



## 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.

**A**s 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

# 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.”*

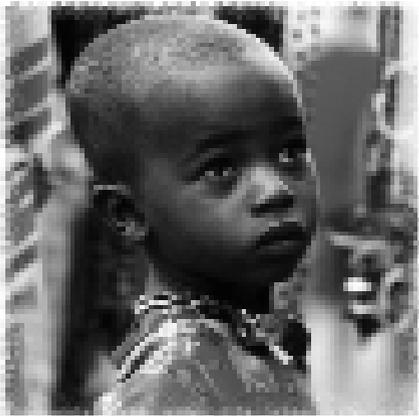
*“What could that possibly be,” we wondered.*

*“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.



**Purpose:****DAY THREE**

- 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](http://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.