

# Educating for Global Citizenship Through Children's Art

Art created by their peers in developing countries makes a powerful impression on American kids and teaches them how similar their lives really are.



Picture and caption courtesy of the See Me, Share My World Activity Book

*"We play this game during moonlight. We join hands and move round and round singing Alata-lata, alata-lata gbamulata, Alata-lata-lata gbamulata, Alatao. At the end of the song everybody should remain still. Anyone who moves loses the game. This is continued until only one person remains as the winner." This picture and caption, by Kambia Conteh of Sierra Leone, were created in response to the "How Do You Have Fun?" theme of "See Me, Share My World."*

Room 122 could not accommodate all the parents and grandparents who showed up for the multicultural tasting party at Calcutt Middle School in Central Falls, Rhode Island. More than 120 people crowded the classroom. Tables and chairs spilled out into the hall. The mayor was there, shaking hands and congratulating the 4th grade classes on the wonderful job they had done in organizing the event.

People were waiting in line behind a long table laden with 30 different dishes, labeled with names like *baccallau*, *arroz doce*, and *Cape Verdean cornbread*. The dishes reflected the diverse ethnic makeup of the school. The students had compiled the recipes in a cookbook they were now selling for \$2 apiece. They planned to send the proceeds to Sierra Leone, one of the developing countries they had been studying in "See Me, Share My World: Understanding the Third World through Children's Art."

**The artwork, photographs, and charts introduce American children to their peers in Colombia, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Sierra Leone, and Thailand.**

At the start of the "See Me, Share My World" teaching unit, most of the 4th graders at Calcutt had never heard of Sierra Leone. They could neither pronounce the name correctly nor locate this small country on a map, even though several children in their school had recently emigrated from West Africa. But, after two weeks of viewing and discussing the colorful drawings created by their peers in

Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the students not only could place Sierra Leone on a map, they knew much about the daily lives of children there—and in five other developing countries—their foods, schooling, health, work, and play. Many students were surprised to find out that three-fourths of the world's people live in developing countries.

The tasting party was a great success, and it was just one of the many multidisciplinary activities that the "See Me, Share My World" teaching unit offered to help children compare experiences and discover connections. The unit's visual and "hands-on" approach helped the students acquire geography skills and familiarity with statistics; more important, they saw the similarities and differences between their lives and the lives of children around the world. They developed both greater knowledge of the global community and empathy for their counterparts in distant villages. Typically, children summed up their learning like this: "It made me think about what I would be like if I were them" and "Now I care what happens to others."

Calcutt was one of 21 Rhode Island schools chosen to pilot this multidisciplinary global education program, developed in cooperation with local educators by PLAN International USA, formerly the Foster Parents Plan.<sup>1</sup> The idea evolved from Childreach Sponsorship, PLAN's humanitarian assistance program linking caring Americans with needy children and their families overseas through personal sponsorship and communications. Funding to design and pilot a supplementary teaching unit and traveling exhibit of children's artwork came from the U.S. Agency for International Development, with matching grants from local funding organizations.

Over 2,500 3rd through 6th grade students and 115 teachers participated in the pilot phase of the project. The schools ranged from Gilbert Stuart—a large inner-city school with many recent immigrants from Latin America and Southeast Asia—to Clayville, a small rural school near the Connecticut border.

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In response to teachers' enthusiasm and recommendations from a pilot evaluation study, PLAN International USA is now disseminating a packaged version of the "See Me, Share My World" program.<sup>2</sup> The new version includes 16 placemat-size laminated prints of the best color artwork and black-and-white photographs from the pilot exhibit, a comprehensive teacher guide with 48 reproducible activity sheets, and a teacher training videotape. The exhibit of children's original artwork is also available for rental to schools, libraries, and community organizations.<sup>3</sup>

**The Daily Life of a Child**

"See Me, Share My World" centers around a vibrant collection of drawings and paintings combined with documentary photographs and charts to create a composite portrait of daily life in economically disadvantaged areas in developing countries. The artwork, photographs, and charts introduce American children to their peers in Colombia, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Sierra Leone, and Thailand. The unit is designed to be adaptable to different grade level requirements in grades 3-6 and to students of varied abilities and interests.

Under the umbrella topic "the daily life of a child," the curriculum addresses six universal themes, introduced by motivating questions that provide a focus for viewing and dis-



"My family earns money by selling balloons. My father has gone to the market to buy balloons. A man is selling toys on a hand driven cart and there is a beggar on the street. The shops are open and people are coming to shop."



"My father has returned to the house with the balloons he bought. My family lives in a small room (10' x 8'). The plaster of the walls has fallen at many places. I help put air in the balloons and my father knots them to make fancy shapes. My mother is making dolls to sell. My little brother is waving goodbye as my father goes to work."



"My father is selling balloons in the community. The children want to buy the balloons. A child is begging his father for a balloon as a few of the others are watching from their houses."



"It is evening. My father has sold all the balloons. He used the money to buy vegetables for our family's dinner."

*Pictures and captions courtesy of the See Me, Share My World Activity Book*

*These drawings and captions, by Sushila Kumar of New Delhi, India, exemplify the "Why do you work?" theme of the program. Children can compare their lifestyles to Sushila's; they also learn that, in the U.S., a full day's work buys rice, flour, milk, six eggs, and chicken, with \$41.55 left over. In India, a full day's work buys only rice, milk, and two eggs.*

Discussing the visual images within a comparative framework. Each theme (question) covers a set of specific objectives, outlined briefly as follows:

1. *Global kinship* (Where do you live?) involves locating the countries where the artwork is from, distinguishing basic differences between developing and developed countries, discussing experiences common to children everywhere, and identifying local/global connections.

2. *Food* (What do you eat?) explores production and distribution of a country's staple foods and investigates the causes of hunger in developing countries.

3. *Education* (Who teaches you?) addresses the issues of access to education, literacy, and learning outside the school classroom.

4. *Health* (What keeps you healthy?) examines the connections between health, environment, and nutrition. It also discusses causes of child mortality in developing countries.

5. *Work* (Why do you work?) examines the role of children's work in rural and urban families in developing countries.

6. *Festivals and games* (How do you have fun?) enables students to celebrate the universality and diversity of festivals and games worldwide.

**"See Me, Share My World" creates a composite portrait of daily life in economically disadvantaged areas in developing countries.**

### Viewing the Artwork

The starting point for the teaching unit is to present the children's artwork and elicit students' reactions to the drawings. In these discussions, teachers should take care, as one teacher explained, "not to dwell on facts. This whole project is about feelings from original art and should be fun." Open-ended questions—*Which picture do you like best? What do you see? How does it make you feel?*—encourage creative and original thinking. Children see different things depending on their own background and experience. There is no one "correct" answer.

When they first see the artwork, many students are surprised. Often the pictures force them to reexamine their television-inspired preconceptions about a country or its people, as illustrated by remarks such as these: "I used to think it was all death and sorrow, but it isn't" ... "Even though the kids are poor, they have just as good talents" ... "They are not as different from me as I thought."

Teachers follow up with the sequenced lessons in the teacher's guide, using "hands-on prints" of the children's art and a variety of learning activities. For example, in an introduc-

**"Now I think when I leave the faucet running" and "We shouldn't waste our resources" were comments from students who started to question practices in their own culture.**

**Fig. 1. Multidisciplinary "See Me, Share My World" Activities**

1. Discuss children's drawings from different countries.
2. Locate the children's countries, and practice other basic map skills.
3. Create artwork comparing your own daily life with that of children from developing countries.
4. Write and perform a dramatic autobiography of what life is like for a child in a developing country.
5. Read folktales from various countries (students choose one to develop into a play or puppet show).
6. Have a storyteller tell African folktales.
7. Invite guest speakers who have lived in or visited developing countries.
8. Bring in everyday products to create a display of our global connections.
9. Analyze import/export links and other economic ties.
10. Make circle and bar graphs using statistics.
11. Play games from different countries.
12. Make various crafts from different countries (students choose the one they want to make).
13. Put together a cookbook containing recipes from various countries.
14. Develop a Children's Bill of Rights.
15. Organize an International Festival with samples of all of these activities to culminate the program.

—Developed by Gloria Monte,  
Meadowbrook Farms School,  
East Greenwich, Rhode Island

tory activity called "World in a Room," students simulate the distribution of population and wealth in the world by dividing their classroom into world regions and distributing people and pennies proportionately. The "how do you have fun?" section of the teacher's guide provides suggestions for how students can create their own artwork and recreate games and toys used by children in different developing countries.

Activity sheets include maps, charts, reference tables, photographs, and art reproductions. Ten class periods provide adequate time to introduce the unit and spend one or two periods on each of the six thematic sections, although some teachers have extended the "See Me, Share My World" teaching unit throughout the entire year.

### Extending Learning

The lessons provide an excellent opportunity to integrate geography, social studies, mathematics, language arts, art, music, and health. "It's more than just visuals," says Gloria Monte, a 6th grade teacher at Meadowbrook

Farms School in East Greenwich; "it lends itself to great flexibility in incorporating content and higher-order thinking skills into all areas of the curriculum" (see fig. 1).

For example, Lois Hamel and Denise Garvey, the 4th grade teachers at Calcutt Middle School, were able to meet their health education requirements by discussing staple foods, nutrition, and diets in developing countries. As part of a science and math class, Al Menard, a 4th grade teacher at East Woonsocket Elementary School, experimented with different measurements to mix ORT (Oral Rehydration Therapy—a drink of water, salt, and sugar used in developing countries to treat dehydration). "We tried measuring with grams and liters and found different ways to measure with handfuls and bottle caps."

### The Magic of Art

Evaluation, based on unit goals, comes from a variety of sources: paper-and-pencil tests administered before and after the unit, student projects and portfolios, classroom observations, and teacher surveys and interviews.

**These dynamic visual images tap children's natural responsiveness, touching both their hearts and their minds.**

Preliminary analysis of the pre- and post-tests from two Cranston schools shows that before the program most of the students thought Third World children were very different and disconnected from themselves. After the program students saw more similarities and connections between themselves and their Third World peers. And they began to reconsider their own personal habits and actions. "Now I think when I leave the faucet running" and "We shouldn't waste our resources" were comments from students who started to question practices in their own culture.

Although fundraising and sponsorship are not program objectives, students at more than one-third of the pilot schools have committed themselves to some kind of social action. For example, each month 6th graders at Providence Street School in West Warwick bring \$1.50 to class. Half pays for a "Third World lunch" of chili, rice, or beans. The other half goes to Amidu Sesay, the child in Sierra Leone they sponsor through PLAN International USA's Childreach Sponsorship program. Fifth graders at Wheeler School in Providence offered to do extra work at home and saved up their allowances to sponsor a child. Students at Norwood Avenue School in Cranston collected canned goods, books, and clothing for needy families in Cranston. In addition, the 3rd graders at Cranston organized a "goodie" store

and voted to send the \$120 they earned to Sierra Leone.

Students from five pilot schools testified at the Rhode Island General Assembly in support of ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Each school developed its own "Kids' Bill of Rights." Students from Providence Street School collected more than 200 signatures from classmates to demonstrate their support of the convention to Rhode Island legislators.

"See Me, Share My World" is powerful and effective. The drawings and paintings of children in faraway places immediately appeal to American students of all ability levels and backgrounds. These dynamic visual images tap children's natural responsiveness, touching both their hearts and their minds. And it is this engagement of heart and mind that leads them to empathy, caring, and social action—and prepares them to assume the role of global citizens when they grow up. □

<sup>1</sup>PLAN International USA (formerly Foster Parents Plan) is part of a worldwide humanitarian organization linking caring sponsors with needy children and their families overseas. Founded in 1937, PLAN is nonprofit, nonsectarian, and nonpartisan.

Through its Childreach Sponsorship program, PLAN International USA combines proven tailor-made assistance with complete sponsor accountability and personal communications to help families lift themselves out of poverty. PLAN's develop-

ment programs are helping 600,000 children and families in 25 countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Programs overseas are supported by global education and child rights advocacy in the United States.

PLAN International USA offers Kids Teach activities about developing countries to U.S. schools that sponsor children. Selected schools also participate in the World Citizen School Sponsorship Program.

<sup>2</sup>The objectives of the pilot evaluation were to determine major patterns, themes, and issues of the project's impact on students and teachers, assess the effectiveness of specific project components, and make recommendations for replication of the project nationally. In the study, children's art emerges as a critical tool for learning important concepts and skills. A full report, including scholars' reviews, is available upon request from PLAN International USA.

<sup>3</sup>Since the pilot phase of the project, more than 100 schools outside Rhode Island—from New Jersey to California—have introduced the new revised teaching unit as part of social studies, language arts, and art curriculums. The exhibit has toured 32 Rhode Island and Massachusetts schools in addition to two libraries and one museum. Children's Television Workshop has animated six of the artworks for *Sesame Street's* yearlong program focus on world cultures.

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### Global Villages

The goals of foreign language proficiency and international understanding go hand-in-hand at Concordia Language Villages in Minnesota, where summer immersion experiences have drawn youths for 30 years. This summer, more than 5,000 students aged 7-18 are expected to enroll in one-week, two-week, and four-week immersion programs in German, French, Spanish, Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, Finnish, Chinese, Japanese, and Russian. The language villages, located at separate lakeside facilities in northern and central Minnesota, aim to simulate a visit to a foreign country in every respect: language, customs, culture, crafts, song and dance, architecture, and food. Authenticity is ensured by native staff members. Programs are offered at every proficiency level and include high school credit sessions as well as programs that combine social studies with language. Summer programs abroad for students are also available, and teachers of French, German, and Spanish may enroll in teacher seminars for graduate credit.

Programs are offered from early June through late August, and spaces are filled on a first-come, first-served basis. Sponsored by Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, the Concordia Language Villages may be reached at 800-222-4750 outside Minnesota and 800-247-1044 inside Minnesota.

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