

Travel the World to gain Knowledge and Enhance Perspective

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Intended for Grade 8

“We travel because we need to, because distance and difference are the secret tonic to creativity. When we return home, home is still the same, but something in our minds has changed, and that changes everything.”

Unknown



II. Introduction

Rationale

In this unit, Travel the World to Gain Knowledge and Perspective, students learn about and explore different parts of the world. They also examine some first-hand memoirs of travelers, their experiences and how those experiences changed them and their perspective of others that live in a world different from their own. Exposing students to this type of information and experiences of others has many benefits. First of all, students will learn the importance of educating themselves about the cultures of various places they are going to travel so that culture shock doesn't take away from their experiences. In the unit students are also exposed to other places, peoples and cultures which broadens their perspective of the world. Learning about these and seeing what all the world has to offer will hopefully spark their interests and desire to see and experience the vast possibilities the world has to offer. Lastly, students will gain perspective through knowledge that will enable them to see others that are different from them with new eyes, openness and less assumption and judgement. They will see that there is not just one "right way", that there are many ways to live life that are beautiful and unique.

Differentiation for Gifted Learners

Differentiation for gifted learners is present throughout this unit including complex content presented, appropriate processes by which to examine the content, products/performance tasks that force students to demonstrate what they have learned and a learning environment that fosters interaction with like-minded peers. Content is differentiated in this unit by using more complex readings and images that require higher levels of thinking and academic skill. The processes in the unit such as a TABA model,

Socratic Seminar and Simulation are challenging for gifted students and encourage engagement, articulation, higher order thinking and collaboration with other gifted students. The performance task at the end of the unit provides gifted students with the opportunity to be creative, assume a role of a real life professional, choose something they are interested in, and demonstrate their learning with the use of technology as a medium. The learning environment supports gifted learners because they are grouped with other gifted students that have the same or similar academic abilities.

Intended Population of Gifted Children

This unit is geared toward 8th grade students that have demonstrated exceptional academic abilities. It is suited for any demographic, however students that are from rural areas that have not been exposed to other cultures would probably benefit from the unit the most. These students tend to be limited in their perspectives of the world at large and could really use the exposure to other cultures as well as planting seeds for them to develop a desire to step outside their comfort zones and experience more of the things, peoples and places that our world has to offer them.

III. Goals and Outcomes

Process

1. SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
 - a. Communicate in collaborative discussions.
 - b. Explain how Knowledge influences perception.

Content

2. RL.8.3 Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.
 - a. Analyze connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas and events.
 - b. Analyze information, draw evidence and support analysis of the information.
 - c. Distinguish between fact and interpretation.

Concept

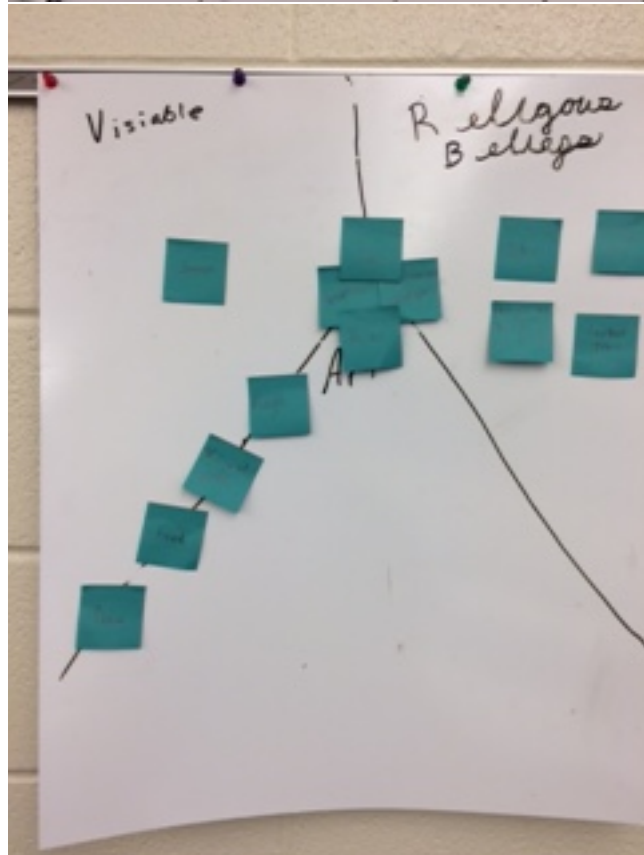
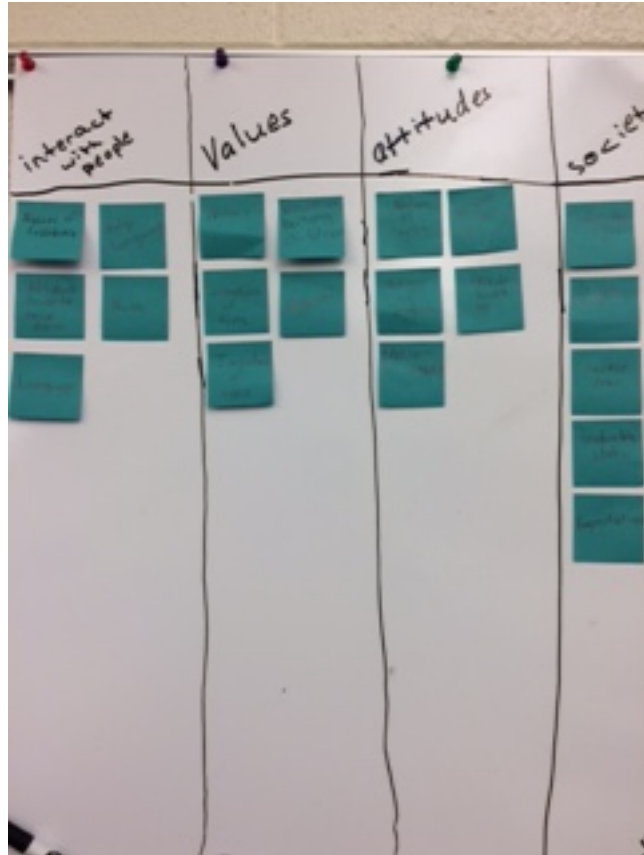
3. W.8.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research. Knowledge gained shapes perspective.
 - a. Make observations and form generalizations about various cultures around the world.
 - b. Cite similarities and differences amongst the different cultures and compare them to their own culture

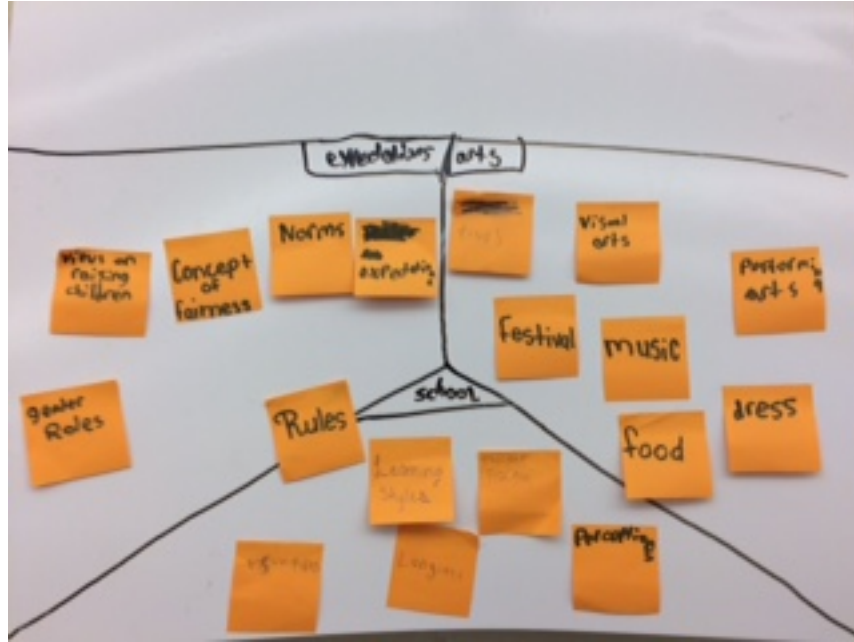
IV. Assessment Plans

To assess student learning for this unit, I will use two types of assessments, Formative Assessments and a Summative Assessment. Throughout the unit I will use a method to formatively assess students. At the end of the unit students will complete a Performance Task that I will use as their summative assessment.

1. Formative Assessments

- a. At the end of lessons 1, 2, and 3, students will respond to a prompt using an online app called LetsRecap.com. Prior to the lesson I will post a prompt that students will respond to verbally while recording their response with the computer camera and microphone. They will use what they have learned during the lesson to articulate a well-developed response to the prompt provided. These responses will be submitted to me via the LetsRecap website. I will use this information presented in their responses to assess the students understanding. Each prompt and response will build on the one before which will provide evidence of progression of understanding of the concept, “How does knowledge shape Perspective?”.
- b. Students will also be formatively assessed by the Categories/Lists that each group comes up with during the TABA Lesson. Based on the groups performance I will be able gauge understanding of the lesson and concept presented. Examples of Student work are below:





- Summative Assessment – Students will complete the following Performance Task to demonstrate their mastery of the concept, “How does Knowledge Shape Perspective?” in relation to the material that has been presented throughout the unit. There is a link provided for an example of a students’ product.
[Student Example - Performance Task](#)

Performance Task:

You are a travel agent working on planning a trip for a client that has had a bad travel experience to a foreign country in the past. The client is very hesitant to travel abroad again due to this experience but wants to try travel again. The client desperately wants to gain a broader perspective of the world we live in. Your task is to research and learn about the Cultural Characteristics of the place that they want to visit. You will need to present them with a comprehensive, detailed account of what they should expect on their travels to ensure that they have the best experience possible. You will use Google Maps to document your research presenting all of the necessary information to ensure the traveler has a well informed perspective about the Culture he/she will be visiting. You should include how this knowledge will shape the perspective of the traveler. Think about what the traveler may assume about the location before he or she is well informed with the information you provide and how knowing this information will change his or her expectations and therefore experience. You will need to include at least 6 (2 from visible part of the iceberg and 4 from invisible part of the iceberg) aspects of culture from the Cultural Iceberg in your presentation.

V. Lesson Plans

TEACHER NAME		Lesson #
Cockerham		1
MODEL	CONTENT AREA	GRADE LEVEL
Questioning	Language Arts	8th
CONCEPTUAL LENS		LESSON TOPIC
Perspective		Travelling abroad changes a person and their perspective
LEARNING OBJECTIVES <i>(from State/Local Curriculum)</i>		
<p>SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.</p> <p>SL.8.4 Present claims and findings emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning and well-chosen detail; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.</p> <p>RL.8.3 Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.</p> <p>RL.8.6 Analyze how differences in points of view or purpose shape the content and style/effects of a text.</p>		
THE ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING <i>(What is the overarching idea students will understand as a result of this lesson?)</i>		THE ESSENTIAL QUESTION <i>(What question will be asked to lead students to "uncover" the Essential Understanding)</i>
Knowledge shapes perspective		How does knowledge shape perspective?
CONTENT KNOWLEDGE (What factual information will students learn in this lesson?)		PROCESS SKILLS (What will students be able to do as a result of this lesson?)

<p>Students will know:</p> <p>That travel offers a direct learning opportunity while exploring different places, peoples and ways of life.</p> <p>Travel can bring great knowledge and understanding/perspective that no other experience can.</p> <p>That Cultural differences can be significant and shocking.</p> <p>That experiencing different cultures can change a person and their perceptions of themselves and others.</p>	<p>Students will be able to:</p> <p>Communicate in collaborative discussions.</p> <p>Explain how Knowledge influences perception.</p> <p>Explain the role of travel in gaining perspective on oneself and other peoples of the world.</p> <p>Present claims and findings in a coherent manner that support their reasoning.</p> <p>Evaluate multiple perspectives on a given subject.</p>
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GUIDING QUESTIONS
What questions will be asked to support instruction?
Include both “lesson plan level” questions as well as questions designed to guide students to the essential understanding

Pre-Lesson Questions:	During Lesson Questions:	Post Lesson Questions:
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<p>Why do people travel?</p> <p>What is the significance of travelling to new places?</p> <p>What travel experiences do you have?</p> <p>What is Perspective?</p> <p>How might travelling around the world change our perspective about ourselves and our own culture?</p> <p>Stereotypes – How does our limited perspective, due to lack of knowledge, due lack of experience, feed the stereotypes that we have about others.</p> <p>How would knowledge of the Muslim culture change our perspective that is illustrated in the image?</p>	<p>What are some of the experiences that Shannon had in the three stories that caused her perspective to change?</p> <p>In what ways did Shannon prepare herself for her journey? Why was this important?</p> <p>How would educating yourself prior to travel aide in the assimilation process?</p> <p>What is the role of assimilation when visiting another country?</p> <p>How did Shannon use assimilation to enrich her experiences and ultimately change her perspective of herself, others and life in general?</p> <p>In what ways did Shannon experience personal growth directly related to her travel experiences?</p>	<p>How does travel foster personal growth?</p> <p>How does travel to other countries and or learning about other cultures broaden our perspective of ourselves and others?</p> <p>What are the benefits of enhanced global awareness – both individually and collectively as a country?</p>
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DIFFERENTIATION

(Describe how the planned learning experience has been modified to meet the needs of gifted learners. Note: Modifications may be in one or more of the areas below. Only provide details for the area(s) that have been differentiated for this lesson.

Content	Process	Product	Learning Environment
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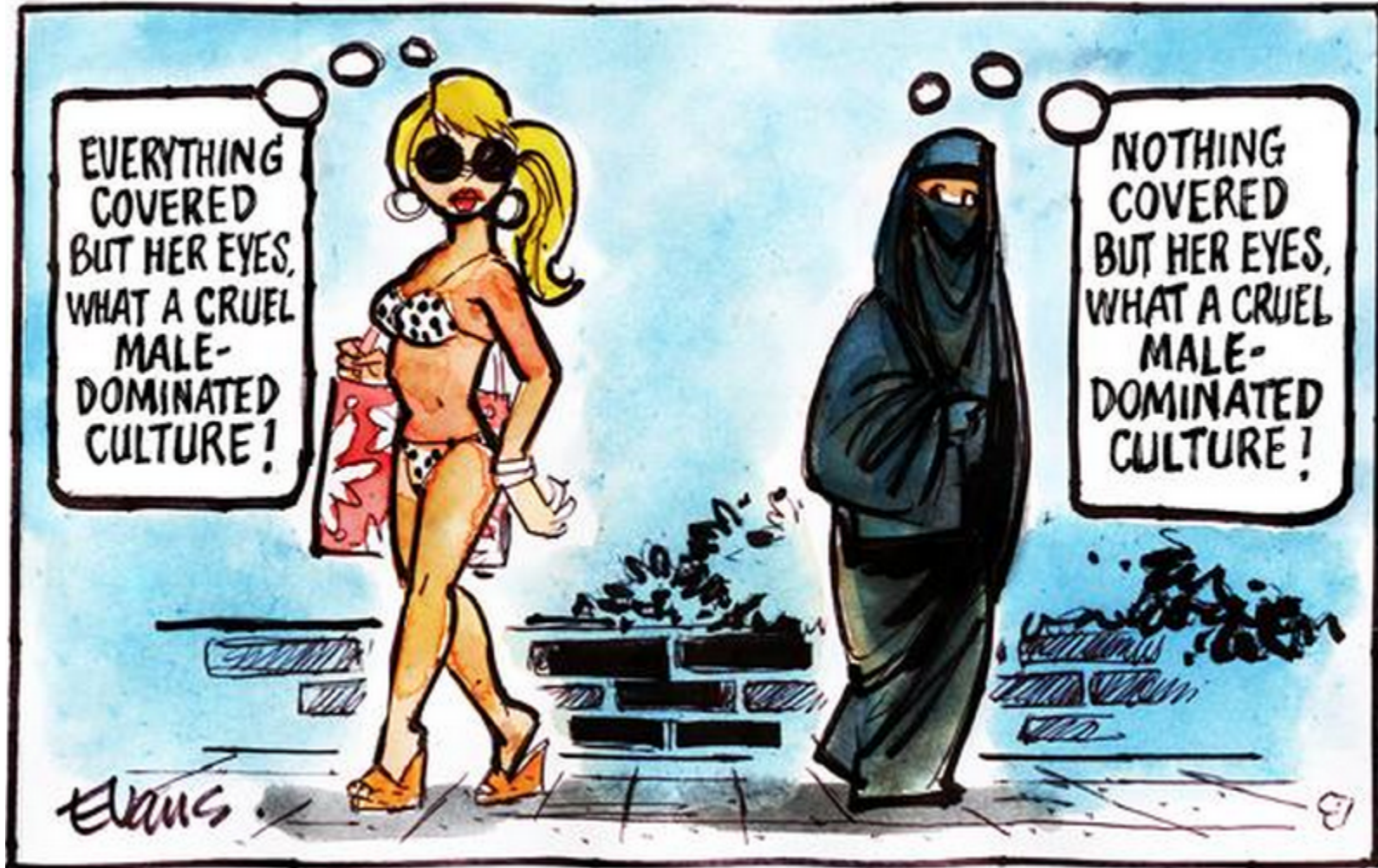
	The close reading and in depth discussion from the Questioning Model, forces students to analyze and make connections which foster a deeper appreciation and understanding of content.		
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PLANNED LEARNING EXPERIENCES

(What will the teacher input? What will the students be asked to do? For clarity, please provide detailed instructions)

Engage and Connect - This phase focuses on piquing students' interest and helping them access prior knowledge. This is the introduction to the lesson that motivates or hooks the students.

To introduce the unit I am going to display the following image on the white board:



We will then have an open discussion about the content of the photo, perspective, and how those perspectives can change with knowledge and experience of other cultures. I will point out that one of the best ways to learn about other cultures is to travel as much as possible. However, not only travel...but when travelling, the importance of immersing yourself into the culture and interacting with the people. This knowledge that is gained can offer new insight and greater perspective on ourselves and other peoples and places.

Stereotypes – How does our limited perspective, due to lack of knowledge, due lack of experience, feed the stereotypes that we have about others.

How would knowledge of the Muslim culture change our perspective that is illustrated in the image?

After a short discussion of the image, I will play this short video about Culture Shock:

[Culture Shock Video](#)

After watching the video we will have a short discussion about Culture Shock. I will ask students to share their experiences with Culture Shock if they have any.

Then I will ask them to perform a quickwrite answering the following question:

How would educating yourself about the culture and customs of another country you are planning to visit help alleviate some of the Culture Shock you may otherwise experience? How can this knowledge enhance your perspective of yourself and others?

I will then ask a few students to share their responses and have a short discussion.

Next, I will give students some background on the author of the stories we will read and then explain that after reading, we will be having a lengthy discussion about how knowledge shapes perception of other cultures and how that knowledge can be best gained by traveling.

Explore - *In this phase, the students have experiences with the concepts and ideas of the lesson. Students are encouraged to work together without direct instruction from the teacher. The teacher acts as a facilitator. Students observe, question, and investigate the concepts to develop fundamental awareness of the nature of the materials and ideas.*

Students will read the following 3 travel stories from Shannon and make notes about the experiences she had and the perspectives she had while visiting each place.

1
Little Adrift... Dispatch From Africa: Perspectives on Poverty

A month into my trip and travels thus far are filled with highs and lows; there were a few days last week where I just wanted to give up, which is normal on any given trip but usually later into the travels. Once Gary left, and I was on my own again, I was overwhelmed with the weight of balancing work and solo travel. But, I met new friendly faces in the past week, and partnering up for a few days helped lighten out some of the discombobulated feeling.

Pushing through the overwhelm, I finished out my time in Cape Town and caught a flight to Nairobi, Kenya. Arriving here was a surreal flashback to Mumbai—bustling traffic, congestion, and drive from the airport lined with slums. This is far from the Africa of travel brochures. A region that calls home to the “Big Five” animals travel dreams are made of is also a struggling, developing economy.

Walking the railroad tracks in Kibera, Nairobi, Kenya as the sun is sitting low and workers return home for the evening.

Conversations with Taxi Drivers

The moment I landed, however, my driver’s enthusiastic exclamation of *karibu!*—which means welcome in Swahili—had me smiling. Language barriers are a fear point for many travelers, and I can only say that the gap here is small. Nairobi hums with English and Swahili both as lingua franca, and most Kenyans speak with fluency. Which makes traveling and learning about the country infinitely easier.

Taxi drivers are fonts of information on this trip. Travels in Asia are often filled with stilted conversations and games of charades, but my African drivers converse with the skill of a veteran barman as they bob and weave through gridlock traffic. They field any topic you throw their way with ease and insight, though the talk here, as in South Africa, often circles back to poverty and politics.

Bill smiles and a wealth of knowledge from our guide as we visited music projects and local initiatives in Kibera.

And as we talk of life (and even philosophy on one late-night ride) my taxi drivers ask me about America. The great American dream is alive here, and throughout most developing countries I visit. Yet it’s skewed. Hollywood and our media have done an excellent job selling others on the big dream, and my drivers are shocked and most don’t believe me when I mention things like poverty, racism, and homelessness in the United States. Our poverty is relative rather than systemic like in many developing countries, but these issues are not

part of the consciousness outside the U.S. We are a vast land of opportunity in comparison, this is not an argument against the U.S., but we are far from the Utopian image portrayed outside our borders.

It's hard to explain to them that we have traded much for the sake of our take on prosperity. A moving documentary I watched last year, [God Grew Tired of Us](#), follows three Sudanese men on a journey from wandering across sub-Saharan Africa to life in the U.S. Their initial elation gives way to deeper insights as the boys remark on the odd state of our communities, the unconnected lives we lead from each other, and the hard work it takes to even to subsist for many Americans.

Like the route our taxi took through the city, our conversations wove through all these complex issues this past week as I made my way through three airports and three thousand miles.

Slum Tourism

In the way of weaving, let's shift topics a bit. I mentioned last week my plan to visit a township in Cape Town on the recommendation of many travelers and as many South Africans. The resounding question is: what did I think?

My conclusion is muddled. I just don't know if this is a positive form of tourism. It had never before occurred to me to partake in one of these tours, but somehow I found myself on two tours in one week. The standard recommendation is to find the right operator, one using the funds to build community projects and empower those in the townships and slums. There is, without a doubt, great need in these areas. As much as I push local-level tourism, this feels off on a large scale.

Outskirts of Cape Town's townships

I didn't love my Cape Town tour, and yet two days later I took a new friend up on a chance to see a different side of it all as he looked for partnerships in the [Kibera slum](#) in Nairobi for his music charity, [Bridges for Music](#). I tagged along in the hopes of seeing an alternative side since we had a purpose, a reason for being there. And it was interesting, I learned a lot and saw incredible initiatives within the slum and heard some excellent local music to boot.

A worker grinds bone into jewelry for sale locally in the markets and to tourists in Kibera.

But in both places, our guides carefully mentioned the need to photograph areas and not people as we walked the streets, to not peer into homes and invade their privacy... and having to stress that this is not a zoo-like experience (their words) is the very reason I can only say that mass slum tourism is an ethically ambiguous area and as such, others should tread carefully.

And one last thought, NGOs catch a lot of flack in Kenya and it only furthers this idea of whether aid and development are progressing in a positive direction. Cynicism abounds, especially in the projects within Kibera, and it didn't take long for locals to point me to [Aid for Aid](#), a home-grown parody series about an international NGO that accomplishes nothing but is filled with do-gooders.

2

Little Hospitality... A Guest is a Gift from God

A throaty tenor danced across the inky night, joined moments later by a chorus of lighter voices. The empty footpath widened as I approached the Kartlis Deda statue. The disembodied voices echoed across the cool night. Lit in soft green, Mother Georgia towered above me. The nearby voices lifted in perfect harmony, swelling as the ethereal melody penetrated the darkness. They were my invisible welcoming committee to this iconic symbol of Tbilisi, but also an unexpected welcome to the kindness and hospitality that I would find across the Republic of Georgia.

During my two weeks in Tbilisi, Georgia's charming capital city, I had come to love the quick flash of a smile and the musical lilt of the Georgian tongue as locals welcomed me into the city's shops and restaurants. The Georgian language is [unrelated to any other](#) on earth. Dating to the fourth century B.C.E., it's also among the world's oldest languages. Spoken Georgian pops and rolls from the mouth,

with gritty consonants softened by a liquid cadence reminiscent of Italian. It's the ending vowels on most words that affords the language a melodic quality, which carries into the nation's long tradition of song.

Twenty minutes passed. I sat on the ledge and listened to them sing, their peaceful melodies flowing around me like a warm hug to insulate against the chilly hint of winter in the air. The city lights flickered in the distance. Landmarks glowed on the dark horizon—church steeples poked the heavy clouds, a glitzy bridge winked in technicolor. All the while, the group pitched their voices to carry far across the mountainside.

During my weeks wandering Georgia, I listened in awe as this style of singing filled the country's many churches. Over hundreds of years, each region of Georgia developed a distinct singing style to record and express its ancient traditions. Throughout war and oppression, modern Georgians maintain strong links to their aural history. So beloved to the Georgians, and so unique to the world, the country's polyphonic singing is now inscribed on [UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage](#) list.

At times, curiosity overcame my timidity. I wanted to venture closer, but was nervous that they would see it as an intrusion. I crept down the staircase, pausing when I was within their view. It took but a moment for one woman to motion me closer. I leaned against the wall, now given an open invitation to listen. As the song faded to a close, a woman in her 20s broke from the group to sit near me. Natia was the only one able to communicate in English. She opened the conversation by passing me a beer and snacks from their communal pile. Then she plied me with questions about my reasons for visiting Tbilisi.

Likewise, I fed my curiosity. She spoke of how her friend-group gathered in the cool evenings to share company and share songs. It wasn't a special occasion, but rather a way to revel in their friendship. Inviting me to join them was in that same spirit—an open offer devoid of expectation. Her invitation was a quintessential gesture of Georgian hospitality. She wanted me to feel welcome as a guest in her country.

In the 12th century, Georgia's most beloved poet wrote *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*. Many believe that Shota Rustaveli's poem encapsulates the true spirit of Georgia. Rustaveli espouses the idea of friendship as a powerful bond, a cult worthy of reverence. A man is judged for his friendship over all other things. In Georgia, one single word, *hospitality*, epitomizes any visit.

Peter Nasmyth wrote of Rustaveli's poem:

certainly he espoused the doctrine of perfect love or the cult of friendship, still prominent in modern Georgian culture—and indisputably linked with the convention of hospitality.

Sitting under the Mother Georgia statue seemed serendipitous for an evening of Georgian hospitality. She stands tall and proud over the city. The items in her hands represent the twin beliefs underpinning much of modern Georgia. One hand holds a sword; a reminder to enemies that Georgia stands proud, free, and independent. In her other hand she offers a bowl of wine—an entreaty for visitors to feel welcome. For all the city to see, this statue is a reminder of the Georgian axiom that “a guest is a gift from God.”

In the mid 2000s, Georgia pulled out of its tumultuous history, and opened to tourism. A new generation of travelers can experience the country's renowned culture of hospitality. While far from a tourist hotspot, the country is growing in popularity. Its food, wine, and traditions draw interest to that corner of the world, smack between the Great and Lesser Caucasus Mountains. I had dreamed of visiting many places as a child. Georgia wasn't on the list. It didn't have the gloss and glamour of Paris, Rome, and Prague. It was several years into my travels that I first considered [visiting Georgia](#). I had little exposure to the Georgian culture, which is why it bowled me over with surprise. It's such a lovely place and people. Like all countries, Georgia has issues. But also like all countries, fascinating [cultural nuance](#) [is just under the surface](#).

The hours melted away. As a group, we sipped beers and chatted. As a group, they continued breaking into song when the urge bubbled to the surface. It was never out-of-place for someone to pause the conversation and join harmonies. Each time, they finished a song with

voices in perfect unison. Several songs were toe-tapping and lively. More often, their voices evoked a deep and heartfelt feeling of loss and longing. They seemed to echo the pain of a thousand centuries.

The sounds of that evening provided a soundtrack for my memories of traveling Georgia. They offered me a simple gift free of expectations. Taken in as a friend, they made me feel welcome. As their friend, I experienced a part of Georgia I hadn't known awaited me. They welcomed me into their lives, into their circle of friendship, for an evening of cheerful camaraderie and song. Perhaps they sang of politics. Perhaps they sang of love. There's even a chance they sang of friendship—I like to imagine that tenuous thread connecting me to them in that moment.

3

Little Reflection ... Lost in the Streets and Stories of Spain

Since childhood Spain pulled my focus and imagination. I studied my history books and learned about the country's role in early exploration. I lamented the nuances of the Spanish language as my high school brain battled to grasp so many tenses. I often plopped myself on my bed and gave intense focus to the photographs of the art and architecture in my travel magazines. And as I got older, the stories of Spain's food culture fascinated me with equal parts excitement at the possibilities of new flavors and fear for my vegetarian sensibilities.

Last fall, I was given the opportunity to [speak at a travel conference](#) outside of Barcelona. As you would imagine, it wasn't a hard decision. In fact, within moments my fingers flew to the keyboard to accept the speaking gig. Two months later, I landed in Spain to spend my week in the country exploring with an enthusiasm fitting to my long-held fervor to visit. And fervor I had; I walked the streets of Barcelona until blisters layered over blisters from the hours spent treading on cobblestone streets—they're picturesque but brutal.

And though I loved my days in Barcelona after a fashion, that fact is not so much the point of this story. You see, those first days in Spain were odd on one level because of my mostly two years spent traveling [Southeast Asia](#), as well as my newly minted status as a solo traveler since my niece stayed home. By landing in Europe, I arrived to a city and people with a culture similar to my own, but different enough in history and language to disorient. In fact, it disoriented me to the point that I withdrew from my usual style of travel: immediate immersion through food, language, and wandering to odd places in the city.

Days passed before I adjusted to the new culture and to traveling solo again, a fact again reinforcing my ideas that the places I visit mirror back to me how I feel at that moment. [My book launch was weeks away](#), Ana was stateside homeschooling herself for a week, and there was, as, landing in an unfamiliar city ... well, it threw me. And it would have been easy to hold that uncertainty against Barcelona itself, but it just took an adjustment.

I needed a re-calibration of my traveling norms until I lost myself in the beauty of Barcelona—lost myself in the cathedrals and narrow, cobbled streets. In the tapas and sweet wines. In the gregarious conversations buzzing well into late evening at the city's sidewalk cafes.

It was a different sort of lost, though, to get lost in the European churches and echoes of Western history ... it's new and interesting but not foreign. Not in the way Asia shocks and jostles the senses in those first moments as a traveler shakes hands with the continent and gives a cautious hello. If I was in the business of ranking feelings of awe—and I'm not—Spain would sit in a different place inside me than when I first scented tangy incense on the air in Bangkok and heard the lilting chant of monks at nearby temple.

Though the United States lacks the Western history to have a Gothic quarter, I identify with this story of the world. I understand the Christian influences and the stories of Spanish port towns sending ships to the Americas. I know what comes next in a way that doesn't exist in my personal story of the world when I think about Asia. You see, the return of those Spanish ships filled with riches from the new lands—gold, chocolate, and coffee—gave birth to my own country.

So in this way, traveling through Spain spoke to a history I share. And that very fact shifted my travel experience. I don't travel through Europe much mostly because of the expense, not out of lack of interest, and Spain reinforced this for me—there is rich history and interesting foods and peoples in every pocket of the world, and as a storyteller, my job was to explore and find them.

y walking the streets of Barcelona, I slowly shed my initial disorientation and I sunk into the travel experience; I began to enjoy Spain or what it was, not for how it compared to the sum of my past experiences. I pulled out my rusty Spanish, sampled the tapas, asked questions, and dug around for interesting answers. In the coming weeks, as I edit the last of my Spain photos, I will sprinkle the blog with stories and photos of the art, culture, and food I found most fascinating and inspiring. :)

explain - *Students communicate what they have learned so far and figure out what it means. This phase also provides an opportunity for teachers to directly introduce a concept, process, or skill to guide students toward a deeper understanding.*

We will then have a discussion about the content of each story. I will ask some/all of the following questions:

What are some of the experiences that Shannon had in the three stories that caused her perspective to change?

In what ways did Shannon prepare herself for her journey? Why was this important?

How would educating yourself prior to travel aide in the assimilation process?

What is the role of assimilation when visiting another country?

How did Shannon use assimilation to enrich her experiences and ultimately change her perspective of herself, others and life in general?

elaborate —*Allow students to use their new knowledge and continue to explore its implications. At this stage students expand on the concepts they have learned, make connections to other related concepts, and apply their understandings to the world around them in new ways*

Students will then read the Blog entry – A Little Perspective

A Little Perspective ... How Four Years of Traveling the World Has Changed Me

When I talk about the direction my life has taken over the years, and what I think about for my future, I find myself circling around the fact that the act of near constant travel these past four years has shifted my perspective on life in tangible and identifiable ways. It shifted who I am, who I want to be, and how I perceive myself. And ultimately, it changed how I see and interact with the nearly every aspect of the world around me: family, jobs and career goals, political views, consumerism and consumption, friendships and my relationships. At one time or two, I've alluded to these changes on A Little Adrift, but never have I elaborated—neither in person, nor on this site, nor even to myself.

But, it seemed appropriate to celebrate my four-year anniversary of travel this month (I left on election day 2008) with a look back on how I feel now—four years later, dozens of countries, hundreds of experiences, thousands of memories, stories, ideas, and challenges. The years have been filled with so much; I feel blessed by the opportunities I have had, and it's surreal for me when I think of my first year on the road. I have a terrible memory, which means I can't recall specific events off the top of my head. Ask me for a highlight from my travels and my brain blanks, little slices of panic creep in for a moment ... surely I have something intelligent to say about four years of near constant travel. But I often don't, and I falter and smile and come up with something that suffices but that rarely encapsulates the highs and the lows, the new perspectives and ideas.

Instead, a certain smell triggers my memories. Or perhaps the quality of setting sunshine casting shadows over a landscape pulls in delicate threads of all the past experiences that echo how I felt at that moment, what happened before and after that moment, and the shift that were happening inside of me.

Because travel is personal.

For me, the memories, reflections, and changes are intertwined with far more than simply being there. It's more than the fact that [watched sunrise very nearly on a mountaintop in the Himalayas](#), and instead that experience is indelibly linked to the fact that I cried for nearly an entire hour because we left at 4am, we hadn't had breakfast, my blood sugar was tanking, and I surrendered instead of continuing. I camped out on a rock while the rest of my group continued to the summit and watched the hazy and cloudy sunrise alone. Sure, I can tell the story of a sunrise in the Himalayas if it occurs to me (which rarely happens) ... but that memory only crops up when it's linked to a me reflecting on failure in a quiet place. Like I did on that mountainside three and a half years ago.

I try to record key moments on my blog, experiences that resonated and changed me in some way, and the journey these past four years, but I invariably miss a lot. And I often leave out the major arch and themes—the reflections on what has shifted when looked at from a macro perspective of four years, not just perspective shifts in a single moment.

Last month, a reader emailed me with a simple request: “You asserted on your site that travel has shifted your perspective—How? Why? What *is* your perspective now?” Throughout the week I received that email, I pondered a response and dug deep to come up with something that would encapsulate what I feel and express something I had never yet put down on paper. Two days later, yet another question—quite similar in nature—popped up in my email. He wrote: “How has your perspective on your own country changed now that you see it through a more globalized lens?”

While I'm not superstitious, I do mostly field travel-specific reader queries via email (questions about the how-tos and the technical aspects of it all), so two questions in the same week told me this warranted a closer look more deeply into the effect my travels have had on me.

It was hard to formulate a response that did the question justice in a single email. And the response is dynamic, which is likely why I never quite tackled answering this question. Ask me in another year, five years, even ten, and my answer will morph to include elements of every new realization and experience. My response changes with every new development in my life, and every trip I take. In conversation, my statements about travel changing me are assumed true by those who have never traveled, and echoed by those who have traveled, but rarely articulated by anyone involved. The assertion is my truth and accepted as such. But there is more to it, there are personal thoughts I have penned over the years that stand out as moments that changed the direction and my path in life. So, with that in mind, I will attempt to break down some of what has gone on inside myself over the years.

From my background ...

At the most basic level, travel has humbled me and expanded my perception of my place in the world. I grew up in the United States and the circumstances of life insulated me from a visceral experience within any other culture. I did not grow up wealthy, not by any stretch of the imagination, but I grew up in suburbia in a split household (my father raised me, my mother raised my brothers) and exotic for us was the luxury of eating at a delicious Thai restaurant my dad favored as I was growing up—no international travel for me, but I knew other places existed and in my teens my parents traveled to Ireland together. I had food on my plate every day, clothes from the second-hand store, and new toys and books under the Christmas tree each year. That was my normal and the foundational basis for my America, my version of what many outsiders see as the American dream—not perfect, not wealthy, but enough.

Once I left my bubble in the U.S., I was thrust into new situations outside my realms of previous experience. I saw extreme wealth living beside startling poverty; I met people with radically divergent religious views. People who hated my country but not me. People who loved my country and assumed my America was a land of great wealth, equality, and outrageous opportunities. Opinions, stories, and new baseline realities were shoving into me at startling speeds.

he pace of life quickens when you're outside of your home base.

he comfort of familiarity was gone and I was a stranger in each new place, the new experiences stacked up faster than I could write them down. That first, mostly solo year on the road was, in a way, my boot camp on life and perhaps the quickest period throughout which I assimilated new lessons. But it was the ensuing years that allowed me to process what I was experiencing; and it is over the years that I formed opinions, ideas, and patterns based on my shifting perspective and the lessons I've learned.

And there have been many lessons. Personal lessons and personal growths that were hard-learned and many were some of them earned. And other lessons, on truths and patterns that exist outside the knowledge bubble I operated from for the majority of my life.

In the lessons and changes along the way ...

Over the years, the nuggets of similar truths found in every city, town, and village I passed through often surprised me. Amidst poverty and hunger, I felt a commonality of shared experiences—a desire within a person to better themselves, or perhaps a parent working diligently day and night on the hope of a better life for their child. The circumstances of the people I have met while traveling were often so seemingly disparate from the suburbia of my youth, but yet underneath, deep within the travel experience were common themes. I found common hopes and common fears within each person's story. Witnessing this, hearing the stories and feeling the inherent kindness of communities all over the world, has broadened my sense of self, and my understanding of the threads of connection binding us all.

I have learned that relative wealth—the wealth we have in the West in the form of opportunities and a government that generally provides basic services and support—does not isolate us from similar common human experiences. Though I have never gone hungry or wondered about my next meal, I do understand loss. I watched loss echo off the dense trees of a remote mountainside in [Nepal](#) as a keening wife followed a funeral procession down mountain behind her husband, gone too soon. And the deep pain in that woman's voice jarred me back several years, to sitting on a couch as my mother processed [my brother's sudden death](#). Both were deep losses, both illustrate shared commonality that crosses cultures—a shared humanity connecting without regard for culture or wealth, class or color.

And then there are the things I see and have yet to assimilate, yet to turn into “lessons” ... the things I don't yet know how to process and accept as reality. The haunting eyes of a child with a distended belly, dirty hands, and probing eyes gave me a regular glimpse at the devastating effects of wealth disparity ... children are starving to death every single day, and yet children in my life throw temper tantrums because they don't “like” the taste of some food provided for them in great quantity and on a daily basis. And I know there is a yawning gap in direct comparisons. I see this though, and there is a pain as I attempt to reconcile the two realities ... but then the travel moment changes, the pickup truck engine starts again and the faces fade into a cloud of rough red dust. Or maybe something happens at the dinner table to channel focus elsewhere, off of the children, and the moment is over, blending into the next experience with the only commonality between these moments me, as the witness.

Who I am today ...

I am a traveler and a sometimes outsider to life. In both places, home and on the road I witness both experiences, I assimilate what I have seen without judgment on a good day, joy on a great day, and sadness on a bad day. I observe and try to understand it all. Try to focus my thoughts into crystal clear clarity, though I know there are some things for which there is no easy answer. I am often at a loss about what I can do in the tough moments both here and on the road, so I mostly stay silent. And I post pretty photos and tell the happy stories.

And what does all of this mean for me, each day after four years of travel?

At the core of it all, travel has recalibrated the point of view through which I approach problems and situations in my life, it has given me a sense of gratitude for what I have in my life through nothing more than circumstance of birth, and even more grateful for my ability to share that message with others. I know more, and though I have learned much, I understand less than I once thought. My view of the world has taken flight like a bird—outside of the microcosm of my country there is a pulsating planet of other people, like me and yet so very different; so different from what I am, have ever been, and will ever be. I appreciate travel if for no other reason than for the fact that

now feel more able to take the proverbial step into another person's shoes and imagine their struggles, feel their hopes, and respect their successes and failures.

Travel has made me *feel* more deeply for other people and has put into perspective the highs and lows in this world. I hurt more and I love more deeply, I see more joy and much more sorrow, I'm more introspective and less impatient. I argue just as passionately but with a lot more experiences to call upon, and a place deep in my soul now understands the meaning of the word solitude, which has taught me to seek the friendships, conversations, and slices of happiness I can find.

In short, travel changed my life.

Once students have finished the reading, we will have a short class discussion answering the following questions:

1. What ways did Shannon experience personal growth directly related to her travel experiences?

2. How does travel to other countries and/or learning about other cultures broaden our perspective of ourselves and others?

3. Evaluate: *This phase assesses both learning and teaching and can use a wide variety of informal and formal assessment strategies.*

Students will respond to the following prompt in the letsRecap app:

What are the benefits of enhanced global awareness – both individually and collectively as a country?

Link for Lesson #1 Powerpoint

[Lesson #1 Powerpoint](#)

TEACHER NAME		Lesson #
Cockerham		2
MODEL	CONTENT AREA	GRADE LEVEL
TABA	Language Arts	8 th
CONCEPTUAL LENS		LESSON TOPIC
Perspective		How knowledge shapes our perspective of ourselves and others
LEARNING OBJECTIVES <i>(from State/Local Curriculum)</i>		
<p>SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.</p> <p>SL.8.3 Delineate a speaker’s argument and specific claims, evaluating the soundness of the reasoning and relevance and sufficiency of the evidence and identifying when irrelevant evidence is introduced.</p> <p>SL.8.4 Present claims and findings emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning and well-chosen detail; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.</p>		
THE ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING <i>(What is the overarching idea students will understand as a result of this lesson?)</i>		THE ESSENTIAL QUESTION <i>(What question will be asked to lead students to “uncover” the Essential Understanding)</i>
<i>Knowledge shapes our Perspective</i>		<i>How does knowledge shape our perspective of ourselves and others?</i>
CONTENT KNOWLEDGE (What factual information will students learn in this lesson?)		PROCESS SKILLS (What will students be able to do as a result of this lesson?)

<p>They will know that there are similarities and differences amongst all cultures.</p> <p>They will know that their own culture influences and knowledge shape their perception of other cultures that are different from their own which brings understanding.</p> <p>They will know they can learn a lot about other people and places by observing them closely.</p> <p>They will know that it is imperative to educate themselves about different cultures prior to travelling.</p> <p>They will know that knowledge of another cultures customs and norms will enhance the travelling experience.</p>	<p>Students will be able to:</p> <p>Make observations and form generalizations about various cultures around the world.</p> <p>Cite similarities and differences amongst the different cultures and compare them to their own culture.</p> <p>Engage in collaborative discussions while building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.</p> <p>Evaluate arguments and the soundness of their reasoning and relevance.</p> <p>Use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume and clear pronunciation while expressing their observations and findings.</p>
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GUIDING QUESTIONS
What questions will be asked to support instruction?
Include both “lesson plan level” questions as well as questions designed to guide students to the essential understanding

Pre-Lesson Questions:	During Lesson Questions:	Post Lesson Questions:
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<p>What is Perspective?</p> <p>What are the different features that make up culture?</p> <p>Why would learning about other cultures/customs of places you plan to visit be important for our travelling experiences?</p> <p>How might travel to these other countries and learning about their cultures and customs affect or change your perspective of yourself and others?</p>	<p>What do you see?</p> <p>What does it make you think about?</p> <p>In relation to the Cultural Iceberg: What customs are evident?</p> <p>Which ones may be hidden?</p> <p><u>Taba Model</u> Using the lens of perspective, take the terms from the Cultural Iceberg and group them into at least 3 different categories.</p> <p>How could you group the various aspects of Culture?</p> <p>What would you name these groups you have formed?</p> <p><u>2nd Grouping – Through the lens of Perspective</u> How else could you categorize or group the observations you have made?</p> <p>Could some of these belong in more than one group?</p> <p>Can we put the same items in more than one group?</p> <p>Why would you group them that way?</p>	<p>As a person that is planning to travel to other countries, why is it important to educate yourself about the culture, customs, and etiquette of a country prior to travel based on what you have learned from today's activities?</p>
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DIFFERENTIATION

(Describe how the planned learning experience has been modified to meet the needs of gifted learners. Note: Modifications may be in one or more of the areas below. Only provide details for the area(s) that have been differentiated for this lesson.

Content	Process	Product	Learning Environment
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	<p>The process the TABA model uses enables students to analyze information and critically think in order to make connections within the content of the lesson. The process helps students articulate generalizations related to the concept of Culture through the lens of perspective.</p>		
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PLANNED LEARNING EXPERIENCES

(What will the teacher input? What will the students be asked to do? For clarity, please provide detailed instructions)

Engage and Connect - *This phase focuses on piquing students' interest and helping them access prior knowledge. This is the introduction to the lesson that motivates or hooks the students.*

1. *We will discuss as a class "What is Culture?" and What is Perspective?*
2. *Students will participate in a simulation where they will experience first hand what it is like to interact with cultures highly different from their own. This will demonstrate why it is important to know the culture and customs prior to travelling abroad so that they understand what to expect and what is expected.*

Students will be divided into 3 groups: The Pandya Culture, The Chispa Culture, and a small group of Observers.

The two culture groups will be sent to opposite corners of the room. They will be either a copy of the Pandya or Chispa cultural-norms sheets for their group. Group members of each culture will read these sheets and discuss their norms among themselves.

I will visit each group to make sure that they are on the right track in creating their plan of acting out their new culture.

The two groups will be invited to a student function set up for exchange students where they will interact with each other abiding by each of their Cultural norms. The purpose is for the two groups to become acquainted and learn about each other, their similarities and differences. This will last for about 10-12 minutes.

The Observers will make notes of that they see in the interactions by walking around and watching, but not engaging with the cultural participants.

After the interaction simulation each group will separate again to discuss the other group's behavior and create a brief report that they will share with the class. Observers will be divided between the two groups. One representative from each group will present the experiences and observations made and noted in the report. After each report is presented, a copy of the opposite groups cultural norms sheet will be given to the group that just presented. They will be asked to see how their report matches up with the actual cultural norms of the other group. The following questions will also need to be answered in their report:

- *What is your perspective of this culture compared to your own?*
- *Based on what you experienced in the interactions of the cultural simulation, how do you think the people from that culture perceive you?*

Debriefing: There will be a class discussion addressing the following questions.

1. *Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Why or why not?*
 - *Based on individual perspective, people have difficulty describing the behaviors of other*
 - *groups in non-judgmental terms.*
 - *People acquire cultural norms fairly quickly.*
 - *Most of the group's norms are maintained through peer pressure.*
 -

Americans tend to feel uncomfortable without eye contact, even though in many parts of the world, eye contact is considered to be rude and impolite.

- The same behavior can be perceived differently depending on your group's norms. For example, what appears friendly to Chispas seems pushy to Pandyas.

2. What lessons from this activity would you want to keep in mind if you were going to spend time in an unfamiliar culture?

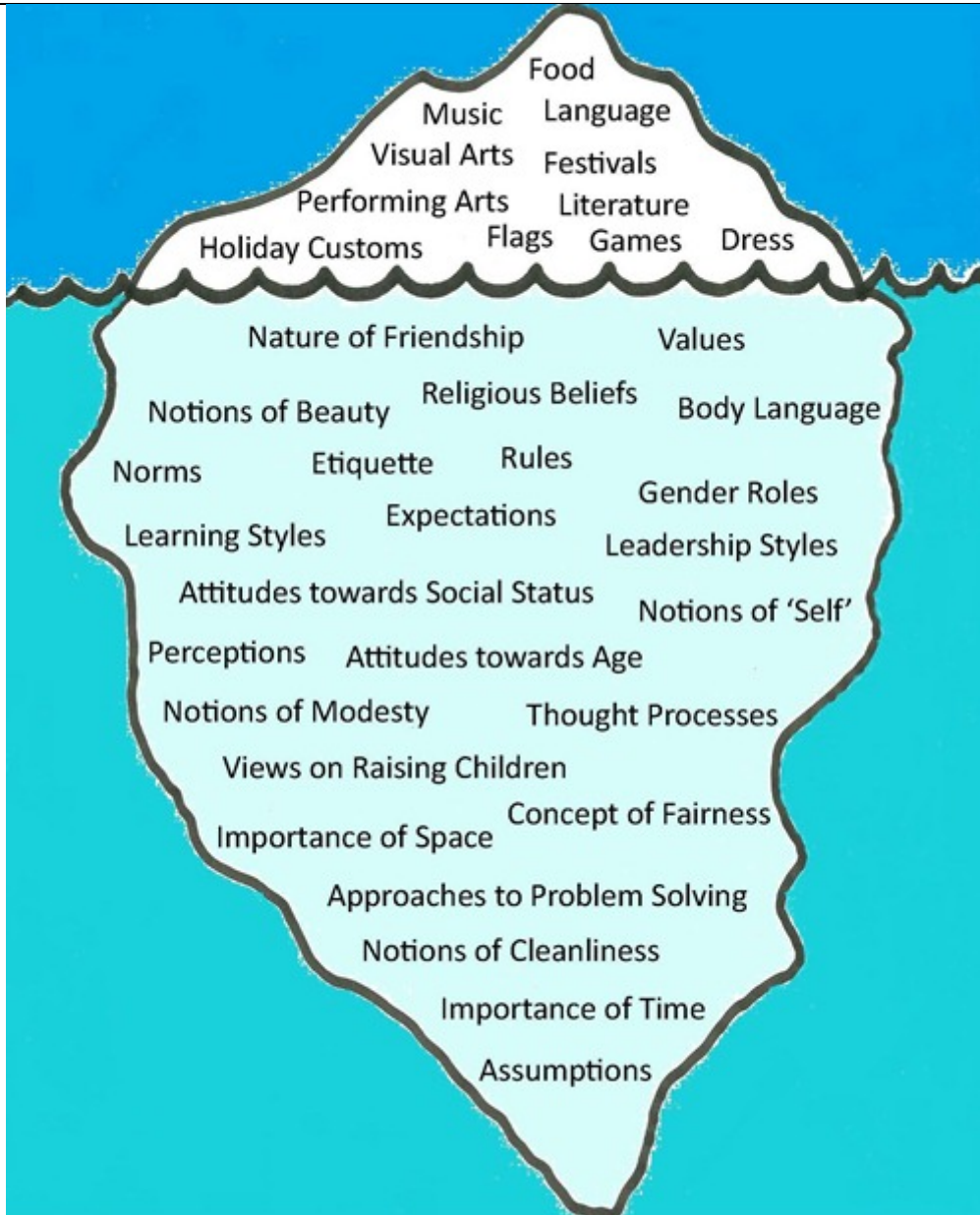
3. Given the experiment we just participated in, why is it important to educate ourselves on the culture and customs of the places we will be traveling?

TABA Lesson:

Introduction:

I will ask the question, “What are some different aspects of a people that make up their culture? (Food, dress, celebrations, music, language, etc)

I will then display the image of the Cultural Iceberg. We will discuss that there are hidden aspects of culture that are “beneath the surface”.



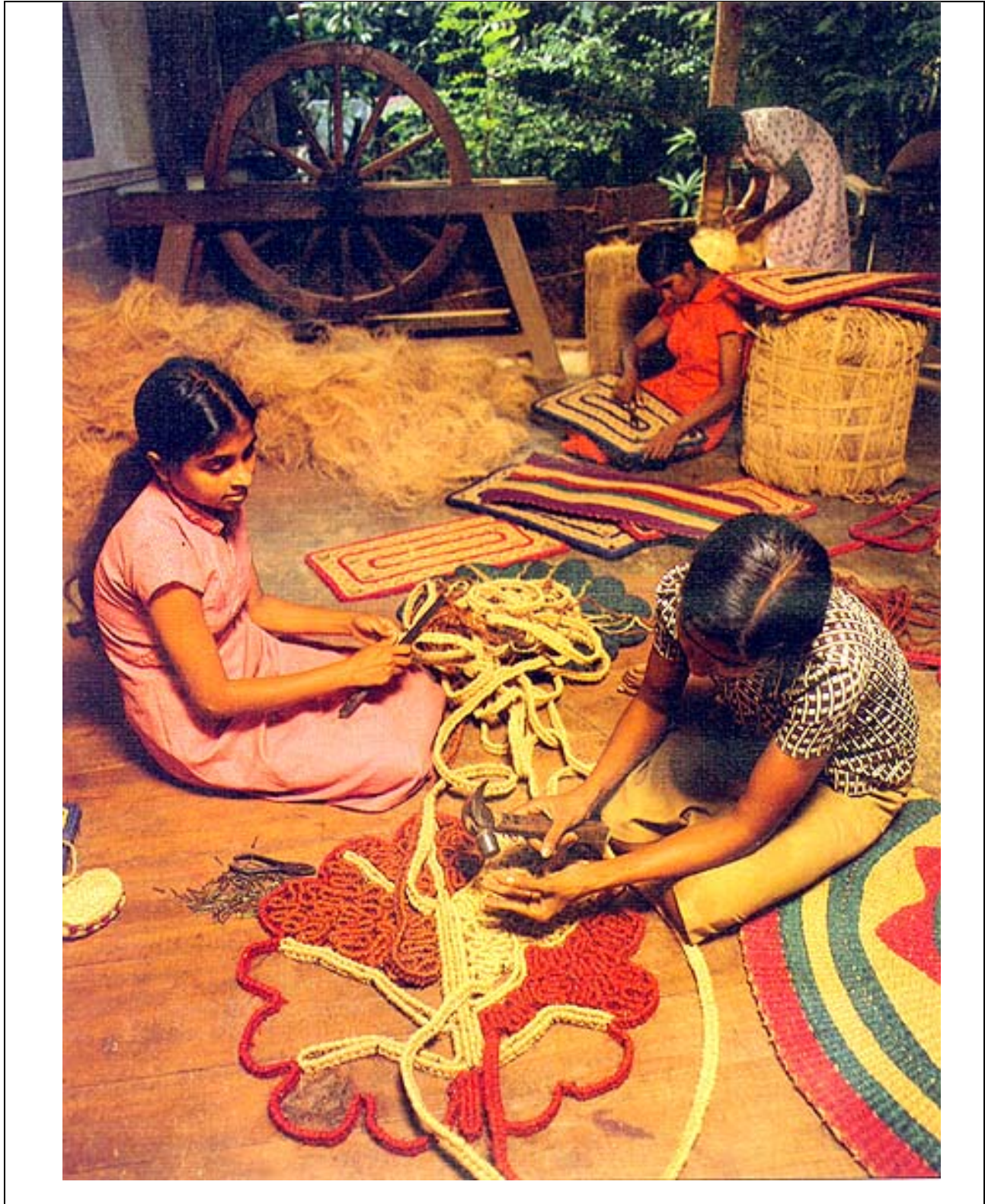
I will show the following images and have students identify various parts of culture (from the Cultural Iceberg Image) that show up in the images. This will familiarize the students with what each aspect means. The “during the lesson questions” will be asked: What do you see? What inferences can you make based on this observation? What else do you see? What does it make you think?



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Explore - *In this phase, the students have experiences with the concepts and ideas of the lesson. Students are encouraged to work together without direct instruction from the teacher. The teacher acts as a facilitator. Students observe, question, and investigate the concepts to develop fundamental awareness of the nature of the materials and ideas.*

Students will be divided into small groups and given a copy of the Cultural Iceberg.

Students will work together to form at least 2 categories, based on the concept of Perspective (internal/external, societal/familial), and group the aspects of culture from the Iceberg into those categories. They can have 3 categories if needed. Students will also need to label/name their categories/groups. Students can only use each aspect of culture once during this grouping process.

Explain - *Students communicate what they have learned so far and figure out what it means. This phase also provides an opportunity for teachers to directly introduce a concept, process, or skill to guide students toward a deeper understanding.*

After the first grouping activity, students will share out their answers (groupings and what aspects they included) with the class.

Elaborate —*Allow students to use their new knowledge and continue to explore its implications. At this stage students expand on the concepts they have learned, make connections to other related concepts, and apply their understandings to the world around them in new ways*

Students will then be asked to go back and think of new ways, based on Perspective, to re-group the aspects of Culture listed on the Cultural Iceberg. If students had 2 categories last time, they will need three this time. If students had 3 categories last time, they will need 4 this time. The new

categories will need to be named, names must be different than the first grouping exercise. Cultural aspects from the list, may be used more than once in the second grouping process.

Students will then share out the categories/lists with the class.

Evaluate: *This phase assesses both learning and teaching and can use a wide variety of informal and formal assessment strategies.*

To formally assess students they will reflect on this process/activity and respond to a prompt on the Letsrecap.com app answering the following questions:

As a person that is planning to travel to other countries, why is it important to educate yourself about the culture, customs, and etiquette of a country prior to travel based on what you have learned from today's activities?

How will attaining this knowledge help you in gaining perspective on different cultures so that your travel experience is enjoyable and not completely shocking?

Link for Lesson #2 Powerpoint

[Lesson #2 - Powerpoint](#)

TEACHER NAME		Lesson #
Cockerham		2
MODEL	CONTENT AREA	GRADE LEVEL
Socratic Seminar	Language Arts	8th
CONCEPTUAL LENS		LESSON TOPIC
Perspective		Travelling abroad changes a person and their perspective
LEARNING OBJECTIVES <i>(from State/Local Curriculum)</i>		
<p>SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.</p> <p>SL.8.4 Present claims and findings emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning and well-chosen detail; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.</p> <p>RL.8.3 Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.</p> <p>RL.8.6 Analyze how differences in points of view or purpose shape the content and style/effects of a text.</p>		
THE ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING <i>(What is the overarching idea students will understand as a result of this lesson?)</i>		THE ESSENTIAL QUESTION <i>(What question will be asked to lead students to "uncover" the Essential Understanding)</i>
Knowledge shapes perspective		How does knowledge shape perspective?
CONTENT KNOWLEDGE <i>(What factual information will students learn in this lesson?)</i>		PROCESS SKILLS <i>(What will students be able to do as a result of this lesson?)</i>
<p>Students will know:</p> <p>That Cultural differences can be significant and shocking.</p> <p>That experiencing different cultures can change a person and their perceptions.</p> <p>That knowledge of a different culture is imperative when visiting a new place.</p>		<p>Students will be able to:</p> <p>Communicate in collaborative discussions.</p> <p>Explain how Knowledge influences perception.</p> <p>Present claims and findings in a coherent manner that support their reasoning.</p> <p>Evaluate multiple perspectives on a given subject.</p>
GUIDING QUESTIONS <i>What questions will be asked to support instruction?</i> <i>Include both "lesson plan level" questions as well as questions designed to guide students to the essential understanding</i>		
Pre-Lesson Questions:	During Lesson Questions:	Post Lesson Questions:

<p>What are our own beliefs and customs?</p> <p>How do these beliefs/customs impact our perception of another cultures norms?</p>	<p>What is your view of Jimmy's father?</p> <p>In what ways did Jimmy's father assimilate into the Sri Lankan Culture over the course of his visit?</p> <p>What was Jimmy's father's perspective on the Sri Lanka Culture when he first arrived? How was that different than he expected? How do you know?</p> <p>In what ways would Jimmy's father conducting some real research into the Culture of Sri Lanka prior to his trip informed or changed his experience?</p> <p>What connections can you make between American culture that Jimmy grew up in and the Sri Lankan culture he lives in now?</p> <p>In what ways does Jimmy's father show his ignorance to the Sri Lankan culture?</p> <p>How do you think you would have reacted had you been Jimmy's father?</p> <p>Explain the relationship of Jimmy's father and the grandmother in the story. What was the author trying to illustrate?</p> <p>How is Sri Lankan Culture of hospitality alike or different than that of hospitality in America?</p> <p>Why do you think Jimmy wanted his father to feel "like slithering into the lemon grass"?</p> <p>How did Jimmy's father change during his stay in Sri Lanka?</p> <p>How do you think he will view the culture of American when he returns home?</p> <p>How does Vijay view American Culture?</p> <p>How do the people of Sri Lanka view the white man from America?</p> <p>How does Jimmy compare the Sri Lankan culture to American Culture?</p>	<p>What is the role of assimilation when visiting another country?</p> <p>How would educating yourself prior to travel aide in the assimilation process?</p> <p>How do you think the experience changed Jimmy's father's perspective on the rest of the world as well as the life he lives in America?</p> <p>What are the benefits of enhanced global awareness – both individually and collectively as a country?</p> <p>How does travel foster personal growth?</p> <p>How does travel to other countries and or learning about other cultures broaden our perspective of others?</p>
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DIFFERENTIATION

(Describe how the planned learning experience has been modified to meet the needs of gifted learners. Note: Modifications may be in one or more of the areas below. Only provide details for the area(s) that have been differentiated for this lesson.

Content	Process	Product	Learning Environment
	<p>The close reading and in depth discussion forces students to analyze and make connections which foster a deeper appreciation and understanding of content.</p>		

PLANNED LEARNING EXPERIENCES

(What will the teacher input? What will the students be asked to do? For clarity, please provide detailed instructions)

Engage and Connect - *This phase focuses on piquing students' interest and helping them access prior knowledge. This is the introduction to the lesson that motivates or hooks the students.*

[Culture Shock Video](#)

After watching the video we will have a short discussion about Culture Shock. I will ask students to share their experiences with Culture Shock if they have any.

Then I will ask them to perform a quickwrite answering the following question:

How would educating yourself about the culture and customs of another country you are planning to visit help alleviate some of the Culture Shock you may otherwise experience? How can this knowledge enhance your perspective.

I will then ask a few students to share their responses and have a short discussion.

I will then give students some background on the author of and the story they will be reading for discussion in a Socratic Seminar. We will talk about the Peace Corp and what its mission is and then the particular Volunteer, Jimmy who teaches school in poverty stricken Sri Lanka.

Explore - *In this phase, the students have experiences with the concepts and ideas of the lesson. Students are encouraged to work together without direct instruction from the teacher. The teacher acts as a facilitator. Students observe, question, and investigate the concepts to develop fundamental awareness of the nature of the materials and ideas.*

Students will read the following texts (excerpts from Jim Toner's memoir, Serendib) independently:

"Help! My Father is Coming!" And "The Visit to Vijay's"

A Volunteer's father visits his country of service
I didn't invite him.

The idea was all my father's, my 74-year-old father who had never been outside America and who suddenly thought that Sri Lanka, where I was a Peace Corps Volunteer, would be a jolly place to visit. He didn't know where it was, though he'd heard of its former name, Ceylon. He didn't know about the hepatitis and typhoid shots he'd have to get. And he certainly didn't know [about] its two civil wars.

"You're coming?" I asked him over the phone. "Are you kidding?"

"Kidding? Sounds like a real adventure to me. Monkeys, parrots, all those monk fellows wandering around. Malone, he's been there. He tells me there's elephants strolling the boulevards like shoppers. Say Jimmy, should I bring a tie?"

"Dad, maybe you ought to?"

"And cobras! No cobras here in Cleveland, Jimmy. Now Malone, he tells me to bring over my Irish flute, conjure those little buggers right out of their holes. How about my Hush Puppies? Think I'll be needing them, or should I just go with the wingtips? I'm figuring a tie doesn't take up much space and well, whadya think, Jimmy?"

My wife, Cindy, sitting next to me in the Peace Corps office in the capital city of Colombo, jumped up and clapped. "He's coming? He's really coming?"

I held my hand over the receiver and told her again that I thought the idea was trouble, big trouble. "He's old and he hates heat, and, God, what could I even say to the guy for?"

"Jimmy? Jimmy, are you still there? Listen, I know the Hush Puppies may not be the most practical choice. But they sure are comfortable as slippers, and my bunions, jeez, they're acting up these days, and so?"

And on he went. But I was barely listening. My head was filled with the preposterous image of my father on Sri Lankan soil. I reminded him about how genuinely bleak and violent this place really was: Sure, Dad, come on over and see two civil wars up close. Go get those typhoid shots and then come face-to-face with the malaria and the rabid dogs, the buses without brakes, the suffocating tropical heat. There are wooden beds waiting for your bony hips, Dad, and no English, and no toilet paper, and no forks?but enough snakes to fill up your nightmares. So come. Come where the cockroach is king. Come spend 700 uninterrupted hours with the last of your seven kids, the one you vaguely know and who vaguely knows you. For the first time in your life, leave America. Come, Dad. Come to the other side of the planet.

"Dad, I'm just a bit worried?"

"Jimmy, we've all got our problems. Jeesh, I'm driving your mother nuts sitting around here all day, and with all this retirement money I thought about Florida. Florida, Sri Lanka?it doesn't matter to your mother. She's just tickled pink to be getting me out of her hair for a bit."

"Save me, Jimmy. Save me now." It was my mom.

"Hi, Mom. How's life in Cleveland?"

"Jimmy, your father's driving me nuts. Get this: He's starting to vacuum. Can you imagine your father with a vacuum? And last night, get this: He decides to cook us dinner. First time in his life. So what does the nut make? Tomato soup. Straight from a can."

"With crackers," my dad said. "Cheese flavored."

"Thinks he's a chef now, the royal nut. Time to get him out of my hair before we both get shipped to the loony bin."

My dad said, "Now listen, don't you let me upset your life over there. You just keep on working and? Hey, what is it you kids do over there, anyhow?"

I rolled my eyes. For the hundredth time over the course of the past two years I repeated, "Teachers, Dad. We're *reteachers!*"

"Jimmy, that'll be some kind of a treat to see you kids up in a classroom. Say, you folks got computers over there? I understand they're all the rage these days."

"Computers? Dad, we don't even have books or enough desks, and the goats keep eating the chalk. And most of the time the schools are shut down, anyway? You know, that little inconvenience of a civil war. You'll be lucky to catch us in action at all."

It was true. We had an official job title as Peace Corps Volunteers? "English teachers" to Sri Lankan adults preparing to become teachers.

"Hey, Dad," I said, "we're really *overjoyed* you're coming here"? Cindy snorted at my lie? "but, you know, are you sure you're up for all these bugs and heat and all that war stuff I've told you about?"

"Aw, heck, Malone tells me? you know Malone, Gus Malone, fella who works at the court? He's been to that Sir Lanker place?"

"Sri," Dad. It's 'Sri Lanka.' At least get that much straight."

It was too late for me to deter him from coming to a place where he really didn't belong, a place too primitive and too hazardous for anyone's father. His was a world of the microwaved potato and the sanitized toilet bowl, of leather recliners and automatic garage-door openers, of air conditioning and cruise control. But maybe, just maybe, he was tired of it all. Maybe he sensed that a lifetime of storm windows and neon-blue bug zappers had kept him disconnected from nature too long. Maybe in coming to Sri Lanka he was questioning whether all those protections had been necessary after all.

In a few minutes my dad would step through that customs door and be the responsibility of this teacher and rather dull boy for the next 700 hours. I turned that figure over in my head: *seven hundred* consecutive uninterrupted hours. That is a lot of time. I worried that if the snakes and heat and intestinal worms didn't get to him, then simple boredom with me might do him in.

The Visit to Vijay's

(Excerpted from Chapter Six in *Serendib*)

The path to Vijay's house was overrun with lemon grass as tall as our eyes. My father and I thrashed through it, unable to see two feet ahead of us until we reached a clearing. There we saw a Tamil family frozen at the impossible sight of us, two tall, white, hairy, blue-eyed men. All of them were crammed into two railroad boxcars called line houses. The British had installed them a century ago to shelter the thousands of southern Indians imported to pick tea. Today, the Sinhalese government did little to improve their situation. Jobs, roads, schools, houses, medicine? the Tamil tea picker living on the sides of these steep hills was sure to get nothing, especially during this heightened stage of civil war. They were the shadow people of Sri Lanka, the poorest and the least educated, the most isolated and the most ridiculed. Even the civil war wasn't interested in these ragged hills. In this and many ways, these Tamils regarded themselves as invisible to the outside world, so that whenever Cindy and I would greet them with *wanacome* (the Tamil version of *ayubowan*), they'd be astonished that we had noticed them at all. I ached at their neglect, and I knew how much a greeting from my dad would mean to them, bearing the multiple status of old and white and male and American? plus he was a guest.

"Just try it, Dad. It's easy: '*Wanacome*.'"

"No, no. Don't start in with the language lessons now."

"Just pretend you're a barber back in Cleveland asking for a comb. 'Hey, you *want a comb*?' Get it? Want a comb, *wanacome*. Give it a try."

"Listen, Jimmy. All I want to try now is a bed. I'm exhausted."

The entire family stood mesmerized as we walked by. Out of respect for us they stayed inside their boxcars, their blue-black faces filling the windows and the open door. The only one left outside was a deformed girl sitting on the ground, rocking herself in the shadow of a tree.

Suddenly a little boy sprinted out from the house toward us, offering a mango, until his father snatched him up in midair and spanked him all the way back inside.

From across the valley came the noon broadcast of the Muslim call to prayer. My dad, walking backward to keep an eye on the Tamil family, paid no attention to the music of the prayer. Instead he stepped square into a mound of cow dung and, until I redirected him, was nearly skewered on the horn of a water buffalo. A mongrel dog bared its fangs at him. A woman who was scraping up the dung to use as fuel threw a coconut shell at the dog, then bowed to my father and slid away into the tall lemon grass. My dad tipped his Indians cap at her, but the grass had already swallowed her up.

We saw Vijay's five sisters before they saw us. They were sitting toboggan-style on their front porch, each searching for ticks in the other's hair. My dad knew what they were up to.

"Say, Jim," he said, tightening his baseball cap, "aren't those hair bugs able to jump?"

"Yeah, but just short distances."

"That's the only distance I care about right now. From Delaware to Louisiana, I don't care, but head to head, that's suddenly my business."

When we entered their yard all five girls darted inside. Vijay's mother then shuffled out to greet us, wiping her hands on the skirt of her sari. Her five daughters followed closely behind, their eyes on the ground. A couple of hens squawked out of the way and ran into the house. I thought I heard a goat screeching inside one of the two outhouses.

Vijay emerged from indoors, smiling and enthusiastic, his arms spread wide. "Jim and Mr. Jim's father! Oh, this is the greatest of honors to have you visit my house."

We embraced. I could see up close that his 22-year-old face, black and hairless, was already wrinkled from the burden of being the eldest son in a family without a father. His family managed to live on his meager salary as a teacher, earned from three months teaching Sinhala to Peace Corps Volunteers, then nine months teaching every subject to tea plantation children. Though talented and bright, Vijay could reach no higher position in this country that based promotions more on race than on merit.

He introduced us to his family. They were all on their knees, bent at the waist, hands together in prayer. To them we were gods? not just demigods, but manifestations of real gods. As Vijay went down the line introducing his sisters to us, I instructed my dad to touch their heads lightly with his fingertips. He whispered to me that he would do no such thing.

"Dad, please. It's their custom, and if you don't they'll see it as an insult." "Yeah, well, I'm in no hurry to make friends with those hair critters. Besides, whatever happened to the handshake?"

His uneasiness was a revelation to me. The slippery art of the introduction, which he had mastered as a Cleveland judge, now confounded him here in Sri Lanka. For years he had been the smooth one, and when I accompanied him to political rallies or funerals (especially funerals; the Irish can't get enough of those funerals), he would meet new people with grace and ease. He remembered names. He knew how to touch elbows, how to tilt at the waist, how to tilt his voice. "Clair! Clair Kennedy!" he'd say, his two hands gloving her one. "My oh my, Clair, your brother and me went back to the days at Cathedral Latin when ?" Eventually he'd get around to introducing me, panicked and blinking, overwhelmed as if

Clair were delivering a baby on the spot. To Clair, whose name I had forgotten the moment I heard it, I would extend my limp, clammy hand, and look away.

Here on this hillside of tea, then, I rather liked my dad's distress. I wanted him to feel like slithering into the lemon grass.

Eventually, after more nudging from me, my dad touched the daughters' heads as if each were a hot stove. When he stood before the mother, she looked up into his eyes and, pressing her hands together beneath her chin, said, "*Wanacome*." My dad's hands came halfway together. His lips moved into some vague shape of "*wanacome*," though it could have likely been "want a hairbrush."

Vijay led us indoors, kicking a chicken out of his way. My father and I ducked our heads beneath the entrance and then stood in the four-room house, its walls and floor made of mud, its roof of asbestos sheeting.

He peeked his head into the dark rooms to scout the horrors awaiting him here, like whether his bed for the night would be made from a hollowed-out cow. All seemed fine for the moment. Then he saw a table of food covered with newspapers dotted with hundreds of flies. While backing away in disgust, he bumped his head into a bizarre decoration hanging from the ceiling. It was Vijay's art, an IV tube that he had twisted and knotted into the image of a fish. It too was black with flies, all rising when my father knocked the fish with his head. For a few seconds the flies buzzed madly around my dad's head like electrons, then settled back down on the fish.

"Holy God," he growled, swatting the air. "How did I end up in this stockyard at my age?"

Vijay led us into the kitchen to meet his grandmother. We peered in from the doorway, adjusting our eyes to the dimness and the smoke. In the far corner, lit by a small fire, squatted the grainy shape of an old woman. She was cutting vegetables in the Sri Lankan way: anchoring the knife on the ground between her splayed toes, blade side up, and swiftly moving the onion across the blade with her hands.

"Now that's a new one," my dad whispered to me. "Never thought you could use a knife like that, turned upside-down. Here I go a whole lifetime thinking there's only one way to cut an onion. Jimmy, remind me to tell your mother about this one."

The grandmother's toes made fresh imprints in the layer of cow dung spread thinly across the mud floor. She glanced up at us, the gold hoop in her nostril glinting in the firelight. My dad tipped his Indian cap to her. She stared at him, stared a little longer and a little more deeply, then turned her shoulder into the corner of the room and spat red betel juice into a tin can. She hid her mouth behind a flap of sari and resumed cutting.

I looked at her and my father. What was happening here in the doorway, between light and dark, between civilizations, between centuries?

Though of the same age, what could this woman be to my dad: more mushroom than woman? More dung and darkness than a lady with wit and fire? In that moment when their eyes met, what secret language did they exchange?

"I have to sit," my dad said. A hen ran out from beneath the grandmother's sari, squawking. "I have to sit now. Better yet, can you find me a bed?"

Vijay, worried about his hospitality, asked if he could get my dad some water or tea. "Or food. Perhaps the sir needs some rice or *wadees* or?"

"Sleep. All I need is a little catnap, Vijoo."

"Dad, it's Vijay."

"Vijay, Vijoo?whatever. All I know is that I've been put through the wringer all day, so just point me to the nearest bed and clear the way."

En route to the bedroom my dad once again hit his head against the plastic fish, releasing the flies. Swatting and cursing he bumped into the table of food, jarring all those flies resting on the newspaper into orbit around his head. "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!" he cursed, beating the air.

"May God in heaven give me strength."

I closed the bedroom door behind him. Vijay motioned me over to the front window, where we stood watching his little sisters outside mimicking my dad, wildly swatting imaginary flies. They laughed so hard that they all fell down. "I'm sorry, Jim," Vijay said, "if we disrespect your ? your ?" But he too started to giggle, then to laugh hysterically, and so did I, though I think my laughter came more from the pleasure of seeing these people full of joy in a time when joy was scarce.

Vijay and I sat and talked. While catching up on our lives we let our fingers entwine around each other's in the custom of good Sri Lankan friends?strictly male to male, that is, or female to female. Eventually our discussion led to Ranji. "I have seen her, Jim," Vijay whispered. "For the last couple of weeks, every day we meet while her father is cutting rice."

"Does he know? The father?"

"I'm sure he does but she doesn't care." For a year Vijay had been in love with a woman whose father had already chosen her mate. Vijay, too, had an arranged partner, though as the eldest son he first had to wait until all five sisters were married. If Vijay broke all the rules and did marry Ranji, both families would banish them, a consequence too grave in this small, religious society. He tightened his fingers around mine. "I must be with her, Jim. I must be with her or I die. I know it is not right for her, for my sisters, for our ?"

One of Vijay's sisters entered the room, kneeling at his feet for permission to leave the house. After he lightly touched her head, she backed out of the room without raising her eyes, her front always facing us.

"For that sister, for the others, I must wait," Vijay said. "But how many more years must I wait for my freedom? Ten? Fifteen? And then my wife is chosen for me. Do you see how I am trapped, Jim? Do you see how in my world Ranji is an impossibility but Ranji is all that I want?"

Another sister, barefoot and eyes down, drifted in with a tray of tea and *wadees*. Flies dotted her arms like freckles, and as she turned to leave, the scent of kitchen smoke and *wadee*grease rose off her sari.

"You in America have it right," Vijay said between sips of tea. "You are free to do what you want, not what your mother or your culture tells you to do. It is primitive, this system. Imagine: You meet Cindy and you love Cindy and then you *can't* marry her because your parents have a strange woman chosen for you, a woman you've *never* seen before. This is barbaric. Why does God put love inside of us if not to be used? Is it only for suffering that God makes me love Ranji and she love me?"

"But, Vijay, look how love fails in America." I explained what I had often told Sri Lankans, that America is not the love paradise Vijay may think it is, that it is a land of disillusionment and divorce and families spread thousands of miles apart. "Over here these arranged marriages seem to work. The partners stay together and love usually grows between them."

"It is a business arrangement, Jim. It gives me a business partner, not Ranji, the woman I love. It places business above love, and I cannot live that way. This is torture for me. This is not life for me."

The highest suicide rate in Asia belongs to Sri Lanka, almost all because of this situation Vijay was in. These young, trapped lovers most often swallowed DDT, the pesticide banned in America but sold by American companies to Sri Lankan farmers. "So, Jim, I must ask you again to help me get to America. You see that I have no future here. Find me a university, a job, any job. I will work in your McDonald's. I'll do anything."

"You know I'll never do that, Vijay." He knew my stance on the immigration topic: I wouldn't contribute to the "brain drain" of Sri Lanka's brightest, even though I was badgered daily by desperate Sri Lankans and offered plenty of bribes. Personally, I wanted Vijay alongside me in America, hiking in Yosemite and shelling peanuts at a baseball game. But to do so would dishonor the Peace Corps and wound his sisters, his students, and his Tamil community at a time when they most needed him. I was there to celebrate and reinforce his culture, not to chip it away. "I'm doing you a favor by doing nothing, Vijay."

"I know, I know. And I respect you and I know I belong here, with my people. But look at it this way: Who's going to introduce *wadees* to America if I don't come over? And who's going to teach your father how to make fish out of IV tubes?" My father! I suddenly remembered that I had a father in the next room. I rose to check on him, concerned that the flies might have nibbled through to his intestines while he slept. When I peered into his room, however, I saw that my dad had solved the fly problem for the Third World napper. He had covered himself from head to toe with newspapers like the food on the table.

"Vijay," I whispered, "come here and see an American judge in all his glory. Call your sisters, too."

Together the seven of us watched from the door, pinching our noses to keep from laughing at this body shrouded in newspaper. The paper crackled with the rising and falling of his breath. Gradually, his hand slid down from his stomach and dangled limp near the floor, his rosary still encircling his wrist. A couple of flies landed on his thumb.

"Holy God," he moaned, flicking his fingers. He returned his hand to his chest and murmured some prayers in time with the clicking of his rosary. We all snickered. But at this moment, seeing my dad on a hard wooden bed, his body wrapped in paper like meat from a butcher's, I couldn't help but love the old guy. In such weak, exposed moments I loved him the most. My pinched snicker nearly made the short leap to tears, and all I wanted to do was toss aside the newspaper and fan my father like a pharaoh, all day and all night.

* * *

We returned to our chairs and soon heard my dad stirring. The newspaper rustled, the wood slats creaked, my dad pleaded to God, and soon he was standing before Vijay and me with his pants twisted to one side and his hair tousled high and wild. He wagged a finger at both of us.

"Think I didn't hear you in there, laughing at your old man like that?" His serious expression gave way to a laugh. "I wish I could've seen it myself, me, and a bedsheet made of the day's news. If you ask me it's a pretty clever fly repellent. Now, Jimmy, don't you be babbling about this back home or Malone, he'll get wind of it and it's yammer yammer yammer up and down the courthouse halls. I can hear that jackass now."

I was glad he was in a good mood because we were about to eat, a cultural experience that was sure to set him back. My dad and I sat down at the table, the cane on the seat of our chairs creaking beneath our weight. I didn't trust the frayed cane, so I sat on the wooden edge and left fate to deal with my dad.

No one ate with us. Vijay's mother and sisters would eat later in the kitchen squatting on inch-high benches; Vijay would follow us at the table. But for now the entire family had the single-minded duty of serving us. They brought in plates of curried vegetables in coconut milk, saffron rice with cashews and raisins, fish, fruit, avocados, and tea, all laid on a new tablecloth which I'm sure Vijay's mother had sewn just for our arrival.

Once our plates were full, the entire family stood against the walls waiting for our next need.

My dad elbowed me. "Where are the forks?"

"Attached to your wrists."

"Wrists? What's that supposed to mean?"

"You use your fingers, Dad. Just pretend you're eating a hamburger or pizza. You wouldn't want a fork for a burger, would you?"

He looked at his plate. "This here is no juicy burger, believe you me. Malone, I remember him telling me all about this. Told me to bring my own fork wherever I went. 'Bring a dozen, John,' he said, 'or else you'll come home with food stuck under your nails for months.'" He lowered his eyes to the plate. "I just hope there's nothing moving in there. Malone told me all kinds of stories about microbes that turn into big eels once they get inside the human belly."

I wanted to slap him?nothing hard, just a light, friendly smack or two. I just couldn't understand how he could be so afraid of food. Here was the judge who stared down all those criminals in his Cleveland courtroom, those hatchet murderers eager to rip off his head. Then he'd go to lunch (every day a tuna sandwich from Wally the blind vendor) before returning to an afternoon docket of rapists and wife bashers. All these thugs cowered before him, and yet now he trembled in front of a plate of rice.

"Take the plunge, Dad. It's time for all good men to be courageous. Just gather the food at the tips of your fingers, like this, and?"

"Hold it, hold it, hold it," he said, raising his hand. "I believe you're forgetting something here, Jimmy."

"What?" "Does the word 'grace' ring a bell around here, as in 'grace before meals'?" He cleared his throat, straightened his back, and adjusted his butt on the creaking cane. He shut his eyes tight. "Let us begin. Dear Jesus, we are gathered here before you?"

This worried me. I was hungry, I was salivating, and this guy's long-winded grace was going to keep all this exquisite food out of my mouth. He had done this before. I remembered all those Thanksgivings when the steam rising off the sliced turkey would disappear while my father prayed on and on and on.

"The good Lord has brought us safely from another continent to sit at this Sri Lankan table with my Jimmy. Our Lord has gathered us to give him thanks, and to thank Voojoo and his family for this wonderful food"?his eyes opened, as if hoping to find corn on the cob and steak and a pitcher of Ohio spring water, then he shut them tight?"food which the good Lord in all His mystery has seen fit to provide for us. In addition, let us pray?"

He was just warming up. It would be a while before he would dismount from this horse?so familiar, so satisfying, so free of eels. But it was torturing me, and I thought of screaming a samurai scream and burying my mouth in the mountain of food on my plate. I glanced everywhere else to get my mind off the food, first up to see the house cat leaning down from the space between the roof and wall, then over to see Vijay and his sisters biting their lips not to laugh.

"Let us pray with all our fervent hearts for the poor people up here in the mountains of Sri Lanka who have little money and little houses full of chickens and flies and hard wood beds and yet who provide us with food which the Lord in all His goodness?"

The cat on the wall pawed downward. My stomach growled. The cane beneath my dad's butt creaked. My stomach growled.

"Let us never forget what the Lord taught us about the least of thy brethren being the first in the Kingdom"?he sagged lower into the chair, and the cat leaned farther?"to stand alongside God who in all His majesty has made all things possible. Let us never forget"?lower, a gentle oozing, a popping of threads?"that Christ Jesus saw fit to?"

Twang! The cane gave way and my dad fell through and the cat jumped into a bowl of fish. Everybody froze. In that frozen moment I marveled that the stuff of bad slapstick could happen in real life. And in that moment I thought: My kingdom for a camera. Then the scene unfroze and the

cat leaped into a corner, leaving curried paw prints on the new tablecloth. My father could see those prints quite well because his head had dropped to the level of the table. He wasn't laughing. No one in that room was, least of all Vijay's mother, who was so mortified that she shrunk into the corner with the cat. But from another room there was a high-pitched whoop, and there inside the doorway to the smoky kitchen squatted the grandmother on her haunches, rocking, laughing herself to tears, pointing at my father with her crooked brown finger. My dad squirmed. "Get me out of here, Jimmy."

I tried to pry him out of the chair but all that lifted was the entire apparatus, twanged chair and white rump now united like a mythological creature. Vijay's mother shrunk farther into the corner, wringing her hands on the skirt of her sari.

"Oh God, Dad," I said, "you look ridiculous. Wait'll I tell Mom about this one. And Malone."

"Don't you dare. Don't you dare whisper one word to Malone or I'm done for sure. Now get me out."

"Sorry, can't. You're stuck in this chair for life, so may as well get used to it. Hey, look at the bright side: You'll never have to stand on a Sri Lankan bus again."

Word was already spreading throughout the tea estate of what had just happened. A few neighbors leaned through the open window, and I could see behind them a dozen more running up from the road. This was an event, maybe the event of their lifetimes, and no one was going to miss the chance to be an eyewitness. By now Vijay's mother was in hiding; the grandmother was out in the open, howling in laughter; and I was suggesting to Vijay that he ought to charge admission.

"Like the baboon lady at a carnival side-show," I said, then turned to my dad as he was inching his way out of the chair. "Not so fast, Dad. We've decided to wrap a cobra around your neck and have you juggle swords, just to make a few bucks. So settle back on down and be a sport, okay?"

"It's not funny, Jimmy. And it's starting to hurt."

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We did free him, eventually, and all the eyewitnesses went home to spread the gospel of the Cane Chair Plunge. It wouldn't take long for this story to reach the farthest edge of Sri Lanka.

We still had to eat. Vijay brought in a new chair for my dad, this one reinforced with enough two-by-fours to support an elephant. Then I taught him how to eat: mash together some of the curries and rice into a ball, twirl it tight, move it up to the tip of the fingers, keep your elbow high, then pop it like a marble with your thumb into your mouth. "See, Dad," I demonstrated. "It's neat and clean."

But nothing he did was neat or clean. Rice kernels fell on his lap and on the floor, bouncing into corners for the chickens to fight over. Very little ended up in his mouth.

"Keep your elbow up higher, Dad, and pack the food tighter."

He tried again. This time he flicked the food with his index finger, not his thumb, sending a missile of rice across the room. The chickens were upon it in seconds. The grandmother was watching all of this from the kitchen entrance, shaking her head.

"Use your thumb, Dad, your thumb. Not your pinky, yourthumb!"

Finally, after more misfires that shot rice up to the ceiling, he got it: The ball of rice landed in his mouth, and from down on her haunches the grandmother applauded.

"Oh yes!" my dad gloated. "Looks like this old dog can still learn a few tricks." But on his own without my guiding hand he never really got it. He sprayed rice on the floor and in his lap and in my hair, and when the curry juices started dribbling down his chin, I thought, "My father, a baby in a high chair." Yet I was worried about this baby who hadn't eaten much since he arrived. I mashed a solid ball of food from my plate and held it up to his mouth.

"C'mon, Dad. You have to eat."

He pushed my hand away. "I'll be fine, Jimmy. I'm sure I'll be fine."

* * *

After dinner my dad and I petted the cow and talked baseball, and when it was time for him to prepare for bed, I showed him to the outhouse. There were two of them, and it was very important to keep them straight. The smaller one was for the women of the house, but it also doubled as a cage for the goat, though no one ever explained why the goat had to be "outhoused" at night. Next to it stood the men's room. Unlike the open-pit toilet in the women's, ours had a porcelain, water-sealed basin cemented into the ground straddled by a pair of large footprints. "This toilet comes from India," Vijay boasted. "The first on the plantation." In the corner stood a 55-gallon drum containing all the water for all the ablutions. I told my dad to scoop out a handful to brush his teeth.

"That water?" he said. "In my mouth? You've got to be kidding."

"Just swish it around a little and don't drink it. Trust me. You'll be fine."

He had that look of someone who's not sure if he's the butt of a practical joke. I had seen it before in five-year-old Jackie Carlin, the neighborhood sucker, when he inspected an Oreo cookie from us older boys. Jackie would sniff and squish the Oreo, half-certain that we had laced the white inner cream with dish soap and cat food. He was right, but he usually shrugged and ate it anyway.

"If I do any swishing," my dad said, "I'll be on the pot all night. Malone warned me about this. 'John, better to put a loaded gun to your head than drink a spot of that gutter water.'" In the neighboring outhouse the goat was getting restless, thumping his legs against the wall. "I'll bet that damn goat is trying to tell me a thing or two."

"Dad, I promise that you won't get sick. I've been swishing this stuff for two years now and," I lied, "I've never been sick."

"Malone wouldn't lie. That goat wouldn't lie. You, I'm not so sure about."

Eventually he dampened his toothbrush with a few sprinkles of water, brushed, then spat it all out a dozen times. "Oh good God in heaven," he sighed wearily, "bless my poor belly tonight."

With his teeth cleaned we turned to the toilet. At the mention of it he looked very old and very sad?sad that the human body couldn't hold its own waste for a month, sad that there wasn't a commode on which to sit for an hour and read the sports page. He moaned and said, "Just show me what to do and leave me a little privacy."

"Okay. The trick is to put both feet on the prints, like this, and then squat all the way down like a grasshopper, or a catcher."

"Yogi Berra I'm not, or that cricket fella?Timony? Bimony? Look, Jim, I'm 74 years old and if I get down like that you'll need a crane to hoist me back up."

"You'll get the hang of it in no time."

He stared down at the toilet. "Where does it all go? Are there pipes down there? Filtration plants?"

"Filtration plants! Are you putting me on?" Whenever I told Sri Lankans about the "modern advancements" in America? ATM machines, cable TV, funeral homes, poodles groomed to look like shrubbery? they thought I must be inventing it all. "I don't know, Dad. I guess it just goes right into the ground beneath us."

"Raw sewage straight into the soil? Is that what you're telling me?"

"Well, yeah, but it's not as gross as you make it sound. I guess it turns to manure down there, and, you know, nourishes the earth."

"*Nourishes!* Hey, I don't care if it turns to Lemon Pledge down there, it still is raw sewage going right into the ground and into rivers and eventually?" he looked at the 55-gallon drum? "into the water I just used to brush my teeth."

While he spat out every atom of moisture from his mouth, I told him that some things were best left unexamined. "Now do your business and give a holler if you need me."

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Later that night my father and I slept in the same room on twin beds, our only cushion a thin grass mat over the wooden planks. On the table between us Vijay had dimmed the oil lamp down to a point. He reminded us to avoid the left outhouse during the night? "The goat is sure to kick you?" and then tugged on my toes and wished us good night. I asked him where he was sleeping.

"In the next room, on the floor. I'm used to it."

"Oh, don't be a martyr. Come sleep here and I'll sleep with my dad."

"No, no, no. I like to be close to the earth. I'm not as soft as you Americans."

My dad turned on his side. "Soft? Is this your idea of soft? Holy God, I feel like I'm sleeping on nails."

Vijay closed the door on the way out. For a long time I stared at the point of light in the oil lamp, thinking too much. My dad never really fell asleep, moaning "Holy God!" every few minutes above the creak of his bed's wood planks. Each "Holy God" pricked me in the organ that holds Catholic guilt in a child, especially when he sat up on the side of the bed, digging his knuckles into his eye sockets. "Holy Mother of God, pray for me."

* * *

He woke up with the slightest of smiles and the slightest skip in his step.

Maybe the smile was from [a dream]. But more likely that smile reflected the start of a shift within my dad during the night. The flies, the harsh bed, the journey to the outhouse? to him these were horrors, and yet by being forced to face them all alone, maybe he was coming to realize that the horrors he'd been guarding against all this time were really thin as masks. Hey, he *could* do this Sri Lankan thing after all? and live! Perhaps a little unsanitary, perhaps a bit uncomfortable, but nothing lethal and nothing more frightening than one's own shame. I'd like to think that the skip in his step that morning came from his having started to shed the weight of all the artillery he'd been lugging around to fight these phantom fears. Now he could skip, and now he could float. He could let go of that rope tying him back to his Cleveland condominium and just float in this new land with hard beds (you get used to them) and outhouses (fresh air) and new toilet customs.

Over the next few days, bit by bit, I saw my father meet Sri Lanka. He mastered the art of finger eating and even asked for seconds. He studied the grandmother cleaning rice in the kitchen, at first standing over her blocking the doorway, later on his own haunches next to her by the fire, helping her pick out stones. He named the goat "Malone" and took it for long walks on a rope through the tea bushes. He asked the tea plantation manager how tea is dried, asked Vijay what it was like to grow up surrounded by tea, and, to my surprise, asked me if I missed America.

One day at my father's request we walked three miles down a steep embankment to visit Vijay's school. Since the school relied on the Sinhalese government for funding, it had nothing. No desks, no chalk, no books. The 68 children, all wearing perfectly pressed white uniforms, were clustered in the shadow of a tin overhang, sitting on handkerchiefs that they had spread with great care. Only Vijay taught. There was one other teacher, but he hadn't shown up for 10 weeks because the government had stopped paying him. Vijay had also not been paid, though he went home each night with both arms full of potatoes and beans and chickens, an occasional rupee, an occasional statue of a Hindu god.

We watched him teach. In this bleak, overcrowded setting with every imaginable obstacle to teaching, Vijay found a way to teach. He drew world maps in the dirt. He taught math by subtracting and adding students standing in front of the class. He acted the part of an elephant in a student drama of the *Ramayana*. Finally, using a goat's bladder stuffed with tea leaves as a soccer ball, he let students play soccer only after they correctly translated some English verbs.

My dad observed all of this very intently. "God bless that boy," he said, and said it in a way that indicated things inside of him were getting shook up. How minor must his own trials have now seemed when compared with the trials of these children, and to Vijay. "He's a magician, that's what he is. Out of nothing he creates so much. And look at those little girls over there, how much fun they're having and learning at the same time."

"He was trained by the Peace Corps," I said. "A lot of what he's doing is what I'm teaching my students up at Bandarawela. We improve their English, but mainly we teach them how to teach in primitive schools like this one. Vijay's a natural teacher, but without the ideas Peace Corps gave him, I think he'd be overwhelmed."

My dad nodded but had no reply. I tried to find in the slant of his head or the narrowing of his eyes some measure of validation for my work, but I found none. I told myself that it really didn't matter. And I repeated that it didn't matter, repeated it so often on our walk home up the mountain path? carrying Vijay's booty of mangoes and bread, passing the tea-pickers spitting betel juice into the tea fields? that I nearly came to believe my own lie.

* * *

On our last night at Vijay's house, the three of us walked at dusk to the Hindu temple, the center of the tea estate community. Vijay knew everybody on the walk: the family of five riding on a bike, the old lady toting a small tree on her head, every tea-picker, every child. Out of respect for the white men they all stood to the side as we passed, looking down at the ground.

We smelled the temple long before we reached it. A thick cloud of incense had spread out from the gates and across the tea fields. When we arrived at the temple, the incense partly obscured our view of the statues on the roof, an astonishing array of colorful Hindu gods that were dancing or sitting or balancing on one foot. My dad marveled at them.

"Look at the monkey face," he said, "and the elephant. And that one with all those arms. Amazing, all this art in the middle of nowhere. Who paints these things, Vooji, and how often?"

Vijay answered these questions and more, patiently teaching my father about this new world of Hinduism. His curiosity surprised me. I had expected him to be repulsed by it all, to regard it as the kind of barbaric and pagan religion that Christianity ought to convert.

We placed our shoes outside the gate and entered the temple. The 50 or so Tamils didn't know where to look, either down at the ground as they had been taught, or up at this mesmerizing sight of two white men with blue eyes and hair on their arms. To them this must have been a miracle, two Americans come to worship in their temple here on their forgotten plantation.

The Hindu priest approached. He stood before my father in just a loincloth, his face and body streaked with ash. For a moment these two opposites stood eye to eye—a nearly naked holy man facing a white man in wool pants holding a Gatorade bottle—and I wondered what sense either could possibly make of the other.

The priest bowed low to my father and chanted some prayers. When he arose, he laced around my dad's neck a garland of brilliant red flowers. He then pressed his thumb into a bowl of golden dust and, reciting a prayer, dabbed a spot of yellow saffron on the center of my dad's forehead.

Vijay said to my father, "The priest is telling you that you are a god in his temple, that the god inside you has met the god inside of him."

My dad appeared moved by this. He pressed his hands together in front of the garland and, bowing to the priest, said, "*Wanacome*."

The priest didn't appear surprised, but the rest of the crowd froze. This one holy Tamil word, *wanacome*, this mere puff of air out of my dad's mouth, had now become as sacred as incense. It settled softly on the heads of these maligned people, settling over their black faces and splendid saris, over their hands callused from picking tea. For a moment their hard lives were full of majesty, full of peace. For a moment that contained eternity, the vast distance from black to white, from Hindu to Catholic, from tea-picker to judge, from Sri Lanka to America—all was ultimately no further than the utterance of a word.

* * *

Later that night my father and I went to sleep in our twin beds. Though he had washed his face with water from the drum, my dad went to bed with the saffron dot still centering his forehead. The garland of red flowers leaned against his Gatorade bottle.

The next morning we left Vijay's home. In an act that was not silly, my dad opened the left outhouse door and put his garland of flowers around the goat's neck. He said good-bye to the chickens and the cow, flicked the flies off the plastic fish just for fun, and pulled a strand of cane from the notorious chair and put it in his mouth, Huck Finn-style.

Outside, Vijay's sisters lined up on their knees. My father stood before each one, firmly touching each head with all his fingers. He accepted a packet of *wadees* from Vijay's mother and an embrace from Vijay before starting to leave.

Sir.

We turned around. There, standing in the doorway with her hands pressed together, was the grandmother. She raised her eyes from the ground and said through Vijay's translation, "Sir, you have honored my family by coming here. You are old, and I know it is not easy for the old to learn the new. You are a good and holy man. May Krishna bless your many lives."

My dad approached her. The wind uplifted some strands of gray hair not covered by his Indians cap; it uplifted some strands of her gray hair not bound in a bun. These were the elders, standing in their own sacred circle. He bowed to her with his palms together, saying in a very familiar way, "*Wanacome*." She shook his hands and then hugged him, crying, her head somewhere at the level of his navel. And then, in a gesture of either comedy or sanctity, my dad placed his Indians cap on her head. Vijay and I laughed, but from her reaction you'd think she'd just been crowned with a tiara of diamonds.

As we walked away she waved the cap up high, an old exuberant Tamil woman with rings in her nose, standing on the tips of her toes, waving an American baseball cap higher and higher until we turned a bend and were out of her sight forever.

Explain - Students communicate what they have learned so far and figure out what it means. This phase also provides an opportunity for teachers to directly introduce a concept, process, or skill to guide students toward a deeper understanding.

After students close read the text we will participate in a Socratic Seminar – discussing the events of the story and the impacts that knowledge gained had on the characters perspective. I will act only as the facilitator of the discussion. The following questions will be posed to begin and continue the discussion:

What is your view of Jimmy's father?

What was Jimmy's father's perspective on the Sri Lanka Culture when he first arrived? How was that different than he expected? How do you know?

In what ways would Jimmy's father conducting some real research into the Culture of Sri Lanka prior to his trip informed or changed his experience?

What connections can you make between American culture that Jimmy grew up in and the Sri Lankan culture he lives in now?

In what ways does Jimmy's father show his ignorance to the Sri Lankan culture?

How do you think you would have reacted had you been Jimmy's father?

Explain the relationship of Jimmy's father and the grandmother in the story. What was the author trying to illustrate?

How is Sri Lankan Culture of hospitality alike or different than that of hospitality in America?

Why do you think Jimmy wanted his father to feel "like slithering into the lemon grass"?

How did Jimmy's father change during his stay in Sri Lanka?

How do you think he will view the culture of American when he returns home?

How does Vijay view American Culture?

How do the people of Sri Lanka view the white man from America?

How does Jimmy compare the Sri Lankan culture to American Culture?

Elaborate —Allow students to use their new knowledge and continue to explore its implications. At this stage students expand on the concepts they have learned, make connections to other related concepts, and apply their understandings to the world around them in new ways

Debriefing: Class discussion answering the following questions:

How do you think the experience changed Jimmy's father's perspective on the rest of the world as well as the life he lives in America?

What are the benefits of enhanced global awareness – both individually and collectively as a country?

How does travel foster personal growth?

Evaluate: *This phase assesses both learning and teaching and can use a wide variety of informal and formal assessment strategies.*

Students will respond to the following prompt in the letsRecap app:

How does travel to other countries and or learning about other cultures broaden our perspective of others?

Link to Powerpoint for Lesson #3

[Lesson #3 - Powerpoint](#)

TEACHER NAME		Lesson #
Cockerham		4
MODEL	CONTENT AREA	GRADE LEVEL
Problem Based Learning	Language Arts	8th
CONCEPTUAL LENS		LESSON TOPIC
Perspective		What you need to know when traveling to a foreign country
LEARNING OBJECTIVES <i>(from State/Local Curriculum)</i>		
<p>RI.8.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text explicitly says as well as inferences drawn from the text.</p> <p>RI.8.3 Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas or events.</p> <p>W.8.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization and analysis of content.</p> <p>W.8.6 Use technology, including the internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas efficiently as well as to interact and collaborate with others.</p> <p>W.8.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.</p> <p>W.8.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources; using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.</p> <p>W.8.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research.</p> <p>SL.8.4 Present claims and findings emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning and well-chosen detail; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.</p>		
THE ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING <i>(What is the overarching idea students will understand as a result of this lesson?)</i>		THE ESSENTIAL QUESTION <i>(What question will be asked to lead students to “uncover” the Essential Understanding)</i>
Knowledge shapes perspective		How does knowledge shape perspective?
CONTENT KNOWLEDGE <i>(What factual information will students learn in this lesson?)</i>		PROCESS SKILLS <i>(What will students be able to do as a result of this lesson?)</i>

<p>Students will know:</p> <p>That researching the culture and customs of a place is imperative when traveling to a foreign or unfamiliar destination.</p> <p>That knowledge of a different places and their culture/customs is imperative when visiting a new place.</p>	<p>Students will be able to:</p> <p>Analyze information, draw evidence and support analysis of the information.</p> <p>Gather information from digital sources.</p> <p>Quote/Paraphrase information</p> <p>Use key search terms and internet search engines Organize ideas and information when writing for a purpose.</p> <p>Distinguish between fact and interpretation.</p> <p>Evaluate relevance of information.</p> <p>Use Google Earth to map locations around the world and document information about those places.</p> <p>Analyze connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas and events.</p>
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GUIDING QUESTIONS
What questions will be asked to support instruction?
Include both “lesson plan level” questions as well as questions designed to guide students to the essential understanding

Pre-Lesson Questions:	During Lesson Questions:	Post Lesson Questions:
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<p>What do you need to know about a place, the culture and customs, before traveling somewhere unfamiliar?</p> <p>Why is this important?</p> <p>How will this impact your perceptions and experiences when traveling?</p>	<p>What are some of the customs that might be surprising when visiting a specific destination?</p> <p>What kind of dress is expected and or acceptable when traveling to various destinations around the world?</p> <p>What are the customs/beliefs surrounding hospitality?</p> <p>How do the people view Americans? Are there any dangers that Americans face while traveling to the destination?</p> <p>What is the political climate of the region?</p> <p>What is the religious climate of the region?</p> <p>Is the area poverty stricken?</p> <p>What might travelers need to know about the landscape and wild life?</p>	<p>Why is it important to inform yourself or other travelers about the culture and customs of a place that they have never visited?</p>
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DIFFERENTIATION

(Describe how the planned learning experience has been modified to meet the needs of gifted learners. Note: Modifications may be in one or more of the areas below. Only provide details for the area(s) that have been differentiated for this lesson.

Content	Process	Product	Learning Environment
	<p>Problem based learning offers students the opportunity to come up with solutions to real world problems or issues that face us today. The PBL model allows students to</p> <p>Acquire critical thinking, decision making skills, problem solving skills, and the opportunity for self learning.</p>		

PLANNED LEARNING EXPERIENCES

(What will the teacher input? What will the students be asked to do? For clarity, please provide detailed instructions)

Engage and Connect - *This phase focuses on piquing students' interest and helping them access prior knowledge. This is the introduction to the lesson that motivates or hooks the students.*

I will conduct a mini lesson on how to use Google Earth/Google Maps

Then I will pose the following "Problem" that they will have to work to solve.

You are a travel agent working on planning a trip for a client that has had a bad travel experience to a foreign country in the past. The client is very hesitant to travel abroad again due to this experience but wants to try travel again. The client desperately wants to gain a broader perspective of the world we live in. Your task is to research and learn about the place that they want to visit. You will need to present them with a comprehensive, detailed account of what they should expect on their travels to ensure that they have the best experience possible.

Explain - *Students communicate what they have learned so far and figure out what it means. This phase also provides an opportunity for teachers to directly introduce a concept, process, or skill to guide students toward a deeper understanding.*

Students will conduct in depth research about a foreign country that they are unfamiliar with and report on the customs and cultures of the destination they choose. Students need to keep in mind the following questions and anything else that is specific to the destination they choose that would make a significant difference in their clients experience and perspective on the customs and cultures of a "different world".

What are some of the customs that might be surprising when visiting a specific destination?

What kind of dress is expected and or acceptable when traveling to various destinations around the world?

What are the customs/beliefs surrounding hospitality?

How do the people view Americans? Are there any dangers that Americans face while traveling to the destination?

What is the political climate of the region?

What is the religious climate of the region?

Is the area poverty stricken?

What might travelers need to know about the landscape and wild life?

Elaborate —*Allow students to use their new knowledge and continue to explore its implications. At this stage students expand on the concepts they have learned, make connections to other related concepts, and apply their understandings to the world around them in new ways*

Students will take the information they have gathered and create a Google Earth/Maps for presentation to their travel client.

Evaluate: *This phase assesses both learning and teaching and can use a wide variety of informal and formal assessment strategies.*

Students will present their research to the class. Presentations should be detailed and thorough.

They will also complete one more entry on LetsRecap.com answering the following question:

How can being knowledgeable about the culture, customs and peoples of an unfamiliar place enhance your perspective of the world as you travel?