

Connect Your Classroom
With a Peace Corps Volunteer
Serving Overseas Through
Correspondence Match



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worldwise
schools

Handbook for Educators

Welcome to Correspondence Match

You and your students are about to embark on a cross-cultural adventure. Through correspondence with a Peace Corps Volunteer living in a community overseas, your students will learn about a people and place to which they might never otherwise be exposed.

Think of your volunteer as a cultural liaison.

For two years he or she lives in the same conditions, speaks the same language, eats the same food, and respects the same cultural norms as host country family and friends. This experience equips your volunteer with a grassroots point of view and provides a wonderful learning opportunity for your students.

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

Some students may have never heard of the Peace Corps, in which case their correspondence with a volunteer will introduce them to exciting new career options. Exposing



students to the work of Peace Corps Volunteers may also instill a community-service ethic and motivate them to volunteer in their local communities.

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

Table of Contents

Welcome to Correspondence Match	1
Getting Started	3
Tips for Communicating	5
Frequently Asked Questions	8
Sample Letters & Activities	10
Curriculum Integration	13
A Word About Standards	16



Getting Started

The Correspondence



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

To get the most out of your exchange, help your students learn as much as possible about the country in which the volunteer is serving. This will provide a broader context in which to place the first-person perspective of the correspondence, and it will generate more interesting class discussions.

Try to stimulate personal reflection and group discussion by asking students to compare life in the United States with life in your volunteer's host country. Point out similarities as well as differences. Ask questions that challenge stereotypes. Also be sure to explain to your students that the volunteer is sharing only a personal perspective of the country. Avoid making generalizations based solely on the volunteer's correspondence.

Getting that first letter written and sent is the first important step in developing your

correspondence exchange. Your Peace Corps Volunteer will be excited to hear from you, even if it is just to introduce yourself. This first letter does not have to be long. Look at it as an

Opportunity for you and the volunteer to share background information and ideas for the direction of your correspondence.

Include a brief description of your class, the degree to which you have or have not studied the particular geographic region, and themes you are interested in focusing on. Remember that these connections are designed to be long-term; you may want to work with your volunteer to set up a schedule of topics to focus on each month to ensure a rich, in-depth transfer of knowledge from the volunteer to the students.

We encourage you to propose how often you and your students plan to write and, likewise, request the same information of your volunteer. One of the important things to establish at the beginning of

your correspondence is a set of mutual expectations, so be direct and honest with your volunteer. We also recommend that you establish a connection with the volunteer and develop a plan for when and how you will be communicating before incorporating the students into the exchange. Click here to see a [sample first letter](#) to a volunteer.

The volunteer with whom you will be corresponding is one of more than 7,600 currently serving Peace Corps Volunteers in more than 70 countries. Volunteers live in cities as well as rural villages, and they work in projects ranging from small enterprise development to English education and agroforestry. They come from all 50 states and represent the United States in all of its diversity.

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

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

After telling your students the name of their volunteer and the country in which he or she is serving, you may want to introduce journals or logs that the students can use throughout the year to record their exchange.

An early assignment could be to have them write down their “predictions” about the volunteer's country and experiences.

- Where is it located?
- What language(s) do the citizens speak?
- How do they dress?
- What do they eat?

Encourage students to use this journal to write down any thoughts they have about the overseas experience and work of the volunteer throughout the correspondence exchange. You may want to use these journals for students to react to issues expressed in your volunteer's letters as well as discussions that come up within the class. There are different ways that teachers may correspond with volunteers. Many teachers have students write individual or collaborative group letters to ask specific questions that can be sent by post or email. Keep in mind that while volunteers will certainly enjoy reading all of your student's letters, he or she may not be able to write a personalized response to each one, due to time constraints, and may simply respond to the class as a whole.

Some teachers are also beginning to include online video chat and blogging as part of the correspondence. Of course, the ability to conduct real-time Internet communication will vary greatly, and most volunteers will have very limited ability to conduct online video chats. Work with your volunteer match to develop the best strategy for communicating.

Tips for Communicating with your Volunteer

A challenging aspect of your correspondence with a currently serving Peace Corps Volunteer will be simply sending and receiving communication successfully. Infrastructure, Internet availability, and postal systems vary widely from country to country, which makes it impossible to guarantee how long a piece of mail will take to arrive at its destination, and difficult to determine how often or how reliable your volunteer's access to email will be.

We encourage you to be flexible and not to lose heart if several weeks go by without a letter or email.



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

Electronic Communication

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

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

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

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

Mail

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

World Wise Schools will provide you with your volunteer's name and a mailing address. Please note that this initial address is for the Peace Corps office in your volunteer's country

of service. It is not his or her local mailing address. The local mailing address, called the "site address," is where your volunteer receives mail on a more regular basis. Once you receive this information from the volunteer, please write it down in a safe place.

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

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

Postage Costs

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

Import Taxes

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

Postage Costs for the Volunteer

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

Valuables

Never send anything of value through the mail.

Customs

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

Diplomatic Pouch

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



Frequently Asked Questions

How often should I correspond with my volunteer?

World Wise Schools recommends that you exchange a letter or email with your volunteer each month. Try to avoid the “I will not write until I first get a letter” mentality, even if you simply send a short note to gently remind your volunteer that you are waiting for their response. This way you and the volunteer are ensured a lasting and productive correspondence. Remember that the Correspondence Match program is not designed to be a student-to-student exchange, but an opportunity for U.S. students to learn more about another culture and country through the eyes of a Peace Corps Volunteer.

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

Contact World Wise Schools so you can explain your situation to a staff member. Email us at wwsinfo@peacecorps.gov, or phone us at 800.424.8580, ext. 1450.

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

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

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



Does World Wise Schools assist educators in paying postage costs?

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

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

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

May I be matched with more than one volunteer?

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

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

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

Can I help my volunteer with his or her projects?

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

What happens when my volunteer finishes service?

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

Sample Letters & Activities

Dear Jeremy:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Talk to you soon,
Shawn Yarrow

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

Best Practices

The Suriname Rain Forest Summit

by Megan Baker NOVA School, Olympia, Washington

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

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

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

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



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

Finally, all parties "met" in the capital of Paramaribo for the summit. As a representative

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

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

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



SURINAME

Curriculum Integration

Understanding by Design

Essential Questions

How Am I Connected to the World?

“Navigators use maps to chart a course,” writes Heidi Hayes Jacobs in her book *Mapping the Big Picture: Integrating Curriculum and Assessment K–12*.

Although unforeseen events and variables affect their journey, they begin by making important choices about their route to avoid a meandering, rudderless voyage. In a similar fashion, teachers must make critical choices as they plot a course for their learners.

“Essential questions are an exceptional tool for clearly and precisely communicating the pivotal points of the curriculum.”

World Wise Schools staff worked with Jacobs to chart a course for Coverdell World Wise Schools for the 21st century. After much careful deliberation, the staff determined that the following questions drive the Correspondence Match program. These questions may be helpful as you begin your own classroom “voyage” with a Peace Corps Volunteer.

Geography

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

Culture

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

Service-Learning

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

Mapping the Big Picture

An Interview With Heidi Hayes Jacobs

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

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

HHJ: Most every state has approved public school standards. Among the specific requirements of these standards is that

Students should become aware, informed, and responsible future members of the global community.

The experiences of Peace Corps Volunteers provide a living, breathing example of this. The need for a genuine and personal international experience is real. As it now stands in many schools, the curriculum that addresses this standard tends to be superficial.

Superficial in what sense?

HHJ: Well, first of all, materials are not always available. And often, in the rush to touch upon these standards before the school year ends, a teacher might create a token curriculum unit about a specific community or culture. This type of “quick fix” can almost create stereotypes. It is as if students receive



information about a place that seems distant and reduced. They’re bombarded with media coverage that is consistently from a U.S. pop culture view. They see films and television imagery that distort other places and peoples while either mythologizing or vilifying Americans. The quick-fix approach to international standards coupled with the strong emphasis on U.S. history in the American school curriculum (which requires a tremendous amount of time) poses a problem. It is difficult to deal with the new demands for an informed generation about the very new world that awaits them in the 21st century.

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

HHJ: For example, what does it mean to become a responsible citizen of my



community? How can I become a responsible citizen of the United States and a citizen of the world? How do the media influence my view of peoples around the world?

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

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

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

HHJ: Yes, they do.

When a volunteer is linked to a U.S. class through a correspondence match, the learning experience itself is going to be interdisciplinary—combining language arts and geography with health or environmental issues. These are natural connections.

A Word About Standards

National Education Standards

We know that teachers everywhere are helping students master state and local content standards. The Coverdell World Wise Schools Correspondence Match program can help support content standards in many areas, including geography, social studies, behavioral studies, service-learning, language arts, and technology. As one example, below is a list of standards from the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) that this program can help your students to achieve. It is our hope that you will view the correspondence exchange with a Peace Corps Volunteer not as a luxury to be squeezed into your curriculum, but as a vehicle for addressing content standards for which you and your students are already being held accountable.

National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Standards

Culture (NCSS Theme I)

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

Time, Continuity, & Change (NCSS Theme II)

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the past and its legacy.

People, Places, and Environments (NCSS Theme III)

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

Individual Development and Identity (NCSS Theme IV)

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

Individuals, Groups & Institutions (NCSS Theme V)

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

Power, Authority, & Governance (NCSS Theme VI)

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

Production, Distribution, & Consumption (NCSS Theme VII)

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

Science, Technology and Society (NCSS Theme VIII)

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

Global Connections (NCSS Theme IX)

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

Civic Ideals, and Practices (NCSS Theme X)

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





NAMIBIA

“The program has allowed my students to learn so much more about other cultures than they could just from a textbook.”

—North Carolina Teacher

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