

Introduction

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

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

Welcome to Paul D. Coverdell World Wise Schools (CWWS), the innovative education program of the Peace Corps that seeks to engage U.S. students in an inquiry about the world in order to *broaden perspectives, promote cultural awareness, appreciate global connections, and encourage service.*

Thank you for your interest in expanding students’ knowledge about other peoples and places. We hope that your correspondence will be as much fun and as interesting for you as it will surely be for the students.

The purpose of this guide is to help you make the most of your correspondence match. Think of it as a CWWS starter kit. It introduces Peace Corps Volunteers and teachers to the program and provides suggestions for how to shape the exchange. To this end, we have included a list of national standards and identified essential questions that are central to the World Wise Schools exchange. It is our hope that, through your participation in this program, we will not only enrich students’ reading, writing, research, and analytic skills but also fulfill the Peace Corps goal of strengthening U.S. understanding of the world and its peoples.

By corresponding with a Peace Corps Volunteer, students gain insight about what it is like to live and work in another country. World Wise Schools participants often find that by increasing students’ awareness of cultural diversity around the world, the students come to value the rich heritage and broad representation of peoples within their own community. “Big” questions, such as *How does culture shape how we understand ourselves, others, and the world?* and *How am I connected to the world?* become the focus of classroom discussions. The World Wise Schools program also tends to stimulate an interest in and appreciation for volunteerism. Students begin to ask themselves, *What does the “common good” mean and why does it matter?* and *How far am I willing to go to make a difference?*



About Paul D. Coverdell World Wise Schools



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

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

The Peace Corps is an independent agency of the United States government, established through the vision and efforts of President John F. Kennedy. The Peace Corps Act of 1961 defined the Peace Corps mission—to promote peace and friendship by making available willing and qualified U.S. citizens to interested countries to achieve the following three goals: to help the people of interested countries in meeting their needs for trained workers; to promote a better understanding of Americans among the peoples served; and to help Americans develop a better understanding of other peoples.

It is the third goal of the Peace Corps that inspired the creation of World Wise Schools, a program that seeks to engage U.S. students in an inquiry about the world.

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

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

Videos & Teacher Guides

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

World Wide Web

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

CyberVolunteer

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

Peace Corps Week

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