Appreciating Trees:

Environmental Education Lesson Plan for a Peace Corps Volunteer

Part A: Introduction

The Peace Corps fields some 7,000 volunteers in more than 60 developing countries each year, with most of these individuals serving in rural areas. Fully 70% of all volunteers work in educating youth, both in formal and non-formal settings. The lesson plan that follows is adapted from a manual I am currently helping to develop—under the close supervision and to the requirements of a certified K-12 environmental education teacher—that is intended to provide Peace Corps volunteers with guidance for facilitating environmental education activities.

Peace Corps learning activities assume children of varying ages grouped together. Instruction may happen in native English, English as a Second Language, or, more rarely, another native language spoken by the children. Because Peace Corps communities are quite small, typically all students share the same mother tongue. Teaching aids such as books, art supplies, audiovisual devices, and computers are often scarce or not available at all, and it is best to develop lesson plans where volunteers may rely on rudimentary tools such as chalkboards and pencil and paper.

In its first-ever conference on environmental education, UNESCO (1977) called on educators, "to provide… opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment, and skills needed to protect and improve the environment" (p. 26); thus, learning to value nature is a founding objective of environmental education. Fagerstam (2012) reports that young people's experiences with nature are fundamental to developing a connection with nature and to establishing a concern for the environment, while Fisman (2005) notes that activities such as journaling can be "an effective strategy for building local environmental awareness" (p. 48). Regarding building vocabulary, Oxford and Crookall (1990) report that "physically acting out" new vocabulary words stimulates learning (p. 19). Finally, Finch explains that simple forms of poetry "can give students a framework for expressing ideas that are meaningful to them, without the constraints of grammatical accuracy" (p. 29).

References

Fagerstam, E. (2012). Children and young people's experience of the natural world: Teachers' perceptions and observation. *Australian Journal of Environmental Education (28)*1, 1-16.

Finch, A. (2003). Using poems to teach English. *English Language Teaching (15)*2, 29-45.

Fisman, L. (2005). The effects of local learning on environmental awareness in children: An empirical investigation. *The Journal of Environmental Education (36)*3, 39-50.

Oxford R. & Crookall D. (1990). Vocabulary learning: A critical analysis of techniques. *TESL Canada Journal (7)*2, 9-30.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (UNESCO). (1977). *Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education: Final Report*. Tbilisi, USSR.

Part B: Lesson Plan: Appreciating Trees

Ages:

9-11

Objectives:

- To begin to develop an appreciation of trees.
- To journal (including writing and drawing pictures) about trees.
- To reflect on journal entries.
- To use the body to act out up to 3 new vocabulary words about trees.
- To write, draw and define up to 3 new vocabulary words about trees.

Lesson Time:

(1 hour)

Materials:

Chalkboard, notebooks and pencils for every child, nearby wooded area, word wall, handouts for each student of tree picture poem (Appendix C).

Activating Prior Knowledge:

(6 minutes)

Tell students that today they are going to closely observe trees. Invite students to the chalkboard to draw pictures and write names of parts of trees. If students have difficulty drawing, encourage them to gesture shapes. Start with less advanced students and call upon more advanced students as the task becomes increasingly difficult. (Different parts of trees are listed in Appendix A.) Instruct students to draw their favorite part of a tree, or

parts of trees, (respectively, for less and more advanced students) in their notebooks and to write down the names for these parts. Have them circle any new vocabulary words.

Assignment for Guided Practice:

(7 minutes)

Tell students that today they will go outside and write about "their" tree. Write the questions below on the board for students to copy into their notebooks. Tell the students that, once they have found their tree, they should answer the questions with pictures and with words, and have them leave space to answer each question. Tell them that they will have about 20 minutes to answer as many questions as possible. Leave the questions on the board, as you will return to them later:

1) What does my tree look like?
2) What do the different parts of my tree look like?
3) How do different parts of my tree sound, smell and feel?
4) What name do I give my tree and why?
5) What do I experience when I am standing or sitting near my tree?
6) How does my community use my tree?
7) How do I feel about my tree?

Guided Practice:

(25 minutes, including walking to and from trees)

Accompany the students to a nearby wooded area and give them time to find a tree to answer the questions in their notebooks. It is okay for multiple students to journal about the same tree. Keep time for the students: Tell them how much time they have to begin with, then announce when their time is half over, and provide a two-minute warning

before returning to the classroom. Circulate among the students and especially engage with any who are having difficulties with the assignment. Remind students to use both pictures and words. Encourage more advanced students to write longer answers.

Closure:

(14 minutes)

Return to the key questions on the board and engage the students in verbal answers and discussion based on their recent experience. Next, invite students to the board to write their answers using pictures and words: single words, phrases, or entire sentences are all appropriate. Introduce three advanced vocabulary words from Appendix B as synonyms for words generated by the students; write these new words and their definitions on the board. (Definitions should include words and drawings.) As a group, have students act out these new vocabulary words. (I.e., for "soaring," students could stretch their hands above their head and stand up as tall as possible. For "gnarled," they could twist their bodies and their hands.) Have the students act out the new words two times each, and also read them chorally from the board.

Independent Practice:

(8 minutes)

Have students write in their notebooks some new things they've discovered about trees today. Instruct them to use two to three new vocabulary words, accompanied by drawings, and to circle these new words and their accompanying drawings. Tell them if they learned any new parts of trees at the beginning of the lesson (from the "activating prior knowledge" segment), they may also use these as new vocabulary terms. In the meantime, add new words to the word wall. Collect notebooks. Pass out a copy of the

picture poem of a tree to all students (Appendix C) and have the class read it silently. Instruct the class to circle any vocabulary words they don't know in the poem; explain that you will go over these words in the next lesson. Promise extra credit to any student who looks up vocabulary words before the next lesson. Assign students to take the poem home to show and read to their family. Tell them that, in the next lesson, they will compose their own poem about their tree.

Assessment:

Review students' journal entries. Check whether less advanced students were able to answer at least four questions, and check whether more advanced students answered all questions. Check whether drawings and words were both used. Make sure that each entry includes some new things learned about trees and has new vocabulary words (with drawings) circled. Comment on the more personal aspects of the entries such as "the name of my tree," "how I feel sitting or standing next to my tree," or "how do I feel about my tree."

Appendix A: Parts of Trees

Bark
Bore
Bough
Branch
Bud
Blossom
Cone
Crown
Fruit
Husk
Leaf
Limb
Needle
Nut
Pod
Root
Seed
Shoot
Stick
Stump
Trunk
Twig

Appendix B: Advanced Adjectives to Describe Trees

Abundant –	plentiful, bountiful, i.e., abundant with fruit
Abuzz –	full of activity, i.e., abuzz with insects
Ancient –	very old
Aromatic –	having a rich smell, pungent
Blissful -	joyous
Bountiful –	plentiful, abundant; i.e., bountiful with fruit
Bristly –	with bristles, prickly
Brittle –	easily cracked or broken
Burgeoning -	growing
Crusty –	covered with a hard, dry layer
Desiccated -	dried
Endangered –	threatened, e.g., by climate change or by humans
Entangled –	snarled or twisted together
Flaky –	tending to peel off in flakes or thin layers
Gnarled -	twisted and bulging, lumpy
Halcyon -	peaceful
Harvested –	with parts that are removed and used by people
Hewn –	cut or chopped by people
Layered –	having multiple layers or tiers (for example, of bark)
Luscious –	rich and juicy
Majestic –	royal, kingly or queenly
Menacing –	threatening, frightening
Peaceful –	causing one to feel at peace or safe and relaxed
Powerful –	very strong
Prickly –	spiky, spiked, thorny, spiny
Protected –	having measures taken to guard its safety
Pruned –	deliberately cut back to improve fullness or harvest
Pungent –	having a rich smell, aromatic
Rare –	unusual, uncommon
Ripe –	bearing fruit, fertile
Scratchy –	causing one to itch
Slick –	smooth surfaced
Soaring –	very tall, towering
Sparse –	not full, spindly
Squat –	short and thick
Stirring –	causing exciting emotions
Sturdy –	physically stable and strong
Threatened –	endangered, e.g, by climate change or by humans
Threatening –	frightening, scary, menacing
Towering –	very tall, soaring
Tranquil –	peaceful, calm
Verdant –	green and luscious
Vibrant –	colorful, dynamic
Waxy –	with a smooth surface, like wax
Weathered –	worn, worn out, damaged by exposure to the environment
Withered –	thin and dried out

Appendix C: Tree Picture Poem

Trees
are old friends.
They have many jobs.
Habitats for animals, shelters
from the cold and the rain,
oxygen producers, and
providers of shade,
sources of fuel.
So
big,
so
alive.
Needing
our protection.