

Teaching Cultural Awareness Using the Four Skills

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Abstract

The following project examines the validity of teaching cultural awareness in a language classroom and includes five readers' theatre plays that help students explore five different countries from around the globe. The countries were determined by the nationalities of the students that participated in the project. The setting for this study was a pull out ESL program in a public school with a large multi-ethnic population. Besides the plays, there are lesson plans, activities sheets and a biography of multi cultural books for children. All activities are designed to incorporate the four skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening.

The paper begins by exploring the positive effects of studying other countries besides the host country. It also searches for ways to justify teaching about culture when second language acquisition is the main objective. Through student reflections and teacher observation, we see that it is possible to interweave language skills with the study of culture. All teaching materials included in this project were developed with the intent of creating awareness and a desire for educators to begin embracing the ever growing diversity present in our schools today.

ERIC Descriptors:

Cultural Awareness
Second Language Instruction
ESL
Literacy
Readers Theatre
Multicultural Books
Teacher Developed Materials

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Chapter One

Introduction

Is there value in teaching students about other countries and their cultures within the context of an ESL classroom where focus is generally placed on students mastering specific language skills? That is the question I asked myself and one that I will attempt to answer in the following chapters.

Chapter one will attempt to give insight into the previously stated question, but we will revisit it again in chapter six. Chapter two will address the setting and context of the school and classroom where the following field test took place, as well as the limitations the context posed in successfully completing all components of the unit. Chapter three covers the procedures of introducing a cultural unit in an ESL classroom. Detailed lesson plans for teaching about Vietnam are located in chapter four. Chapter five includes lesson plan outlines for the four remaining countries and my reflections on each lesson. Finally, in chapter six we will readdress the question we posed regarding the value in teaching about culture in a language classroom by reflecting on the unit as a whole. The final chapter also delves into why some aspects of the unit worked and others didn't, along with suggestions for teaching a similar unit in the future. The appendix serves as a teacher resource where the bulk of the teacher developed materials are located, including five reader's theatre plays, several worksheets that were developed for this unit, but could be adapted for other purposes, and lastly, a bibliography.

Throughout this paper I will discuss the value in teaching students about other countries and their culture, so before we begin that discussion let me first share a definition for culture, as there are many. The following definition is how Helmer and Eddy define culture in their book, *Look at Me When I talk to You: ESL Learners in Non-ESL Classrooms*, “Culturemeans passing on values, perceptions, attitudes and behaviors, as well as a reflection of tradition, lifestyle and patterned ways of dealing with the world.” (Eddy and Helmer 2003) It is their definition that most closely reflects my interpretation of what culture is and although it would be unrealistic to think that all aspects of a person’s culture could be taught within the confines of an elementary classroom, it is traditions and lifestyles where I placed my focus, due to the age of my target group. It is also important to be cognizant of the fact that culture is ever changing, whether due to modernization, political, economic or religious issues, or in some cases, as in the United States, the influx of immigrants and their cultures intertwining with ours, forming new traditions, values and philosophies.

Now we’ll explore whether the ESL classroom is the appropriate setting to teach about cultures and countries other than the host country. Before embarking on my own quest to find the answer, I was inclined to believe affirmatively, wavering between doubt, which I know was a manifestation of pressure from public school guidelines and philosophy, and inner confidence and a strong conviction that the cultures of the students should not just be acknowledged, but celebrated. “Though the traditional mandate of

teachers of non-English speakers has been to teach the English language while acquainting these learners with aspects of the host culture, it is increasingly recognized that developing an awareness and appreciation of the cultural background of the learners improves their chances of achieving a reasonable measure of success at this task.”

(Helmer and Eddy 2003)

The idea of integrating the students native cultures into the ESL curriculum was something I had experimented with in the past, but it was one particular occasion that was the catalyst for encouraging me to take it a step further and develop an actual unit based on the students’ individual backgrounds while integrating the state mandated language arts skills into the lessons. One day in class I read the book, *Going Home, Coming Home*, by Truong Tran. It is a bilingual book written in Vietnamese and English. This will be discussed further in the lesson plans section of chapter four.

I chose this particular book because at the time, I had a girl from Vietnam in my class. Tran had entered my class as a newcomer the previous year. She was a quick learner and her English skills had come remarkably far in that short period of time, however the students still looked at her as not knowing as much as them, after all they could speak English fine and she still struggled. All that changed in the blink of an eye when I asked her to read the Vietnamese portion of the book while I read the English. The class was mesmerized and for the first time they saw Tran as they had never seen her before. When she sat down, the class applauded and in that moment everything changed. Tran beamed with pride, and after so many months of being the “slow one”, she, was now the one

excelling. Almost immediately the other students began asking questions about her life in Vietnam. They wanted to know about the schools, the houses, what her town looked like, and in that moment I knew this was much more than a reading lesson, it had suddenly become a lesson in cultural awareness.

In another class where I had two girls from India, I read aloud the book, *Nadia's Hands* by Karen English. It is about a young girl who has her hands painted with henna for her aunt's wedding, and although she is proud of her hands when she is around her own family, she is embarrassed to go to school the next day with her hands still painted. She knows the other children will not understand and worries they will laugh at her. The students had prior knowledge to draw upon as I read the story because one of the girls had come to school with her hands painted once before and the students reflected upon that as I read the story. The following day I read another story about a little Japanese girl in the book *Suki's Kimono*, written by Chieri Uegaki, even though at the time I had no students from Japan. I chose *Suki's Kimono* because the main character in the book receives a kimono from her grandmother and she wants to wear it to school even though her sister tells her the other children will laugh at her. This was an ideal opportunity to compare the main characters in *Nadia's Hands* with *Suki's Kimono* and ask the children which character best related to them. Are they more like Suki and proud of their heritage or are they like Nadia, embarrassed and shy to share their culture's traditions?

After these particular lessons, I decided to begin developing an in depth unit on other cultures that I planned to teach the following year. In the following chapters I share my experiences teaching such a unit, along with the lessons and resources I created. The

challenge for me was to create a unit that would be relevant to the students in the class, fun and at the same time be in compliance with the state guidelines or TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) as they are referred to in Texas. First, I needed to justify my reasons for teaching about different countries in my language class. I could just hear the other teachers saying, “Why is she teaching geography to the ESL students when what they need is English?” Therefore, it was incumbent upon me to define and clarify my intent.

The following is a list of objectives I identified as my justification for introducing countries and cultures into an English class.

- Create a high interest level, relevant to students
- Build self esteem
- Promote student’s pride in their heritage
- Create an awareness of other countries and cultures
- Open the door to important discussions related to culture while developing communication skills.
- Build community and respect for one another

Interestingly, as I was doing research for this paper, I stumbled upon an article discussing the curriculum that is taught to Peace Corp volunteers before they set out to interact and work with other cultures. The following is a partial list of objectives as stated in an article in *World Wise Schools* entitled, *Culture Matters*, a program developed by the Peace Corp.

- Provide students with a wide range of cross-cultural understandings and skills.

- Build a framework to analyze cultures around the world and at home.
- Develop community and cross-cultural understanding within your school.
- Promote students' understanding of themselves, others, and the world.
- Appreciate how, despite our cultural differences, we are all united in a common bond of humanity.

(Coverdelt 2008)

I decided it was one thing to teach about other countries and cultures, but to truly be of relevance to the students and to achieve my objectives of high interest, build self esteem and pride in ones own heritage, then I needed to begin with the students own cultures.

ESL students and other immigrants that attend public elementary schools in the US are constantly exposed to and immersed into customs and holiday celebrations that are the cornerstone of the American lifestyle. Many schools are getting away from displaying Christmas trees, and other decorations reflecting the Christian holiday, and what in the past was referred to as the class Christmas party has metamorphosed into the “holiday” party. None the less, there is no denying that what we consider typical American holidays are still very much alive in our schools. Walk into any elementary school in the month of October and you will see projects about Columbus, February you’ll see ground hogs, past presidents and hearts, and in March or April you’ll see painted eggs and decorated baskets.

I am most certainly not opposed to immigrants to our country learning about our customs, our holidays, our history, and our way of life. On the contrary, in my opinion, it is the obligation of the students or individuals who reside in another country, to not only learn

the language, but to acquaint one self with the host countries' culture and history.

However, it is still possible and almost expected for an immigrant to totally embrace the culture of their host country while still retaining the cultural and religious beliefs of their native land.

We as members of the host country have an obligation of our own. We must also embrace the diversity present in our classrooms. We must show an appreciation for and interest in the cultures and backgrounds of the children entering our schools. It is also the obligation of the teachers to be aware of and sensitive to the so called baggage many of the students bring with them to their new land. For many, it is not by choice that they left their homelands, but rather a financial need to provide for their families, to seek better educational opportunities, or even in some cases to seek a safe haven. "Not only should teachers and students who share group membership delight in their own cultural and linguistic history, but all teachers must revel in the diversity of their students and that of the world outside the classroom community" (Delpit 1995).

It is not only natural, but it is incumbent upon the non-ESL teachers to teach their students about customs, traditions, and history of the host country, but not exclusively by excluding the voices of the other cultures that typify the diversity of so many classrooms today. Phillips and Crowell emphasize the value in school systems honoring diversity in their article *Cultural Diversity and Early Education* "The growing linguistic and cultural diversity of the student population is often viewed as problematic, as an additional pressure placed on an already beleaguered school system. But, diversity is not inherently

problematic. Early education settings can and should be designed to approach diversity as an asset that can be used in the preparation of all students for citizenship in an increasingly diverse society.” (Phillips and Crowell 1994) Unfortunately, in the school that I taught, many of the teachers certainly did not look upon the ESL students as assets to their classrooms, nor did they comprehend the complexities of second language acquisition.

Having also been an elementary teacher in self contained classrooms for many years prior to teaching ESL, I was painfully aware of the strict curriculum guidelines, not to mention the sundry of special accommodations needed to meet the needs of a classroom full of students with a multitude of learning styles. Keeping in mind my goals and objectives I outlined earlier, I set forth to meet the increasing need for cultural understanding in the public school system. The next step was to incorporate those goals into a curriculum based on the four skills; reading, writing, speaking and listening. Weaving the four skills through out our study allowed me to honor the states requirements and to effectively develop the necessary language skills my students needed.

There were two main components to the project, one was to include fictional and non fictional children's books representative of the countries we studied and the other were short plays I created specifically for this unit. Both the books and the plays were used in a variety of ways to develop listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, as well as a stepping stone to rich classroom discussions. I wanted to repeat the positive impact that arose from Tran reading a book in her native tongue, Vietnamese, or the discussions

about pride of ones heritage that were generated by the books, *Suki's Kimono* and *Nadia's Hands*. Finding quality books from each of the countries was not always an easy task and I was also aware that when, “selecting books about the ESL child’s first culture, it is important to avoid those that show stereotyped views.” (Spangenberg-Urbschat and Pritchard 1994) It helped to have a variety of books, showing each culture from different perspectives, thus being sensitive to my audience.

Although we focused on the countries we were studying, I kept a wide selection of books from many countries displayed around the room and read many of them with my other classes, as well. “It is important to have books in the classroom library that relate to the ESL children’s own culture. Not only does it help the self esteem of the ESL children, it also supports the growth of other children’s awareness of and respect for the cultural groups that make up their society.” (Spangenberg-Urbschat and Pritchard 1994) Whenever my other classes would have free time in the book center, they would almost always gravitate toward the books about their own culture, even if they couldn’t read the text, they were enchanted by the pictures and illustrations.

As I stated, the other major component was the inclusion of plays for each of the countries we studied. In the past I had had great success using Readers Theatre in my ESL classrooms and I thought it was a wonderful way to incorporate the four skills into the unit. The beauty of Readers Theatre is its simplicity. Since the plays are generally just read aloud there is no need for props, costumes or a large space, such as a stage. In our

classroom the students usually sat or stood in a semi circle and read from their scripts. On occasion we would use props or add some movement and action.

In creating the plays, I used reoccurring characters and a repetitive theme to generate familiarity and anticipation from one play to the next. The familiar and personalized subject matter created a high interest level along with boosting self esteem. Readers Theatre is such a great tool for developing reading fluency and increasing comprehension and since several of the class members who participated in the project were struggling readers and lacked confidence, it seemed to be the ideal fit. I did not target a specific reading level, although I tried to keep it around a third grade reading level. I also did not write parts with specific students in mind because the students enjoyed and benefited from changing characters everyday, giving them the opportunity to eventually read the entire script.

Initially, I searched for plays reflecting lifestyles and customs of different countries, but all I came up with were plays based on fables or folk tales from around the world.

Although these have value and would be a suitable addition to the cultural unit, I had something else in mind. I then decided to take it upon myself to create the plays, allowing me to tailor fit them to our learning experience. I generally would wait until we had been learning about a country for at least a week before I began developing the plays. This allowed me the opportunity to include words, information, or places, the students had either read about or heard about, thus making the plays both more meaningful and readable.

As I wrote the plays, I included either information they had learned while visiting web sites, doing reading comprehension activities, listening to books or folktales and of course our class discussions. Reading plays about what they had just learned allowed the students to activate schema and increased the interest level. Spangenberg-Urbschat and Pritchard support the idea that the more prior knowledge students have about a particular subject, the easier it is for them to understand and read the text. Additionally, since the plays were based on what they had just learned, as the students read and heard the plays repeatedly, this undoubtedly aided retention of their newly acquired knowledge.

Having mapped out my objectives for teaching cultural awareness and after developing activities to incorporate the four skills while addressing the ESL curriculum guidelines, I was ready to begin. Yet, this being such a personalized unit, based on the students themselves, it is vital to understand their backgrounds. Chapter two will discuss the setting and context in which this cultural unit was taught.

Chapter Two

Classroom Setting and Context

At the time I taught this unit, I was teaching in an elementary school, Southridge Elementary, in Lewisville, Texas. Lewisville is a suburb of Dallas and the school itself is situated in an economically diverse neighborhood, including low income housing, apartments and typical middle class homes. The school district has a large LEP (Limited English Proficient) population of over 4,500 students, including students serviced by ESL, bilingual and those that have refused services, but are still considered LEP. The

majority of the students have Spanish as their first language, however, there are also over 70 different languages spoken among the LEP community.

During the time in which this project was conducted, the ESL/bilingual department at Southridge consisted of two pull-out teachers, two full time aides, one for bilingual and one for ESL, and 12 bilingual classroom teachers. Since there were two ESL teachers, we split the class load. I taught grades 2 and 3 and the other teacher taught grades 1 and 4. We had such a high number of kindergarteners that we both taught a group and the fifth graders, we only had four days a week, so we each took two days and shared the responsibility. The size of the classes varied, but ranged in size between 5-10 students per group.

There were several factors that influenced my decision to do the cultural unit with my group of third graders. Although my second graders would have enjoyed many of the activities and benefited from the lessons, I knew many of the writing assignments would have proven too difficult for them. The other major reason I chose third was because that was the only group I serviced for a full 90 minutes, five days a week, and the other groups were pulled for only 60 minutes. This allowed me time to also cover the curriculum from their regular classrooms that the teachers and I had agreed upon. For example, they were with me when their class did spelling, so they kept their books in my room and I did spelling with them, which enabled me to modify the lessons when necessary.

Two of the students moved to our school after we began the project, but we were able to get them up to date by pairing them with a buddy. Unfortunately, it was not as diverse a group as I would have liked, but we managed to have five different countries represented out of the eight students in the group. The following is a break down of the countries and the students in the class. As you can see, the only country that had more than one representative was Mexico.

Vietnam: Phuong

Argentina: Alex

Nigeria: Justin

Brazil: Israel

Mexico: Candy

 Brenda

 Arline

 Sierra

Israel came to the US the year before, but was at a different school within the district. He was at a level where he had mastered his BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills), in other words he could communicate fine with peers and teachers, but was lacking CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency), the skills necessary to decipher grade level texts and comprehend well enough to respond to most comprehension questions that went beyond just recall. Sierra was also new to our school but had been enrolled in ESL programs since kindergarten. Phuong was in her third year, and was a very good student, but her writing still reflected that of a second language learner. A set of twins, Candy and Arline were also in their first year at our school,

having moved here from California at the beginning of the year. They are extremely close and always wanted to do everything together. Brenda was also new and was one of the students that arrived a few months after the school year began. She had been in a bilingual program and was still struggling with English, especially reading. Justin had been at our school since kindergarten and I had taught him before. He was also a struggling reader, who by the end of the year qualified for resource services. Alex was the last student to move into our room and she moved to our school a little after Brenda arrived. Alex was a very strong student with little indication that she was a SLL (Second Language Learner).

In the state of Texas at the time this project was conducted, third grade was the first year that students were expected to take TAKS, the state standardized test. Since several of my third grade ESL students were struggling learners, some due to issues with second language acquisition and still others due to learning difficulties, they were receiving additional tutoring sessions that on occasion caused them to miss some of their ESL instructional time. Even Alex, who was a good student in reading and language, struggled with math skills, requiring her to attend additional math tutoring sessions in preparation for the upcoming TAKS test. Other events such as field trips, assemblies, absences and the unavoidable, time consuming end of year testing that all LEP students must participate in, proceeded to steal valuable instructional time in the ESL classroom. As a result, many of the intended activities were never brought to fruition. For example, my initial intent was to have the students, once we had visited each of their home countries, choose a country we had not studied yet and plan their own lesson, from beginning to

end. They were to choose the books we read, find web sites, plan lessons and ultimately write their own play about the country they chose. Unfortunately, time did not permit us to follow through with this assignment and we ended the project after we had explored each student's country.

Chapter Three

Introducing the Unit

A few days before we were to begin the cultural unit, I tried to incite anticipation and excitement among my group of third graders. I told them that we would be starting a new project in a few days and that they were special because I had chosen to only do it with them. Immediately I was flooded with questions about the project and knew I had sparked their interest. The day before I introduced the unit, I decorated a bulletin board in the room by placing a world map in the center and push pins on the countries we were to

study. Then, I took colored yarn from the push pin to a sign with that countries' flag and one or two famous attractions from that country. Next to the sign I mounted a picture of native people in their daily life and a poem about each country. The pictures I found by going to a used bookstore and purchasing a book, *The World in Focus* by William MacQuitty, which was full of breathtaking photos from around the world. As a book lover it was difficult for me to cut out the pictures from the pages of the book, but it served a greater purpose being a part of the display and besides the book was in poor condition.

In preparation for introducing the project, I also put out on display numerous books I have about children, festivals, customs and folk tales from around the globe. I purposely did not put out any books about just one country because as an introduction, I wanted to give them a taste of what we would be studying without emphasizing any one particular country. In addition to the book display, I had set out many items of my own from different cultures. Some of the items included a rain stick from El Salvador, a fan from Japan, wooden shoes from Holland, several musical instruments from around the world, and many other objects.

As the children entered the room that first day I had some Tibetan music playing in the background, the book and artifacts display along with the bulletin board. The students were eager and inquisitive as they wandered around the room. Naturally, the highlight for them was the bulletin board where they could locate their own country and look with great detail at the pictures and poems. I gave them some time to take it all in before

officially introducing the unit and explaining that we were about to embark upon a journey through each of their countries.

I then proceeded to tell the students to look around the room at each other and asked them how they were different from each other. Initially, they were obvious differences such as boy, girl, or tall, short then gradually they began to look deeper and started talking about the different languages they each spoke, or their skin color. After much discussion, I asked how they were similar and again it went back to languages because five of them spoke Spanish. Next, I read aloud the book, *Whoever You Are* by Mem Fox. It talks about the fact that all over the world people may have different houses, schools, and so on, but they are also the same when they smile or cry. The book ends with, “But remember this: Joys are the same, and love is the same. Pain is the same, and blood is the same. Smiles are the same, and hearts are just the same- wherever they are.... all over the world” (Fox 1997)

After I read the book we compared our list of differences and similarities to those in the book. At this point, I explained to them that we were going to “travel” to each of their native countries to learn more about each other and our backgrounds. Everyone in the class seemed very enthusiastic except for Justin. He never talked much about his past or his life in Nigeria, so I didn’t expect him to be as excited as the others and I also knew that I had to respect his feelings. Whenever teachers explore the backgrounds of their students, it is imperative that they be sensitive to their receptiveness, especially those students who have immigrated from war torn lands and who may have lost family

members or had their homes destroyed due to war. There can be many reasons why a child may not want to share his or her experiences. It may not always be as obvious as war. Sometimes it can be a personal family issue, thus it isn't the teachers place to pry or force a student to participate. Still other times students may be reluctant to share because " Sharing may represent a loss of power, influence or privilege, or reflect a loss of competitive spirit." (Helmer and Eddy 2003) I decided to forage on and hope that as time wore on, Justin would feel more comfortable about studying his country and sharing his culture with the rest of us.

I explained that we would read books about their countries; do research on the computer, read plays, and many other activities. Next, I went to my display of assorted multi-cultural objects and spoke about where they came from, what they were used for, and in some cases, I passed them around the room, and let the students beat on the drum or shake the maracas as they asked questions and told tales of their own. A few of the students said how they had maracas at home, and that's when I told them when we study about their country it will be their turn to bring in objects from home to share with the class. At this juncture, I was quick to add, "Only, if you want to." I didn't want to lose Justin at this point and I knew if he felt he had to share and had to bring in objects from his homeland, that he might just shut down. Had I thought about it more, I could have provided an alternative activity for Justin, such as researching a Nigerian game or craft for him to teach the class. Another option would have been to have him read a Nigerian folktale, allowing him to participate without sharing more than he was ready to share.

In the past I had set up a multi-cultural display at the school and any ESL students that wanted to participate, brought in cultural items, or realia from their country and we put them on display in the library. I chose the night our school was holding its annual Celebration of the Arts, an event where the music, art and physical education departments all do various performances. Since many parents would be coming to see their child perform or see their art work on display, I knew I would have a captive audience and as it turned out, it was a huge success. Letting the class know that I planned to hold a multi-cultural night again this year, I was also letting them know that their culture was not only important to our class community, but the school community, as well.

It wasn't until the second day when I gave each member of the class a white binder with clear pockets covers on the outside and two smaller ones on the inside. I told them that these would be their cultural binders that we would add to as we "traveled" through our countries. After passing out the binders, I spread out a stack of old travel magazines and told them to make two collages of pictures found in the magazines. These were to serve as the front and back covers of their binders. The next step was to make separate sections for the binders and label those sections. Students can write or decorate their own labels, or in my case, I printed labels on the computer and had them glue them onto five different pieces of colored tag board. The different sections included **Facts about Geography and Culture, Fictional Story Summaries, Poetry, Readers Theatre and My Reflections**. Lastly, each piece of tag board was three hole punched and placed in the binders.

The other key feature to our traveling binder was the passport. Certainly not an original idea and there are I am sure many examples of passports to be found in teacher resource books, however, I put together one of my own and printed it on colored tag board, asked the students to fill them out with their full name, date of birth and nationality, then I had them laminated for extra durability. I instructed the students to keep their passports in the front inside pocket of their binders, so each time we traveled to another country; they would get a flag sticker of that country and stick it inside their passports. Some flag stickers I was able to order on line and others I found a picture of the flag I needed on the internet, made copies the same size as the other stickers, printed them in colored ink and had the students glue them in their passports. Another great source for flags and many other activities related to various countries is Enchantedlearning.com. (Appendix 10)

With fully assembled binders and passports in hand, we were ready to begin our journey. The students were eager to begin, but I needed to remind them that we must also continue with our other work, so our cultural unit soon became a reward for accomplishing our other obligations. The students almost seemed unaware that they were still doing “work” when we were doing lessons associated with our cultural project. I made a point of keeping it a secret which country we were traveling to next. I wanted to keep the feelings of anticipation strong and just adding that extra element of surprise kept the excitement alive.

Chapter Four

Lesson plans

There were both similarities and differences among the lessons we did for each country. Therefore, I will go into greater detail with our first country, which happens to be Vietnam. For the remaining countries I will only elaborate upon different activities or lessons that were not previously introduced. The reason I chose Vietnam as our first stop on our journey was simply the fact that Vietnam was Phuong's native country and I not only knew she would be an enthusiastic contributor to our discussions, but I also knew she would be most likely to share her knowledge. It proved to be a wise decision as she immediately embraced the idea of not only teaching us about her country, but she also zealously soaked up any new information she learned from our studies. When it came time for her to share cultural items brought from home, she generously shared an abundance of items as well as teaching a craft and allowing each student to keep their creation.

As stated, I will begin our journey with Vietnam, followed by Brazil, Mexico, Nigeria and finally, Argentina. The four remaining countries will contain an outline of the lesson and activities, as well as reflections and comments. Each of the five plays are located in the appendix with a complete bibliography of the books and resources mentioned in the lesson plans, as well as copies of the teacher made worksheets.

Vietnam

We began our adventure with a bit of role playing. The class was instructed to get their binders, take out their passports, and strap on their seatbelts as we took off in our imaginary airplane. Everyone was anxious to see where our first stop would be. Finally, I landed my finger on the big world map and pointed to Vietnam. Immediately, Phoung's face lit up and the rest of the class seemed equally pleased with our first destination. I then asked Phoung to come up to the map and point to where she lived, but purposely did not discuss anything else until we had completed our KWL chart. A KWL chart is divided into three sections: what the students already **K**now, what they **W**ant to know and finally the last section which is filled in at the conclusion of the lesson, what the students **L**earned.

In the front of the room I have a wipe off KWL chart that we would use at each of our locations before we formally began the lessons. The student or students whose native country we were studying were not allowed to contribute until the rest of the class had shared their prior knowledge. Each time we did this activity, the students had more and more to contribute, but since Vietnam was first, and not many of the students had much prior knowledge about Vietnam, they didn't generate a long list. They knew they spoke Vietnamese and since we had already located Vietnam on the map, someone noticed that it was in Asia and near the water. I then gave Phoung a chance to share a few things she knew about her own country. Next, we filled in the column of what they wanted to learn about Vietnam and again since they didn't really know what to expect, this column was also quite short, but as we continued with our travels the students soon became more

versed in studying about other cultures and began wanting to learn similar information so they could make comparisons between the countries.

Our next step was to locate Vietnam on the bulletin board display. The children looked at the flag and were reminded that they will get a flag sticker in their passports when we complete our study of Vietnam. We also looked at the picture I chose for Vietnam, a photo of people in a boat with fish and the children began to ask Phoung questions about what they saw. Lastly, I read aloud the poem that was on the board and we discussed what it means. The poem I had on the board entitled, "My Life Story" written by Lan Nguyen from the book, *This Same Sky A Collection of Poems From Around the World*, is a sad poem about growing up in a beautiful land, but surrounded by war. We discussed the meaning of the poem and the contrast between the beauty of a country and the ugliness of war. Due to the age level, we did not delve too deeply into the subject of the war, but we discussed the images that come to mind when the poem is read.

The students were anxious to use their binders, so they were pleased when I distributed the first pages to our unit. I began each country with factual information and a reading comprehension selection. There are certainly many choices for pre-made reading selections related to various countries, but the source I found most helpful was edhelper.com. (Appendix 10) The comprehension questions certainly do not require higher order thinking skills, but they are just the right length and you can pick the reading level that best matches your class. The other benefit is that they have a wide selection of countries listed, so I was able to find all the countries we studied, allowing me to be

consistent with this component of the unit. As mentioned earlier, enchantedlearning.com is also a wonderful source and when I do this again in the future, I plan to use the full page flags for each country and have the students color appropriately.

By going to the edhelper.com site, I was able to click on geography, locate the country we were studying and print out a map of the country, a reading comprehension selection, which generally ran about two pages and a comprehension worksheet based on the text. There is very little variation to the types of questions, and if this were our only source of reading comprehension, I would be concerned, however, since it isn't, the maps and text suffice for an introduction to each country. The students first received the page with an outlined map of Vietnam, depending on time and the age group, students can just color in the country, or locate and label the capital city or even add more details, including major rivers or mountain ranges.

We began by finding the location of the capital city and labeling it on our maps, then later as we read more about our country, we would go back and add other details. Next, I distributed the reading selection which we read aloud by taking turns. The students then read it aloud a second time with a partner, alternating paragraphs. The last step was for the students to complete a reading comprehension sheet based on the text. Most of the questions are in a multiple choice format, with an occasional question requiring a short answer response.

As I mentioned, these questions were certainly not up to par in terms of the difficulty level the children would face on the standardized test that takes place in the spring, however, we did apply the same test taking strategies to these questions, tying it into the third grade curriculum. Since the majority of the questions were factual recall, I was able to emphasize the importance of going back into the text, finding your answer and underlining or highlighting where you found your answer. This was a test taking strategy that was drilled into the students throughout the year. I then collected the comprehension questions, graded them and we would go over the answers together and the students were then required to state where they found their answer. The maps and reading selection, the students placed in their binders in the section labeled “Facts about Geography and Culture”.

The next lesson involved reading the bilingual book *Going Home, Coming Home* by Truong Tran. Before I began reading, I gave each student a copy of the note taking sheet (Appendix 3) and told them they would hear the story twice, so the first time they could just listen and enjoy the story, reducing the pressure to write everything they hear down on paper. Since this was the first time they used the note taking sheets, I gave them time to record the title and I also gave them the name of the main character, since it was a Vietnamese name I knew they would have difficulty spelling it correctly. We then did a book walk by looking at the cover of the book and flipping through the pages, just giving them time enough to glance at the pictures. I allowed time for the children to make predictions based on the illustrations, then, we collectively decided that the main setting of the story took place in Vietnam. The students also accurately determined that the

young girl in the story must be visiting her grandmother. They were a bit distracted and turned their attention away from the illustrations when they spotted the text in Vietnamese.

After I read the book, we took time to discuss how the main characters' attitude changes toward her native country. As the book opens, she considers herself only American and has no interest in going to visit her homeland, yet as the story draws to a close, the young girl is now proud of her heritage and considers herself both, American and Vietnamese. It also talks about how she learns to communicate with her grandmother even though they don't speak the same language. I gave them time to fill in some details of the story on their note taking sheets, then I read the story again, but this time I invited Phoung to read the Vietnamese part just as I had done with Tran in the past. Phoung was already a very strong student, so the reactions weren't as remarkable as when Tran had read aloud, however, the children still looked at Phoung in awe as she read the story in her foreign tongue. Once again the students were given time to fill in details of the story on their note taking sheets. The names of some of the characters were quite difficult, so I assisted them by writing key words on the board. For example, the young girl's name was Ami Chi and she called her grandmother, "Ba ngoai".

The next step was to take the notes they had written and write a summary of the story. I first read another short unrelated story so I could model the proper way to write a summary. Once they had seen a concrete example, I distributed the book summary sheets (Appendix 2) and the students wrote their summary of the book, *Going Home, Coming*

Home. I repeated this process for each country for two important reasons. The skill of summarization and being able to recognize key components of a story is tested in numerous ways on the state standardized test. Secondly, Spangenberg-Urbschat and Pritchard support the idea that summarization skills help boost comprehension in all students, ESL in particular. Both the note taking and summary sheets were then placed in their binders in the “Book Summary” section.

I tried to alternate between fiction and non-fiction, so next I read some factual information from two books I used often and that were excellent resources for factual information without over loading the students. The first is a book, *Children Just Like You and Me* which is written and illustrated by a husband and wife team and is filled with wonderful pictures and information geared toward children. Each of the countries they cover focuses on the life of a child. Pictures and text typically cover the child’s school, foods they eat, games they play, family life, their clothing and so on. The other book I read to them from was *Children from Australia to Zimbabwe* by Maya Ajmera and Anna Rhesa Versola and it too focuses on children, but also includes a map of each country. The illustrations are fairly small so it is best shared in small groups. Our original group of six was perfect, but even with our additional two students who moved in later, the group was still small enough for everyone to appreciate the illustrations.

The next lesson basically fell into my lap and took little planning on my part. Our district had used *Into English* as the ESL book adoption and one of the books in the set, written by Holly Keller is called, *Grandfather’s Dream*. It’s about a man and his granddaughter

who live in Vietnam. The grandfather wishes for the cranes to return now that the war is over and he shares his dream with his granddaughter. The other people in this small village think that the land would be better suited for growing rice than for attracting cranes. We read the book two times, taking turns reading it altogether and partner reading. After they read the book twice, they were able to use the book to answer comprehension questions and other similar activity sheets from the teachers' resource book that accompanies this series. Since most of the books I used with this unit were single copies, it was nice to be able to include a lesson where each child had their own book to read from and use as a reference when completing the various activity sheets.

Our next component of our cultural project was to visit a website geared for children about Vietnam. I was fortunate enough to have four computers in my classroom, including my laptop and the teacher in the adjoining room was gracious enough to allow my students to use her computers, also, thus allowing each student to have access to their own computer without having to waste class time venturing to the computer lab. This component of the unit was a well received diversion from the paper, pencil and book activities which constituted the majority of the lessons. The first web site we explored was from the *Time For Kids* website. (Appendix 10)

Time For kids is an excellent resource and in our case each of the five countries we "visited" had their own web site, however, they do not have a site for every country, but there are many other web sites available that are also kid friendly. Each web site is similar in format, including a map of the country and country facts, a section that has key

words or phrases in the native language and in some cases an interactive quiz for the students to take after exploring the entire site. I wanted the students to truly enjoy learning and reading about these countries, so whenever they were on these sites, I let them view the sections in whatever order they wished and to go at their own pace.

The next segment of the unit contained the readers' theatre plays I developed for each of the countries. As stated earlier, I purposely did not write these plays until we had had time to delve into the culture and strengthen our knowledge about each individual country. This allowed the students to rely on schema when reading aloud the plays. They were proud of themselves when they could read something easily because they had already heard it many times in our discussions or read it themselves during our varied lessons. For example, the Vietnam play (appendix 5) includes references to Vietnamese words that were introduced in the *Time For Kids* web site and some of the information we had learned during our reading comprehension sheets and the factual information I shared with the class.

I did not specifically ask the students what should be included in the plays, but instead made observations of my own, making note of what information sparked their interest the most. For example, when we read about the children going to school on Saturdays in Vietnam, the students were intrigued by this and we discussed it at great length, so I made a point of including it in the play. Certainly actively seeking the students' input can be beneficial especially in preparing them to eventually write their own plays. The reason I chose to write them on my own was because as we went to each country they anxiously

awaited the moment I introduced the play. It was as if I was presenting them with a gift created just for them.

At the time we studied Vietnam, we only had six students in our group, but I wrote the play with eight speaking parts, allowing for some students to read two people's parts. I also wanted to include extra because we never knew when we would be getting new students and ironically, when our group was complete we ended up with eight students. As I assigned parts, I did not place emphasis on gender, especially since our group consisted of two boys and six girls. Initially there was some giggling when a male student read the role of a female in the play, but it soon desisted as we proceeded along.

Poetry was our next focus. I shared with the class a haiku from the book, *Good Luck Gold and other Poems*. It is a poetry book for children written by an Asian-American writer, Janet S. Wong. My goal was to teach the children how to write a different type of poem for each country we studied. I read the following haiku to the students.

Family Style

*Like hungry seagulls,
chopsticks fight, trying to snatch
the best piece of fish.*
(Wong 1994)

We discussed how different cultures use different utensils to eat and how fish is very popular in Vietnam. I then passed out chopsticks and asked Phoung to teach us all the proper way to eat with chopsticks. I say all, since I am not very adept at using chopsticks

myself, I too benefited from her instruction. After some funny mishaps, most of us had acquired the new skill of eating with chopsticks.

Now it was time to acquaint ourselves with the type of poem we had read and to learn how to write one ourselves. We counted the syllables on each line and after determining that the haiku formula is 5,7,5 syllables, we attempted to write one ourselves. I asked someone to volunteer a topic, then as a whole group we composed one together on the board. It was now their turn to write their own haiku, but this time the topic was chosen by me. They had to write a haiku about Vietnam. I told them they were free to gain inspiration from any of the books that were on display throughout the room or from their binders.

Since we had written the first haiku together without much difficulty, I assumed they would have little trouble composing one of their own. I assumed wrong. The process was very time consuming, due to numerous revisions and editing sessions with me. They started with great ideas about what they wanted their poem to say, but had much difficulty fitting it into the required amount of syllables. Although we spent more time than I had planned, eventually each student created their own haiku and a copy of “*Family Style*” and the student’s original haiku were placed in the “poetry” section of their binders.

In both *Grandfather’s Dream* and *Going Home, Coming Home* our primary focus was on listening and writing skills, but with the next non-fiction book, I chose to focus on

listening and speaking skills. I read aloud the book, *Angel Child, Dragon Child* by Michele Maria Surat. The book deals with the issues newcomers face as they enter the American school system for the first time. The main character is Ut, a Vietnamese girl who moves to America and begins attending school with her sisters and struggles to fit in until a wise principal intercedes.

After reading the book aloud, I divided the class into two groups of three. Whenever we divide into discussion groups there are three simple rules they must follow.

1. One person is assigned or volunteers to be the reporter. Their job is to take notes so they can report back to the rest of the class.
2. I tell them in advance how much time they have in their groups, so must stay on task and only discuss the questions they are given.
3. Everyone in the group must participate.

They were given three index cards with the following questions to discuss.

1. **Why do you think the principal disciplined Raymond and Ut the way he did?**
After getting caught throwing snowballs at each other, Ut and Raymond were placed in a room and Ut was instructed to tell Raymond her story while Raymond wrote it down on paper.
2. **Why do you think the principal read the paper to the entire school the next day?** Raymond had recorded the tale Ut told him about how her mother was still in Vietnam because they did not have enough money to bring her to the states and she misses her mother terribly.

3. **What are some other ways that they could raise money?** After the principal reads the letter to the school, the children, including Raymond decide they need to do something to raise money for Ut's mother to come to the US. The school decided to host a Vietnamese fair for their fundraiser.

After the students met in their separate groups, we all came together and the reporters shared with the class how their group responded to each question. The initial grouping of three students per group was a more conducive setting for the shyer students to speak freely. I also made a point of separating the set of twins so that their individual voices could be heard.

It was now time for Phuong to bring in items from her native land. I had given them suggestions on items they could bring from home, but as I had suspected, Phuong did not need any encouragement in this area. She brought in Vietnamese money, a game, pictures of her in her school uniform standing in front of her school and a picture of her sister's wedding. The children discussed the differences in American and Vietnamese money, asked Phuong more questions about her school and what weddings were like in her country. She had jewelry, a small painting and several other items. She also brought in a couple of her old workbooks from Vietnam and when the students saw the difficulty level of the math she was doing before she arrived, one of them commented, "Now I know why you're so good in math". We all enjoyed listening to her tell us about each of the items and the children all listened attentively. The best part though, was when she shared the Vietnamese cookies her mother had baked and then she taught us all how to make

these tiny paper stars. She brought in enough material so everyone could make their own. It was the perfect way to end our study of Vietnam.

Although our journey was nearly over, there were still four more tasks at hand. First, the students needed to complete their “Country Fact Sheet” (appendix 1). This was my way of assessing what they had learned and retained from our Vietnamese odyssey. After everyone had finished listing their facts, I asked each student to give me one fact they learned so that we could complete our KWL chart with **W**hat we had learned. The second form of assessment came in the form of reflection. The students were instructed to write their personal reflections on our study of Vietnam, stating what they liked best, what they liked least, and if their view of this country had changed as a result. They wrote their feelings on the “Reflections sheet” (appendix 4). Both “Country Fact Sheet” and “Reflection Sheet” were placed in the appropriately marked sections of their binders, leaving one last order of business. I gave them their flag stamps for the passports just as we were leaving the country. I’m not sure why I decided to do it that way and certainly it can be adapted to the more traditional way of stamping their passports as they enter a country.

Reflections on Vietnam

Overall, I felt our first experience in exploring another culture was a success. It was definitely a learning experience for me and some of the activities worked better than others. Just as it had been when Tran read, having Phuong read in Vietnamese was one of the highlights. It also became apparent to me that time spent on the computers learning

about each country was going to be a student favorite. Phuong was so excited to see the web site devoted to her native land that she asked if she could copy down the website address so she could share it with her family at home. Naturally, the other highlight for me was seeing the enjoyment the students got out of reading the play I had developed. It was very rewarding to see how they reacted when they read about the hats we had talked about or the words in Vietnamese that we learned from the *Time For Kids* website.

I also enjoyed reading the students' reflections, however, this was another area that I realized they needed further instruction. It proved difficult for the students to get away from just listing what activities we did, what Phuong brought in to share, or the titles of the books. A few students even proceeded to just list more facts that they had learned about the country, as they had done on the "Fact sheet". I realized that I needed to model what I expected in regards to their reflections. After soliciting their opinions and sharing what some had already written, I proceeded to compose a sample reflection paper, pointing out the differences between facts and feelings.

A few stated that their favorite part was when Phuong brought in her Vietnamese articles from home. A few said they enjoyed learning about Vietnam and some said that Vietnam was like their country because they wore uniforms too. Others said they would want to live there because children get money for New Years and another wouldn't want to live there because they wouldn't want to clean their classrooms at school.

Phuong said she loved learning about Vietnam and it showed in her enthusiasm as she talked about her country. The craft project, the cookies her mother prepared and the numerous items she brought in the day she shared not only indicated that she was proud of her heritage, but that her family was, too. It was my intent to demonstrate to the parents, as well as the children that we as a school community care about them, care about their culture, and value them as individuals. I was cognizant not to put pressure on the students to share, but at the same time, I wanted the message to reach their families, since this was an opportunity for the parents that did not speak or understand English to get involved with their child's education. Phuong's parents spoke little English, yet it was evident that they played a role in gathering collectibles and family belongings for Phuong to share.

Chapter Five

Other Resources

In this section I will give a brief outline of books and resources or additional activities I used for each of the four remaining countries. I will only give a brief outline since many of the activities have already been introduced and explained in the previous lesson plans and since websites and a complete bibliography for the many books I used are all mentioned in the appendix. I will also do a brief reflection at the conclusion of each segment.

Brazil

- Poem: “Souvenir of the Ancient World” Written by Drummond de Andrade and translated by Mark Strand (*This Same Sky* 1992:66)
- Informational book: *A-Z Brazil* (Fontes and Fontes 2003)
- Brazil play (appendix 6)
- Fable: ‘How Birds got Bright Feathers’ (*Stories From Around the World* 2000:28-31) Students listen to the fable and then retell the story to a partner. One partner retells the first half of the story and the other retells the second half.
- Fable:

Instead of using a bilingual fictional book for this unit, I decided to improvise and use two different resources for my fictional tale. The first fable, I chose to do a listening and speaking activity and use the second fable as the basis for the story summary. This unit is designed to be flexible in nature due to the wide range of countries that are represented and the limited availability of resources. Collecting children’s literature from diverse cultures is a personal passion of mine, so I was fortunate enough to have a myriad of books at my fingertips, however, the school library and internet can usually provide the necessary resources on even the lesser known countries.

The two fables met my literary requirements; however, I was hoping to use a bilingual book so that Israel could read to the class in Portuguese. Knowing that Israel had only been in the country for a short while, I knew that he could read in his native language, Portuguese, and considering we did not have the most diverse group, I wanted to emphasize the fact that although Brazil was a South American country, Portuguese is the native tongue for Brazil. I decided instead to use the “Native Lingo” section from the

Time For Kids web site and have Israel read aloud and teach the class how to pronounce a selection of phrases. The students appeared to enjoy this exercise and just as Phoung had benefited from the opportunity to showcase her second language skills, so did Israel.

It was while studying about Brazil, our second country to visit, that I began to reassess the poetry section of the unit. Having composed their own haikus for the Vietnam unit and being only moderately successful, I chose a simple couplet format for our next exploration into the poetic world. Unfortunately, the simple format did not translate into a simple lesson. They were able to compose a generic couplet rather easily, but the goal was to compose a couplet specifically about Brazil. Lack of time was always our enemy, so I resigned myself to the idea of changing the contents of the poetry section beginning with our next country, Mexico.

Mexico

- Poem: “Country Memory” Written by Leticia Herrera Alvarez and translated by Judith Infante (*This Same Sky* 1992:101)
- Informational Book: *Off We Go To Mexico* (Krebs 2006)
- Fictional Book: *Saturday Market* (Grossman 1994)
- Bilingual Book: *Iguanas in the Snow* (Alarcon 2001) This is a wonderful bilingual poetry book and it was nice to at least read and discuss various poems, even if they weren’t writing them. It was also the book that the students read in Spanish.
- Mexico play (appendix 7)

- Mexican Fable: “The Singing Toad” *Stories From Around the World* (Amery 2000:45-50) Students listened to the fable and then retold the story with a partner.

Unlike Brazil, I myself had more than enough resources to explore Mexico, not to mention that since we were at a bilingual school, the main library and the leveled library both contained a rich supply of books, videos, and music. The four girls who represented Mexico were elated to finally be getting to their country and since so many of the other students had already been exposed to the Mexican culture via celebrations and activities they witnessed in observing the many bilingual classes on campus, it was crucial to make this particular unit more exhilarating and more enlightening as to the true culture of the Mexican people. Justin, in particular did not hide his lack of enthusiasm when he discovered our next stop was Mexico, but as the unit progressed he began to come around and appeared to be interested, however twice in his reflections he stated that his least favorite country was Mexico and that he did not like it at all. In my opinion, this probably was due to a predisposed prejudice influenced by his family’s beliefs. It could have also been a reaction to feeling out numbered by the Spanish bilingual students in the school and even the number of students from Mexico in our own classroom. It saddened me to read that even at the conclusion of our cultural unit, Justin still spoke so negatively about Mexico even though his actions conveyed a more positive image and perhaps it was just a boy being stubborn and putting into print how he thinks he should feel, rather than how he actually does.

Since many of our bilingual and ESL students have grown up in the states, even though they may speak Spanish at home, they were never formally taught how to read and write it. Out of my four Spanish speaking students, only two could with ease, read the Spanish section of the bilingual books. I invited whoever felt comfortable enough to read a few of the poems in Spanish from the *Iguanas in the Snow* (Alarcon 2001) book after I read them in English. When I read Laurie Kreb's *Off We go to Mexico*, all four helped teach the class the proper pronunciation of the various Spanish words, as well as the phrases in the back of the book. As stated, they all knew how to speak the language, so none of them hesitated to correct my poor pronunciation, but what better way to increase self esteem than by correcting the teacher and having the knowledge that their English may not be perfect yet, but they possess a skill others don't, speaking Spanish fluently.

Despite their participation and enthusiasm throughout our "travels" in Mexico, I was a bit disappointed when it came time for them to bring in items from their native country. Both Israel and Phuong had brought in a fair share of items, so naturally I thought among the four of them, Mexico would be well represented. In the past I had many students from Mexico, who shared in abundance, cultural items from their country, including food samples, but this was a different group and their family situations and life styles were not necessarily conducive to school participation beyond the minimum requirements. As noted before, the fact was that two of the students had never even been in Mexico, having grown up in the states, so in many ways they were learning about their culture along with us, broadening the value in teaching such a unit. Luckily, once again, I had numerous

items of my own to help supplement when it was their day to share, but I allowed them to talk about the items that they recognized, passing ownership onto them.

As I mentioned, after so many failed attempts at original poetry, I decided to take the poetry unit down a different path. The time restraints of a pull out program along with the additional material that needed to be covered, I decided to just include the poems we used on our bulletin board. After all, the main purpose of this project was to increase cultural awareness and although teaching how to write different forms of poetry has its merits, I knew if we were going to make it through all the countries, I would need to save poetry writing for another occasion. Instead, the students placed in their binders, copies of the published poetry from each of the countries we studied.

Nigeria

- Poem: “Village Market” from *The Distant Talking Drum* (Olaleye 1995)
- Informational Book: *Ikenna Goes to Nigeria* (Onyefulu 2007)
- Fictional Book (based on real events): *Beatrice’s Goat* (McBrier 2001) This story actually takes place in Uganda, but the story is universal as far as African life is portrayed, so I chose this book for the story summary.
- Nigeria play (appendix 8)
- A Counting Tale and Informative Book: *Catch that Goat*, Polly Alakija’s tale of a young Nigerian girl searching for her lost goat intertwined with a counting theme. In the back of the book there are several pages talking about Nigeria and certain

customs. There is also a page with the numbers 1-10 in Yoruba, a language spoken in Nigeria. The students made their own counting book using the numbers in Yoruba.

It was quite interesting how Justin's attitude had altered since we began our journey through the various countries. Having taught Justin for several years in ESL, I was cognizant of the fact that he did not possess many favorable memories of his native country. In fact, initially when I explained what we were going to do and how we would collectively learn about each others cultures and homelands, Justin was the only one who remained subdued and mumbled something to the effect, "the schools are mean in Nigeria, they spank you". Later in one of the student's reflections they recalled Justin making that statement, even though we never read anything in our books or on line mentioning this form of discipline in Nigerian schools.

Despite Justin's initial hesitation when we first began our journey, he actually smiled when we "landed" in Nigeria and I announced this would be our next destination. As we began filling in what we already knew for our KWL chart, Justin volunteered information and as we read books about his country and researched on line, he seemed to actually begin to take pride in his native land. In the three years I had known Justin, I never heard him speak about Nigeria, except once and it wasn't positive then either, so I began to see this as a major breakthrough. Perhaps his attitude toward Mexico had not changed, but if he could see his own heritage more optimistically, then at least we were making some strides.

When it was his turn to bring in objectives from his cultural background, I had to remind him repetitively. I was sensitive to the fact that not all cultures and not all families would be willing to share their personal items and was also painfully aware that some did not have many personal effects since some families fled their own countries with little more than what they wore on their backs. Perhaps due to some peer pressure and pleas from the other students, Justin finally brought in a few objects to share with the class. He didn't appear to be familiar with the Yoruba language as we learned the numbers one through ten, but he enjoyed learning to pronounce them and the other phrases along with the other class members.

Once again we placed in the poetry section a published poem rather than having the students compose their own. It is important for me to point out that despite the fact I abandoned the poetry writing component, I had not abandoned the idea of studying poetry from other lands. The poem we used in the introduction, *Village Market*, comes from Isaac Olaleye's beautiful book, *The Distant Talking Drums*, a collection of poems from Nigeria. We took the time to read all the poems and look at all the wonderful illustrations, giving us another glimpse into the Nigerian culture.

Argentina

- Poem: "untitled poem" Written by Robert Juarroz and translated by W.S. Merwin (*This Same Sky* 1992:172-173)
- Fictional Book: *The Magic Bean Tree* (Laan 1998)
- Informational Book: *A Ticket to Argentina* (Dell'Oro 1998)
- Argentina play: (appendix 9)

- Informational Book: Countries of the World: Argentina (Dubois 2001)

Argentina was our last country to visit and unfortunately it came at a time when we were immersed in testing season. By the spring, everything seems to shift into testing mode and students begin taking a multitude of state standardized tests in addition to tests specifically designed to monitor second language acquisition and yearly progress. We eventually completed all the planned activities; however, they were stretched over a much longer period of time. The frequent interruptions due to the incessant testing and end of year activities hampered the level of enthusiasm the students had for learning about the Argentinean culture.

This was also a time when we drew the project to a close, making sure our binders were complete and writing our final reflections on the entire cultural unit. Many of the students missed class a few days a week in order to attend extra tutoring sessions, thus making it even more difficult to forage our way through Argentina and bring our travels to a halt. In the next chapter I will share some of the comments from the students' final reflections, as well as my own.

Chapter Six

Reflections

Overall, and despite set backs and occasional disappointments, in my opinion, this project was a success. The two limitations which proved to affect the quantity and quality of the unit were time restraints and lack of diversity. I have alluded to my frustration with time issues throughout the project, and knowing that the nature of teaching requires flexibility, I was willing to deal with the constant interruptions in our schedule, but my greatest regret was running out of time before the students had the opportunity to choose their own country to research. Especially in regards to the plays, I was anxious to witness them

researching and writing their own plays. Certainly, I would budget my time more wisely in the future in order to see the project to completion.

The other limitation that was imposed on the project was the lack of diversity within this particular class. In the year when I first thought of using children's books and plays to teach cultural awareness, my third grade class consisted of a more multinational group. That particular year I had students from Bangladesh, Albania, Mexico, Vietnam, Burma, Pakistan, along with several other nationalities. This variegation in nations would have created a melting pot of cultures for us to explore and would ultimately have widened the students' view of the world. Perhaps that is only being selfish of me since I myself would have liked to have explored more cultures, but the children were perfectly content with the five countries we did get to visit.

One of my objectives from the onset was to build community and respect for one another. This was one area where I was pleasantly surprised by a certain chain of events. I did not introduce this project to the class until at least a month into the school year. When I first started pulling my third graders there were only six of them, as Brenda and Alex joined our group later. They did not start off as a very conducive group, in fact this disharmonious group would squabble with each other constantly, making partner work and small groups a challenge. Certainly I have no scientific evidence to claim that the cultural unit was the reason, but as the year progressed, the squabbling subsided and they became a much more harmonious group.

The change in their behavior did not happen overnight, but I would like to believe that as they learned more about each other, they also learned to care about and to support one another. From the very beginning when I introduced the project, I tried to build up their self confidence while also trying to build a community as I emphasized the fact that they were my only class to be doing this very special project. The moment they received their binders and began decorating them together, there appeared to be a slight shift in attitude.

As I mentioned previously, seeing the change in Justin's perception of his country was certainly a step in the right direction since one of my other goals was to develop pride in one's heritage. It was interesting because Justin started with little or no pride, Phuong and Israel had the most pride in their heritage from the very beginning and the others possessed a moderate amount, yet they all became fervent participants when their country became the focus of study and self esteem peaked as they shared their knowledge. Below are some of excerpts from the students' final reflections. Arline, Candy and Sierra took their binders home before I was able to make copies of their reflections, but I have included comments from the others.

Justin: "I liked Vietnam the most because it was interesting to learn about" "I think all the countries were fun except Mexico I didn't like it at all."

Israel: "The most that I like is all specily Mexico and Brazil."

Phuong: "This rocks it is so cool doing this. I get to learn a lot from other people country like Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Vietnam and Nigeria." "I love the most part in Vietnam when we do the play. In Mexico the most part I like was when we read about Mexican culture."

Alex: “I liked the whole unit of talking and learning about countries.” “On one thing in Nigeria Justin said that in Nigeria people spanked kids at school.”

Brenda: “I learned things about different countries and it was really fun to learn about different things. I liked more is the computer and the things people brought.”

In their reflections they also mentioned specific books that they enjoyed, but the two favorite activities seemed to be when they were on the computer using the *Time For Kids* web site and the plays. My favorite part of course was the plays. I not only enjoyed writing the plays by trying to include information we had covered, but I also delighted in their pleasure as they read them for the first time and showed signs of recognition, then asked to read them over and over again. My other favorite part of the whole experience was whenever a student read in their native language and transformed from struggling ESL student to confident bilingual student.

Another event that the students were given the opportunity to participate in was the multicultural display that I once again put on during our schools Celebration of the Arts. That evening the PE teacher had students perform jump rope routines, the art teacher had student work displayed throughout the halls, and the music teacher and drama teachers both had several student performances. It was a great time to let the ESL students shine and be recognized.

All ESL students, in all grade levels, past and present were invited to bring in cultural items from home to display in the library on this particular evening. Once again, I was a bit disappointed by the lack of participation from my third graders, but many of my

students that had participated in the past brought in items and we managed to have quite a varied sampling of items. Two girls from India who I had taught in the past asked to perform a native dance. I was delighted and happily agreed to let them perform their dance in the library, however, on the night of the event, their families and extended families all showed up for their performance. The girls were dressed from head to toe in native dress, so I managed, at the request of one of the parents, to allow them to perform on the stage between musical numbers.

I received many positive comments from parents and students that were not part of the ESL community, which helped validate my reasoning for creating such a display. As stated in the introductory chapter, one of the objectives for Peace Corp volunteers is “to develop community and cross-cultural understanding within your school.” Certainly hosting a multi cultural display is one way to create an awareness and respect for the various cultures within the school community. The first step is to cultivate awareness within the ESL community, but it should not stop there. The ESL students need to feel they are accepted and respected by the school as a whole, not just with their ESL peers. “Research suggests that students who are valued by the wider society (and by the schools that inevitably tend to reflect that society) succeed to a greater extent than students whose backgrounds are devalued.” (Sprangenberg-Urbschat, Pritchard 1994:53)

Chapter Seven

Reviewing Key Points and Conclusion

Setting the Scene: Before introducing a unit of this type it is best to create an atmosphere that will spark interest and stimulate curiosity. Let the students know that they are about

to embark on a special journey designed just for them. The unveiling of the personalized bulletin board spotlighting the countries the children represent along with the display of multi cultural items, and books creates an immediate sense of excitement.

Flexibility: Any teacher knows that to teach is to be flexible and this unit is a prime example. Besides the fact that there will always be constant schedule changes and classroom interruptions, each group of students is unique and each new group brings their own challenges. Although this class struggled with the poetry writing and my decision to abandon this component of the unit did not mean I would not attempt it again with another group who quite possibly could be extremely successful. Perhaps if another class enjoyed proverbs, a section could be added onto the binders as the students collected and illustrated proverbs for each country. This unit is flexible by design and can be molded to fit a diverse population of students, personalities, interests and contexts.

Native Languages: Although it is not always possible, including bilingual books for the various languages is a valuable component, especially if the students are bilingual and are able to read to the class in their native tongue. Not only does this boost the self esteem of the bilingual student, but it is an ideal way to enhance awareness and an appreciation for the multitude of languages around the globe. Even without books, the students can learn simple words and phrases that could also be added to an additional section of their binders.

Building Bridges and Mending Wounds: Since one of the goals of this unit is to develop cultural understanding and acceptance of one another's cultural differences, I would say we succeeded. Although Justin had trouble embracing and accepting the Mexican culture, he did not react negatively toward the students whose background is

Mexican. For this reason, I believe that his actions were more of a front than anything else. As I mentioned before, we have a very large Hispanic population and I honestly do not believe Justin's hostility was directed toward the students, but rather a childish reaction toward celebrating a culture that is so predominant and whose traditions are already celebrated within the school community. My belief is that it is also misdirected hatred toward another culture, when as in Justin's case; he still has wounds of his own and must mend those before he can learn to embrace others.

Justin's reaction is not uncommon and as teachers we need to be sensitive to the fact that some students may need time to heal their own wounds. How a teacher handles such a conflict often depends on the maturity level and personality of the students involved. In Justin's case, we discussed how we need to respect one another even if we may have negative feelings about another person's country or traditions and although everyone has a right to their own opinion, they should not be directed toward the individual. When I was teaching at a Middle school once, one of my Asian students was very upset by the actions of some of the Hispanic students in the class. Since both groups were quite verbal and the other class members were affected due to the friction created by their interactions, we discussed it during our Way of Council sessions. Each Friday we would end the day with Way of Council, where students sit in a circle and share what is on their minds, following such guidelines as not interrupting when a person is speaking. This is aided by the use of a special object, such as a rock which is passed around the circle, allowing only the person holding the rock to speak. The idea is for individuals to share how they feel without pointing fingers or becoming argumentative. It took several

sessions, including a few mid –week sessions, but their mutual hostility eventually dissipated.

Readers Theatre: As I mentioned earlier, due to time constraints, the students never had a chance to write their own plays which of course was my initial intent. There are a number of ways this can be done, but I will now share how I intended to include the students in the writing process. Once we had traveled through each country and they had in their binders the five plays I had created as concrete examples, my plan was for the class as a whole to choose a country they wanted to learn more about and have them create the readers theatre play for that country. Perhaps they would choose a country that someone they know comes from and are eager to learn more about that person's background, or perhaps an interest in a particular country, stemming from a book they had read.

Once they had chosen the country, my plan was to locate books, web sites and follow a similar format as we had done with the other countries. After we had explored the country for a couple weeks, then I planned for them to write their own play as a whole group. If this were a self contained classroom with more time and more students, I would have had them probably work in groups of three or four to write the plays. Since I knew our time would be limited, I had planned to have them share their ideas as a whole class and establish location, characters and details they wanted to include. Next, I would have them choose the character they wanted to be so that each person would be expected to contribute speaking parts for their character. One person would be assigned the scribe so

that they could record the text. This would take several revisions and guidance on my part, but ultimately it would be their creation.

The Reflective Process: This component of the unit is a vital part, both for the teacher and the students. Having the students reflect after studying each country helps them process all that they have learned and experienced along the way. From the teacher's perspective, it is a window through which the teacher can gauge the students' reactions, observe changes in attitude, increased appreciation for their own heritage and those of their classmates. Certainly we did not cover everything there was to learn about each country, so in their reflections students are encouraged to think and write about parts of the culture they are still curious about, which can also be valuable information for the teacher as they plan future lessons.

You will recall how I needed to model the reflective process in order to get them away from just recapping the lessons and activities and saying what they liked or disliked. What I was really looking for were connections. I wanted to know if they could relate to the characters in the books, could they make connections between the different countries, pinpointing similarities or differences, and I especially was looking for clues showing me that something clicked and that their world was now a much bigger and brighter place.

The Four Skills: The following is a list of lessons and activities used throughout this unit. For easy reference, I have also coded each activity with **R**-reading, **W**-writing, **L**-listening, **S**-speaking, and **T**-test taking skill.

1. K-W-L chart (**S**)
2. Poetry (**L, W, R**)
3. Reading comprehension sheets (**R, T**)
4. Doing story walks and making predictions before reading (**S, T**)
5. Teacher read non fictional books (**L**)
6. Multiple copy student books (**R, L**)
7. Teacher read fictional books and summary (**L, W, T**)
8. Teacher read folktales and student retelling (**L, S, T**)
9. Researching on the computer (**R**)
10. Recalling factual information and completing Fact Sheet (**W, T, R**)
11. Readers Theatre (**R, W, S, L**)
12. Sharing cultural items with the class. (**S, L**)
13. Completing reflections sheet and sharing with the class (**W, R, L**)
14. Class discussions, or small group work (**W, S, L**)
15. Comparing and making connections among cultures (**S, W, T**)
16. Note taking sheet (**L, W, T**)
17. Student and teacher reading aloud bilingual books (**R, S, L**)

Conclusion

Now it is time to revisit the question I first posed in chapter one, “Is there value in teaching students about other countries and cultures within the context of an ESL

classroom where focus is generally placed on students mastering specific language skills?” Certainly, I have no quantitative data, nor survey results to support my opinion, just my own teacher observation. However, this project was not designed as a scientific study, but more as a tool, or resource for teachers to use in their own classrooms. My goal was to teach the four skills, developing second language skills while simultaneously learning about each others’ cultures and ultimately building a community. Did I achieve my goal? Yes, I can honestly say I did.

I no longer teach at the school where this experience took place, having moved out of the country. Sadly, the ESL pull out program is rapidly becoming obsolete. The district in which I taught is now moving towards total immersion, utilizing the ESL professionals as support for general education teachers by providing inclusion when needed, teacher training, but mostly as paper pushers and test administrators.

This by no means infers that the cultural awareness unit has no value nor have the goals become unattainable. Personally, I am sad to see the pull out program be eradicated, since I see the self esteem levels rise and the sense of community, or family that develops in the small group setting. This is not to say I am completely against immersion, knowing full well there are additional benefits in having the ESL students become part of an even larger community and as long as general education teachers are not only trained in second language acquisition strategies and teaching methods, but equally as important is that they receive training to become more sensitive to the plight of the second language learners. This is why this particular unit is adaptable to all age levels and all types of

classes, pull-out, self contained, classes with a multi-national population and even those with zero diversity.

My biggest concern is that the ESL students become lost in the woodwork, so to speak and ultimately lose their individual voice. As Pat Moran states in his book, *Teaching Culture Perspective in Practice*, “When we encourage learners to give voice to their experiences, we can help them make sense of them.” (Moran 2001) Both native and non native students will profit from cultural exchanges and increased awareness. “ Every learner has a distinct story to tell, and teaching culture is about constructing and hearing these stories.” (Moran 2001)

Teaching with quality children’s literature is a propitious tool for teaching all learners, second language learners, included. “ Good children’s books can help move second language learners into their new language and the world of literacy...books provide reasons to talk and offer a framework for writing.” (Spangenberg-Urbschat, Pritchard 1994) This was evident throughout our unit. For example, in *Beatrice’s Goat* we discussed how privileged they were to get a free education with real desks, school supplies and even computers at no cost to their families. After much discussion, the students were able to put into their own words, how they felt as they summarized the story.

The plays proved to be another rich source for literacy development. Since the plays had been designed around our lessons, the students drew on prior knowledge, along with their

word attack skills, this allowed them to read and pronounce words they otherwise never would have been able to. Waiting for their next reading part, kept them focused and forced them to follow along, something they didn't always do in longer texts. The shortened length of their characters dialogue also helped alleviate anxiety over reading the typical lengthy text from a basal reader.

Ultimately I would love to see cultural awareness a required course in schools.

Considering the diversity of our growing society, it seems to be a natural and necessary addition to our school system. Especially in school districts such as the one I taught in, where most classrooms have at least one past or present ESL learner. It can only be a mutually beneficial situation as both native learners and non native learn from each other and learn to embrace their differences.

As I look back on this past year and think of the progress each of my third graders made and how far they came from the beginning of the year, I can't help but smile. I saw individual growth as each student made strives in all four areas, reading, writing, speaking and even listening, which can be difficult for many 8 and 9 year olds. Probably even more rewarding was that I also saw growth in the students as a whole, as a group.

These third grade ESL students built their own community, with each of them making a valuable contribution to our world view and our acceptance of other cultures. As Parker Palmer eloquently states in his book, *The Courage to Teach* "Long before community assumes external shape and form, it must be present as seed in the undivided self: only as

we are in communion with ourselves can we find community with others.” (Palmer 1998)

Our classroom community became a safe haven for these eight students, where they knew they were accepted and their voices could be heard loud and clear. ESL classrooms are not just for learning English, they’re for learning about each other and about building communities where students don’t just learn to survive, they learn to thrive.

Country_____

Official Language_____

Capital City_____

Description: _____

Character: _____

Description: _____

Character: _____

Description: _____

Main Idea _____

Details

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Appendix 3

My Reflections

Vietnam

Cast:

Sarah (American girl)

Jason (American boy)

Mrs. Miller (American mother)

Mr. Miller (American father)

Mr. Nguyen (Vietnamese man)

Mrs. Nguyen (Vietnamese woman)

Thao: (Vietnamese girl)

Narrator

Narrator: Mr. Miller must go to Vietnam for business and the entire Miller family decides to travel with him. Vietnam is a country in Southeast Asia and is home to the Nguyen family. After a very long and tiring plane ride, they land in Ho Chi Minh City, the capital of Vietnam. It is a very active city with people everywhere. Many of the people are on bicycles or motor bikes.

Sarah: Dad, look at all these bikes!

Mrs. Miller: I see them, but I sure hope the Nguyen's pick us up in a car. I don't feel like trying to balance my suitcase on a bike.

Jason: How will we recognize them and how will we communicate with Mr. and Mrs. Nguyen? I learned how to count to ten in Vietnamese, but I don't think that will help much.

Mr. Miller: The Nguyen family lived in the US for sixteen years and only moved back here two years ago. They speak both English and Vietnamese.

Narrator: Just then, Sarah spots a man holding a sign with "Miller" written in big letters. It is Mr. Nguyen who is there to pick them up and drive them back to his house. It is just a short drive from the airport.

Mrs. Nguyen: Good afternoon. I am so glad you arrived safely. You must be exhausted. Please make your self at home and we will eat in about an hour.

Narrator: Sarah sees a photo of a young girl wearing a beautiful silk dress. She picks up the photo and looks at it closely.

Sarah: Is this a picture of your daughter?

Mrs. Nguyen: Yes, her name is Thao, but she is in school right now.

Jason: Today is Saturday, what is she doing at school?

Mr. Nguyen: In Vietnam we have school six days a week, Monday through Saturday. She will be home soon. She only goes to school until 11:00.

Mrs. Tran: Thao may be a little late because I asked her to stop at the market to pick up some fresh vegetables for our lunch.

Narrator: Soon the two families sit down to enjoy a nice meal. It is a popular Vietnamese meal of roast duck with rice and fresh vegeatables. After dinner the adults spend time talking and sipping tea. In another room, Thao, Jason and Sarah play a game with sticks and a piece of fruit.

Sarah: This is like a game we play in the states.

Jason: Yes, but I like this game better. What is it called?

Thao: It is called truyen and I play it all the time with my friends.

Narrator: Soon it is the following day and the Nguyen's have offered to give the Millers a tour of the city.

Mr. Nguyen: Please tell us what you are interested in seeing.

Mrs. Miller: I want to go to a market place and buy some souvenirs. A friend of mine asked me to buy her a hat. What do you call those hats that are a big circle on the bottom and shaped like a triangle at the top?

Thao: Oh, you must mean *nonla* and yes we will see many for sale at the market place.

Mr. Nguyen: Let's go then. The market we are taking you to is very popular. It is called Cho Ben Thanh market.

Narrator: The Miller family had a wonderful time at the market place, buying hats, jewelry, baskets and lots of delicious fruit. The two families also spent time down at the water, watching people on boats of every kind.

Jason: Wow! I want to move here and live on a house boat. Those are cool.

Mr. Miller: I wouldn't mind spending my day fishing like those fishermen. Did you see all those fish they caught?

Sarah: Well you can go fishing and mom and I can go shopping every day. I loved the market place. There were so many things to see and buy.

Mrs. Miller: Yes, but did you see all the young girls your age working hard weaving baskets, selling items and helping their parents?

Mr. Miller: Well my favorite part of this country is all the wonderful seafood.

Jason: And don't forget all the rice!

Mr. Nguyen: We know just where we will take you for dinner tonight. If you like fish and enjoy being on a boat, the Bach Dong River is the place for you.

Sarah: Are we going to have a picnic?

Mrs. Nguyen: No, there are many restaurants to choose from and they float out on the river while you eat.

Narrator: That evening the two families enjoyed a delicious meal of seafood, fresh vegetables and rice. Thao even tried to teach Jason and Sarah how to use chopsticks. The families also enjoyed listening to live music and watching dancers as they floated along the river. The next few days Mr. Miller was busy with business meetings while Mrs. Miller, Mrs. Nguyen and the children visited more sights and sounds of Vietnam. Their first adventure was to walk around downtown and see the locals going about their daily lives.

Mrs. Miller: Oh my goodness, are they actually having their hair cut here on the sidewalk?

Mrs. Nguyen: Yes, people in the city spend most of their time outside and you can find almost anything you need out here.

Thao: Mother, may we go across the street? I see some dresses and Sarah said she wanted to get one like mine.

Jason: Can I buy some more coconut juice from that street vendor?

Mrs. Miller: Let me see if I still have some Vietnamese money in my wallet. (mother looks in wallet) Yes, I still have some dong.

Narrator: After the children find what they want, Mrs. Miller stops along the street to buy a painting that a man is selling. They spend a long day walking around the city and dodging the many bicyclists that race along the streets. Finally, they go back to the Nguyen home and meet the others.

Mr. Nguyen: Did everyone have a good day?

Mr. Miller: It sure looks like you had fun. What did you buy?

Thao: Sarah bought a beautiful dress. She looks so pretty in it.

Jason: Dad, I bought you a T-shirt since you were stuck in meetings all day.

Narrator: The next day Mrs. Nguyen takes the Millers out to the country to show them the rice paddies and the beautiful countryside.

Sarah: Look, the people working in the rice paddies are wearing those hats.

Mrs. Nguyen: Yes, the nonla keep the sun out of their faces. It gets very hot out in those fields.

Mrs. Miller: We certainly can see why you like it here so much. It is a beautiful country and we wish we didn't have to leave tomorrow.

Thao: Sarah and Jason, we want to give you a gift before you leave.

Narrator: Mrs. Nguyen hands each of the children a wooden dragon.

Thao: In Vietnam we believe dragons will bring you good luck.

Mr. Nguyen: Please come back and visit us. Next year you should come during Tet, our New Years celebration.

Mr. Miller: We would love to. Thank you so much for all your hospitality.

Narrator: The children had been practicing *good bye* and *thank you* all week.

Sarah and Jason: Tam bietCam on

Narrator: The Nguyens' smiled happily and waved good bye.

Brazil

Cast:

Sarah (American girl)

Jason (American boy)

Mrs. Miller (American mother)

Mr. Miller (American father)

Marco (guide #1)

Antonio (guide #2)

Narrator

Narrator: The Miller family travel to Brazil on a family vacation. Mr. Miller has come here before on business, but then he went to the capital city of Brasilia. This time the family plans to visit two major cities, Manaus and Rio de Janeiro. Their first stop is the local airport in the city of Manaus because they have come to take a tour of the Amazon rain forest. Everyone is surprised to see a large city so close to the Amazon River. On their way to the hotel, everyone stares out the taxi's window to look at all the sights along the way.

Mrs. Miller: Wow! That was a long trip. I'm sure glad we are finally here.

Mr. Miller: It sure was and I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm starving. Let's just get unpacked quickly and head out to find a place to eat.

Jason: Can we get pizza for lunch?

Sarah: I saw several pizza restaurants on our way from the airport and there is one very close to the hotel.

Narrator: After lunch the Miller family walks around the city and stops by a waterfront market to buy Indian crafts. The next morning the entire family boards a boat to travel on the Amazon River exploring and learning about all the unusual wildlife.

Marco: Welcome to our beautiful country, Brazil. Brazil is the largest country in South America, the fifth largest country in the world and we are traveling on the second largest river in the world, the Amazon.

Antonio: Keep your eyes open as we move along. You will see many kinds of birds, animals and plant life that are only native to this part of the country.

Marco: The Amazon rainforest is home to well over 100 types of animals, over 400 different birds and thousands upon thousands of insects.

Antonio: Don't forget the plant life. There are also well over 1,000 types of plants, many of which you will find nowhere else. Many of the plants are used to make medicine.

Sarah: I heard that we would see a lot of colorful butterflies, too.

Jason: Look over there! What is that?

Mrs. Miller: It looks like some kind of monkey to me.

Marco: Yes, you're right, it is a monkey but it is an unusual kind.

Antonio: Those monkeys are called zog-zogs.

Mr. Miller: What a silly name for a monkey!

Sarah: Oh, look over there. Do you see all those butterflies?

Mrs. Miller: They're so graceful and colorful. It almost looks like a rainbow from here.

Jason: Well, I know whatever that is in that tree over there is too big to be a butterfly.

Marco: No, that's not a butterfly, it's a tree snake.

Mr. Miller: We haven't seen any birds yet.

Sarah: I heard that we should be able to see toucans. Don't they live here in the rain forest?

Antonio: Yes, just like our butterflies, we have many bright colored birds, such as the toucan or macaw. They live in the canopy which is the top layer of the trees. We even have hummingbirds and I'm sure you've seen those before.

Mrs. Miller: Oh yes, we have some of those in our back yard at home.

Narrator: The tour continues on as the Millers' see even more incredible sights and learn the names of many animals they had never heard of before. After a long and exciting day, they return to their hotel. They are tired but full of stories to share when they get back home. The next day the family spends the entire day shopping and eating.

Mr. Miller: Today for lunch I want to take you to eat a typical Brazilian meal that I had when I was here last time. It is called Feijoada.

Jason: What is it? It doesn't sound very tasty.

Mr. Miller: You will love it. It's a meat stew with black beans and for dessert we can have fried plantains or a type of pudding called doce de leite which is very sweet.

Narrator: As the family ate their lunch Mr. and Mrs. Miller quizzed the children on what they had learned about the rainforest.

Mrs. Miller: Who can tell me what the layers of the rain forest are called?

Sarah: That's easy. The top layer is the emergent layer, then the middle is called the canopy and the bottom is the under story.

Mr. Miller: Very good! Now who can tell me what animals you might see if you were on the under story level.

Jason: Anteaters, owls, bats, snakes, all kinds of insects.

Narrator: The Millers' continued quizzing the children and were very impressed with what they had learned. The next day everyone enjoyed seeing even more exotic animals at a nearby zoo.

Mrs. Miller: I had a terrific time at the zoo today, but I am ready to go relax on the beach tomorrow.

Jason: I want to go to the beach too, I think I have seen enough animals for a while, but don't forget you promised we can go to a soccer game while we are in Brazil.

Mr. Miller: We will, when we get to Rio de Janeiro tomorrow. We'll spend most of the day at the beach, but I have tickets to a futbol game on Saturday.

Sarah: I thought we were going to see a soccer game, not football.

Mrs. Miller: We are, but remember they call soccer, futbol here.

Narrator: Early the next morning, the family heads to the airport to fly to the city of Rio de Janeiro in the south of Brazil. Soon after arriving and unpacking, they go straight to the beach.

Sarah: The water is so pretty and I love the white sand. Come on Jason, I'll race you to the water.

Mr. Miller: Do you see that mountain sticking straight up?

Mrs. Miller: Isn't that a famous landmark?

Mr. Miller: Yes, it is called Sugar Loaf Mountain and I read somewhere that you can ride a cable car up there to see it better.

Narrator: The next day the entire family went to a huge stadium to watch a soccer game. After the game they walked around and explored the city. The following day, the Millers all rode on a cable car to see the famous Sugar Loaf Mountain.

Jason: That was lots of fun going up the mountain yesterday.

Mrs. Miller: I can't believe that after today we need to go home.

Sarah: What are we doing today?

Mr. Miller: I thought we could just go to the beach again this morning and then go visit a few more markets.

Jason: Mom, aren't you still looking for one of those scary looking sculptures that Marco told us were supposed to scare away water monsters?

Mrs. Miller: Yes, hopefully I will find one in the market place. I also want to bring back some coffee for your grandmother. They grow a lot of coffee here in Brazil.

Narrator: The Millers' filled their suitcases with all the goodies they bought at the market yesterday. Now it was time to fly home. Everyone was sad to leave the white sand beaches, the blue water, and of course the green rainforests.

Sarah: Can we come back when they have Carnival? I heard this place goes crazy with parades and fireworks.

Mr. Miller: We'll have to see, but right now if we don't hurry we will miss our flight.

Jason: Don't forget the camera! We took so many awesome pictures and I can't wait to look at them when we get home.

Mexico

Cast:

Sarah (American girl)

Jason (American boy)

Miguel (Mexican boy)

Maria (Mexican girl)

Mrs. Salazar (Mexican woman)

Mr. Salazar (Mexican man)

Abuela (Mexican grandmother)

Narrator

Narrator: It is summer vacation and Sarah and Jason Miller have traveled to Monterrey, Mexico to visit their old neighbors, the Salazars. Miguel and Maria were not only neighbors, but went to the same school and played on the same soccer team as the Miller children. Miguel and Maria moved to Mexico with their mother, father and grandmother two years ago. Monterrey, Mr. Salazar's hometown is the third largest city in Mexico.

Mrs. Salazar: Maria and Jason, we are so happy to see you. Hopefully next time your parents can come with you. We would love to see them again, also.

Sarah: My mother sure misses you. The people that moved into your old house are nice, but it just isn't the same.

Miguel: Do you want to go to the park across the street and play some soccer?

Jason: Sounds good to me!

Abuela: Don't be too long. We'll be eating dinner in a few hours.

Narrator: When the children get home from the park, the house is full of relatives. Aunts, uncles and cousins have stopped by to meet the visitors from the United States. Mrs. Salazar is busy in the kitchen cooking with some of the other women. After Mr. Salazar introduces Jason and Sarah to everyone, the four friends and all the cousins go

outside to talk and play some more soccer in the street. Luckily for Jason and Sarah, all of the cousins speak at least some English because they all go to bilingual schools where they take classes in Spanish and English.

Jason: Now I see why you've gotten so good at soccer. You play all the time!

Miguel: You're right. I play at school everyday and usually after school at the park.

Maria: We both play on a team at our school. Soccer is very popular here in Mexico.

Narrator: That evening after enjoying a meal of enchiladas y papas everyone talks and laughs well into the night. The boys play soccer, while the girls listen to music and talk outside. The next morning Mrs. Salazar makes *chorrizo con huevos* (sausage with eggs) for breakfast.

Sarah: I had forgotten how much I missed your cooking. This is delicious!

Jason: We haven't had chorizo since you moved away.

Maria: Mom, are we going shopping for Gabriela's quinceanera tonight?

Mrs. Salazar: Yes, I thought I would take you and Sarah shopping with me while your father takes the boys to a soccer match.

Sarah: What is a quinceanera?

Maria: It is a big fancy celebration that girls have in Mexico when they turn 15.

Abuela: I hope you like to dance because there will be a lot of music and a lot of dancing at the party tonight. You will like Gabriela. She is a very sweet and friendly girl.

Narrator: That afternoon the girls and Mrs. Salazar go downtown shopping for a new pair of shoes and to pick up the cake they ordered for the party. The Salazars' are padrinos, or godparents of the birthday girl so they have volunteered to get the cake. Late in the afternoon, they all meet back at the house and get ready for the quincenara.

Sarah: Wow! You two look awesome and you're so dressed up.

Miguel: We have to dress this way because we are part of the ceremony. I am one of the chambelanes, which means I needed to learn a special dance that I will do with the Gabriela and the damas.

Jason: Who or what are the damas?

Maria: They are like the maids of honor in a wedding and they are part of the ceremony, too. We all have to wear these dresses. That's why I have such a pretty dress.

Narrator: That night everyone had a great time at the fiesta. They danced, listened to music, and ate delicious birthday cake. Sarah and Jason met so many people and had such a wonderful time. The next day at breakfast everyone was talking about the great party.

Sarah: That was so much fun last night and I can't believe how friendly everyone was.

Jason: They acted like we were part of the family. We made so many new friends.

Abuela: Yes, it was a wonderful party and didn't Gabriella look beautiful in her dress?

Sarah: She looked like she was getting married in her long, frilly, white dress and her hair was done so fancy.

Mr. Sanchez: It was a great fiesta, but today is another busy day because Sarah and Jason, we are taking you to a rodeo. After the rodeo I can stop by another market place in case you want to do some more shopping.

Sarah: That sounds like fun. I have never been to a rodeo and I love horses!.

Miguel: I went to a few rodeos in the states but they don't compare to the ones here. You will have the best time, trust me.

Mr. Sanchez: It really is exciting and very popular, so we need to need to leave shortly or we won't get a seat.

Abuela: You all go and have a good time without me. My old bones are too tired to climb all those steps.

Mrs. Sanchez: Oh, abuela are you sure? I know how much you enjoy the mariachi bands when they play.

Abuela: I'll go another time, but today I think I'll just stay home and do some sewing.

Narrator: Everyone arrived back at the house tired from such a long day. The children had a fantastic time at the rodeo watching the charros (cowboys) and listening to typical Mexican music. They were also able to get a beautiful pottery vase for their mother and woven blanket for their father at the market place. Then on the way home they bought some tacos from a street vendor.

Sarah: Those tacos were much better than any I've had before.

Jason: They sure were and so were those peanuts with hot sauce we had. Mexican food is the best!

Maria: Just wait until tomorrow because we are going to another birthday party for my cousin and I know my aunt is making tamales.

Sarah: Do we have to get dressed up again?

Mrs. Sanchez: No, this is for my nephew who is turning seven years old and we are having the party in a park. They will have a piñata and lots of food.

Jason: I had your mom's tamales once before when you lived next door. Aren't they hard to make?

Abuela: They aren't too difficult to make, but they take a long time. Tamales are a mixture of corn dough with usually meat in the middle and rolled in a corn husk. They are a very special treat and muy sobroso.

Narrator: Everyone had a great time at the birthday party and Mrs. Sanchez was right. There was lots of food. Jason and Sarah loved the tamales and had so much fun trying to break open the piñata. There was music and even a puppet show.

Maria: Did you have fun today at the party?

Sarah: Oh yes, I can't believe how many relatives you have and they were all there.

Miguel: Family is very important in Mexico and most of our family all lives here in Monterrey.

Maria: Tomorrow we will take you to another park, but a much bigger one.

Abuela: We will pack a big picnic lunch.

Mr. Sanchez: Do you like to go hiking because there are some wonderful trails to hike at this park.

Mrs. Sanchez: It is only about twenty minutes from here, but it feels like you are out in the country.

Narrator: The next day the group travels to Chipinque National Park and spends the day hiking and playing outside. Sarah takes lots of pictures while she is there. Before they know it, it's time to leave and go back home. The whole Sanchez family takes Jason and Sarah to the airport to say goodbye.

Sarah: Thank you, no I mean *gracious* for everything. We had a terrific time.

Jason: I sure am going to miss all the delicious Mexican food.

Abuela: Don't worry because I put some recipes in your suitcase so your mother can make some meals at home.

Sarah: I hope you included a tamale recipe. Those are my favorite!

Maria and Miguel: Adios!

Nigeria

Cast:

Sarah: (American girl)

Jason: (American boy)

Aunt Sadie: (American woman)

Uncle Seth: (American man)

Eseye: (Nigerian woman)

Odili: (Nigerian man)

Narrator

Narrator: For their spring break, Jason and Sarah Miller spend a week visiting their aunt and uncle in Nigeria, Africa. Their aunt and uncle have been teaching and working in an orphanage for the past two years. Nigeria is located in Western Africa and the orphanage is located in Lagos.

Jason: I'm glad you warned us about the rainy season. We both brought our umbrellas.

Sarah: Yes, that sky looks like we could get rain any minute.

Aunt Sadie: It may rain and still be quite hot today. That's not the only thing you'll have to adjust to while you are here.

Uncle Seth: We don't have air conditioning like you have in your house at home. After a while you get accustomed to it and it isn't so bad.

Sarah: Don't worry about us, we'll be fine

Narrator: On the way to the house, they pass the orphanage where Uncle Seth and Aunt Sadie both teach. It is a very plain one story building.

Jason: How many children live there?

Aunt Sadie: We have about 70 children altogether and they range from 3 years up to 16 years old.

Sarah: That means we will meet boys and girls our own age. How sad that they don't have a home of their own.

Aunt Sadie: You are also lucky that you go to very nice modern school. Many children in Africa don't even get the chance to go to school because their parents can't afford to pay for school supplies or uniforms.

Jason: If they don't go to school what do they do all day?

Uncle Seth: Their parents send them to work to earn money and help pay for food and other things the family needs.

Aunt Sadie: Many people here don't believe girls need to go to school. If they only have enough money to send one child to school, then they will choose the boy.

Narrator: It didn't take Jason and Sarah long before they realized how lucky they were. That evening they ate, talked and went to bed early. Soon it was the next morning and time for school. Aunt Sadie works with the 3 and 4 year olds, so Sarah went with her. Uncle Seth teaches a group of older students, so Jason went in his classroom.

Jason: The students all seemed so happy to be at school and all they had in their classroom were these old, wooden desks and a few posters on the wall.

Sarah: I know, our room didn't have much either, but the kids were so sweet. We had fun singing songs and playing games.

Jason: We went outside at break time and played net ball.

Sarah: What is net ball?

Jason: That's what they call basketball in Nigeria.

Uncle Seth: Tonight we are going to my friend's house for dinner. He and his wife want to meet you.

Narrator: That night Jason, Sarah and their aunt and uncle all go to dinner at the house of Nnamdi, and his wife, Aseye. Nnamdi also works at the orphanage while Aseye makes and sells jewelry from home. Both Nnamdi and Aseye were born in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, but they moved here five years ago so Nnamdi could teach school.

Aseye: Welcome to our home. It is so nice to finally meet you.

Nnamdi: Please sit and visit for a while. Dinner will be ready in about twenty minutes. I hope you're hungry.

Aunt Sadie: Aseye, may I show Sarah and Jason some of your beautiful jewelry?

Aseye: Why of course, and in fact, I have a piece for each of them as a gift.

Nnamdi: Jason, this is a necklace made out of cowrie shells for you.

Aseye: It is yours to keep so you will always remember your time in Nigeria.

Jason: Thank you so much. I love it.

Aseye: Sarah, I also have something for you. It is called a dogon bracelet.

Sarah: It's so beautiful! I just love all the colorful designs you make with the beads.

Narrator: Soon it was time for dinner. The group enjoyed delicious, traditional foods such as Jellof Rice, which is rice cooked in a tomato sauce. They also ate fried yams cooked in palm oil and roasted corn on the grill. After dinner, Nnamdi brought out all different kinds of musical instruments and passed them around the room.

Nnamdi: Sarah, you can play the cabasa. It is like a rattle and all you do is shake it to the beat of the music.

Aseye: Jason can play the guiro. It is easy, all you do is hit the block of wood with the stick and you can make different sounds.

Uncle Seth: I want to play the rain stick. It's my favorite of all your instruments.

Narrator: Nnamdi played his big conga drum while the others played their instruments and everyone sang along. Jason and Sarah learned several traditional African songs and tried playing the drums. They all hated to leave at the end of the evening.

Sarah: Aseye said we could go stay with her a day or two while you both are at school. She said we can go with her to the market and help her sell her jewelry.

Jason: Yes, and we can also buy something for mother and father at the market.

Narrator: For the next few days the children spent time helping their aunt and uncle at school, making and selling jewelry, and walking around the market place. One day after school they all went swimming at a nearby beach.

Aunt Sadie: Did you get anything at the market today?

Sarah: We bought a wood carving of a giraffe for dad and a woven basket for mom.

Jason: Today on our way to the market we saw women balancing huge baskets on their heads.

Sarah: I don't know how they can carry such large baskets with out dropping them.

Uncle Seth: How about all the food at the market? Whenever I go I always want to eat everything I see.

Sarah: I know what you mean. Today I ate fresh papayas and mangos.

Jason: I think my favorite thing to eat were the pieces of fried dough. Aseye told me what they were called, but I forgot.

Uncle Seth: Those are called *chin chin* and they're a favorite of mine, too.

Aunt Sadie: We're so glad you are having a good time, but we've decided to take you on a trip. Your uncle and I are taking Thursday and Friday off so we can leave early for a weekend trip to Yankari Game Reserve.

Narrator: Eseye and Nnamdi were enjoying the children so much that they decided to go, too. Yankari National Park is a long trip, so the group travels to the city of Abuja and spends the night with Eseye's family. The next day they arrive at the park. The children have a wonderful time spotting many different types of animals and birds. After they spend the day in the park, they relax at the Wikki Springs where they sit and talk in the warm water of the springs.

Eseye: I don't know about anyone else, but I had a great day today.

Nnamdi: I can't believe we saw a lion this time. This is the first time I got to see one here and it sure was quite a sight!

Jason: The lion was cool, but I couldn't get over seeing so many elephants and monkeys.

Sarah: My favorite was the baboons. They were so much fun to watch.

Narrator: The next day, the group drives back to Lagos and it is time for the children to fly home.

Uncle Seth: A go dey see yu. (ah go day see you) I will see you later.

Aunt Sadie: We will see you in a few months when we go home for a visit.

Argentina

Cast:

Sarah (American girl)

Jason (American boy)

Mrs. Miller (American mother)

Mr. Miller (American father)

Aunt Luciana (Aunt born in Argentina)

Uncle Mark (American Uncle)

Mateo (American cousin)

Narrator

Narrator: Mr. Miller's brother, his wife and son are traveling to Argentina to visit his wife's family. They have invited Sarah, Jason and their mom and dad to go along on the trip. Argentina is located in South America. They begin their trip by flying into Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina. Both families will be staying at the house of Aunt Luciana's family. This is also the house where Aunt Luciana lived when she was young.

Aunt Luciana: We will have dinner at home then I want to take you to a show tonight, so you can see some tango dancing.

Sarah: I have heard of tango dancing but I have never seen it.

Uncle Mark: It is a beautiful dance that is very popular in Argentina. Your aunt is an excellent tango dancer.

Mrs. Miller: Well I can't wait to see the show. I have always loved watching people tango dance and the dresses the women wear are so pretty.

Mr. Miller: I want to see the show too, but I also can't wait to eat. Luciana, don't forget you promised me we would have some gnocchi (naw-kee).

Jason: What is gnocchi? It sounds like a funny thing to eat.

Mateo: They are rolls made out of boiled potato dough.

Aunt Luciana: I cook them at home, but they never taste as good as my mothers. I am so excited to get some home cooking.

Uncle Mark: You will like them I am sure and she will serve them with a tomato sauce and beef. Mateo's grandmother is a great cook!

Mrs. Miller: Everyone is making me hungry talking about all this food. Let's go get unpacked so we will be ready for dinner and a show.

Mateo: Come with me and I'll show you where you are staying.

Narrator: That night the two families enjoyed a delicious meal and a night of music and dancing. The next day Aunt Luciana decided to take everyone for a tour of her city.

Aunt Luciana: First I want to take you to an area called Palermo where there is a huge park along the river and it is a great place to go and relax with a picnic lunch.

Jason: Mateo, why don't you bring your soccer ball with you and maybe we can play some while we are in the park.

Sarah: That sounds like fun, but I thought we were going to the zoo today.

Uncle Mark: It is over in the same area, so after lunch we will go to the zoo.

Narrator: Everyone had a great day at the park and the zoo. That night Mateo's grandmother cooks another wonderful meal and the two families spend the evening talking and eating. Mateo starts looking at a photo album with pictures of his mother when she was his age.

Mateo: Mom, why is everyone wearing white coats in this picture?

Aunt Luciana: That is my school picture. Children in the public schools here wear those. They are called guardapolvo.

Jason: (laughing) You all look like doctors!

Mrs. Miller: You children need to get some sleep because tomorrow we are going shopping at some street fairs.

Narrator: The next day everyone spends the day walking around different craft markets. Finally they stop at a popular restaurant for a late lunch.

Mr. Miller: That certainly was a great lunch. I especially enjoyed the beef pastries.

Mateo: You mean the espanadas. Those are my favorite, too!

Mrs. Miller: Yes, and now I need a cup of that strong coffee they make here.

Sarah: I wish we didn't have to leave tomorrow. I like it here in Buenos Aires.

Uncle Mark: It has been wonderful, but you will also love the estancia we are going to tomorrow.

Jason: I thought we were going to a big ranch with horses and cattle.

Uncle Mark: In Argentina they call ranches, estancias. It will be a lot of fun.

Aunt Luciana: Now that you have seen the big city, I want you to see another part of my wonderful country.

Narrator: Bright and early the next day everyone leaves for the estancia. It is about an hour drive from Buenos Aires.

Uncle Mark: Here we are!

Jason: Wow, this place is cool. Look at all the horses.

Sarah: Will we be able to ride them?

Mateo: Dad, you said we were going horseback riding while we were here.

Uncle Mark: Yes, as soon as you change into some riding clothes we can all go.

Mrs. Miller: I loved the city, but I think I like all this open land even more.

Aunt Luciana: I would always come out here every chance I got when I was little.

Mateo: My mom knows how to herd cattle on horseback!

Jason: I wish I could do that!

Uncle Mark: We will do that tomorrow. Your aunt will also teach us how to milk the cattle like she did when she a little girl.

Narrator: Everyone quickly changed into their riding clothes and met outside. They rode for a long time and didn't get back to the ranch until dark.

Aunt Luciana: Did everyone have fun on the horseback ride?

Sarah: It was the best! Did you see the deer and foxes while we were riding?

Jason: I sure did. I also saw a family of armadillos.

Mrs. Miller: It is so peaceful out here.

Mr. Miller: I know, it is hard to believe the city is only an hour away.

Mrs. Miller: All that riding sure did make me hungry.

Aunt Luciana: Good because the owners of the ranch are having a barbecue later tonight.

Mateo: Just wait until you taste the asado. That is what they call barbequed meat.

Narrator: Mateo was right. Everyone loved the asado and all the food. Another guest brought out his guitar and they spent the evening singing and looking at the stars.

The next morning the children got up early so they could help out around the ranch. After lunch Jason, Mateo and their dads went horseback riding again. Sarah and her mom stayed behind so they could learn how to make a popular Argentinean drink.

Jason: Sarah, you missed a great ride. The gauchos, took us all around the ranch. The gauchos are like cowboys.

Sarah: Well, we had a good time here. We learned how to make yerba mate. Do you want to try some?

Mrs. Miller: It is a type of tea. They make it in a gourd and drink it through a special straw. It is very tasty.

Mateo: Let's let them drink tea and we can go swimming.

Uncle Mark: Don't take too long because your aunt wants to take us bird watching later.

Mr. Miller: When we were riding our horses, one of the gauchos told me this is a great place to watch birds.

Aunt Luciana: Oh yes, you will be amazed how many types of birds we have here.

Narrator: The children had fun swimming and the adults enjoyed their tea. Later everyone went bird watching. After dinner they all went for a moonlit ride in an old wagon. They sang songs and enjoyed the fresh air. The next day it was time to drive back to the city for one more night before flying home.

Mr. Miller: I am going to miss this place. I have had such a great time.

Jason: When I grow up, I'm coming back here to be a gaucho!

Aunt Luciana: I'm glad you were all able to see my beautiful country.

Sarah: It sure is pretty. Now I know why you miss it so much.

Mrs. Miller: When we get home, Sarah and I can make you some yerba tea and we can look at all the photos we took on our trip.

Narrator: The families packed up their belongings and thanked their hosts at the ranch.

Jason and Sarah: Thank you!

Mr. Miller: Don't be surprised if you see us back here some day.

Aunt Luciana: Chau, Nos vemos. (Bye, see you soon)

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