

Activity Suggestions: Grades 10-12

Beauty

Class time needed: Two to three class periods

Materials

- Objects provided by students
- Art supplies

Objectives

- Students will develop appreciation for the individual experiences that shape our views of what is important or valuable.
- Students will practice tolerance and acceptance.

Note: This activity asks students to share potentially sensitive aspects of their personal lives. Help shy or reluctant students find “safe” ways to participate and set clear expectations for mutual respect in the class.

Introduction

Objects tell stories. Each of us owns treasured mementos that hold little meaning or appeal for other people. These objects help us remember significant events and serve as symbols of personal or family milestones. This activity will help students understand how individual experience influences the way we view the world. It also provides a forum for discussion of the value of diversity and of our capacity to change.

Procedure

1. Ask each student to consider the emotional connotations of the word beautiful. An object that has personal or sentimental value may be “beautiful” to its owner, even though someone else might consider it odd, unusual, or ugly.
2. Ask each student to bring an object to class that he or she considers “beautiful” because of its connection to an idea, event, or person important to its owner.
3. Have students display their objects in the classroom as if it were a museum.
4. Have students tour the exhibit and take notes describing their gut reactions or first impressions of each object. Try to maintain a formal museum or gallery atmosphere in the class. Owners should not explain their objects, and observers should not comment aloud.
5. For the second class period, ask each student to find a way to explain the significance of his or her object. Students could use visual art, poetry, storytelling, dance, etc. to illustrate the events and feelings associated with their objects. They should invite their classmates to ask questions about each object and the story behind it. Students should then visit the “museum” a second time, again noting their responses.



Debriefing

Use the following questions (or questions you create) to guide discussion of how perceptions can change when we have the opportunity to hear each other's stories.

1. How did it feel to know that people were looking closely at, and perhaps making judgments about, something you treasure?
2. What happened the first time you looked at the objects exhibited by your classmates? Share some of the observations you made about the objects. What happened when you viewed the objects for a second time? Share some of your new observations. Did your feelings about the object change?
3. What are some things you learned about each other during this exercise? What did you learn about yourselves?
4. Working in groups of two to three, brainstorm a list of things that people judge according to appearance. Is it ever OK to do this? When?
5. What if we did this activity with people who were not familiar with American culture? How would you help them to understand the value of your objects? What questions could you ask to learn about the things they consider "beautiful"?
6. What are some things we can do to stay open-minded about things we don't immediately like or understand? As a group, devise a checklist or guide that students can use to help them remember to re-examine first impressions.

Extending the Ideas

- Ask students to keep a journal of their reactions to new situations, people, food, music, etc. for a specific time. Invite students to share their journal entries with the class and to discuss their progress as they develop perspective awareness.
- If your class is corresponding with a Peace Corps Volunteer, ask him or her to compare initial impressions of the host country with later feelings. Ask your Volunteer to discuss perspective awareness. What strategies does the Volunteer use to understand issues and events from the perspective of the hosts?
- Invite a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer or someone from your community who has spent time in other countries to talk to your class about perceptions of unfamiliar things from another culture. Ask the speaker to describe how these impressions influenced his or her behavior. Ask if the unfamiliar became routine over time and how that happened. Have the speaker describe situations that illustrate the concepts brought out in this lesson. Contact World Wise Schools for a list of Returned Volunteers in your area (e-mail: <dpinfo@peacecorps.gov>; phone: 800-424-8580, extension 2283).

Perspectives on Paraguay

Class time needed: 40 minutes

Materials

A copy of “Perspectives on Paraguay,” an interview with returned Peace Corps Volunteer Nichola Minott, for each student

Objective

- Students will develop awareness of diverse cultural norms and values.

Introduction

Nichola Minott was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Paraguay from 1991 to 1994. She worked as a teacher trainer and then as a health coordinator. She was interviewed during the filming of a World Wise Schools video, *Destination: Paraguay*. In the interview excerpts printed on the student activity sheet, Nichola tells about her experiences as a Volunteer in a South American country. She provides a glimpse of the lives and culture of the people of Paraguay. Be aware that students may find aspects of Paraguayan life unfamiliar and strange in comparison to their own. Emphasize the need to be respectful of other peoples’ ways of life, ideas, and traditions while reading and discussing the interview. The full interview can be found on the Peace Corps web site at <<http://www.peacecorps.gov/www/dp/interview/wwsin1.html>>.

Procedure

1. Help students locate Paraguay on a world map. Ask students to share their ideas about how a Paraguayan teenager’s life might compare to a teenager’s life in the United States. At this point it doesn’t matter whether students have much background information about Paraguay; it will be interesting to see what the students’ expectations are.
2. Provide each student with a copy of “Interview with Nichola Minott.” Ask students to read the interview to learn about aspects of Paraguayan life and to compare it to their own.
3. After the students have read the interview independently, ask them to work in small groups to find specific similarities and differences between Paraguayan and American views. Be sure all of the cultural backgrounds represented in your class are heard during these discussions and during the debriefing period.
4. Ask a student spokesperson to summarize the similarities and differences identified by each small group.

Debriefing

Use the following questions to help students think about what they have learned.



1. What Paraguayan customs or views seemed most unusual to you? Are there aspects of Paraguayan life described in the interview that would be difficult for you to adapt to? Did Nichola Minott describe family and social expectations that also are important in your community?
2. What are some characteristics of life in our community that might make a teenager from Paraguay feel uncomfortable?
3. What are some values and characteristics that Nichola Minott labels as “American”? Would all Americans in all regions and communities agree with her?
4. Nichola Minott said that the Paraguayan perception of Americans is “blond hair, blue eyes.” If you were a Peace Corps Volunteer in Paraguay, what could you do to give people a more diverse perspective?

Extending the Ideas

- View the World Wise Schools video *Destination: Paraguay*. Ask students if their impressions of life in Paraguay formed after reading Nichola Minott's interview were confirmed or challenged.
- Have students create a video tape that demonstrates daily life in your community. Encourage students to present the community's diversity.
- Use this same reading as the basis for a discussion on generalizations and how to recognize them. See "How Accurate Is It?" in the Grades 6-9 section of this guide for suggestions and debriefing questions.



Perspectives on Paraguay

Question (Q): Describe the people in Paraguay.

Answer (A): OK. They're very open, they're very friendly. No matter how poor they are, they'll invite you to the house and give you the best portion of what they have. They're also very honest. For example, in the United States people are so conscious about their weight. In Paraguay, if someone is overweight, they'll say, "Oh, you know you're fat," but it's not something that's considered negative. It's just how you are. They're very honest about that, and I think that it takes a little bit of adjusting, especially coming from a culture where physical appearance is so important. It takes a little adjusting to realize that they're just being honest, but at the same time, it's not necessarily seen in a negative way.

The people of Paraguay are very friendly. They're shy at first. They feel you out to see who you are, especially if you're a foreigner. But once they get to know you, they are very protective of you. They make sure that nothing happens to you. They're just really open, really loving.

I think they value the family; the family's very close. Daughters, even though they get married, they still come back and they visit their mothers, their fathers. They live fairly close to each other. On weekends and Sundays, they always come back if they don't live very close to visit and have lunch. They're just a very open and loving people.

Q: How is life in Paraguay different from life in the U.S.?



A: Well, there's a term that they use here a lot in Paraguay—it's called *tranquillo*. I think life is a lot calmer, more low key, down to earth in Paraguay than in the U.S. In the U.S. everybody's rushing to get somewhere, rushing to do something. There's never enough time to do the things they want to do, and I think in Paraguay there is. There isn't so much emphasis on job as there is on family, and I think that's something that really differentiates the people in Paraguay.

Q: Describe the differences between men and women in the rural areas and then, if it's different, in the urban areas.

A: Well, there's a great division of the sexes. The men are considered the heads of the families and the women are to stay home and have babies and take care of the kids. That is the way it is. It's to a greater degree in the more rural areas, of course, and there's more freedom for women in the more urban areas. Like, for example, in this town, Carapegua, the women have jobs, they're teachers. They have their own businesses. In the rural areas that's not the case at all. So there are very distinct lines between males and females. And, for example, for a woman to



reach a certain age and not be married is not considered socially acceptable. There are women who have remained single most of their lives, but it is not socially acceptable. Also, it is unheard of for a woman to live alone. They're always living with their families. For me to come into this community, which is a fairly large town, and live by myself was something that they just could not understand. The women have been trained . . . to find a husband and get married and have a family. And that's the way it is right now. Just recently they have started to change that mentality, but it's a very long process, and it's not going to change overnight.

Q: Describe some of the dating customs.

A: Women are not allowed to [go to] dances until they're 15. When they turn 15, there's a huge party and then they're considered eligible. They can get married at 15, and they can go out to parties with a chaperone, either their mother or their older sisters. They cannot go to parties, especially in the more rural areas, without a chaperone or a date. They have certain visiting days when the men go over to the women's houses. They sit with the family and they talk to the dad, and they have very little time alone, and they get to know the family. On the non-visiting days they can do what they want. But when a man comes on those certain days, then that means he's interested and they're dating.

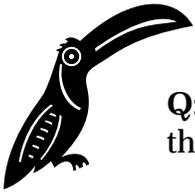
Q: Talk a little bit about some of the friendships you've made here in this area.

A: Well, let's see, I've made really good friends here. I think that's a feat in itself in that [I had] to learn the language. I wouldn't consider the friends I've made here superficial friends. I think it took a lot of work and a lot of trying on both our parts, but I think I've made friends that I hope to maintain when I return to the States. And the thing that is so important to me is that I've made them in a different language. We did not speak the same language when I first came here, and now we've passed that and it's a deeper friendship, and I value it. I value it more because of the work to form the friendships here.

Q: Do you feel that you've become part of the community?

A: Yeah! I felt I became part of the community . . . but you're always a foreigner, you're always the North American. I felt that people accepted me, and they were comfortable around me, but I don't think that I could, at least in two years, ever be completely integrated into the community. I'm still considered a novelty in a lot of ways. Their perception of Americans is blond hair, blue eyes—because that's the majority of what they see on TV and of Volunteers coming down here. I think I was a novelty because they'd never seen a black woman. So it was an awakening for them, and I think a good thing that they got to see an American who was not representative of the white Americans that they see on television.





Q: Do you have any special experiences or moments that you can share with us that come to mind, stand out?

A: I think one of the most rewarding experiences for me, workwise, was visiting a school and seeing them using something that we'd talked about in a workshop. That was really rewarding. For example, seeing a little kid wearing shoes and talking to his little brother or sister and saying, "You've got to put on your shoes," after I talked about not running around without shoes so you don't get parasites—I think that was rewarding. On another level, working with the kids, even though I didn't work with them a lot, was something I had a good feeling about.

On a personal level, I'd say the moment I got past the superficial barrier with my friends was very special to me, the moment we got to the point in our friendship where they started to come to me and ask my advice about things and talk to me. Then I knew we had reached a new level where I could talk to them and get advice from them—just like in the States when you're hanging out with your girlfriends and you're gossiping and going over your problems and getting different opinions. I thought that was one of the more rewarding experiences—when they started to come to me and when I started to do that with them.

Q: So what do you think people in the U.S. can learn from the Paraguayans?

A: I think one of the things we're losing in the U.S. is the importance of family. I've learned that personally being here. Just to value the family, also the importance of the community as a whole and working together for the community. It is not always the case in all communities, but in comparison to the United States, there's still a strong sense of community here in Paraguay. I think in the United States people tend to focus on consuming and having things, and I don't know whether it's to replace something they're lacking emotionally, but I think here people are more concerned with living. They buy things they need, but there is not so much emphasis on work and earning money. There's more emphasis on family. Work is to get the things you need in the house and the things you need to survive. But family is important.

Q: What makes Paraguay special for you?

A: There are a lot of things that make Paraguay special for me. I can't pinpoint one thing. I will say my experience has been enriched by the people I've met. . . . I really enjoy the culture, the language, listening to Guarinese even though I don't understand it. Spanish, learning Spanish, and just learning about a different culture, and communicating when three years ago I couldn't. I think that's part of the reason I really enjoy it, that I now have an understanding of people that I didn't have before.

Nichola Minott served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Paraguay from 1991 to 1994.

