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Geography and Mutual Understanding: "Harvest of Hope"

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The "Harvest of Hope" was an interdisciplinary science/geography project that provided students from two different schools and very diverse backgrounds the opportunity to work in a cooperative community service effort. With teacher coordination from both districts involved in the project, students from an inner-city school and a suburban school planted, tended, and harvested crops on unused school property and donated the food to organizations providing resources to the needy. "Harvest of Hope" was designed to aid the needy of Denver and teach high school students about real-world geography issues. Students also gained knowledge of issues inherent in world agriculture and the group problem-solving process. From a social perspective, inner-city students and suburban students had the opportunity to interact and gain an appreciation for cultural diversity. Most importantly, students learned through this project to think globally, but act on a local level. **Key words:** *stereotype, cultural diversity, community service, agricultural development, egress.*

The "Harvest of Hope" was a cooperative community service project designed to aid the needy of Denver and teach high school students about real-world geography issues. The project required teacher coordination from two diverse school districts. Students from an inner city school (West High School) and a suburban school (Eaglecrest High School) planted, tended, and harvested crops on unused school property and donated the food to organizations providing resources to the poor and aged.

In the "Harvest of Hope" project, the problems of developing countries—including world hunger and agricultural needs—were studied on a theoretical level and then applied in a practical setting. Students also gained knowledge of issues inherent in world agriculture and the group problem-solving process. The humanistic approach of the "Harvest of Hope" project attracted the attention of the educational reporter with the NBC network affiliate in Denver. The progress of the students was chronicled in three news segments during the year.

From a social perspective, inner-city students and suburban students had the opportunity to interact and gain an appreciation for cultural diversity. "Harvest of Hope" also provided an ideal opportunity to involve minorities and young women as participatory citizens in an on going community service project. Most importantly, students learned through this project to think globally, but act on a local level.

The project was funded with Chapter II monies, which are earmarked for programs that assist at-risk students or that are particularly innovative. As funds, they are adaptable to a variety of educational and environmental settings. They allow students who might otherwise lack the opportunity to know cultures "outside our borders" to experience more fully and better appreciate our multicultural society.

Key Activities

To begin the project, teachers from Eaglecrest High School and West High School diagnosed the needs for the project and outlined the scope and sequence for the year. Teachers decided to have the project simulate the experiences of agriculturally developing countries. The gardening plot was initially divided into sections, leaving one section rich through water availability and others rich because of resources such as seeds and tools. Teachers planned to have students negotiate for a sharing of necessary resources, much like the negotiations that take place in developing countries. After this meeting the teachers contacted the University of Northern Colorado Extension Service to help develop strategies and time lines for preparing and planting the crops. A site was chosen at Eaglecrest for the garden, and students in grades 9-12 who were interested in participating were assembled at both schools.

Meetings

The student and teacher teams that worked through this project met a number of times through a five-month period, including the summer growing season. At the first meeting of students and teachers from both schools, students became acquainted, brainstormed obstacles and solutions inherent in the project, and learned gardening techniques. By the end of the first meeting, students had determined what crops to plant, learned the length of the growing season, and ways to grow crops organically (Figure 4). Students outlined their personal and group responsibilities at the conclusion of this meeting (Figure 5). Additionally, students had an opportunity to discuss the cultural and economic differences between inner-city and suburban schools.

The second time students met they participated in a lottery to simulate real-world economic considerations cre-

ated by geographic differences. Students without advantageous conditions in their plot sections were given greater financial resources in the form of "Geo Bucks." With this money, teams then negotiated water rights and the acquisition of needed materials. Students were willing and adept at negotiating (Handout 1). Students concluded their second meeting with a visit to a homeless shelter where they discussed the goals of the project with residents.

The third time students met, they mapped their sections for planting, prepared the soil of their 60- by 40-foot garden plot, and planted their crops (Figure 6). Students also outlined a watering and weeding schedule for the summer months.

The final meeting of the students as a group was a picnic to celebrate the last harvest. Over the summer months, student continued to make deliveries of crops to the homeless shelter which had been designated by the students as the recipient of the harvests of their labors and cooperation.

Update

A core of interested kids from Eaglecrest have continued to work on Harvest of Hope, continuing the project for another year through the Environmental Action Club. They planned the second-year garden together, used resources, and utilized materials from the previous year to improve on the garden's output. It is still their objective to share the harvest with the needy.

Students have decided to limit the project to one school, as the coordination of labor became too difficult over the summer last year. They have also discussed the possibility of bringing the garden inside to a greenhouse to enable harvest in the winter. Working the project into the curriculum might give students an incentive to work on it during the entire year.

Discoveries in Summary

The structure of this particular project allowed students to explore and better understand the stereotypes they had about each other. The project was cooperative rather than competitive in nature in terms of intra-district coordination, interdisciplinary content, and community involvement.

One of the advantages of the project was its ability to expose students to different educational environments. It was meaningful for suburban students to begin to recognize the rich heritage of inner-city students and learn of the traditions that become a cornerstone of the city's older schools.

The opportunity for students involved in the project to

socialize and share meals helped to establish a sense of camaraderie. It was important for students to feel united in their effort to accomplish the project's goals.

The planning and maintenance of the plot is important. It is valuable to enlist the support of maintenance crews to cultivate the plot, establish fence protection, and help water the plot.

It is valuable and important that students personally deliver the food that they were able to harvest to the homeless shelter. After students put so much time and effort into raising the crop themselves, the strongest gesture of caring they could make was to share their harvest with others.

According to one student involved in the project, "This was a common project that united the schools, but in the later stages of the project there was a feeling of friendship that grew among the students. Visiting a shelter made both sets of students realize they had more in common than differences. Having a common goal and helping the less fortunate in our society made us realize how much the same we all are."

One adjustment worth considering in the project would be the use of a community garden that would be an equal distance from both schools. It is helpful to have land that has been previously cultivated and is conveniently located in proximity to students at both schools.

It is helpful to have at least a dozen committed students to work on the project in order to divide the labor equally over the summer months.

It is important for the teachers to understand that what the students gain from such an experience is greater than the actual harvest itself.

No occupation is so delightful to me as the culture of the earth, and no culture comparable to that of the garden. Such a variety of subjects, someone always coming to perfection, the failure of one thing repaired by the success of another, and instead of one harvest a continued one through the year.

Thomas Jefferson
August 1811

References

- Bartholomew, M. 1981. *Square foot gardening*. Emmaus, Pennsylvania: Rodale Press.

Our Country 'Tis of Thee

by Marianne Kenney and Cindy Bleskin, Denver Public Schools. This activity is based on an idea by Harmon and Matherley.

Description

Students composed of teams from two diverse schools must draw up boundaries for a plot of land ensuring that the boundaries are equitable to all. This activity develops problem-solving techniques, team building, and the concept of "Think globally, act locally." This lesson is designed to take one and one-half hours.

Objectives

- 1) To learn the importance of water, space, and light in planning the garden.
- 2) To apply the local activity "Harvest of Hope" to an international conflict.
- 3) To learn the importance of compromise and working together.

Materials

Overhead transparencies, placard or flag for country names, markers, negotiations and trade agreements—handout 1, time and visitation schedule—handout 2, negotiated binding agreement—handout 3, butcher paper with five plots of land, geobucks.

Procedures

- 1) Each "Harvest of Hope" group consists of six students. There were three students from each school in each group.
- 2) Students are given the charge of developing their plot of garden space as their "country." Each group, selected by random choice, receives its plot of land for development and negotiations begin.

| | | | | |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| A | B | C | D | E |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|

- 3) Teachers review with students the total agenda for the activity. Receive land for development, name country (make placard or flag), develop by-laws (rules that will govern your country), elect officers, decide property needs: i) present needs to all groups, ii) each country shall give ambassadors direction and decision making powers, negotiate with other countries and set up boundary agreements.
- 4) The teacher will have each team work together to discuss the needs of its country for the project and what its group is willing to barter or trade. Give students handout on the Negotiations and Trade Agreements (Handout 1). Teams should elect a president and ambassadors, develop by-laws, and decide property needs such as water, space, light, and protection. Students were given financial resources in the form of "Geo Bucks." With this money teams negotiate water rights and the acquisition of needed materials.
- 5) The teacher might consider taking the president of the group closest to the water source aside and telling him/her not to advocate giving the water away.
- 6) Each group sends two ambassadors to visit and negotiate with other countries to set up boundary agreements. Students follow the time and visitation schedule (Handout 2).
 - i) Plots A & E may be able to outgrow their boundary or expand their crop.
 - ii) Plot C has the only water source.
 - iii) If any plots plant tall crops, these crops will shade other areas.
- 7) Agreements need to be written and signed by the president from the group being visited and visiting ambassador and one teacher sponsor (Handout 3).
- 8) Spokespersons for each group share land, water, and space agreements with all groups in one multinational meeting.

Debriefing

Students should voice concerns about any inequities and tensions not resolved. Ask students what they learned about the skill of negotiating, what examples they can give of current world boundary disputes, what are countries willing to fight over, and what makes a good boundary.

Negotiations and Trade Agreement Issues

Upon receipt of their country assignment, each group will have to make some decisions based on the location of their property. Some of these decisions may involve some of the following conditions:

- sunlight
- size
- location
- proximity to water
- how water is to be brought into the country
- where water will come from first
- space for growing
- plant sizes
- roots or vines that may "overgrow" boundaries
- proximity to underdeveloped land
- physical barriers, such as fences and other boundaries
- egress (right to cross other lands with water, etc.)
- pollution (fertilizers, tools, bags, etc.)
- damage (harm done to property during plot management)

Country Name

Country Location

Needs

Assets

Ambassador

Each country needs to confer decision-making power to their country's ambassador. Sometimes during negotiations the ambassador will have to make decisions, as they will not be able to return to the group before agreements (Handout 3) are written. Elect an individual your group will trust.

Harvest of Hope

Ambassadors' Visitation Schedule Negotiations for International Agreements

| Country A Name: | Country B Name: | Country C Name: | Country D Name: | Country E Name: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| First visit to: (E) _____ | First visit to: (A) _____ | First visit to: (B) _____ | First visit to: (C) _____ | First visit to: (D) _____ |
| First visit to: (D) _____ | First visit to: (E) _____ | First visit to: (A) _____ | First visit to: (B) _____ | First visit to: (C) _____ |
| First visit to: (C) _____ | First visit to: (D) _____ | First visit to: (E) _____ | First visit to: (A) _____ | First visit to: (B) _____ |
| First visit to: (B) _____ | First visit to: (C) _____ | First visit to: (D) _____ | First visit to: (E) _____ | First visit to: (A) _____ |
| Last session: Report home with agreements |

**Harvest of Hope
Binding Negotiated Agreement**

The sovereign country of _____ hereby agrees to
provide _____

in exchange for the following provisions from the sovereign country of _____

Signed on this day of _____, in good faith.

President, _____

President, _____

Ambassador, _____

Ambassador, _____

Teacher / Sponsor as Witness

Considerations

- 1) What should we plant?
- 2) How should we plant it? (depends on the chosen crop)
- 3) How should we fertilize these plants?
- 4) How will we attend to the weeding and maintenance of the crop?
- 5) How do we take care of the seedlings during the winter?
- 6) How shall we manage pests and predators?
- 7) How and when shall we harvest? (depends on chosen crop)
- 8) What will we do with the harvest?
- 9) How do we determine who needs it, and how will we get it to them?

Role Definitions Contact Information

Each Harvest of Hope group shall consist of six students. There will be three students from each school in each group. The three students from each school shall decide within their group which main function they will perform for their group, thus there will be two students per role per group.

Functioning Position

1) Historian: The historian shall be responsible for recording all activities by the group and keeping a journal of all that happens until distribution of the harvest is complete. This person shall also be involved in the purchasing of the supplies for the group and any bookkeeping that is needed.

2) Facilitator: The facilitator shall be responsible for organizing activities done by the group. This person shall coordinate meeting times, planting, harvesting, and any other organizational activities needed. The facilitator shall also be responsible for formulating work schedules.

3) Distribution Manager: This person shall be responsible for planning the distribution of the harvest. He or she will need to contact the organizations involved, write letters, manage publicity, and coordinate any other activities the group decides is involved with the final distribution of the product.

Each member of the group must aid and assist with such projects as deciding what is to be planted, maintaining of the garden, and harvesting. It is important to realize that the group must work together for the good of all, and that intergroup communication is vital to your success.

Historians,
Names

Facilitators,
Names

Distribution Managers,
Names

To assist your group, please list names and phone numbers:

- | | |
|----|----|
| 1) | 4) |
| 2) | 5) |
| 3) | 6) |

Eaglecrest and West High Schools: Hints for a Better Gardening Experience!

These are a few ideas that may help you plan your garden.

- 1) Plan where you are going to put your plants.
- 2) Make a map of what and where you plant.
- 3) Always read the instructions for planting on the seed package.
- 4) Be careful not to plant the seed too deep, or it may not sprout or bear fruit.
- 5) Remember to put soil over the top of freshly planted seeds, so they will not blow away. Press the soil over the seed, firmly but without packing it down too much.
- 6) Be sure to leave some room between plants. When they grow, their foliage will need some space. The root system of the plant may need growing space also. The seed package will have special instructions for the type of seed you have.
- 7) After the seeds sprout, you will need to thin them if there are too many plants in each area. It is important to keep the plant that you think will survive, and then you will pull up the weaker plants in that region.

Gardening Hazards

Various problems may arise in your garden. Generally these problems are caused by some type of pest. The pest is anything that can harm a garden. Generally we think of pests as insects, but they could be larger (like rabbits or deer) or even humans!

Some organic (not using synthetic chemicals) pest controls might be useful.

- 1) A light spray of dish soap and water mixture. Spray plants every few days. The soap causes the "shell" of the insect to become soft and not be able to protect the insect.
- 2) Orange peels thrown about the garden will prevent local cats from using soft dirt for a litter box.
- 3) A piece of yellow paper covered with mineral oil hanging in the garden will attract aphids and gnats away from the crop plants. They get stuck in the oil.
- 4) Snow fence or chicken wire fencing will keep out small plant-eating animals.

Gardens need to have many different types of energy to keep them going. They need the energy of the sun to grow. They also need your energy to maintain them. They need water, light, and care. Plants that you do not want in your garden will need to be taken out (weeded) periodically.