saharan Africa. It includes the Congo River Basin, which encompasses an area of almost 400,000 square miles. In his introduction to *The Ponds of Kalambayi*, Tidwell describes the Congo River and the chiefdom of Kalambayi. We think his description is so evocative that we’ve included it as a separate worksheet to be photocopied for students (see page 87). We encourage you to read it to students or have them read it themselves.

A Note to Teachers

In the lesson on Day One, which recommends that students read Tidwell’s description, there are two concepts you can explore with students:

- The meaning of the word “traditional” as Tidwell has used it. Explain to students that the word traditional in this context refers to a place where life is the way it has been for many years. It is a place far from the flow of modern technology—where children grow up and do the same things their parents have done, where family ties are extremely important, and where habits and values rarely change. In the sense that Tidwell used the word traditional, it is the exact opposite of what we in the United States would construe as “modern.”
- The meaning of Tidwell’s statement: “What I gave these people in the form of development advice, they returned tenfold in lessons on what it means to be human.” As students are reading the story, ask them to look for the kinds of lessons the people of Kalambayi gave Tidwell on “what it means to be human.”

Worksheet #1

The Congo River Resource Sheet



Bending and arching, looking curiously confused, the Congo River makes its way through central Africa, crossing the Equator twice. It's an enormous river, dominating both geography and human life in Zaire [now the Democratic Republic of the Congo]. In his famous novella *The Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad wrote of the Congo:

There was in (the world) one river especially, a mighty big river, that you could see on a map, resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land.

Actually the Congo has several tails. A dozen major tributaries spill into its serpentine body. These tributaries are themselves fed by other rivers, each farther and farther lost in the depths of the land. One such branch, running through the grasslands of south-central Zaire, roughly a thousand miles east of the Congo's main body, is the Lubilashi River. On a map, the Lubilashi appears as an unremarkable ribbon meandering among the others. But on the ground it is wide and powerful; an impressive river. At one point along its banks live 20,000 people banded together in a chiefdom called Kalambayi. Like the river along which they live, the people of Kalambayi are lost, their lives barely touched by the probing hands of the 20th century. To this place I journeyed with my newly acquired duffel bag [as a Peace Corps Volunteer].



One way to understand what it means to be lost in sub-Saharan Africa is to visualize the continent in terms of concentric circles. The outermost circles, near the coasts, generally have the highest levels of economic development.... But as one moves inward geographically in Africa, one moves downward in income. On the way to the center of the continent, one passes through ever-tightening circles of poverty until, inside the final, smallest ring, one finds Kalambayi: a 400-square-mile patch of simple mud huts and barefoot people.... There are few places in the world where the people are as poor and the life as traditional.

For two years, I lived among the Kalambayan people. I spoke their language and taught many of them how to raise fish. My goal was to increase family protein consumption. But what I gave these people in the form of development advice, they returned tenfold in lessons on what it means to be human. There, at the center of the continent, they shared with me the ancient spirit of Africa's heart. They shared its hopes, its generosity. Above all, they shared its unbending will to survive in the face of adversities so severe I nearly lost my life more than once just passing through.



From the Introduction to Mike Tidwell's *The Ponds of Kalambayi*

*It always comes back to
the same necessity: Go
deep enough and there
is a bedrock of truth,
however hard.*

May Sarton
Author

DAY ONE

Suggested Instructional Sequence

In this lesson plan, we present many ideas for reading and responding to “I Had a Hero.” In particular, we have differentiated the instructional activities to provide options for using “I Had a Hero” with younger or less able readers, as well as with older, more sophisticated and skillful readers. Our suggested lesson sequence is a flexible springboard for tailoring instruction to the unique needs of your students—and to your state or local curriculum standards.

We’ve also developed this lesson plan to address specific language arts and social studies standards using the *Understanding by Design* curriculum framework (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998). The framework, based on “enduring understandings” and “essential questions,” is described in detail in Appendix A to this collection on page 174. You can find the enduring understandings and essential questions that we suggest for this story in the margin on page 89.

Purpose:

- To introduce students to the story “I Had a Hero.”
 - To stimulate individual and group reflection about the story’s meaning.
1. Provide students with a brief overview of the Peace Corps and some of its work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire), using the information provided on pages 85 and 86. Explain to students that they will be reading “I Had a Hero,” a personal narrative by Mike Tidwell, a Peace Corps Volunteer who served in Zaire from 1985 to 1987.
 2. Show students a map of Africa and point out the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Explain that when a new government came into power in 1997, the country’s name was changed from Zaire. Provide students with a copy of the Congo River Resource Sheet (page 87) to give them a feel for the setting of the story, the rural chiefdom of Kalambayi.
 3. Explain that the two main characters in “I Had a Hero” are the author, Mike Tidwell, and Ilunga, the chief of the village of Ntita Kalambayi. Then read aloud the following passage from the book:

On the way to the center of the continent, one passes through ever-tightening circles of poverty until, inside the final, smallest ring, one finds Kalambayi: a 400-square-mile patch of simple mud huts and barefoot people.... There are few places in the world where the peo-

ple are as poor and the life as traditional.... For two years, I lived among the Kalambayan people. I spoke their language and taught many of them how to raise fish. My goal was to increase family protein consumption. But what I gave these people in the form of development advice, they returned tenfold in lessons on what it means to be human. There, at the center of the continent, they shared with me the ancient spirit of Africa's heart.

4. Suggest to students that, as they read "I Had a Hero," they look for examples of what Tidwell was referring to in #3 above. Refer students to the Glossary of Terms on page 21, and ask them to read "I Had a Hero."
5. *Journal Entry:* When students reach the end of the story, ask them to respond in their reader response journals to the following prompts:
 - What do you think is really important about this story?
 - What feelings did you have as you read it? Why?
6. Ask students to share their journal responses with a partner and then conduct a class discussion focusing on students' various interpretations of the story. Stimulate student dialogue by asking questions such as:
 - What do you think Tidwell wanted readers to be thinking about as they read "I Had a Hero"?
 - What lessons about "what it means to be human" do you think Tidwell learned from Ilunga?
7. *Journal Entry:* For homework, ask students to reread the story, underlining important parts, parts that made a strong impression on them, and parts that may have been confusing to them, in preparation for the next lesson. After they've reread the story, ask students to respond in their journals to these prompts:
 - What thoughts does this story bring to your mind about friendship?
 - What thoughts does this story bring to your mind about heroism?
8. Ask students to respond to these questions using examples from the text.

Enduring Understandings:

- The potential for heroism lies within each of us.
- Friendships sometimes develop unexpectedly, in unlikely ways and places.
- Unlikely friendships can leave a lasting mark on us and influence our view of the world, ourselves, and others.

Essential Questions:

- What does it take to be a hero?
- How can heroic individuals influence our lives?
- How can we become open to unexpected friendships? Why bother?
- What can this story teach us about the world, ourselves, and others?

Materials:

Worksheet #1: The Congo River Resource Sheet. Worksheet #2: Comparison Matrix

Assessments:

Journal entries, graphic organizers, dramatizations, written responses to the text.

DAY TWO**Purpose:**

- To deepen students' understanding of the meaning of the story and help them respond to it in writing.
- To teach students a reading comprehension strategy.
- To have students relate an aspect of the story to their own lives.

Part One

1. Have students share their underlinings from Day One with a partner. With another partner, have students share their journal responses. With a third partner, ask students to discuss the parts of the story that made a strong impression on them.
2. Ask if there was anything confusing about this story that the students would like to clear up. Then facilitate a class dialogue, comparing responses with the homework assignment: "What parts of the story did you underline? Why? What did this story say to you about friendship? About heroism?" During the discussion, ask students to support their opinions with examples from the text.
3. *Differentiating Instruction: Reading Comprehension.* This optional activity is for use with younger or less able readers. However, it can be useful to readers of any age. Explain to students that you are going to use the story of Tidwell and Ilunga to teach them a reading comprehension strategy they can use any time they want to remember what they have read. The strategy is to create detailed mental pictures of the information they are reading—almost like creating "a movie in their mind." Tell students that, after you model this strategy, you would like to hear their opinions about it.
4. It is a fairly well-accepted principle that if students have the ability to generate detailed mental images of information they are receiving, they can improve their comprehension of the information (Marzano et al., 1997; Marzano et al., 2001). Skilled readers may do this automatically. Less-skilled readers will benefit from being introduced to this strategy.
5. Ask students to close their eyes as you go through the significant incidents of the story, using the following sensory prompts to help students create detailed mental pictures in their minds:
 - Hear the sound of the author's motorcycle at the beginning of the story. Picture him wearing orange gloves, large goggles, and a yellow crash helmet—and suddenly seeing Ilunga emerge from the tall grass holding a spear and a machete and wearing a coonskin cap.
 - Picture this first meeting of Tidwell and Ilunga. How do you think each of them feels?

- Picture Ilunga digging the fishpond covered with dirt and sweat. Picture him putting the shovel into the earth time and time again, refusing to give up digging.
 - Picture the sweat running down Tidwell’s face as he helps Ilunga shovel. Imagine the pain each of them feels from the exertion of digging.
 - Feel the exhaustion Tidwell and Ilunga experience as they dig for hours in the hot sun. Silently reflect: Has there ever been a time when you felt this kind of exhaustion?
 - Picture the completed hole for the fishpond. Imagine the fishpond filled with water and fish. What does it look like? Sound like?
 - Picture Ilunga and Tidwell during their victory celebration, as they are “hooting and hollering” and laughing in joy—and as they, slightly drunk, begin to name the fish and predict how large they will grow. Silently reflect: How did Tidwell’s and Ilunga’s impressions of each other change from the beginning of the story to the end? Why?
6. In their Reading Response Journals, ask students to write about the mental image that was most significant to them. Then ask them to respond to the question: How did the author’s and Ilunga’s impressions of each other change from the beginning of the story to the end? Why?
 7. Have students share their journal responses with a partner—someone with whom they haven’t shared their thoughts in a while. Then conduct a class discussion based on students’ journal responses.
 8. Ask students what they think of visualization as a reading comprehension strategy. Did it help them find more meaning in the story? Understand it better? Why? Why not? Do they think this strategy will help them better remember the story in the future? Why? Why not? Would they modify this strategy in any way?
 9. Mention to students that they can use this strategy on their own to help them remember anything they might have to read in any subject. Ask students if they have ever used visualization as a reading comprehension strategy. In what subjects might they try it? Relate a personal example, such as:

When I’m reading a history book and know that I’ll need to remember important information, I sometimes try to create a movie in my mind of what I’m reading. Sometimes, I will even do this when I’m reading a science book. After a while, it seems to become automatic with me.

To create one must be able to respond. Creativity is the ability to respond to all that goes on around us, to choose from the hundreds of possibilities of thought, feeling, action, and reaction and to put these together in a unique response, expression, or message that carries passion and meaning.

Clarissa Pinkola Estes
Psychologist

Part Two

1. Draw students' attention to one of the enduring understandings we've identified for this story. Suggest to students that the potential for heroism lies within each of us. Ask whether they agree. Why or why not? Do they think anyone can be a hero?
2. Then ask
 - What exactly does it take to be a hero?
 - What are the qualities you associate with heroes?
3. As you are discussing these questions, write the qualities and characteristics students associate with heroes on an overhead transparency or chart paper.
4. Ask students to look back at the text and identify the qualities and characteristics that caused Tidwell to view Ilunga as a hero. Ask students to provide specific examples of heroic characteristics from the text.
 - Find out from students what they think impressed Tidwell so much about Ilunga that he was inspired to write a story about him after he returned home from serving in the Peace Corps.
5. *Written Response to Literature:* Ask students to write a vignette about someone who has inspired them by his or her heroism. Suggest to students that while their examples of heroes can be historical or public figures, they can also think of a heroic person "closer to home." In particular, suggest that they think about a friend, family member, or other person in their lives whom they consider heroic. As they write their vignette about this person, ask students to pay particular attention to describing the personal qualities and characteristics that made the person heroic to them. Then, ask them to describe how this person inspired them or influenced their lives.

DAY THREE

Purpose:

- To help students probe the meaning of the story using a specific comprehension strategy.
 - To help students organize a written response to literature.
1. In groups of three, have students share and discuss the vignettes they have written. Explain that you would like each of the students to take five minutes to summarize their vignettes to the members of their small group and then to invite reactions from group members.
 2. Following the group discussions, ask students:
 - How were the heroic individuals each of you wrote about similar? How were they different?
 - What qualities and characteristics did the heroic individuals you wrote about possess?
 - How were these similar to or different from Ilunga's personal qualities and characteristics?
 3. As students relate the heroic qualities and characteristics they've come up with, add them to the list you began on Day Two on the chalkboard, an overhead transparency, or chart paper.
 4. *Differentiating Instruction: Reading Comprehension:* This optional activity is for use with younger or less able readers. However, it can be useful to readers of any age. Recent research has found that graphic and symbolic representations of similarities and differences enhance student understanding of content (Marzano et al., 2001; Hyerle, 1996).
 Explain to students that you are going use the heroic characteristics they have generated to teach them another reading strategy they can use to increase their comprehension and level of thinking about a text. The strategy is to use a specific graphic organizer called a "Comparison Matrix" (see Worksheet #2).
 5. Show students a copy of the Comparison Matrix on an overhead projector. Explain that in this matrix, you'll be modeling for them how to compare the author and Ilunga with respect to the heroic characteristics they have generated.
 6. Provide students a copy of the Comparison Matrix on Worksheet #2.



Worksheet #2
Comparison Matrix

Heroic Characteristics	Tidwell	Ilunga
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		

7. Walk students through the use of this strategy by saying something like: “Suppose you were to choose ‘desire to help others’ as a heroic characteristic. You’d begin by writing it in the first box in the first column.” Now ask students to work in pairs to add their own characteristics to the matrix—the characteristics that have the most meaning for them. After they have identified and written a different characteristic in each cell of the first column of the matrix, ask students, still working in pairs, to work row by row and write in the columns labeled “Tidwell” and “Ilunga” brief examples from the text of how each man did or did not exhibit each of the heroic characteristics.
8. Review with students the examples they identified. Ask what conclusions they can draw from this information.
9. *Written Response to Literature:* For homework, ask students to write a brief character sketch of Ilunga. Ask them to use the information they generated in their comparison matrices as an organizing structure for their writing. Ask students to select the lines or sentences from the text that they feel best illustrate Ilunga’s strength of character, and to include these textual examples in their character sketch. Give older, more experienced students the option of comparing Ilunga with the heroic individual they described in their vignette from the night before—or with a fictional hero or heroine. In this option, ask students to comment on what they think it means to have “strength of character.” Let students know that, in this assignment, you will be reading and responding to their writing.

All good books are alike in that they are truer than if they had really happened and after you are finished reading one you will feel that all that happened to you and afterwards it all belongs to you: the good and the bad, the ecstasy, the remorse and sorrow, the people and the places and how the weather was.

Ernest Hemingway
Author

Purpose:

- To help students relate “I Had a Hero” to specific issues in their own lives.
 - To review the reading comprehension strategies used with this story.
1. Suggest to students that, just as in the case of Tidwell and Ilunga, friendships sometimes develop unexpectedly in unlikely ways and places. Friendships like these can sometimes influence the way we view the world, ourselves, and others. Ask students:
 - In what ways do you think Tidwell and Ilunga may have changed as a result of their friendship?
 - In what ways did Tidwell and Ilunga’s friendship change the way they may have viewed the world, themselves, or others?
 - In what ways were Tidwell and Ilunga open to having an unexpected friendship develop?

DAY FOUR

2. Ask students to think of a time when they developed an unexpected or unlikely friendship with someone very different from themselves. Ask them to do a five-minute “quick write” in their journals about this friendship and its impact on them.
3. Pursue the theme of “unlikely friendships” by asking students such questions as: How can we become more open to unexpected and unlikely friendships? Why would we want to bother? What if Tidwell had met Ilunga but had chosen not to befriend him—because Ilunga was so “different”? Why do we sometimes tend to avoid others who seem “different”? What if everyone in this school/this community/this country avoided getting to know people whom they perceived to be different?
4. *Journal Entry:* Ask students to respond in their journals to the following prompts:
 - What did I learn about friendship and heroism from reading and thinking about “I Had a Hero”?
 - What did this story teach me about the world, myself, and others?

Choices and Explorations:

“I Had a Hero” is rich with instructional possibilities. If time permits, have students complete one of these optional assignments:

- Working in teams of four, write a script for a dramatization of “I Had a Hero.” Then conduct your dramatization for the class.
- Imagine that you are a Peace Corps Volunteer writing about Ilunga in a journal you keep to record your Peace Corps experiences. Describe how your friendship with Ilunga has changed the way you view the world, yourself, and others. As you assume the role of Mike Tidwell, describe the reasons why you (Tidwell) consider Ilunga to be a hero.
- Assume the role of Ilunga and write a description of your impressions of the Peace Corps Volunteer Mike Tidwell—from the time you first saw him (arriving on a motorcycle in orange gloves, large bulging goggles, and a bright yellow crash helmet) until your victory celebration with him at the end of the story. Describe how your friendship with Tidwell has changed the way you view the world, yourself, and others.

READING AND RESPONDING TO 'MAGIC' PABLO

Overview

We've designed this lesson plan to help you and your students explore the meaning of the personal narrative "Magic' Pablo," written by returned Peace Corps Volunteer Mark Brazaitis. "Magic' Pablo" is taken from the book *The Great Adventure*, a collection of essays by Peace Corps writers, inspired by personal encounters in their service abroad. From 1991 to 1993, Brazaitis worked in rural Guatemala as a high-school English teacher and as a trainer in the seed improvement and post-harvest management program. He is the author of *The River of Lost Voices: Stories From Guatemala* and winner of the 1998 Iowa Short Fiction Award. Brazaitis is also a recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship, and his stories, poems, and essays have appeared in *The Sun*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Beloit Fiction Journal*, *Shenandoah*, and other literary journals. His writing has also appeared in the *Washington Post* and the *Detroit Free Press*. He is currently a professor of English at West Virginia University.

"Magic' Pablo" is a true story about imagination, determination, and cross-cultural friendship. It is about having a dream and working to make it a reality. The two characters in the story are Brazaitis, the author; and Pablo, one of his Guatemalan students. Although Pablo was just one of many students in Brazaitis' classes, the story helps us learn what made Pablo "magic"—and unforgettable.

About the Setting

To help your students understand the impact of the story, we provide you with some information about its setting in Santa Cruz Verapaz, Guatemala. Guatemala is the northernmost and most populous of the Central American republics. Twelve million people live in an area about the size of Tennessee. Guatemala has coastlines on the Pacific and the Caribbean, and borders Mexico, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador.

More than half of Guatemalans are descendants of Maya Indians. Many are of mixed Spanish, European, and Maya descent. Many Guatemalans live in rural areas. However, urbanization is steadily increasing as rural Guatemalans move into the cities seeking employment. Nearly 1.5 million live in the nation's capital, Guatemala City. Throughout the country, there is a contrast between the old and the new. In Guatemala City, home to major television stations and newspapers, there are skyscrapers, supermarkets, and streets crowded with cars and buses.

In contrast, Santa Cruz Verapaz (the town of 4,000 people where Mark

STANDARDS

National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association

- *Standard 1:* Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world.
- *Standard 2:* Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions of human experience.
- *Standard 3:* Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts.
- *Standard 5:* Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

National Council for the Social Studies

- *Theme 1: Culture.* Social studies programs should provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity so that the learner can explain how information and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.

Brazaitis served) was a remote farming community that lacked many of the conveniences of the urban capital. During the time he served in Santa Cruz Verapaz (1991–1993), Brazaitis noted that “electricity was so unpredictable that occasionally it would be off for three or four days in a row.” At the same time, the town basketball court was “painted with the Coca-Cola logo,” “American basketball games were broadcast on Saturday mornings” via a Mexican TV station that reached Santa Cruz, and “children could often be seen wearing Ninja Turtles T-shirts” (“‘Magic’ Pablo,” pages 23–27).

The Peace Corps program in Guatemala, which began in 1963, is one of the oldest in the agency. Since the agency’s inception, more than 4,000 Volunteers have served in Guatemala. Today Volunteers are focusing their efforts on helping rural communities move from subsistence to small-scale commercial agriculture, manage and conserve natural resources, improve health and nutrition, and increase off-farm incomes. Peace Corps Volunteers live and work together with Guatemalans, enabling both to learn about one another’s history, languages, and cultures.

Suggested Instructional Sequence

In this lesson plan, we present many ideas for reading and responding to “‘Magic’ Pablo.” In particular, we have differentiated the instructional activities to provide options for using “‘Magic’ Pablo” with younger or less able readers as well as with older, more sophisticated and skillful readers. Our suggested lesson sequence is a flexible springboard for tailoring instruction to the needs of your students—and to your state or local curriculum standards.

We’ve also developed this lesson plan to address specific language arts and social studies standards using the *Understanding by Design* curriculum framework (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998). The framework, based on “enduring understandings” and “essential questions,” is described in detail in Appendix A to this collection on page 174. You can find the enduring understandings and essential questions that we suggest for this story in the margin on page 99.

Purpose:

- To introduce students to the story “‘Magic’ Pablo.”
 - To stimulate individual and group reflection about the story’s meaning.
1. Ask students to be prepared to explain at least six basketball terms and to give the name of three basketball heroes in class the next day. They can research the topic on the Web, in magazines, or in the newspaper; or they can interview friends or relatives.
 2. In addition, ask several basketball-savvy students (both male and female) to research the basketball careers of Magic Johnson and Michael Jordan, prepare brief presentations to the class about them. Teach the class, if needed, the meaning of the following terms: “slam-dunk,” “rebound,” “jump shot,” “reverse layup,” and “block out.” This will ensure that all students understand the names and terms they will encounter in the essay.
 3. Begin the lesson the next day by asking students to share with a partner the basketball information they’ve gathered. Then ask the pairs to share this information with the rest of the class. Finally, have the students you selected make their presentations on Michael Jordan and Magic Johnson.
 4. Tell students that they will be reading a story written by a Peace Corps Volunteer, Mark Brazaitis, about his experience as an English teacher in a small town in rural Guatemala. The story describes one of his students, Pablo, who had a passion for basketball.
 5. Briefly describe the setting and life in Guatemala, based on the information provided on pages 97 and 98.
 6. Ask students to read “ ‘Magic’ Pablo,” keeping this question in mind:
 - What made Pablo “magic” to the author?
 7. *Journal Entry:* When students have finished reading, ask them to respond in their journals to the following prompts:
 - What questions did this story bring to mind?
 - What do you imagine the author, Mark Brazaitis, wanted readers to be thinking about as they read the story?
 - What, if anything, do you think is really important about this story?
 - What was it about Pablo that made him seem “magic” to Brazaitis?
 8. For homework, ask students to complete their responses to the prompts in #7. Let students know that their responses will form the basis of the next day’s class discussion.

DAY ONE**Enduring Understandings:**

- Heroes can kindle our imagination, inspire us to dream, and influence our lives.
- Hard work and strength of character can bring dreams to life.
- Friendships sometimes develop unexpectedly, in unlikely ways and places.
- Unlikely friendships can leave a lasting mark on us and influence our view of the world, ourselves, and others.

Essential Questions:

- How can heroes influence our lives?
- How can dreams become a reality?
- How do unexpected friendships begin and develop?
- What does this story teach me about the world, myself, and others?

Grade Levels:

This lesson plan can be adapted for use with students in grades 6–12.

Assessments:

Group discussions, oral presentations, journal entries, extended writing assignments.

DAY TWO

Purpose:

- To have students probe the deeper meanings in “‘Magic’ Pablo” through small group dialogue.
 - To encourage students to use a variety of ways to process the story’s meaning.
1. Have students number off from 1 to 4 and then form groups according to their numbers.
 2. Write the following questions on an overhead transparency or a piece of chart paper, and number them from 1 to 4.
 - What was it about Pablo that made him seem “magic” to the author, Mark Brazaitis?
 - What questions and thoughts did this story bring to mind?
 - What do you imagine Brazaitis wanted readers to be thinking about as they read “‘Magic’ Pablo”?
 - What, if anything, is really important about the story “‘Magic’ Pablo”?
 3. Assign one question to each group and ask students to discuss these questions in their groups.
 4. Give groups five minutes to discuss their assigned question. Then ask each group to select a reporter who will summarize the group’s responses to its assigned question for the rest of the class. After each summary, ask the class what other ideas they would like to add.
 5. Finally, ask groups to discuss how heroes kindled Pablo’s imagination, inspired him to dream, and influenced his life.
 6. Give each group a sheet of chart paper and a set of felt-tipped markers of various colors. Explain to the groups that you would like them to construct an “ideagram.” An ideagram is a device for summarizing information or responses to questions using pictures, symbols, graphics, and simple words or phrases. The ideagram is then used to explain clearly the group’s summary to the whole class.
 7. Give groups 10 minutes to work on an ideagram that clearly summarizes their responses to the topic in #5. Have groups select one or two group members who are skilled at drawing to be the primary recorders of group members’ ideas. However, all group members contribute orally to the summary and help the “artists” clearly depict the information that will be shared with the rest of the class.

We grow great by dreams. All big men are dreamers. They see things in the soft haze of a spring day or in the red fire of a long winter’s evening. Some of us let these great dreams die, but others nourish and protect them; nurse them through bad days till they bring them to the sunshine and light which comes always to those who sincerely hope that their dreams will come true.

Woodrow Wilson
U.S. President

8. Have each group explain its ideagram to the rest of the class.
9. *Journal Entry:* For homework, ask students to reread “‘Magic’ Pablo,” underlining the parts of the story that have special meaning to them. Suggest to students that as they are rereading the story, they should imagine that they are having a conversation with Mark Brazaitis, the author. They should ask him: What is your message? Also suggest to students that they try to use the same comprehension strategy when rereading “‘Magic’ Pablo” that they used when they were reading “I Had a Hero,” i.e., that they try to form detailed mental pictures of the author, of Pablo, and of the events in the story. Finally, ask students to respond to the following journal prompts, using examples from the text:
 - What mental image was strongest for you?
 - Does the story have a message? If so, what is it?

Purpose:**DAY THREE**

- To encourage students to see the connections between Pablo’s actions and their own lives.
 - To enable students to see the connections between “‘Magic’ Pablo” and “I Had a Hero.”
1. Prior to students’ arrival, write each of the following quotations in large letters on a separate sheet of chart paper. Post each sheet in a different corner of the room.
 - “If you can imagine it, you can achieve it. If you can dream it, you can become it.”
 - “The only thing that stands in the way of people and what they want in life is simply the will to try and the faith to believe it’s possible.”
 - “To achieve a goal, nothing can take the place of persistence. Talent cannot. Genius cannot. Persistence and determination can accomplish the impossible.”
 - “Your mind can amaze your body if you just keep telling yourself: ‘I can do it, I can do it, I can do it.’”
 2. When students arrive, revisit core ideas from the previous day’s discussion and invite new ideas, based on students’ journal entries. Ask students to share with a partner the various mental images they formed while rereading “‘Magic’ Pablo.” With another partner, have them discuss their thoughts

about the story's message. Then conduct a class discussion.

3. Ask students to think about the phrase that is repeated throughout the story: "Let's imagine..." Then ask them what "Let's imagine..." is an invitation to do.
4. Call students' attention to the four quotations in the corners of the room. Ask students to reflect on each and then to move to the corner of the room with the quotation that has the most meaning for them. When groups have formed under each quote, ask students to discuss why they selected this particular quote. Then give each group a sheet of paper on which you've reproduced the questions below. Ask students in each corner to appoint a discussion leader, who will lead the group's discussion on each question, and a reporter, who will summarize the group's responses for the rest of the class.
 - How do you feel about this quotation?
 - How does this quotation relate to Pablo's experience?
 - How does it relate to Ilunga's experience in "I Had a Hero"?
 - In what ways are Pablo and Ilunga alike?
 - If you were to take this quotation seriously, what would it mean for your life?
5. Give students five minutes to discuss all five questions. Ask each group's reporter to summarize for the rest of the class the group's responses to these questions.
6. Suggest to students that both "I Had a Hero" and "'Magic' Pablo" are stories about unexpected and unlikely friendships. They are about friendships that left a lasting impression on the authors of these stories and, in some ways, changed or enriched their lives.
7. Ask students to think about the following questions:
 - What "mark" or lasting impression did Brazaitis and Pablo leave on each other? In what ways, if any, were they each changed by their friendship?
 - How do you think Pablo and Brazaitis' friendship may have influenced their view of the world, themselves, and others?
8. Allow time in the remainder of the class period for a discussion of these questions.
9. *Journal Entry:* For homework, ask students to respond to the following prompts in their reader response journals:



- In the story “‘Magic’ Pablo,” both the author and Pablo gave something to their friendship and received something from their friendship. What did the author give to his friendship with Pablo, and what did he receive?
 - What did Pablo give to his friendship with the author, and what did he receive?
10. For an extended assignment, ask students to relate these questions to Mike Tidwell’s friendship with Ilunga in “I Had a Hero.” Ask them to compare the impact of Tidwell’s friendship with Ilunga to Brazaitis’s friendship with Pablo.

Purpose:

- To encourage students to reflect on the promises and possibilities of unexpected friendships.
- To allow students the opportunity to create an extended response to the text.

DAY FOUR

1. Ask students how likely they think it was that a Guatemalan teenager and an American young man would become such good friends. Not all “unlikely friendships” have to be with someone from another culture. They could be with someone from another part of town, someone with a different background, someone with different interests, someone who isn’t inside the circle of one’s usual friendships or group. Try to give an example from your own experience.
2. Ask students to review the journal entry they wrote when reading “I Had a Hero” in which they described an unlikely or unexpected friendship they developed with someone different from themselves. Then ask them what “mark” or impression this friendship left on them.
3. Following this discussion, suggest to students that in order to develop an unexpected, unlikely friendship, one first has to be open to having this kind of experience. Ask why any of us would want to bother being open to unlikely friendships. What does being open to a friendship mean?
4. Ask students to respond in their journals to the following idea:
 - Think of someone very different from yourself with whom you might want to become friends. What promises or possibilities might this new friendship hold for you? How would you go about beginning this friendship?

5. Conduct a class discussion on the reasons we might want to begin a friendship with someone very different from ourselves.
6. *Journal Entry:* Ask students to respond in their journals to these prompts:
 - What did I learn about friendship and heroism from reading “‘Magic’ Pablo”?
 - What did this story teach me about the world, myself, and others?

Optional Extended Response to Literature:

Explain to students that you would like them to create an extended response to “‘Magic’ Pablo” by selecting one of the writing options below. For this assignment, if time permits, have students use all aspects of the writing process: pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Have students work on the writing option they have selected. Provide time for peer review, feedback, and revision. When students have completed their essays, have them share their work with each other in small groups. If you are teaching this unit to another class, you might arrange for an exchange of essays.

- Imagine that you and Pablo begin corresponding with each other. Write four or more letters (e.g., two from you to Pablo and two from Pablo to you) that describe major events (real or imagined) in each of your lives—and that also illustrate how your friendship develops and grows stronger over time.
- Write a sequel to this story describing how you think Pablo’s life evolved in the years following the time the story ends. In what ways does his imagination help him? In what ways does his determination help him? In what ways does his friendship with Brazaitis remain with him even after Brazaitis returns to the United States?
- Step into the shoes of Pablo. In the first person, as if you were Pablo, describe how you felt and what you did after Brazaitis left Guatemala. Describe the impression Brazaitis has left you with. Then describe how your life unfolds over the next two years. What goals do you pursue? What dreams do you follow? How does your strength of character help you?

Choices and Explorations:

Below are several ideas to consider for having students respond to the story in a way that allows for multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983).

- Have students write and do some role-playing in which they assume the roles of the author and Pablo in a meeting that occurs several years after the end of the essay. Assume that Brazaitis returned to the United States shortly after the essay ends and is now returning to Guatemala to visit Pablo. (Verbal/linguistic intelligence; bodily/kinesthetic intelligence)
- Have students create a flowchart that illustrates the sequence of events in “‘Magic’ Pablo.” (Logical/mathematical intelligence)
- Have students engage in a debate in which half the class takes the affirmative position and half the class takes the opposing position to the following statement: “It is not natural talent, but imagination, effort, and perseverance that enable us to achieve important personal goals.” Have students work in groups of four to develop arguments for the affirming or opposing position. (Verbal/linguistic intelligence)
- Have students illustrate key events in “‘Magic’ Pablo” in a series of drawings or in a six-block cartoon (Visual/spatial intelligence)
- Have students write and present a poem, song, or rap composition that captures the events and main ideas in the essay “‘Magic’ Pablo.” (Musical/rhythmic intelligence)
- Have students assume the role of Pablo and write a diary entry in the first person that describes some aspect of his friendship with Mark Brazaitis and the impact it had on him. (Intrapersonal intelligence; verbal/linguistic intelligence)

READING AND RESPONDING TO *CROSS-CULTURAL DIALOGUE*

Overview

This lesson plan explores the meaning of the personal narrative “Cross-Cultural Dialogue,” by former Peace Corps Volunteer Roz Wollmering. Wollmering’s narrative is reprinted from the book *To Touch the World*, a collection of stories by Peace Corps Volunteers about their service abroad. Wollmering served in Guinea-Bissau, West Africa, from 1990 to 1992. In this essay, she writes about the problems she experienced as a beginning English teacher in a culture unfamiliar to her.

“Cross-Cultural Dialogue” is a story about individuals from two different cultures trying to understand one another and having a difficult time of it. Originally titled “My Side vs. Their Side,” the story provides observations first from the author’s point of view and then from what she imagines to be her students’ point of view. Writing is the author’s way of sorting out and making sense of a chaotic experience.

Remind students that when the story shifts from the author’s point of view to her students’ point of view, it is still the author writing the other side of the dialogue. As she writes about the experience from her students’ point of view, she is trying to step into their shoes to see the world as they see it. A remarkable thing about her story is her strong-willed and humble commitment to understanding another culture—to see the world with new eyes.

About the Setting

Guinea-Bissau is a small country on the West African Atlantic coast, bordering Senegal. Among its 1 million inhabitants, more than half over the age of 15 cannot read or write. Many people live in small villages in remote areas, often without paved roads. In September 2000, Guinea-Bissau was one of the poorest countries in the world, with approximately 88 percent of the population living on less than the equivalent of one U.S. dollar a day. It is here that Roz Wollmering agreed to serve as an English teacher and Peace Corps Volunteer.

Suggested Instructional Sequence

This lesson plan offers many ideas for reading and responding to “Cross-Cultural Dialogue.” There are options for using “Cross-Cultural Dialogue” with younger or less able readers as well as with older, more sophisticated and skillful readers. The suggested lesson sequence is a flexible springboard for tailoring instruction to the needs of your students—and to your state or local curriculum standards.

The lesson plan addresses specific language arts and social studies standards using the *Understanding by Design* curriculum framework (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998). The framework, based on “enduring understandings” and “essential questions,” is described in detail in Appendix A to this collection on page 174. For the enduring understandings and essential questions suggested for this story, see the margin on page 109.

Purpose:

- To introduce students to the story “Cross-Cultural Dialogue.”
 - To help students understand how a writer can write from two different perspectives.
 - To teach students two reading comprehension strategies.
1. Provide students with a brief overview of the Peace Corps and its work in Guinea-Bissau, using the information provided above. Explain to students that they will be reading a personal narrative by a Peace Corps Volunteer titled “Cross-Cultural Dialogue,” based on one of the author’s experiences as she served as an English teacher in Guinea-Bissau.
 2. Show students a map of Africa and point out the location of Guinea-Bissau. Explain that it is one of the poorest countries in the world, where more than half of the adult population cannot read or write. Though a high value is placed on education, many factors interfere with children being able to attend school on a regular basis. Some of these factors, at the time this story was written, included children being needed at home to help grow and harvest food; children sometimes being needed to care for younger siblings while their parents worked in fields; a high degree of illness due to unsafe drinking water and lack of refrigeration for food; schools being badly in need of teachers and supplies, often making do with little.

DAY ONE

STANDARDS

National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association

- *Standard 1:* Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world.
- *Standard 2:* Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions of human experience.
- *Standard 3:* Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts.
- *Standard 5:* Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

National Council for the Social Studies

- *Theme 1: Culture.* Social studies programs should provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity so that the learner can explain how information and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.

3. Explain that the author chose to serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer teaching English in a rural area of Guinea-Bissau from 1990 to 1992. Despite extensive cross-cultural training, she was not prepared for the situation she encountered on her first day of school. Her determination to understand the local culture, and to bridge the cultural divide that separated her from her students, is clearly evident in “Cross-Cultural Dialogue.”
4. Suggest to students that they imagine they are Peace Corps Volunteers assigned to teach English to preteens and teenagers in a remote and impoverished part of the world. They arrive at their destination and are excited to begin work. Ask what is going through their minds. What are their expectations of what the school and students will be like? What are they most looking forward to? Conduct a brief class discussion.
5. Prior to asking students to read the story, explain that it is written in two parts and from two different perspectives. Explain to students that the story was originally titled “My Side vs. Their Side,” because the author tells the story first from her point of view and then from what her experience in her students’ culture led her to believe was her students’ point of view. In order to write from her students’ point of view, Wollmering had to try to step into their shoes and see the world as they saw it.
6. Suggest to students that when they have finished reading the story, they should decide how successful the author was in capturing her students’ perspective. If it is difficult to decide this, the students should think about what additional information they might need. How would the author ever be able really to know how her students experienced the situation?
7. Refer students to the Glossary of Terms on page 38 and ask them to read “Cross-Cultural Dialogue.” *Optional Comprehension Strategy:* Suggest to students that—if they are reading a photocopied edition—they highlight or note in the margin where they think a particularly important point is being made, when they find something they particularly like, or when something raises a question. “Talking to the text” in this way can help them get at the meaning of a passage. Provide students the remainder of the class period for reading the story.
8. *Comprehension Strategy:* There is significant research showing a positive correlation between the use of graphic organizers and student achieve-

ment. We suggest you use a “Story Frame” (Fowler, 1982) to help students sort out the multiple meanings in “Cross-Cultural Dialogue.” Close to the end of the class period, provide students with copies of “Story Frame A” (Worksheet #3a) and “Story Frame B” (Worksheet #3b). Then, for homework, ask students to prepare for class discussion by reviewing the events of the story from each of the two perspectives: the author’s and her students’. Using “Story Frame A,” have them describe in writing the events from the author’s perspective. Using “Story Frame B,” have them describe in writing the events from her students’ perspective.



Enduring Understandings:

- Two or more people can have the same experience but see it in entirely different ways, especially when crossing cultures.
- To avoid misunderstanding others, you have to try to see the world from their perspective, in addition to your own.
- Writing can help us sort out life experiences and better understand the world, ourselves, and others.

Essential Questions:

- How can two people have the same experience and see it differently?
- How do you learn to see things from another person’s—or another culture’s—perspective? Why bother?
- How can writing help us make sense of life experiences and better understand the world, ourselves, and others?

Grade Levels:

This lesson plan can be adapted for use with students in grades 7–12.

Assessments:

Group discussions, graphic organizers, role-playing, journal entries, extended writing assignments.

Worksheet #3a

Story Frame A: Wollmering's Perspective



Directions: Fill out this story frame in response to the following prompts:

In this story, Wollmering's problem starts when:

After that:



Next:

Then:

Finally:



Worksheet #3b
Story Frame B: The Students' Perspective

Directions: Fill out this story frame in response to the following prompts:



In this story, students' problems start when:

After that:

Next:



Then:

Finally:



DAY TWO

*Either write something worth
reading or do something
worth writing.*

Benjamin Franklin
U.S. Statesman

Purpose:

- To have students probe the deeper meanings of the story.
 - To have students experience what it is like to try to see the world from another perspective.
1. Have students share their highlights, the lines or sentences they liked, and the parts of the story that were confusing or raised questions for them with a partner. Then conduct a class discussion on what students think is really important about the story “Cross-Cultural Dialogue.”
 2. Divide the class into two groups—A and B. Students in group A will focus on Story Frame A. Ask group A to form groups of three. Have students in group B focus on Story Frame B and also form groups of three.
 3. Ask students in each of the small groups to compare their story frames, fill in details they may have missed, and help each other clarify points that may have been confusing.
 4. Ask students what they think of using a story frame as a reading comprehension strategy. Did it increase their understanding of the story? If so, in what ways? If not, why not? When else might they use this strategy?
 5. *Role-Playing:* Tell the groups that you’d like them to participate in a role-playing activity. To prepare, have groups who focused on Story Frame A take 10 minutes to decide what they will say role-playing when paired with someone who has focused on Story Frame B. Students in group B will prepare the same way.
 6. Set up the role-playing activity this way: Ask one group of students focusing on Story Frame A to pair up with one group focusing on Story Frame B, thus forming groups of six. Do this until you have several groups of six, with the As and Bs seated facing each other.
 7. Everyone with Story Frame A will play the role of the author. Everyone with Story Frame B will play the role of her students. Ask students to imagine that the role-playing begins on the day when there are enough students in Wollmering’s class for school actually to begin. Groups should rotate the role of the author among the three players. Encourage both the author and student groups to refer to the text for ideas if the role-playing begins to lag.
 8. Allow about 10 minutes for role-playing. Circulate among groups, taking brief notes on interesting comments.

9. Debrief the students with the following questions:
 - How did it feel to step into the shoes of the author?
 - How did it feel to step into the shoes of the students?
10. *Journal Entry:* For homework, ask students to select one incident from the story—one that seems significant to them, and around which there was considerable misunderstanding. They should describe the incident in their Reading Journals. Then, have them try to step into Wollmering’s shoes and interpret and write about the incident from her point of view. Next, they should step into her students’ shoes and interpret and write about the incident from their point of view. Finally, they should explain in writing what they learned by going through this process.

Purpose:

- To have students use the incidents in the author’s story to explore the concept of crossing cultures.
 - To have students reflect on what it is like to feel like an outsider (in the way that the author did).
1. Ask students to share their journal entries with a partner, and then in a class discussion. Ask why it may be difficult to step into another person’s shoes.
 2. Then ask what the students would have done if they had been in Wollmering’s situation. If the author’s students were to have the opportunity to read her story, does your class think they would agree with the way the author has portrayed the situation? Why or why not?
 3. Make the point, if it hasn’t already come up, that to imagine someone’s point of view is not the same thing as actually knowing what that person’s point of view really is. How could Wollmering have checked out whether her perceptions were correct? Does the class think every student in the author’s class would have seen the situation in exactly the same way?
 4. Ask students how it is possible for two or more people to experience the same events and interpret them completely differently. Have they ever had the experience of going to a movie or watching a video with a friend, and each thinking that something completely different was important? Ask how that could be.

DAY THREE



5. Explain that it is rare that two people have the same experience and interpret it in exactly the same way. This situation becomes even more complex when the two people come from different cultures.
6. Explain to students that when the author left the familiar culture of the United States and entered the unfamiliar culture of Guinea-Bissau, she experienced a phenomenon called crossing cultures.
7. Ask students what “crossing cultures” might mean. Have they ever “crossed cultures”? What did it feel like?
8. Clarify the concept of “crossing cultures” by explaining to students that when we talk about behaviors and beliefs that a group of people have in common, we are talking about culture. Culture consists of the daily living patterns and the most deeply held beliefs that a group of people hold in common. It is demonstrated in many ways: customs, traditions, values, worldview, styles of dress, attitudes toward education, beliefs about the importance of time, the responsibilities of children and teens, and the role of the family, as well as celebrations, music, art, and much more.
9. When individuals cross from one culture into another, they often feel different, strange, or like an outsider—and they view people from the new culture as different or strange. They feel that they have stepped out of a familiar place where all the rules for behavior are known, into a place where they have to learn a whole new set of rules.
10. *Journal Entry:* Ask students to respond in their Reading Journals to this prompt: Have you ever had the experience of not being sure what the rules were? (Explain that this could be the experience of moving to a new country, moving to a new state, city, town, or neighborhood, moving to a new school, or moving to a new group within a school.) Ask students to write about this experience and what it felt like.
11. Ask students to share their responses with a partner. Then ask partners to share with another set of partners in groups of four. Students in your class who have come to the United States from another culture can be a great resource in this activity. Invite them to share their experiences.
12. Ask students what experiences they heard about that made a strong impression on them. Elicit several different responses.
13. *Journal Entry:* For homework, ask students to consider the following statement: “To avoid misunderstanding the behavior of individuals different from yourself, you have to try to see the world from their perspective, in addition to your own.” Ask them to explain in their Reading Journals whether they agree with this statement or not—and their reasons. Then ask them to respond in their Reading Journals to this question: “What are

some possible ways to go about seeing things from another person’s—or another culture’s—perspective?”

Purpose:**DAY FOUR**

- To have students experience how the act of writing can help sort out complex experiences that involve different perspectives.
 - To have students apply to their own lives what they have learned from “Cross-Cultural Dialogue.”
1. Ask students to share their journal responses from the night before in a class discussion.
 2. If students don’t mention this, suggest that the act of writing was the author’s attempt to try to see the world from another culture’s perspective and to sort out the meaning of her experience.
 3. Ask students to think about a misunderstanding that has occurred in their lives. Suggest that writing about this experience could help them sort it out—or at least see it with new eyes. Tell the students that you will be having them write about the misunderstanding, first from their own point of view and then from the point of view of another person involved. To help students organize their thoughts and their writing, suggest that they talk to the person with whom they had the misunderstanding and—putting their own perspective aside for a moment—try to see the misunderstanding from the other person’s perspective. If they are not comfortable talking to the person, they should try to imagine, as the author did, what the situation looked like from the other person’s perspective.
 4. Have the students use the graphic organizer in *Worksheet #4* and the questions to help them develop a set of written reflections on the misunderstanding. Before writing about the misunderstanding, they should brainstorm a set of preliminary notes in *Worksheet #4*.
 5. Once students have made their preliminary notes in the graphic organizer, have them write about the misunderstanding from both points of view.
 6. Have students begin this assignment in class and complete it for homework. Ask them to share their work in small groups during the next day’s class. Ask for volunteers to share their writing and what they learned as they worked to see a situation from two points of view. In the course of the discussion ask:

- What was the most difficult part of this writing assignment? Why?
- What was the most important thing that you learned?

7. *Journal Entry:* Conclude the lesson on “Cross-Cultural Dialogue” by asking students to respond in their journals to the following prompt: How did reading and responding to “Cross-Cultural Dialogue” help you better understand the world, yourself, and others?

Choices and Explorations:

Ask students to select an individual in your school or community who has come from another culture. Ask them to talk with this person about things that have been difficult for him or her to understand about the culture of the United States. Ask students to follow up their conversations with a written account of what they have learned about seeing the world from another culture’s perspective.

Worksheet #4
Sorting Out Perspectives

Directions: Complete the worksheet by responding to each of the prompts.



The experience as I saw it:

The experience as the other person saw it
(or how you think the person saw it):



How I felt about the experience:

How the other person felt about the experience
(or how you think the person felt):



Why I felt the way I did:

Why the other person felt the way he or she did
(or why you think the person felt that way):

READING AND RESPONDING TO *ON SUNDAY THERE MIGHT BE AMERICANS*

Overview

This lesson plan will help you and your students explore the meaning of the short story “On Sunday There Might Be Americans,” by former Peace Corps Volunteer Leslie Simmonds Ekstrom. The story was first published in *Living on the Edge: Fiction by Peace Corps Writers*, a collection of Peace Corps Volunteer fiction edited by John Coyne (Curbstone Press). Many Peace Corps Volunteers are inspired to write about their encounters with other cultures—especially relationships or events that held great meaning for them. Often their writing is a way of preserving their memories of important people, stirring events, and significant places in their Peace Corps experience. Sometimes it is a way of thinking through differences in cultural values—or reflecting on personal changes they may have experienced as a result of their Peace Corps service. And sometimes it is a way of sorting through their experience of leaving the United States, a land of plenty, and encountering cultures and peoples who may lack the basic necessities of life.

Leslie Simmonds Ekstrom served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Nigeria, a country in West Africa, from 1963 to 1965. Before starting her story, she tells readers what prompted her to write it:

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, I'd always loved being part of the excitement and commotion of an African marketplace. When I lived in Niger as a Peace Corps staff spouse, I didn't have the freedom I'd had as a [Peace Corps Volunteer] and I missed being “among the people” in a bush marketplace. Except for the sassy, noisy boys who demanded to guard your car, barter a price, or carry your loads, the market that most reminded me of my Volunteer days was at Ayorou, near the Mali border. One Sunday at Ayorou, a small boy followed me all through the market. He was shy and hesitant and I thought I could ditch him, but then he'd reappear in my shadow again. I finally paid him to go away. But I kept thinking about him—what his life might be like, how he perceived Westerners, and how easily Westerners become oblivious to the lives of ordinary people like him. Trying to imagine his life, I wrote “On Sunday There Might Be Americans.”

“On Sunday There Might Be Americans” is a story about many things: It's about a young boy taking responsibility for his family's survival; about how close family bonds bring balance to difficult economic conditions; about a young boy's hopes and dreams; and about how it feels to be overlooked and ignored.

On the deepest level, it is a story about seeing yet not seeing others. The difference between seeing people only with our eyes and seeing them with our minds and hearts is immense. This story is a way for you to explore these

issues with your students. It is also an opportunity for your students to experience what it's like to grow up in a culture very different from their own.

Ekstrom's nonfiction articles and commentary pieces have been published in numerous community publications, as well as the *Washington Post*. Her fiction has appeared in *The Bridge*, a national publication on cross-cultural affairs.

About the Setting

Niger, in West Africa, a country of 10 million people, is located in sub-Saharan Africa, south of Algeria and Libya and east of Mali. The Sahara extends into Niger's northern regions. Located close to the Equator, Niger has extremely high daytime temperatures and little rainfall in many regions. Drought is the main threat to food production, and malnutrition is a persistent health problem. Many Peace Corps Volunteers work in rural areas of Niger to improve the nutritional status of children and pregnant women.

According to World Bank data, Niger is one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world. According to statistics for the year 2000, Niger ranked 173 out of 174 on the United Nations Human Development Index—an assessment of social, health, and economic conditions. According to Peace Corps data, roughly 25 percent of children in Niger under the age of two are malnourished, resulting in one of the world's highest infant mortality rates. Nearly a third of the children born in Niger die before age five from malnutrition and poor health conditions. The life expectancy for the total population is 45 years. According to World Bank statistics for 1999, only 23 percent of Nigeriens over age 15 can read and write, and only 24 percent of school-age students attend school.

You can find additional information about Niger on the Coverdell World Wise Schools website at www.peacecorps.gov/wws/water/africa/countries/niger/.

STANDARDS

National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association

- *Standard 1:* Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world.
- *Standard 2:* Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions of human experience.
- *Standard 3:* Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts.
- *Standard 5:* Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

National Council for the Social Studies

- *Theme 1: Culture.* Social studies programs should provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity so that the learner can explain how information and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.

Suggested Instructional Sequence

In this lesson plan, we present many ideas for reading and responding to “On Sunday There Might Be Americans.” In particular, we have differentiated the instructional activities to provide options for using the story with younger or less able readers, as well as with older, more sophisticated and skillful readers. Our suggested lesson sequence is a flexible springboard for tailoring instruction to the needs of your students—and to your state or local curriculum standards.

We’ve also developed this lesson plan to address specific language arts and social studies standards using the *Understanding by Design* curriculum framework (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998). The framework, based on “enduring understandings” and “essential questions,” is described in detail in Appendix A to this collection on page 174. You can find the enduring understandings and essential questions that we suggest for this story in the margin opposite.

DAY ONE

Purpose:

- To introduce the story to students and have them reflect on its setting.
 - To stimulate group discussion about the story’s meaning.
1. Provide students with information about Niger presented on page 119. Show students a map of Africa and point out Niger in West Africa.
 2. Ask students what they think the lives of Nigerien children and teenagers must be like. Give the students an opportunity to share their thoughts with a partner.
 3. Explain to students how Leslie Simmonds Ekstrom came to write “On Sunday There Might Be Americans,” using the information provided on page 118. Ask students what they think Ekstrom might have wanted readers to be thinking about as they read her story.
 4. Tell students they will be reading about a day in the life of Musa, a 12-year-old Nigerien boy. Refer them to the Glossary of Terms on page 51, then have them read the story. Ask them, as they did when reading “I Had a Hero,” to try to visualize the different scenes in the story as if they were creating “a movie in their minds.” Also ask them to highlight sentences or passages of particular meaning to them and to jot down notes in the margins regarding anything that may raise questions or cause confusion.
 5. When students have finished reading the story, ask them to form groups

of three and share their highlights and questions. Then conduct a class discussion to address anything the students are confused about or that raises questions.

6. Explain to students that there is no one right answer when trying to interpret a story. Different individuals will respond to a story in different ways, based on their own perspectives and life experiences. Suggest that reading a story is enriched by hearing many different interpretations and then selecting those that have the most meaning. With these thoughts in mind, ask students:
 - What do you find significant about this story?
 - What ideas do you think Ekstrom wanted her readers to be thinking about?
7. As you conduct a discussion about these questions, different students will focus on different things. Some students may focus on the personal and cultural differences between Musa's life and their own. Some may focus on the relationships in Musa's family. Others may focus on the issue of poverty. And still others may focus on the way the American woman was so caught up in her own world that she simply ignored Musa and what his needs might have been. All these interpretations will help students recognize the many rich facets of "On Sunday There Might Be Americans."
8. Additional questions to stimulate discussion (have students discuss these questions with a partner before beginning a class discussion):
 - Why did Ekstrom choose this particular title for her story? Does the title make sense to you? Why or why not? Is there another title you would have used?
 - Why do you think the author ends her story the way she does? Remind students that since this story is fictional, the author could have ended it any way she wished. So why this particular ending?
9. *Journal Entry:* For homework, ask students to reread the story, complete the story frame on Worksheet #5 on page 123, and respond in their Reading Journals to the following prompts:
 - What does this story leave you wishing you knew more about?
 - What experiences does this story make you think of?
 - What do you think is really important about this story?

Enduring Understandings:

- Sometimes we are so caught up in our own world that we really don't "see" others—or realize how they might see us.
- To avoid misunderstanding—or possibly hurting—others, we need to see the world from their perspective, in addition to our own.
- Reading enables us to see the world from many different perspectives and expand our worldview.

Essential Questions:

- How do you learn to see things from another person's—or another culture's—perspective? Why bother?
- What does it take to put ourselves in another's shoes? Why bother?
- How does reading help us expand our perspective on the world, ourselves, and others?

Grade Levels:

This lesson plan can be adapted for use with students in grades 6–12.

Assessments:

Group discussions, journal entries, graphic representations of key ideas, extended writing assignments.

Note to Teachers:

In preparation for the next day's lesson, here are approaches of a more factual nature to check students' comprehension of the story:

- Describe Musa's surroundings and what they tell you about his life and economic situation. Who are the people living in the same compound with Musa? What does this tell you about the local cultural family traits?
- Explain the dynamics between the pack of boys "hovering near the hotel gates" and the people driving the cars through the gates.
- How does the man in the white Peugeot respond as the pack of boys circles the car? What do you think of his response? How would you have responded?
- When one of the Fulani (a nomadic tribe) girls looked at Musa, "speaking to him with her eyes," he didn't "answer back." Later, when the Bela (another nomadic tribe) girls were "flashing their eyes at him," this time he looked back. What do these encounters reveal? How can you relate to this?
- As Musa looks at his reflection far off in the hotel doors, he thinks about what could be in his future. What are his dreams? How are they like yours? How are they different?
- Reread the dialogue at the end of the story between Musa and his mother. What is taking place between the two of them? Do you think Musa's mother understands what really happened at the market? What keeps Musa going back to the market on Sundays?

Worksheet #5

Story Frame: Understanding Musa

Directions: Fill out this story frame in response to the following prompts:



In this story, Musa's problem starts when:

After that:



Next:

Then:

Finally:



DAY TWO**Purpose:**

- To help students see the world from Musa's point of view.
 - To allow students to capture the essence of the story using graphic representations.
1. Remind the class of the visualization strategy they employed in "I Had a Hero." Ask them in what ways using this strategy increased their comprehension. Ask whether they have tried to use visualization as a comprehension strategy in other classes. Which ones? How did the strategy work?
 2. Tell students that you'd like to try the visualization strategy again to help them increase their comprehension of the story. This time you will be focusing not only on mental pictures but also on feelings. You would like them to put themselves in Musa's place and try to "walk in Musa's shoes." Ask students to close their eyes and picture in their minds the following:
 - Musa holding his baby sister in his lap and feeding her his porridge.
 - How Musa must have felt as he was walking in the crowd of people going to the town market.
 - All the boys swarming around the large green car filled with wealthy Europeans going to the hotel. Feel how Musa must have felt as he watched them.
 - How Musa felt when he looked inside the hotel gates.
 - Musa following the American woman around the market hoping she would ask for his help.
 - Musa being distracted by the shy Bela girl.
 - How Musa felt when the American woman allowed him to be the go-between so that she could buy a bracelet.
 - How Musa must have felt in the heat of the day when the American woman went into the hotel.
 - How Musa must have felt looking into the hotel knowing that this world was closed to him and that he could not go in.
 - How Musa must have felt when he realized he had slept too long and woke up to find that the Americans were leaving.
 - What Musa must have felt when the American woman said to him: "Oh, I forgot about you."
 - Musa returning home to his family with nothing to show for his

day at the market. Feel how he must have been feeling.

- How he must have felt when he returned home and his mother offered him a fresh, warm bowl of porridge.
- How Musa must have felt when he told his mother he would try again next week because “Americans come every Sunday.”

3. In a class discussion, ask students:

- What visual images in the story were particularly striking to you?
- How easy or difficult was it for you to put yourself in Musa’s shoes? Why?
- What makes it hard to see the world from another person’s point of view?
- Did the American woman see the world from Musa’s point of view? Why or why not?
- How do you learn to see things from another person’s point of view? Why bother?

4. Now ask students to turn to the Story Frame and questions they responded to in their homework. Have students compare their Story Frame in groups of four. Tell students not to expect that each Story Frame will be the same. Different students will think that different things are important in the story. Ask them to see what they can learn from their group’s Story Frames.

5. After five minutes or so, ask several volunteers to share the content of their Story Frames with the class.

6. Then have students discuss their responses to the journal prompts they completed for homework. Remind them that these are not easy questions to answer and, in fact, there is not one right answer to the questions. These are questions that call for personal interpretation. Encourage students to express many different ideas and to back them up with quotations from the text.

- What does this story leave you wishing you knew more about?
- What other experiences does this story make you think of?
- What do you think is really important about this story?

7. Ask students to discuss their responses in groups of four. Follow this with a class discussion.

8. One way to encourage students to express different points of view is to remain nonjudgmental about their responses. Remind students always to support their viewpoints with examples from the text.



9. *Graphic Representations:* Allow sufficient time for a discussion of these questions. Then ask students to form groups of three. Give each group a large sheet of paper and some felt-tipped markers in various colors. Ask the groups to draw symbols, sketches, or other graphic representations that capture the main ideas in “On Sunday There Might Be Americans.” Research (Marzano et al., 2001) has shown that when students are able to represent key ideas nonlinguistically, their comprehension increases.
10. As students may not have enough time to complete this activity in class, ask each student to come up with his or her own symbols, images, or sketches for homework. Ask students also to look in various magazines for photos that may represent the main ideas of the story and to bring these photos to class. Let students know that in the next session they will return to their same group of three and finish their graphic representations of the main ideas of “On Sunday There Might Be Americans.”

DAY THREE

Purpose:

- To encourage students to probe the deeper meanings of the story.
 - To help students relate important ideas raised by the story to their own lives.
1. Have students rejoin their groups of three and complete their graphic representations. Provide glue sticks to groups that have magazine photos to add.
 2. After groups have completed this assignment, ask each group of three to share their graphic representations with another group of three. Group members should be able to provide good reasons for the particular images they selected to convey the story’s main idea. Have the groups share their graphics with the class. Then, post each group’s graphic representation on the walls around the room.
 3. *Cooperative Learning Activity:* Reassemble the class into no more than five groups. Give each group a number from one to five. Explain that you will give each group a different question to respond to.
 4. Here are some suggested questions. Write each on a separate sheet of paper. Number each paper with the question number. Staple three or four sheets of blank paper behind the paper with the question on it.
 - In what ways did the American woman not really “see” Musa? If

the American woman had been able to see Musa not only with her eyes but also with her mind and heart, what do you think she would have done differently? Why?

- How do you think the world within the hotel gates and walls is different from the world Musa lives in? What does it feel like to be an outsider?
- Musa wonders “why Allah had made the world unevenly.” Why does he wonder this?
- What disturbed you most about the story “On Sunday There Might Be Americans”? Why?
- Like the American woman, sometimes we are so caught up in our own worlds that we really don’t see others—or realize how they might see us. How could we change this? What would we need to do differently?

Reading a book is like rewriting it for yourself....You bring to a novel, anything you read, all your experience of the world. You bring your history and you read it in your own terms.

Angela Carter
Author

5. Once you have prepared the questions, explain to the five groups that each will be receiving a different question about the story. Each group’s task is to read the question, discuss possible answers, arrive at the best answer(s), and write them on the attached sheets of blank paper. Each group will have five to seven minutes to do this. Ask each group to select a discussion leader, a timekeeper, a “gatekeeper” (explained momentarily), a recorder, and a reporter. (The discussion leader’s role is to read each question to the group, to read previous responses to the question to the group, to make sure that each group member has a chance to contribute to the discussion, and to permit only one person to speak at a time. This role is an important one, so you will want to make sure that the class knows these ground rules. The gatekeeper’s role is to support the discussion leader by ensuring that all members are being listened to. The recorder’s role is to write down the group’s responses to each question. The reporter gives the final summary, and the timekeeper gives the “two-minute” warning.)
6. Call “time” at the end of seven minutes, at which time each group passes its question and answers to the adjacent group. In this way, each group will have a new question to answer, but may benefit from thinking about the answers from the group that previously answered that particular question.
7. Repeat the process, call time, and have each group again pass its question to the adjacent group. Ask the discussion leaders to read the group’s new question, as well as the answers from the previous group(s). The process repeats itself for a total of five rounds until each group has its original question back.

8. At this point the groups read all the responses to their original question and discuss and reflect on the responses in order to present a summary of the responses to the whole class. Ask each group's reporter to present a summary of the responses to their question to the whole class.
9. Since this is a cooperative group process, it works best when each member of the group has a role to play. We've suggested the roles in #5. You may want to add others.
10. *Journal Entry:* In all likelihood, it will take the rest of the class period to complete this activity, so you will need to process it the next day. For homework, ask students to respond to the following prompts in their Reading Journals:

- As I think about the activity we just completed, here are some things that I came to realize about the story's meaning that I hadn't thought of before:
- As I think about "On Sunday There Might Be Americans," what surprises me is ...



Purpose:**DAY FOUR**

- To stimulate further thinking about the meaning of the text.
 - To provide students the opportunity to craft an extended written response to the text.
1. Ask students to share their journal responses from the night before with a partner and then in a class discussion.
 2. Remind students that when the class read “I Had a Hero” and “‘Magic’ Pablo,” they explored the idea of character and strength of character. There was a discussion about how character can sometimes be viewed as the mark you leave on another person. Ask students:
 - What impression or mark did Musa leave on the American woman?
 - What impression or mark did the American woman leave on Musa?
 - What impression or mark did Musa leave on you?
 - What do you see as Musa’s strength of character? What are the character traits that most impress you about Musa?
 3. After exploring these questions, talk with students about the ways they think reading can provide new perspectives on the world. Ask what new perspective they gained on the world as a result of reading “On Sunday There Might Be Americans.”
 4. Talk to students about the ways they think writing can help us make sense of confusing or complicated experiences. Ask why Ekstrom might have written “On Sunday There Might Be Americans.” What was she trying to make sense of? (See page 118 for her explanation.)
 5. *Extended Response to Literature:* To conclude work on this story, have students respond to “On Sunday There Might Be Americans” through an extended piece of writing. They will have many options to select from:

Responding Through a Personal Narrative: Write a personal narrative, using (or adapting) one of the scenarios below:

- Describe a time when someone (a friend, teacher, coach, group of kids) made a you feel completely left out, invisible, disregarded, or ignored—or a time when you made someone else feel that way.
- Describe a time when someone seemed completely oblivious of your feelings and needs—or when you were oblivious of his or hers.
- Describe the similarities and differences between a Sunday in your

life and a Sunday in Musa's life. What are the reasons your life is the way it is, and what are the reasons Musa's life is the way it is? What does comparing your lives make you think about? Describe a "new Sunday" in Musa's life the way you'd like it to be.

Responding Through Fiction: Write a piece of fiction, based on one of the ideas below. Your fictional account should include characterization, description, setting, and dialogue.

- Rewrite the ending of "On Sunday There Might Be Americans" in a way that is credible to readers, based on what they know about Musa and his situation.
- Write a sequel to "On Sunday There Might Be Americans" that begins at the point where the short story ends.
- Write a fictional piece of your choice that in some way reflects the ideas in "On Sunday There Might Be Americans."

Responding Through Letter Writing: Write three letters: the first from you to Musa; the second from Musa to you in response to your letter; and the third from you to Musa in response to his letter to you. Or write a series of letters from you to the American woman and from the American woman to you.

Responding Through Poetry: Compose a narrative poem about Musa that captures the essence of "On Sunday There Might Be Americans"—and that also captures the way in which this story relates to your own life. In your poem, rhyme is not as important as expressing the essence of the story, your response to it, or the way the story may have changed you.

Overview

This lesson plan will help you and your students explore the meaning of the personal narrative “Ilunga’s Harvest,” by former Peace Corps Volunteer Mike Tidwell.

“Ilunga’s Harvest” is a fascinating sequel to “I Had a Hero.” In it, Tidwell writes again about his extraordinary friendship with the African village chief Ilunga. This time, Tidwell writes about an incident with Ilunga and the people of Kalambayi that caused him to become aware of, question, and come to grips with his own deep-rooted cultural beliefs as he had never done before. The experience he describes in “Ilunga’s Harvest” raises complex questions that have no easy answers.

As we noted earlier when introducing “I Had a Hero” (pages 85 and 86), Tidwell met Ilunga during his Peace Corps service in the chiefdom of Kalambayi, in the African nation of Zaire (since 1997, the Democratic Republic of the Congo). Tidwell’s assignment as a Peace Corps Volunteer was to teach the villagers how to build and stock ponds for raising fish.

We chose “Ilunga’s Harvest” as the first story under the theme *No Easy Answers* because we think it presents an invaluable opportunity for students to learn about cultural differences—and to think about times in their lives when they faced questions or situations that had no easy answers. In “Ilunga’s Harvest,” Tidwell describes an incident in which there is no clear right or wrong course of action. On one level, the story deals with a people’s struggle to survive. On a deeper level, it deals with issues of generosity, justice, individualism and community, and the complexity of cultural differences. It demonstrates the way in which our cultural upbringing influences our beliefs, our behavior, and the decisions we make. The story also illustrates how the experience of going from one culture to another caused Tidwell to raise questions—not just about the new culture, but also about his own. And the questions that Tidwell confronted were the kind that are not easily answered.

About the Setting

To help your students understand the impact of the story, review with them the information provided for “I Had a Hero” (pages 85 and 86) about the Democratic Republic of the Congo, formerly Zaire (and, before that, the Belgian Congo). Tidwell, in his introduction to *The Ponds of Kalambayi*, describes the Congo River and the chiefdom of Kalambayi in the very heart of central Africa. The description of the Congo River Basin was included as a separate worksheet with “I Had a Hero” on page 87 to be photocopied for students. Have students review it, or, with younger or less able readers, read it to them.

READING AND RESPONDING TO *ILUNGA’S HARVEST*

STANDARDS

National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association

- *Standard 1:* Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world.
- *Standard 2:* Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions of human experience.
- *Standard 3:* Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts.
- *Standard 5:* Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

National Council for the Social Studies

- *Theme 1: Culture.* Social studies programs should provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity so that the learner can explain how information and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.

When you come to the section of the lesson plan (Day One) that recommends that students read Tidwell’s description of the setting, there are two important concepts to revisit with students:

- The meaning of the word “traditional” as Tidwell has used it. Explain to students that the word traditional in this context refers to a place where life is the way it has been for many years. It is a place far from the flow of modern technology—where children grow up and do the same things their parents have done, where family ties are extremely important, and where habits and values rarely change. In the sense that Tidwell used the word, it is the opposite of what we in the United States would construe as “modern.” Thus, on one level, “Ilunga’s Harvest” is about a “modern man”—Tidwell—encountering a “traditional” culture.
- The meaning of Tidwell’s statement: “What I gave these people in the form of development advice, they returned tenfold in lessons on what it means to be human.” As students are reading “Ilunga’s Harvest,” ask them to look for exactly the kind of lesson the people of Kalambayi taught Tidwell on “what it means to be human.”

Introduction

This lesson plan presents many ideas for reading and responding to “Ilunga’s Harvest.” It provides options for using “Ilunga’s Harvest” with younger or less able readers, as well as with older, more sophisticated and skillful readers. In particular, we introduce the option of using literature circles (Daniels, 1994) with older, more experienced readers (see Appendix C, page 178, for instructions). The lesson sequence is a flexible springboard for tailoring instruction to the needs of your students—and to your state or local curriculum standards.

Differentiating Instruction: Older Students

Try using the strategy of literature circles (Daniels, 1994) with older students to help them become more self-directed in exploring the deeper meanings of a text—and to increase their level of understanding and ownership of the ideas embedded in “Ilunga’s Harvest.”

Differentiating Instruction: Younger Students

These lesson plans for “Ilunga’s Harvest” have explicit guidelines, questions, and activities for younger students or less advanced readers. However, you can easily adapt them for students of any age or ability level.

Keep in mind that the use of literature circles and the lesson plan that follows are not mutually exclusive. Use parts of the following lesson plan together with literature circles, or use only the instructional sequence as it’s pre-

sented below. We assume that teachers who use them will make modifications or enhancements based on time, experience, and their students' needs.

The lesson plans address specific language arts and social studies standards using the *Understanding by Design* curriculum framework (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998). The framework, based on “enduring understandings” and “essential questions,” is described in detail in Appendix A to this collection on page 174. You can find the enduring understandings and essential questions that we suggest for this story in the margin at right.



Enduring Understandings:

- Everyone has a culture. It influences how we see the world, ourselves, and others.
- In some cultures, people believe the group is responsible for the well-being of each individual. In other cultures, people believe individuals are primarily responsible for themselves.
- Life can raise questions with no easy answers.

Essential Questions:

- How does our culture influence how we view the world, ourselves, and others?
- 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?
- Why are some life questions so hard?

Grade Levels:

This lesson plan can be adapted for use with students in grades 6–12.

Materials:

Worksheet #1: The Congo River Resource Sheet (see page 87);
Worksheet #6: “Ilunga’s Harvest” Discussion Guide

Assessments:

Journal entries, oral presentations, role-playing, extended written responses to the text.

DAY ONE**Purpose:**

- To introduce students to the story “Ilunga’s Harvest.”
 - To stimulate individual and group reflection about the story’s meaning.
1. Provide students with a brief review of Tidwell’s work with the Peace Corps in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) using the information provided on pages 85, 86, and 131. Explain to students that in “Ilunga’s Harvest” they will be reading a sequel to “I Had a Hero.” In it, Tidwell describes what happens to Ilunga’s extraordinary fishpond and how that caused him to think about things in a way he had never done before.
 2. Have students review the Congo River Resource Sheet (page 87) so that they have a feel for the setting—the rural chiefdom of Kalambayi.
 3. Remind students that the two main characters are the author—returned Peace Corps Volunteer Mike Tidwell—and Ilunga, the chief of the African village of Ntita Kalambayi. Ask students to discuss the following questions with a partner: What do you already know about Ilunga? What is he like as a person? What more would you like to find out? What do you think his harvest will be?
 4. Ask students to notice that “Ilunga’s Harvest” has been included under the theme of *No Easy Answers* rather than under the theme of *Heroes & Friends*. Thus, ask:
 - What makes some questions in our lives so hard to answer?
 - Why, in some situations, is it difficult to know the right thing to do?
 5. *Journal Entry*: Ask students to think of a time in their lives when they faced a question that had no easy answers. Have them jot down some notes about this incident in their journal. Then ask students, as they are reading Tidwell’s story, to ask themselves: What are the questions and situations in this story that have no easy answers?
 6. Refer students to the Glossary of Terms on page 64 and ask them to read the first part of the story up to the sentence at the end of the third paragraph on page 56: “An unacknowledged, icy fear ran through both of us as we agreed that Sunday afternoon at my house to harvest his pond the next day.”
 7. Ask students to stop reading for just a moment and discuss with a partner: What is really going on here? What does Tidwell want us to understand—about the fishpond, about himself, and about Ilunga?

8. Following this discussion, ask students to read the next part of the story from page 56 to the top of page 60, ending with the sentences: “I couldn’t refuse his offer without devastating him. I took the fish up the hill, feeling like a real parasite.” Ask students what all the different emotions were that Tidwell wanted to convey in this section of the story. What do the students think was going through Ilunga’s mind as he gazed into the shallow fishpond and saw no fish? What do they think was going through Tidwell’s mind? What are the questions with no easy answers in this section of the story?
9. After a brief class discussion, ask students to finish reading the story. Remind them, as they read, to continue asking themselves: “What are the questions and situations in this story that have no easy answers?”
10. For homework, ask students to reread “Ilunga’s Harvest.” Provide each student with a copy of Worksheet #6: “Ilunga’s Harvest” Discussion Guide on page 137 and ask them to jot down notes next to each question as they reread the story.

Purpose:

- To have students probe the deeper meanings of “Ilunga’s Harvest.”
- To stimulate active engagement with the ideas of the story.

1. Prior to class, post five sheets of chart paper around the room, with ample space between each of the sheets. Write one question (and its number) at the top of each sheet of chart paper. Number the questions as they appear on Carousel Brainstorming Questions, Figure One, on the next page. Use masking tape to tape a felt-tipped pen next to each sheet of paper.
2. When the time comes for this activity, begin at the front of the room and ask students to number off from one to five. When students have their numbers, ask them to move to the paper on which their number is written.
3. Then ask students to discuss the question on their group’s sheet of chart paper for five minutes. Before the discussion begins, ask each group to select a recorder. As groups are discussing their question, the recorder’s role is to record the group’s responses on the chart paper using the felt-tipped marker.
4. Call time after five minutes. Then give the recorders time, with help from their group, to summarize in writing the group’s responses to its question.
5. Now, ask each group of students to move to the next piece of chart paper. The process repeats, with five minutes for discussion and recording, until you once again call time. Groups again move to the next sheet. The process continues until all groups have discussed and responded to all questions—and the groups

DAY TWO

Cooperative Learning Strategy: Carousel Brainstorming

We suggest using this strategy with “Ilunga’s Harvest” and again with the next selection, “The Talking Goat” (pages 144–153), because we think it is a useful and active way to elicit divergent viewpoints on a story’s multiple meanings. We suggest you use the five questions from the Discussion Guide in Figure One as the basis for this activity—or any adaptations you may choose.

FIGURE ONE:
Carousel
Brainstorming
Questions

1. What is Ilunga's crisis? What does it have to do with the fish-pond?
2. Describe Ilunga's efforts to feed his fish and what this revealed about his character.
3. Why did Tidwell "pray like hell" that the promises he made about helping Ilunga rise out of poverty were true?
4. What made the argument Tidwell had with Ilunga such a heated and emotional one?
5. What do the incidents in "Ilunga's Harvest" make you wonder about?

have arrived at their original question.

6. Ask groups to read the responses to their question that the other groups have written. Ask groups to select a reporter who will provide a summary of what the group thinks are the most interesting responses. At the end of all of the summaries, ask why some of these questions have no easy answers.
7. Conduct a class discussion on the remaining questions in the Discussion Guide (Worksheet #6). Try to elicit as many different responses as you can; e.g., What is important to you about this story? What questions did this story raise that have no easy answers?
8. *Journal Entry:* For homework, ask students to respond to the following prompts in their journals:
 - As I think about the carousel brainstorming activity we just completed, here are some things that I came to realize about the story's meaning that I hadn't thought of before:
 - Describe a time when you faced a question that had no easy answers. What was the question? What made it difficult to answer? Did you ever resolve it? If so, what helped?

Worksheet #6**'Ilunga's Harvest' Discussion Guide**

- What is Ilunga's personal crisis? What has it got to do with the fishpond?

Describe Ilunga's efforts to feed his fish and what this revealed about his character.

What do the incidents in "Ilunga's Harvest" make you wonder about?

- What is important to you about this story?

What are the main questions with no easy answers the story raises?

Why do these questions have no easy answers?



DAY THREE Purpose:

- To engage students in a closer analysis of the text.
- To have students consider how the local culture influenced the events in “Ilunga’s Harvest.”

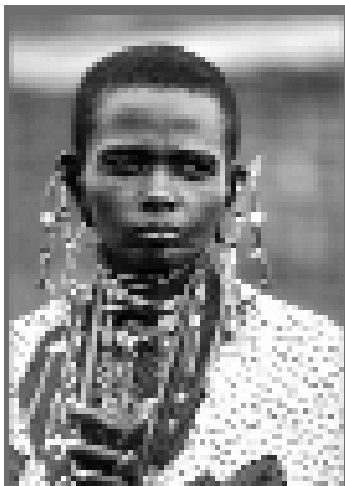
1. Tell students that sometimes, when readers really want to go deeper into the meaning of a story, they take a paragraph or part of the story that seems important and they study it in depth, really trying to think about what the author means and how it relates to life and their own thinking.
2. By way of example, say something such as the following: “There is one passage in ‘Ilunga’s Harvest’ that seems especially important to me. I’d like to share it with you and hear your thoughts on it.”

You gave away too much, Ilunga. You can’t keep doing this. You can’t feed the whole village by yourself. It’s impossible. You have to feed your own children and take care of your own immediate family. Let your brothers worry about their own families. Let them dig ponds if they want to. You’ve got to stop giving away your harvests.... Stop the giving and the community-oriented attitude, and you can escape poverty. Build a pond and make it yours. And when you harvest it, don’t give away the fish. Forget, for now, the bigger society. Forget the extended family. Start thinking of yourself.

3. Then tell students that this passage raised many questions in your mind, such as:

- Did Ilunga really give away too much?
- Can someone be too generous?
- Does generosity have a limit? If so, how do you know what the limit is?
- 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? Why might the answers to these questions vary from culture to culture?
- Would it have been possible for Ilunga to “stop the giving and the community-oriented attitude ... and forget the extended family,” given the culture he was raised in?
- Did Ilunga’s brothers have a responsibility to dig their own ponds and raise their own fish?

4. Have students form groups of four to discuss these questions. Photocopy the questions and give one copy to each group. Allow groups 10 minutes



for discussion. Ask each group to select a reporter to summarize the group's thoughts for the rest of the class to hear.

5. When the summaries are complete, ask students why these are examples of questions that have no easy answers.
6. Explain that the culture in which people are raised exerts a strong influence on their behavior. For example, Ilunga's culture actually required him to share the fish. In his culture, it was the right thing to do. It was expected and normal. It was, as Tidwell phrased it, a "cultural imperative." In Ilunga's culture, taking care of the group is a value that takes precedence over taking care of oneself. In Ilunga's culture, people survive by taking care of one another.
7. Ask students in what ways the culture of the United States differs from the culture of Kalambayi. Which words and phrases that Tidwell used in explaining the argument he had with Ilunga over the fish were an example of a cultural value that was ingrained in him, having been raised in the United States?
8. Ask students to discuss these questions in their groups. Then ask for an example of the words Tidwell used that demonstrated the difference between his culture and Ilunga's. Undoubtedly students will cite this example: "Build a pond and make it yours. And when you harvest it, don't give away the fish. Forget, for now, the bigger society. Forget the extended family. Start thinking of yourself." Encourage students to come up with other examples from the text that demonstrate how Tidwell's culture influenced the way he saw the world, himself, and others.
9. Then ask groups to discuss why they think Tidwell became so angry when Ilunga began giving his fish away that he said, "Fury and frustration crashed through me with the force of a booming waterfall." What caused this intense reaction?
10. Finally, ask students whether we in the United States take care of our own relatives and friends as well as Ilunga took care of the people in his village. Why or why not? Which way is better? Does this question have an easy answer? Why or why not?
11. *Role-Playing Option:* If time permits, this would be an excellent place to stop the discussion and ask groups to prepare to role-play in the next class. Students should plan to take roles in the argument that took place between Tidwell and Ilunga on page 58 that begins with the words: "After Ilunga's sister left for the market, I couldn't hold my tongue any longer. We were alone at his house." Using this option, give the groups of four

Note to Teachers:

Cultural anthropologists might classify Ilunga's culture as a "collectivist" culture. They might classify the culture of the United States as a more "individualistic" culture. For information on individualistic and collectivist cultures, see pages 29–36 of the Peace Corps cross-cultural training manual *Culture Matters: Fundamentals of Culture 1: The Concept of Self*. You can find the full text of this manual on the Coverdell World Wise Schools website: www.peacecorps.gov/wws/culturematters.

some time at the end of this class and the beginning of the next one to prepare for the role-playing.

12. *Journal Entry*: Conclude today's lesson by saying to students that, just as you selected a passage from the text that had particular meaning for you, you'd like them, for homework, to go back through the text and select a passage that has particular meaning for them. Ask them to summarize the passage in their Reading Response Journals and write about what it means to them. Have them jot down any questions the passage may raise in their minds. Tell them that you will ask them to share their selections in class the next day and suggest that their ideas might help others in the class learn something from the story that they might have missed.

DAY FOUR Purpose:

- To have students examine the impact of the events in "Ilunga's Harvest" on the author, on Ilunga, and on the people of Kalambayi.
 - To have students develop an extended response to literature.
1. *Journal Walk*: This is a strategy you can use to help students think more deeply about other portions of the story. Ask students to open their Reading Journals to the pages on which they wrote down a passage from the text and described why it seemed important to them. Then ask them to circulate silently around the room reading various journal responses of others, thinking about the passages others have selected and reflecting on how they might add to their own responses, based on what they've read. (Note: If some students prefer to keep their writing private, provide them the option of turning their journals facedown.)
 2. Provide 5 to 10 minutes for this activity. Then have students return to their seats. Give them time to add to their own journal responses based on what they've read in their classmates' responses.
 3. Now read students the passage in the worksheet on the Congo River Basin (page 87) in which Tidwell remarks:

On the way to the center of the continent, one passes through ever-tightening circles of poverty until, inside the final, smallest ring, one finds

Kalambayi: a 400-square-mile patch of simple mud huts and barefoot people.... There are few places in the world where the people are as poor and the life as traditional.... For two years, I lived among the Kalambayan people. I spoke their language and taught many of them how to raise fish. My goal was to increase family protein consumption. But what I gave these people in the form of development advice, they returned tenfold in lessons on what it means to be human. There, at the center of the continent, they shared with me the ancient spirit of Africa's heart.

4. Ask students what lessons Tidwell learned on “what it means to be human” from the people of Kalambayi. Ask students first to discuss this question with a partner, and then have partners join another group of partners, forming a group of four. Then ask the groups of four to discuss what Tidwell meant when he said: “They shared with me the ancient spirit of Africa’s heart.”

5. *Journal Entry:* Ask students to return to their seats. Then conduct a class discussion about the lessons Tidwell learned from his Peace Corps service in Kalambayi. Conclude the discussion by asking:
 - What mark did Tidwell’s Peace Corps service leave on the people of the chiefdom of Kalambayi and on Ilunga?
 - What mark did the people of Kalambayi and Ilunga leave on the author?
 - How was each changed by encounters with the other?
 - Did each leave the other with questions that have no easy answers?
 - If so, what were they?

6. Conclude the lesson by asking students to respond in their journals to the prompt: What mark do you hope to have on others?

7. *Extended Response to Literature:* Provide students the opportunity to select from one of the following options for an extended written response to “Ilunga’s Harvest”:
 - Interview someone from another culture. First summarize the events in “Ilunga’s Harvest” and then ask what that person would

have done in Ilunga's situation. Write up an account of your interview in the form of a newspaper article to be submitted for publication in the school newspaper.

- Working in groups of four, develop a script for a dramatization of the main events in "Ilunga's Harvest." Perform this dramatization for a class of younger students. Each person in the group should be able to provide a summary of the background of the story and explain the story's significance. After the dramatization, ask the younger students: What would you have done in Ilunga's situation?
- Write a paper describing Tidwell and Ilunga's friendship and how it developed, from the events Tidwell described in "I Had a Hero" to the events he described in "Ilunga's Harvest." Describe the challenges their friendship faced. Explain their growing mutual respect. Describe the mark each left on the other and how their friendship may have changed each of them forever.
- Write a position paper in which you take a controversial issue of your choice from "Ilunga's Harvest" and develop a written argument for or against the position. An example of a controversial issue might be: "Was Ilunga right in giving away his fish?"
- Write a letter to Ilunga describing the impact he had on you. What mark has he left on you? Use examples from "I Had a Hero" as well as from "Ilunga's Harvest." How have you changed as a result of getting to know Ilunga?
- Write a letter to Tidwell describing what you learned about him as an author and a person. Describe the way his writing in "I Had a Hero" and "Ilunga's Harvest" affected you personally.

- Write an essay describing a time in your own life when you faced a question with no easy answers and how you resolved (or didn't resolve) it.
- Write an essay addressing the question: When is it more important to take care of the group, and when is it more important to take care of the individual? Why are these questions that have no easy answers? Why might the answers vary from culture to culture?
- Write an essay addressing the question: How would life in our school be different today if everyone in our school shared the values of the people of Kalambayi?



READING AND RESPONDING TO *THE TALKING GOAT*

Overview

We've designed this lesson plan to help you and your students explore the meaning of the African folk tale "The Talking Goat." This folk tale was told to returned Peace Corps Volunteer John Acree, who then gave it to us for use on the Coverdell World Wise Schools website (www.peacecorps.gov/wws/folktales). Acree served in the African nation of Liberia from 1983 to 1985. He notes:

During a village meeting in rural Liberia, the chief of the village told the tale of the "The Talking Goat." He was trying to explain to villagers that, although they had waited a long time for a health clinic to be built, they would soon be rewarded. They must be patient.

"The Talking Goat" is included as part of the theme *No Easy Answers* because it raises questions about justice and adversity that are not easily resolved. "The Talking Goat" should inspire lively discussions among the students in your classroom.

About the Setting

Liberia, a country slightly larger than the state of Tennessee, is located along the Atlantic Ocean in the tropics of West Africa between Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire. Liberia is home to a number of indigenous tribes. According to 1999 World Bank statistics, less than half of Liberians over the age of 15 can read and write, and close to 55 percent of Liberians live in remote villages far from the modern conveniences and public services. Liberia was involved in a bitter civil war in the 1990s and is struggling today under political disarray and poverty.

About Folk Tales

Folk tales begin as simple stories passed down from one person to the next by word of mouth in the oral tradition. Indigenous storytellers in cultures everywhere preserve such oral tales. Stories and folk tales began as an attempt to explain and understand the natural and spiritual world. One can imagine groups of people sitting around a campfire on a starry night weaving stories that not only entertained but also helped make sense of their world. These stories were passed on from one generation to the next, with changes or embellishments created by each storyteller. Gradually folk tales began to appear in written form. They exist today in every culture.

The telling of stories is a cultural universal, common to traditional and modern societies alike. Folk tales often reflect the values and customs of the culture from which they come. Because folk tale plots are generally concerned with life's universal themes, they often transcend their culture of origin and reveal the commonality of human experience. The structure of folk tales is often similar from culture to culture. They contain colorful people, talking animals, humorous events, suspense, action, and a definite conclusion. The conclusion normally teaches a lesson—often in the form of a moral or admonition. Or sometimes a folk tale will end simply with the well-known phrase “and they lived happily ever after.”

Folk tales can be divided into separate parts. First, the introduction lets you know the leading characters (including animals), the time and place of the story, and the problem or conflict to be faced. Following the introduction is the development of the tale. Here the action mounts quickly and steadily until it reaches the next stage, the climax. Here the problem or conflict is confronted and resolved. Typically, the hero or heroine faces many obstacles and is sometimes reduced to helplessness before the climax. The last stage is the conclusion, where all is resolved, the just obtain their reward, and a moral is offered. Most folk tales have happy endings. At the same time, some, like “The Talking Goat,” raise questions that have no easy answers.

Suggested Instructional Sequence

This lesson plan provides many ideas for reading and responding to the folk tale “The Talking Goat.” In particular, it distinguishes instructional activities for using “The Talking Goat” with younger or less able readers and with older, more sophisticated and skillful readers. The suggested lesson sequence is a flexible springboard for tailoring instruction to the needs of your students—and to your state or local curriculum standards.

We've also developed this lesson plan to address specific language arts and social studies standards using the *Understanding by Design* curriculum framework (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998). The framework, based on “enduring understandings” and “essential questions,” is described in detail in Appendix A. You can find the enduring understandings and essential questions that we suggest for this story in the margin on the next page.

STANDARDS

National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association

- *Standard 1:* Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world.
- *Standard 2:* Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions of human experience.
- *Standard 3:* Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts.
- *Standard 5:* Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

National Council for the Social Studies

- *Theme 1: Culture.* Social studies programs should provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity so that the learner can explain how information and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.

DAY ONE

Purpose:

- To introduce students to the folk tale genre.
- To engage students in the content of “The Talking Goat.”

Enduring Understandings:

- Folk tales occur in all cultures and teach important life lessons.
- Folk tales contain universal themes that transcend their culture of origin.
- In folk tales and in life, people deal with setbacks and adversity in many different ways.

Essential Questions:

- What life lessons can we learn from folk tales?
- When facing adversity, how patient should one be?
- What does this folk tale teach me about the world, myself, and others?

Grade Levels:

This lesson plan can be adapted for use with students in grades 6-12.

Assessments:

Group discussions, oral presentations, journal entries, extended writing assignments.

1. Prior to this lesson, photocopy the folk tale in two sections. The first section represents the majority of the story and ends with the chief’s words “Looking Tugba in the eyes, the chief announced, ‘Bring your goat to the square!’” The second section is the rest of the story.
2. Provide students with information from the overview, setting, and background (see page 144). Show them a map of Africa and point out Liberia.
3. Explain to students the basic elements of a folk tale (pages 144 and 145) or go directly into the story. (With struggling or younger readers, you can use one of the reading comprehension strategies used earlier in this collection: visual imagery, graphic organizers, story frames, or highlighting.)
4. Tell students that you will be giving them only the first section of the folk tale to begin with. Ask them to think about these questions as they read:
 - How generous should we be?
 - How patient should we be?
5. When they’ve finished reading the section, have students form groups of four to discuss their thoughts about the questions in #4. Then ask each group to predict how they think the folk tale will end.
6. Now give students the second half of the folk tale and have them read it. When they have finished, ask them to respond in their Reading Journals to the following prompts:
 - How do you feel about the way “The Talking Goat” ended? Why?
 - Which did you like better: your group’s predicted ending or the actual ending? Why?

7. Have students react to the ending in a class discussion.
8. For homework, ask students to reread the folk tale and respond in their journals to the following prompts:
 - Which lines and sentences held the most meaning and power for you? Why?
 - What thoughts does this folk tale bring to mind about how generous one should be? About how patient one should be?
 - What other questions does this folk tale raise in your mind?

Purpose:**DAY TWO**

To have students probe the deeper meanings of the folk tale.

1. Have students share their journal responses first with a partner and then conduct a class discussion about the questions the folk tale raises.
2. *Cooperative Learning Strategy:* “Carousel brainstorming.” Prior to class, post five sheets of chart paper around the room, with ample space between them. Number the questions as they appear on Worksheet #7 on page 148 and write the questions and their numbers at the top of each sheet of chart paper. Tape a felt-tipped pen next to each sheet of paper.
3. Ask students to number off from one to five. Have them move to the chart paper on which their number is written.
4. Have students discuss the question on their group’s sheet. Give the groups five minutes for discussion. Before the discussion begins, ask each group to select a recorder who will write the group’s responses on the chart paper using the felt-tipped marker.
5. Call time after five minutes. Then give recorders time, with their group members’ help, to summarize in writing their group’s responses.

Worksheet #7

'The Talking Goat' Discussion Guide



1. How did Tugba deal with adversity?
How would you have handled your bad luck if you'd been in Tugba's position?

2. Why does misfortune befall good people? How much control do we have over the events in our lives?



3. When things are tough, how patient should we be? As patient as Tugba?

4. Do you agree with the statement: "What you do not suffer for, you do not enjoy"? Why or why not?

5. What questions does the folk tale raise that have no easy answers?



6. Now, ask each group of students to move to the next piece of chart paper. The process repeats, with five minutes for discussion and recording, until you once again call time. Groups again move to the next sheet of paper. Continue the process until all groups have discussed and responded to all questions—and the groups have arrived at their original question.
7. Each group should select a reporter to provide a summary of what the group thinks are the most interesting responses to their question, and to read the responses aloud. At the end of the summaries, ask the class why these are questions with no easy answers.
8. Conduct a class discussion on each of the five questions. For homework, ask students to respond in their Reading Journals to the following prompts:
 - As I think about the carousel brainstorming activity we just completed, here are some things that I came to realize about the folk tale’s meaning that I hadn’t thought of before:
 - Describe a time when you faced a question that had no easy answers.

**Purpose:**

- To help students find the patterns in a text.
 - To use the text of “The Talking Goat” to increase students’ skills in drawing analogies.
1. Have students open their journals to the page where they responded to the questions above. Ask them to do a “silent journal walk,” i.e., to circulate in the room and read their classmates’ journal responses. Provide about 10 minutes, then have students add to their own journal responses based on what they’ve read.
 2. Then tell students that you will show them a strategy they can use in many subject areas to help them find patterns and relationships in texts. Research (Marzano et al., 2001, pp. 16; 23–26) has shown that helping students learn to recognize the patterns in a text and identify analogies leads to higher levels of thinking and increased academic achievement. If this is the first time you are using this “pattern recognition” strategy with your

DAY THREE

*What is written without effort
is read without pleasure.*

Samuel Johnson
Author

students, plan to spend at least 15 minutes explaining and modeling the example provided in the worksheet opposite.

3. Begin by explaining that folk tales and stories often have an abstract pattern underlying their structure. Being able to uncover the abstract pattern can increase students' ability to think about and analyze the story at higher levels. Explain that there is an abstract pattern in "The Talking Goat" that has nothing to do with Tugba or goats. Tell the students that you will provide them with an example of this. Give each student a copy of Worksheet #8 and guide them through the example given.
4. As you are completing the rows in Column 2, it is often useful to provide students with the first few examples of the pattern, and then give them an opportunity to come up with the next one or two until the whole pattern is revealed. Remind students that each part of the pattern cannot mention Tugba, the talking goat, the village chief, or any other literal details of the story. Remind them that they are trying to uncover the abstract pattern in the folk tale.
5. Ask students if they can think of any other story or film that contains this pattern. If students can think of examples for even part of the pattern, this is the first step toward learning how to employ this strategy. If students get stuck, you can mention Cinderella and ask students to identify the similarities between the Cinderella story and the folk tale "The Talking Goat."
6. To ensure that students understand the difference between the literal story and the abstract pattern, work through the left-hand column of the chart on Worksheet #8. Use Worksheet #9 for your own reference. Explain that this column is meant to be used to record the literal elements of the folk tale "The Talking Goat" that correspond to the abstract pattern.
7. Note: Because abstracting allows students to see how two seemingly different things are connected, it is an effective tool for strengthening their thinking and analogical reasoning skills. Becoming skilled in the process of abstracting can help students create metaphors and analogies between the known and unknown in any content area. (For further information about the process of abstracting the patterns from a text see Marzano et al., *Dimensions of Learning*, ASCD, 1997, p. 130.)

Worksheet #8

The Abstract Pattern in 'The Talking Goat'

Literal Elements	Abstract Pattern	New Literal Elements
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone is leading a happy life. • This person is generous and kind. • Misfortune befalls him or her unexpectedly. • He or she is reduced to helplessness for a long time. • Suddenly, his or her luck changes. • A magical creature appears. • This creature has the potential to save him or her. • At the critical moment, the creature <i>appears</i> to lose its magic. • The person feels that all is lost. • Suddenly the creature's magic returns. • The person is saved and happy once again. 	

Worksheet #9

The Literal Elements in 'The Talking Goat'

Literal Elements	Abstract Pattern	New Literal Elements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> • Tugba and his wife are rich and happy. • Tugba cares for his animals and helps his neighbors. • A terrible drought comes over the land. Crops wilt and animals die. • Tugba leaves his ravaged property and brings with him only his favorite goat. • One day, Tugba discovers his goat can talk! <input type="checkbox"/> • Tugba makes a plan to take his goat to the village square. He will become rich again! • When Tugba takes his goat to the village square, the goat does not talk. • The angry villagers beat Tugba and prepare to kill him. • Suddenly, the goat says: "You must not kill him. Let him go." • Tugba receives many riches from the village chief. <input type="checkbox"/> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone is leading a happy life. • This person is generous and kind. • Misfortune befalls him or her unexpectedly. • He or she is reduced to helplessness for a long time. • Suddenly, a magical creature appears. • This creature has the potential to save him or her. • At the critical moment, the creature <i>appears</i> to lose its magic. • The person feels that all is lost. • Suddenly the creature's magic returns. • The person is saved and happy once again. 	

8. Have students practice finding analogies between “The Talking Goat” and another folk tale or fairy tale, like Cinderella. To do this, have the students work with a partner to complete column 3 of Worksheet #9 by writing down the literal elements of the folk tale or fairy tale you (or they) select that correspond to the abstract pattern in “The Talking Goat.”

9. *Optional Extended Response to Literature:* Have students use the abstract pattern in “The Talking Goat” to write a folk tale of their own creation. Students can use Worksheet #9 as a graphic organizer to begin to brainstorm the literal elements of their own folk tale. Before students begin working on their folk tales, review with them the information on folk tales on pages 144 and 145. Remind students of the structural elements of folk tales: an introduction, a development, a climax, a conclusion, and a moral. As students are brainstorming the plot of their own folk tale, have them compare their initial notes with a partner prior to writing.

10. Conclude the lesson by asking students to respond in their journals to the following prompt: What has reading and discussing the folk tale “The Talking Goat” taught me about the world, myself, and others?



READING AND RESPONDING TO *THE EXTRA PLACE*

Overview

We've designed this lesson plan to help you and your students explore the meaning of the story "The Extra Place," by returned Peace Corps Volunteer Susan Peters. Peters served as a Volunteer in Poland from 1990 to 1992—a time of unprecedented political, social, and economic change there. The free national elections that occurred in November 1989 marked the first time in 40 years that Poland was led by a non-Communist government. While the change to democracy in Poland was a welcome one, the transition was not easy. For 40 years, the Polish economy had been centrally planned by the Communist government. Then, in 1990, the new government began Poland's transition to a free-market economy. As with all transitions, there was a period of confusion and uncertainty as the Polish people dealt with the impact of these changes—including an initial period of high inflation and unemployment. Now Poland's economic growth rates are among the highest in Europe.

"The Extra Place" is included within the theme *No Easy Answers* because it deals with the complex issues of personal safety in a climate of social and personal change. In "The Extra Place," the way the main characters deal with the dilemma they are confronted with raises questions that have no easy answers.

The Peace Corps was active in Poland from 1990 until June 2001, working to ease the country's return to democracy. Peace Corps Volunteers worked in two specific areas: education and the environment. Volunteers taught English at secondary schools and teacher training colleges. They also assisted governmental agencies in heightening public awareness of environmental issues.

About the Setting

Poland is in the heart of Eastern Europe, bordered by Germany on the west, the Czech Republic and Slovakia on the south, and Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania on the east. Its capital, Warsaw, has a population of more than 1.6 million. An estimated 99 percent of the population age 15 and older can read and write. Ninety-five percent of Poles are Roman Catholic. Christmas Eve supper, called Wigilia (vee-GEEL-ya), is widely celebrated as one of the most important holiday meals for the Polish people. Wigilia involves many traditions, one of which is to leave one extra chair and a table setting for an unexpected or missing guest. Uneaten food is also left on the table for anyone who might come in. According to Peace Corps Volunteer Cindy Bestland, who served in Poland from 1996 to 1998, the Polish have a saying that they take to heart: "A guest in the house is God in the house."

Suggested Instructional Sequence

This lesson plan presents many ideas for reading and responding to “The Extra Place.” It provides options for using the story with younger or less able readers, as well as with older, more sophisticated and skillful readers. Our suggested lesson sequence is a flexible springboard for tailoring instruction to the needs of your students—and to your state or local curriculum standards.

We’ve also developed this lesson plan to address specific language arts and social studies standards using the *Understanding by Design* curriculum framework (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998). The framework, based on “enduring understandings” and “essential questions,” is described in detail in Appendix A to this collection on page 174. You can find the enduring understandings and essential questions that we suggest for this story in the margin on page 156.

STANDARDS

National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association

- *Standard 1:* Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world.
- *Standard 2:* Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions of human experience.
- *Standard 3:* Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts.
- *Standard 5:* Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

National Council for the Social Studies

- *Theme 1: Culture.* Social studies programs should provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity so that the learner can explain how information and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.

DAY ONE Purpose:

- To introduce the story to students and have them reflect on its setting.
- To stimulate group discussion about the story’s meaning.

Enduring Understandings:

- Cultures and people change.
- Change can sometimes make us feel we are losing a part of ourselves and prompt questions that have no easy answers.
- Reading can help us see the world from many different perspectives and lead to a deeper understanding of ourselves and others.

Essential Questions:

- How do you hold on to the good in the midst of change?
- What is it “to lose a part of yourself,” and how do you know it’s happening?
- How does reading help us expand our perspective on the world, ourselves, and others?

Grade Levels:

This lesson plan can be adapted for use with students in grades 6–12.

Assessments:

Group discussions, journal entries, oral reports, extended writing assignments.

1. Explain to students that the next selection they will read describes a story told to a Peace Corps Volunteer, Susan Peters, who served in Poland from 1990 to 1992. Provide students with the information about Poland on pages 154 and 155. Show them a map of Europe and point out Poland.

2. Present students with this scenario:

Imagine that your family is getting ready for a holiday celebration. Unexpectedly, a stranger knocks at your front door. You don’t know this person and are afraid to open the door, so you talk to the stranger through the intercom. You are impatient to get on with your holiday preparations as you ask the stranger what he wants. You discover the stranger is homeless. He is cold and hungry and has nowhere to stay. He wants your family to take him in. Would you open the door?

3. Have students discuss this question with a partner and then conduct a class discussion.

4. Have students read the story and ask them to highlight sentences or phrases that have particular meaning to them.

5. Then have students pair off anew to discuss the question above. Ask each pair to try to come to a consensus on what they think is significant about “The Extra Place”—and on one or two questions they think the story raises that have no easy answers. Give each pair a sheet of chart paper for use in summarizing their responses.

6. Give pairs 10 minutes to discuss the questions and record their responses on the chart paper. Ask each pair to select a reporter to present their responses, using the chart paper summary as a guide.

7. *Journal Entry:* For homework, ask students to tell the story of “The Extra Place” to an adult—or to a younger person—and to ask that person what made Kasia’s situation so difficult. What would the listener have done in her position?

DAY TWO

Purpose:

- To help students probe the meaning of the text.
- To help students connect the story with their own lives.

1. Ask students to return to their partners from the previous day and share their journal summaries from the last class. Then conduct a class discussion as follows:

2. Read this passage from “The Extra Place” to students:

So I am thinking now that maybe I do not want to live in Poland for a while. I know that the old system was bad, but I think now that we are losing our soul, and that the problem we have in Poland is not just the inflation that people complain about. It is something else, and I don't know what to call it. But we are losing ... a part of ourselves....

I don't want to live in this country if we are so afraid that we do not even open our door on Christmas to a stranger. If we are so busy that we forget what it means, the extra place.

3. Ask students what they think Kasia meant when she said “we are losing our soul ... a part of ourselves.” What exactly does it mean “to lose your soul ... to lose a part of yourself;” and how do you know it’s happening? What is the connection between change and “losing a part of yourself”?
4. Suggest to students that making the transition from childhood to adulthood represents a change in which a part of us is lost or left behind to make room for the new person we are becoming. Have students return to their partners to discuss how the story “The Extra Place” might help them think about changes they’re experiencing in their own lives.
5. After the partners have had some time for discussion, ask how we can hold on to the good in the midst of change. Give the students five minutes to discuss this question, and then have one from each pair summarize their responses.
6. *Journal Entry:* Ask students to respond in their journals to the following prompt: Describe a time in your life when, as a result of a change or an event that occurred, you felt as if you were “losing a part of yourself—or losing your soul.” For example, this might have been a situation where, because of peer pressure, you compromised your values. Or it could have been an event or change that had nothing to do with friends. It might have been moving to a new place, growing up and facing issues that you didn’t have to face as a child, seeing things in the media you didn’t agree with.

7. Give students at least 10 minutes for writing, and then ask them to share their thoughts with a partner. Then ask for volunteers to report their thoughts to the rest of the class.
8. For homework, ask students to return to their journal response in #6, write about it in more detail, and then respond to the question: Is change always accompanied by losing a part of yourself? Why or why not?

DAY THREE

Purpose:

- To give students the opportunity to think about and discuss a question the text raises that has no easy answers.
1. Conduct a class discussion about the journal responses to the questions: Is change always accompanied by losing a part of yourself? Why or why not?
 2. The night before the class, make large signs that say: “Strongly Agree,” “Agree,” “Disagree,” and “Strongly Disagree.” Post each of the signs in a different corner of the room.
 3. Ask students to reread “The Extra Place” and then form groups of four. Ask each group to identify the most important question they think the story raises. Allow time for groups to discuss their question and possible answers.
 4. Suggest to students: “Some people might say (or perhaps a group has already said) that because it was Christmas and a Polish tradition to set an extra place at the table, Kasia and her husband should have invited the stranger to come in and share the meal with them. This is a difficult question to answer. I’d like to invite you to move to the corner of the room that best expresses your opinion on this issue: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly disagree.”
 5. Allow students time to move to their desired corner. Then have them select a partner and discuss the reasons they have taken this position on the issue—or, perhaps, more important, why it might have been hard to take a position.
 6. After students have had a chance to discuss with a partner the reasons for their position, ask them to discuss it with the rest of the students in their corner. Allow five minutes for discussion, after which a spokesperson from each corner is selected to summarize the reasons behind his or her group’s position.

7. *Journal Entry*: Following the group summaries, debrief the students by having them return to their seats and respond in their journals to the following prompts:

- As a result of this activity, what have you learned?
- As a result of reading and thinking about “The Extra Place,” what have you learned about the world, yourself, and others? What have you learned about change?

8. Ask students to complete their journal writing for homework. Tell them that you are looking forward to responding to what they have written about each of the above questions in a “dialogue journal” format. If students are not familiar with dialogue journaling, explain to them that it is an opportunity for them to express their thoughts to you, and for you to respond to them in writing with your reflections on what they have written.

The sole substitute for an experience which we have not ourselves lived through is art and literature.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn
Author

Choices and Explorations:

1. To reinforce the process of finding the more abstract patterns in a text (see pages 149–152), explain to students that, just as folk tales such as “The Talking Goat” have abstract patterns that underlie their structure, so does a story like “The Extra Place.” Explain that the more they practice finding the abstract patterns in a text, the easier it becomes. Then they can use this skill in this class—or in a social studies or history class—to make connections between two seemingly unrelated stories, incidents, or events, based on their abstract patterns. Explain that the ability to uncover abstract patterns and make connections can increase their ability to think at higher levels about what they are learning in any class. Provide students with the following example on Worksheet #10 on page 161.
2. Ask students to help you complete parts of the middle column and then to fill in the left-hand column with the literal facts from “The Extra Place.”
3. Then ask them what analogy they can develop in the right-hand column. What is something they have seen or read or experienced that follows the abstract pattern in the middle column, but that has nothing to do with Christmas or strangers at the door?

4. Have students work with a partner to come up with an analogy. Then ask for volunteers to share their analogies with the rest of the class. See how many different analogies you can elicit. Ask students what they think of the strategy of abstracting the pattern in a story. How might they use this strategy in another class? In another subject area?
5. Based on these analogies, or on their personal responses to “The Extra Place,” ask students to write a poem or draw a mind map or other graphic representation that illustrates the mental connections they have made.



READING AND RESPONDING TO *A SINGLE LUCID MOMENT*

Overview

We've designed this lesson plan to help you and your students explore the meaning of the story "A Single Lucid Moment," by former Peace Corps Volunteer Robert Soderstrom, who served in Papua New Guinea. Soderstrom and his wife, Kerry, were the first Peace Corps Volunteers to serve in the remote village of Maimafu in the Eastern Highlands province of Papua New Guinea.

This selection is the last for the theme *No Easy Answers*. It should speak strongly to students on many levels—emotionally and intellectually. "A Single Lucid Moment" deals with a sudden and profound change in worldview that occurs when individuals from a modern, technological, materially wealthy culture encounter individuals from a traditional, materially simple, communal culture. It raises questions about the meaning of individualism and community and about the values of generosity and self-sufficiency. In "A Single Lucid Moment," the way the main characters deal with the dilemma they are confronted with when they move from one culture into another raises questions that have no easy answers.

About the Setting

Maimafu is a remote village of about 800 people in Papua New Guinea. A country about the size of California, Papua New Guinea, just below the Equator in the southwest Pacific, makes up the eastern half of the island of New Guinea. The majority of the people live in rural areas—often without access to electricity and plumbing—and are dependent on subsistence agriculture for their living.

Papua New Guinea is a diverse country of 4 million people and 800 languages. It is home to more than 200 cultures, each with its own traditions. Because 85 percent of Papua New Guinea consists of dense rain forest—and because of its rough, mountainous terrain—many of its numerous tribes seldom have contact with each other, and rarely with the outside world. For most people living in rural villages in Papua New Guinea, life goes on without change year after year. Traditions and customs remain the same from one generation to the next. The tribal cultures are primarily communal ones in which each member of the community can count on being cared for in some way within a circle of family, community, and friends.

Introduction

This lesson plan presents many ideas for reading and responding to “A Single Lucid Moment.” It differentiates the instructional activities for younger or less able readers and for older, more sophisticated and skillful readers. The lesson sequence is a flexible springboard for tailoring instruction to the needs of your students—and to your state or local curriculum standards.

We’ve developed this lesson plan to address specific language arts and social studies standards using the *Understanding by Design* curriculum framework (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998). The framework, based on “enduring understandings” and “essential questions,” is described in detail in Appendix A to this collection on page 174. You can find the enduring understandings and essential questions that we suggest for this story in the margin on page 164.

STANDARDS

National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association

- *Standard 1:* Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world.
- *Standard 2:* Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions of human experience.
- *Standard 3:* Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts.
- *Standard 5:* Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

National Council for the Social Studies

- *Theme 1: Culture.* Social studies programs should provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity so that the learner can explain how information and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.

DAY ONE

Purpose:

- To introduce students to the story and its setting.
- To encourage students to find personal meaning in the text.

Enduring Understandings:

- A “single lucid moment” can challenge and change our worldview.
- In some cultures, people believe the group is responsible for the well-being of each individual. In other cultures, people believe individuals are primarily responsible for themselves.
- Life can raise questions with no easy answers.

Essential Questions:

- What is a “single lucid moment” and how can it 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?
- Why are some life questions so hard?

Grade Levels:

This lesson plan can be adapted for use with students in grades 6–12.

Assessments:

Group discussions, journal entries, oral reports, extended writing assignments.

1. Begin this lesson by suggesting to students that “A Single Lucid Moment” will have more meaning for them if they take time to explore the meaning of the title and some information about the story’s setting. Begin with the title. In the context of this story, lucid means “extremely clear.” The lucid moment in the story is one in which a basic way of looking at life is brought clearly into focus, challenging worldview and personal values. Ask students if they’ve ever experienced a moment when they suddenly realized that something they accepted and took for granted was not accepted or taken for granted by others. Examples of things we might take for granted: When people are sick, they can go to the emergency room. When people need a loaf of bread, they can go to the store to buy one. When people see violence in movies or cartoons, they know it’s just make-believe. Or new realizations can take place if you are
 - Traveling to another place and seeing that people there see the world and behave unlike people where you live.
 - Spending the night or a weekend at a friend’s home and noticing that your friend’s family has customs, traditions, and ways of interacting completely different from your family’s.
 - Seeing a movie in which you are strongly affected by the way the main character sees the world, even though that person is very different from you and sees the world in a completely different way.
 - Becoming friends with someone who sees the world differently from the way you do.
2. Ask students to pair up with a partner and share their reactions to the scenarios presented above. Ask partners to think, in particular, about this question: How have you felt when you’ve suddenly realized that the things you’ve accepted as true for yourself and for everyone are true only for yourself, and not true for everyone?
3. Point out to students that the moment when we realize that the things we accept as true or normal for everyone are not true or normal for everyone—or that our view of the world is not the only view of the world—can become a “single lucid moment” for us.

4. Provide students with the information from the Overview and Setting sections on page 162.
5. Ask students to read “A Single Lucid Moment.” Suggest to them that as they read, they jot down notes in the margin—or highlight sentences that evoke a strong reaction. They should pay particular attention to points where the story makes them feel happy, peaceful, sad, frustrated, angry, or confused. At those points in their reading, they can try “talking to the text”—i.e., writing notes in the margin about what those particular passages mean, as if they were asking: “Story, what is your message?”
6. As students finish reading the story, ask them to look back over the sentences they have highlighted and select one or two that evoked the strongest response.
7. Then call on volunteers to read those sentences that evoked the most powerful response and explain why they chose them. After each comment, ask if anyone highlighted the same sentence. Was it for the same reason, or a different one? Elicit a number of different responses.
8. *Interviews and Journal Entries:* For homework, ask students to tell the story of “A Single Lucid Moment” to another person (adult, child, or teen), then interview that person on how he or she might have responded to the Maimafu village council’s questions about homelessness. Finally, ask students to summarize the interview response and their reaction to it in their Reading Journals. Explain that their written journal entry will help them in the next day’s lesson.



DAY TWO**Purpose:**

- To have students probe the deeper meanings of the story and the questions it raises.
- To prepare students for a written response to the story.

1. Ask students to form groups of four and share the results of their interviews and their journal responses from the night before. Follow this with a class discussion about the various responses students received. Ask why the Peace Corps Volunteers were so startled by the Maimafu village council's request.

2. Now tell a personal story something like this:

Often as I walk to work in the morning or leave in the evening, I pass a homeless person. My feelings are always mixed—sympathy, fear, uncertainty, sadness, uneasiness, concern. I always wonder: “Should I give this person money? How will he use it? How can I ignore someone who is obviously distressed? Will my giving this person money only perpetuate his situation and keep him from seeking legitimate help? Is the person really as helpless as he looks? If I give to one homeless person, do I need to give to every homeless person? What is the right thing to do? What if I were this person? How would I feel? What would I need? What if someone asked me to bring this person into my home? What would I do?”

3. Suggest that the increasing phenomenon of homelessness in the United States is no doubt troubling to all of us. Sometimes it is even easier to pretend it doesn't exist. Ask students to turn to a partner and discuss what they would do if they were to pass a homeless person on the street. Would they talk to the person? Would they give the person money? Would they invite the person into their homes?

4. Ask students why these are questions with no easy answers.

5. Then suggest to students that they try to imagine a culture in which the concept of homelessness hadn't even existed until the two American Peace Corps Volunteers arrived. Try to imagine a culture in which people simply cannot grasp the idea that a person might exist outside the circle of the love and support of family, friends, and community.

6. Ask students to close their eyes and imagine they are one of the Peace Corps Volunteers in this story. Say something along these lines:

Picture the bamboo home the people of Maimafu have built for you. Picture the path to your home sprinkled with flower petals. Picture the garden in the back of your home the people of

Maimafu have started. Imagine how the pictures of the two homeless men in Chicago must have looked to the Maimafu villagers. Now picture a village elder asking you: “Why do you have homeless people in your country? How can it be that, in such a rich country, there is no one who will take care of them?”

7. Ask students to form groups of four and discuss the way they might have responded to these questions.
8. Then ask the groups to discuss: Why—when the Maimafu village council proposed to bring the homeless men to Papua New Guinea—was this “a single lucid moment” for the Peace Corps Volunteer? How did the Maimafu villagers’ request turn the Volunteer’s worldview upside down and leave him speechless? How might it have made him see the world in a way he had never seen it before? Do you think he would ever be able to look at the photographs of the homeless men in Chicago in the same way as he had before? Why was the memory of this moment so strong that it caused one of the Volunteers to write a story titled “A Single Lucid Moment”?
9. Conduct a class discussion addressing these questions. Then ask students to respond to the questions as a journal entry in preparation for the next day’s class.
10. Near the end of the class, read this passage from the story aloud:

Moia spoke, “After you left last night, all of us men on the village council had a very big meeting. For a long time we discussed the two men in your picture. We have reached a conclusion and have a proposal for you.”

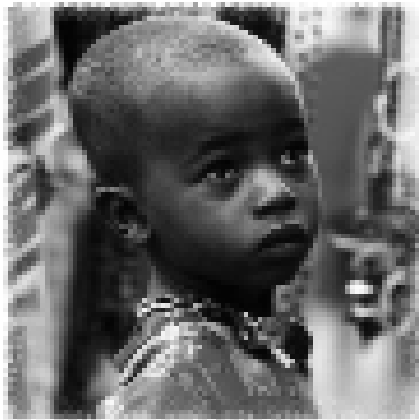
“What could that possibly be,” we wondered.

“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.

11. *Writing Assignment:* Conclude the class by assigning students homework to write a script for a dramatization of the story “A Single Lucid Moment.” Explain that the next day you will ask for students to volunteer to play the roles of the Peace Corps Volunteers and the Maimafu village council members. While the passage you’ve just read should be the basis of the dramatization, ask students to elaborate on what you’ve read by adding new dialogue of their own, based on other passages in the story that held meaning for them. Ask students, as they are writing the script, to try to see the world from two points of view—that of the Peace Corps Volunteers and that of the Maimafu villagers.
12. *Differentiating Instruction:* Depending on the ability level of your students, you might provide an extra class period for students to complete this writing assignment in groups of three.



DAY THREE

Purpose:

- To deepen students' understanding of the story by engaging them in an experience that makes its events come alive.
 - To inspire student empathy.
1. Ask students to share their scripts in small groups. Then ask for volunteers to conduct the dramatization. One way to conduct the dramatization to increase student involvement: When one of the student volunteers runs out of ideas for things to say during the dramatization, another student can take that person's place, adding his or her own dialogue.
 2. Ask students who are observing the dramatization to think about the question: If you could step into the shoes of these Peace Corps Volunteers and actually go to the Maimafu village, what would you say and do in response to the village council's request?
 3. Debrief the class after the dramatization by asking the role-players to talk about how they felt as they played the Peace Corps Volunteers and the Maimafu villagers. What is it like stepping into the shoes of others and trying to see the world from their point of view?
 4. *Journal Entry:* For homework, ask students to respond in their journals to the following ideas: In some cultures, like that in Maimafu, people believe the group is responsible for the well-being of each and every individual; in other cultures, people believe that individuals are primarily responsible for themselves. Is one way better than the other? Why or why not? Do you think this is an either/or situation? Or is it possible to achieve a balance between the two beliefs? If so, how might this balance be accomplished? If not, why not?
 5. Tell students that they will have a chance to read each other's ideas in the next day's lesson.

DAY FOUR

Purpose:

- To engage students in a close analysis of the text.
- To strengthen students' awareness that responses to literature are both unique and personal.

1. *Journal Walk*: Begin the lesson with a “Journal Walk” (see page 140). Students open their journals to the page where they have responded to the homework questions. Then they silently walk around the room reading other students' responses to the journal prompts. Give students the option of leaving their journals facedown if they wish to keep their writing private. After sufficient time has passed for students to read, ask the students to return to their seats and add anything they wish to their own responses.
2. After students have had a chance to walk, reflect, and write, conduct a class discussion on the journal responses.
3. Now explain to students that sometimes, when readers really want to go deeper into the meaning of a story, they take a paragraph or part of the story that seems especially important and study it in depth, trying to think about what the author means and how it relates to life and their own thinking.
4. To demonstrate this approach, read to the class the following selection as an example, followed by the questions below.

Fetching water in the ink-black night and looking up the hill at our small hut, 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 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? ... I discovered that the world's purest form of brotherhood can often be found in the smallest of villages.

Questions this passage raised for me:

- What does the author mean by “the spiritual wealth of Maimafu”? Can a community reach a balance of material wealth and spiritual wealth? 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? What is our responsibility to others less

fortunate than we are—whether in our own country or in other areas of the world?

5. Divide the class into small groups to discuss these questions. Then ask groups to select a passage of their own for analysis. Once each group has selected a passage, ask groups to identify the ideas and questions the passage raises in their minds. Provide students the option of selecting the same passage that you selected, but identifying different questions.
6. Ask each small group to select a reporter to read the group's selection and summarize the group's questions for the rest of the class.
7. After each report, ask the class how they might respond to these questions. After each response, ask if there are any other ways to look at this—and if there was something else in this passage that another group found had great meaning for them or raised new questions for them. Elicit a variety of responses.
8. Point out to students that responding to literature is a personal experience. What evokes a strong reaction in one reader may not evoke the same reaction in another. The important things to do, when reading, are: 1) actively look for what has meaning for you; 2) think about what you agree and disagree with; 3) think about what the author was trying to say that was important for him or her.
9. *Journal Entry:* Conclude the lesson by asking students to respond in their journals to the following prompts:
 - What did you find important about the story “A Single Lucid Moment”?
 - What did this story make you wonder about?
 - What did this story teach you about the world, yourself, and others?
10. *Extended Response to Literature:* Ask students to select from one of the following options in response to their reading of “A Single Lucid Moment.”
 - Write a personal response to the story “A Single Lucid Moment.” Your response might simply be a description of what the story meant to you personally, citing passages from the text that were important to you. Your response might also be a personal narrative, similar to Soderstrom's, describing a time when you experienced a “single lucid moment”—a moment that was startling or troubling and caused you to look at the world in a new and different way. Perhaps it was a moment that caused you no longer to be able to see the world in the same way as before.

- Write a personal response to the story in which you revisit the inability of the Maimafu villagers to comprehend a person being without a home—without a circle of caring family, friends, and community. In your written response, develop a list of questions the Maimafu villagers might ask about American culture—and explain how you would respond to them. In addition, develop another list of questions to ask the people of Maimafu about their culture.
- Look back at the sentences in “A Single Lucid Moment” that held the most meaning for you—the lines you highlighted that evoked a strong emotional response. Then write a narrative in which you discuss the sentences and the reasons they held meaning for you. Tell students that you would like to submit the best pieces of writing for publication on the Coverdell World Wise Schools website (www.peacecorps.gov/wws).
- Write a personal response to the story in which you compare the issues raised by “A Single Lucid Moment” with the issues raised by “Ilunga’s Harvest.” Explain how reading these stories caused you to think in new and different ways—and altered your view of the world, yourself, and others.

Appendixes

Appendix A: EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORK

We've created this curriculum guide using the curriculum design framework *Understanding by Design* (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998), developed with the support of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). The *Understanding by Design* approach is intended to deepen student understanding of important concepts and skills in such a way that this knowledge will endure over time. In contrast with the traditional way of designing curriculum (identifying objectives, planning lessons, and assessing results), the *Understanding by Design* framework uses a “backward design process” that identifies assessments before planning learning experiences and lessons. We've summarized the process of “backward design” below:

- Identify desired results: *What is worthy of student understanding?*
- Determine acceptable evidence: *How will students demonstrate their understanding?*
- Plan learning experiences, lessons, and instruction: *What will we have students experience and do in order to achieve the desired results?*

UNDERSTANDING BY DESIGN CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

Stage One: Identify Desired Results

- What understandings are desired?
- What essential questions will guide this unit and focus learning?
- What key knowledge and skills will students acquire?

Stage Two: Determine Acceptable Evidence

- Through what authentic performance task(s) will students demonstrate understanding, knowledge, and skill?
- Through what prompts or academic problems will students demonstrate understanding, as well as more discrete knowledge and skill?
- Through what observations, work samples, and other tasks will students demonstrate understanding, knowledge, and skill?

Stage Three: Plan Learning Experiences and Instruction

- What sequence of teaching and learning experiences will equip students to develop and demonstrate the desired understandings?

Appendix B:

READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

Research on reading has shown that comprehension is a process that can be taught directly. When a student has the opportunity to use a comprehension strategy repeatedly, he or she eventually will begin to use it automatically and independently. Reading research has also shown that comprehension can be enhanced by collaborative learning—small- and large-group dialogue in response to open-ended questions. In *The Art of Teaching Reading*, Calkins (2001) suggests that literary interpretation can be taught:

The difference between experienced readers and the rest of us is that the experts have the strategies, the tools, and the inclination to extend and deepen their responses to a text.... Teaching interpretation means teaching students a process that, for the rest of their lives, will yield big, thoughtful responses to texts” (pp. 477 and 478).

Voices From the Field uses a recurring set of questions proposed by Calkins to strengthen interpretation and divergent thinking about a text, as well as selected comprehension strategies from reading research. These are summarized below.

Strengthening Students’ Interpretation Skills:

Calkins (p. 478) notes that the first interpretation strategy good readers use is to ask themselves one or two of the following questions:

- What is really important about this story?
- What does this story say about the world?
- What does this story say about my life?
- What is the point of this story for me?
- What is this story really about?
- Does it matter if people read this story or not? Why should or shouldn’t they?

Comprehension Strategies Used:

1. *Creating Detailed Mental Images of Information.* Research has shown that comprehension of textual information increases when students can create detailed mental pictures of what they are reading. The mind stores knowledge in two forms—a linguistic form and an imagery form. The linguistic form is semantic in nature—the words stored in memory. The imagery form, in contrast, is expressed as mental pictures—and even physical sensations, such as smell, sound, taste, and touch. The more students use both sys-

tems of representation—linguistic and nonlinguistic, the better able they’ll be to think about and recall what they’ve read. (Richardson, 1983; Muehlherr and Siermann, 1996; Desmaris et al., 1997; as referenced in Marzano et al., 2001).

2. *Creating Graphic Representations of Similarities and Differences.* Graphic representations of similarities and differences using such graphic organizers as Venn diagrams and comparison matrices can enhance student learning for many of the same reasons as those stated in #1, above (Marzano et al., 2001).
3. *Using Mixed-Ability Grouping and Cooperative Learning Strategies.* Reading comprehension can be increased when students are able to share their interpretations of a text with peers. Working in cooperative, mixed-ability groups can help students clarify the basic meaning of the text. As they hear the opinions and interpretations of others, students’ own thinking about a text can be expanded upon, clarified, or enhanced (Fielding, 1994; Calkins, 2001; Marzano et al., 2001).
4. *Creating Graphic Representations of Key Ideas.* Drawing pictures or pictographs (i.e., symbolic pictures) to represent key ideas is an effective way for students to generate nonlinguistic representations of information. The more teachers use both linguistic and nonlinguistic systems of representation, the better students are able to think about and recall knowledge (Newton, 1995, as referenced in Marzano et al., 2001, p. 74).
5. *Analyzing Perspectives.* Stepping into the shoes of another and trying to see the world from that person’s point of view not only builds empathy, but also strengthens students’ critical thinking skills (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998; Marzano et al., 1997; Paul, 1990).
6. *Using Advance Organizer Questions.* Advance organizer questions can help students activate their prior knowledge and lead them to focus on the most important parts of the text. Research has shown that advance organizers, particularly in the form of higher-level questions, significantly increase student achievement (Walberg, 1999).
7. *Close Analysis of Text Passages.* As Calkins (2001) notes, when good readers really want to go deeper into the meaning of a story, they take a paragraph or part of the story that seems important and they study it in depth, trying to figure out what the author means and how it relates to their own thinking. This strategy is further enhanced when done in a small-group discussion format and when students have an opportunity to write essays based on the lines that held the most meaning for them.

8. *Dramatization of the Key Events in a Story*. This strategy is yet another variation of creating nonlinguistic and linguistic images of a text (Marzano et al., 2001). The more immersed students become in the dramatization, the more intense learning becomes. Through dramatization, students can experience a story both emotionally and rationally; in so doing, the story becomes more deeply embedded in long-term memory.
9. *Using Journals and Other Forms of Writing-to-Learn Strategies*. How well a reader constructs meaning depends in part on metacognition—the reader’s ability to reflect on, think about, and control the learning process (i.e., to plan, monitor comprehension, reflect on what and how he or she has learned, and revise the use of strategies for comprehension). Reading comprehension is enhanced when students are encouraged to respond in writing to what they read through the use of journals, quick writing, mind mapping, and other strategies. Students’ thinking about a text is greatly enhanced when journal writing prompts are designed to foster multiple interpretations.
10. *Literature Circles*. Reading comprehension is enhanced through social interaction—especially through large- and small-group dialogue, in which students are encouraged to seek out the meaning and formulate their own interpretations of the text. Literature circles are yet another cooperative learning strategy that can lead to increased student achievement (see #3 above). See Appendix C, page 178, for further information on literature circles.

Note:

The list of references on pages 180–183 provides complete bibliographic information on all citations in this appendix.

Appendix C: LITERATURE CIRCLES

How to Set Up a Literature Circle:

To set up a literature circle, divide the class into groups of five, and ask the students in each group to agree on the role for which each will take responsibility. Explain that each role requires a written component that allows you, the teacher, to see how they have prepared for their parts.

Description:

Literature circles are small, temporary discussion groups comprising students who are reading the same text (see Daniels, 1984). The circle usually consists of five students. Each student reads the story individually, and each student is also responsible for playing a particular role during the conversation once the story has been read. The roles are:

- *Summarizer*: lays out the story action at the beginning of the circle's meeting.
- *Discussion Leader*: devises thought-provoking discussion questions and keeps the discussion moving along.
- *Passage Master*: cites what he or she thinks are important passages to be read aloud and discussed.
- *Connector*: suggests connections between the text and students' real-world experiences.
- *Illustrator*: produces a graphic, nonlinguistic representation of what he or she thinks are the key ideas of the text and a brief written description of why these ideas are important.

Student Guidelines:

If this is the first time you'll be using literature circles, ask students to keep several ground rules in mind:

- All participate in the discussion, in addition to taking responsibility for the particular role they are assigned.
- During discussion of the text, different interpretations are welcome, because they add richness and interest to the conversation.
- There is no one right way to respond to a text. Each person will find his or her own meaning in what has been read. When each member of the group feels free to express his or her point of view (and knows that it will be listened to with respect), the conversation becomes much more engaging.
- Conversations about the story should last a minimum of 30 minutes.
- Only one student may speak at a time.
- Each circle's discussion leader and illustrator are responsible for summarizing the important parts of the circle's conversation—including areas of disagreement—to the class on the day following the circle's discussion of the text.

Journal writing provides students with an opportunity to express their ideas, observations, and emotions while confident that their writing will be accepted without criticism.

Useful across the entire curriculum, journal writings can help students

- Explore experiences, solve problems, and consider varying perspectives.
- Examine relationships with others and the world.
- Reflect on goals, ideas, and values.
- Summarize ideas, experiences, and opinions before and after instruction.

The journals used in the curriculum units in *Voices From the Field* are literature logs or response journals. They are an integral part of reading instruction because students' responses are the basis for literature discussion and are central to assessment for comprehension. They contain not only self-selected topics but also assigned topics.

Appendix D: *THE USE OF JOURNALS*

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