



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.

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:**DAY ONE**

- 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.

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:**DAY THREE**

- 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.



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):