

Web Unit Plan

Title: The World Through a Different Pair of Eyes

Description: Middle school students see the world through another pair of eyes as they communicate with other students from different countries. Students learn about life in other parts of the world, investigate current events, and learn about factors that affect the quality of life and longevity of other cultures. Students address the issue of the possible correlation between where people are born and how long they are likely to live.

At a Glance

Grade Level: 6-8

Subject sort (for Web site index): Social Studies

Subject(s): Social Studies

Topics: World Geography

Higher-Order Thinking Skills: Problem Solving, Analysis

Key Learnings: Distribution of Global Resources, Human Health and Life Expectancy, Cultural Differences, Civics, Data Analysis

Time Needed: 5 weeks, 45 minutes, 2-3 times a week

Background: [From the Classroom in New Mexico, United States](#)

Unit Summary

Students visit other countries through the eyes of their ePALS partners and learn to appreciate life in a different country. Using insights from research and their ePALS partners, students compare life expectancy rates in various countries and analyze factors that contribute to or limit longevity. After evaluating their research data, students describe problems related to low life expectancy in one country and present possible solutions at a Model United Nations Conference.

Curriculum Framing Questions

- **Essential Question**
How does where we live influence how we live?
- **Unit Questions**
Why do some populations live longer than others?
How do events in different parts of the world have an impact on our lives?
- **Content Questions**
What factors contribute to life expectancy?
What does a low/high life expectancy rate tell you about a country?
How are you similar and how are you different from your ePALS partner?

Assessment Processes

View how a variety of student-centered [assessments](#) are used in The World Through a Different Pair of Eyes Unit Plan. These assessments help students and teachers set

goals; monitor student progress; provide feedback; assess thinking, processes, performances, and products; and reflect on learning throughout the learning cycle.

Instructional Procedures

Other topics can be used as the focus of this unit, such as hunger, poverty, employment, or education.

Prior to the Unit

Using your district's acceptable use guidelines, draft a [letter](#) to parents requesting permission for students to be assigned an e-mail account for school use.

Week One

Introduce the Project

Write the Essential Question, *How does where we live influence how we live?* on the board and have students take time to write their thoughts about it in their journals. Discuss initial responses and record them on poster paper. Have students reflect on where they live. Ask questions for them to respond to in their journals, such as:

- *What jobs are available?*
- *What types of homes do people live in?*
- *What level of medical care is available?*
- *What kinds of clothes do people wear?*
- *What kinds of food do people eat?*
- *How do people spend their free time?*
- *What is the availability of life's necessities?*

Conclude by asking the students how their answers to the preceding questions might change if they lived somewhere else. Have them reflect in their journals on how their life might be different if they lived in a different country.

Let students know they will be corresponding with a student in a different part of the world and will gather more information to help them respond to the Essential Question.

Using a world map, show students the regions of the world represented in the [ePALS Classroom Exchange Web site](#)*. Have students develop a set of selection criteria (you may want a class theme), and then have each student select a region of interest and an ePALS partner from the region. Encourage students to choose different countries to study. Discuss [E-mail Etiquette](#)* with students.

To develop common themes for discussion, brainstorm a set of questions of general interest that students might ask their ePALS partners. These might include favorite types of music, family configuration, occupations of family members, how free time is spent, important holidays or celebrations, favorite subjects in school, current events, eating habits, and so on. Plot countries of ePALS partners on a wall map.

Start Writing!

Begin e-mail communication. Have students record notes, reflections, and questions in a journal while communicating with their ePALS partners. Make sure at least one common question is asked each week, and then conduct a weekly ePALS check, where students have a time to share what they are learning from their ePALS partners regarding the common themes. Set aside five minutes each day for

students to summarize their conversations in their journals. Periodically, have students share some of their learning from their communication with their peers. Use the [journal checklist](#) to keep track of students' sharing, noting particular insights and feedback to others.

Investigating: What Are Current Events in My ePALS Partner's Country?

Discuss what students are learning about current events through their correspondence. Pose the Unit Question, *How do events in different parts of the world have an impact on our lives?* Have students do a quickwrite responding to this question.

Introduce students to electronic news sources, such as [U.S. News & World Report](#)* or [CNN](#)*, where they can read stories about their ePALS partners' countries. The United Nations has a Web site called [Cyberschoolbus](#)* that has a section called "Country at a Glance" with links to specific countries' news stories. Have students take notes and ask their ePALS partners for personal analyses of these events.

Ask students to choose one or two compelling news stories to summarize and analyze for the class in a mini-report. Use the [My Country Today](#) worksheet to collect information. Have students share news items with one another, discuss the concept of the global village, and discuss how events occurring in different parts of the world impact our lives as well.

Week Two

How Do We Compare?

Refer to the poster paper from the introduction of the unit. Hold a brief discussion about the Essential Question, *How does where we live influence how we live?* Record any additional thoughts and comments students have on the paper.

Get students to think about the Content Question, *How are you similar and how are you different from your ePALS partner?* Using journal entries and current events research, have students complete Venn diagrams comparing their lives with those of their ePALS partners.

Create a sense of empathy and perspective by having students take the view of a student from the country they are studying. In their journals, have students describe what a day in the life of a student would be like.

How Long Do People Live?

Broaden and deepen an understanding of geographic differences in the human condition by discussing [Life Expectancy Rates](#)*. Ask students where in the world they think people live the longest. Pose the Unit Question, *Why do some populations live longer than others?* And explain that students will be researching this question.

Present students with the [CIA World Fact Book](#)* Web site and its [Life Expectancy Table](#)*. Locate the countries with the highest and lowest life expectancies, and find them on a map. Briefly gather first impressions from students about why they think some people live longer than others.

Pair students and have them create a graph comparing rates of the country they live in with their two countries of study. You may want to collect data from all students and create a graph comparing all of the countries studied.

Have students contribute to a colored [World Life Expectancy Wall Map](#)* with a light-to-dark scheme reflecting expectancy rates in 5- or 10-year increments. As an extension, you may want a set of students to make maps and charts reflecting gender differences as well.

Using the class graph and the life expectancy map, promote a discussion about the variables that might affect life expectancy rates.

Week Three

What Factors Affect Life Expectancy?

Develop the idea of life expectancy further, and set students to work researching the variables that affect life expectancy in their countries of study. Have them explore the Content Question, *What factors contribute to life expectancy?* Students should develop a hypothesis for which factors (disease rate, calorie consumption, access to medicine, population growth, infant mortality, public health, nutrition, and so forth) are most likely to affect life expectancy. They should then investigate those factors further. They should also explore the Content Question, *What does a low/high life expectancy rate tell you about a country?* Ask students to make assumptions about living conditions in regions with low and high life expectancy rates. The [country research](#) worksheet is a useful organizer.

Use the [life expectancy](#) handout to help students explore more about situations that might affect life expectancy in their countries of study.

Help students investigate whether the primary variables they are studying exist in other countries that have either a similar or very different life expectancy rate. Enter data into a database, such as Microsoft Access*. (The PDF [How to Use Microsoft Access](#)* will help you use the database program.) This information will be assessed with their final presentations.

Weeks Four and Five

What Can We Do About It?

Model how to sort and make queries. Direct students to use the database to research whether a relationship exists between their data and their presumed greatest factor influencing low life expectancy. Have them explore relationships within the data. Be sure to discuss the difference between *correlation* and *causation*. Ask students to propose some possible solutions that could increase life expectancy in the countries they are studying.

Organize students to work in alliance groups consisting of countries that are within the same region or face similar problems. Have each team list some actions that could help their countries increase life expectancy. Share ideas as a whole class and narrow the list to 7 to 10 items. Some examples include the following:

- Provide nutrition, family planning, and hygiene classes
- Train health workers to immunize children
- Build sanitation facilities
- Train youth as peer educators
- Develop new industries for employment
- Offer free literacy classes
- Improve readiness plans for natural disasters
- Create and distribute disease-prevention posters
- Produce an education campaign about safe drinking water

- Help farmers change crops and improve local diets
- Train entrepreneurs in small business development
- Encourage greater access to medical drugs

Prioritize Solutions

Before proceeding with the next activity, build a project in the [Visual Ranking Tool teacher workspace](#). (If you choose not to use the *Visual Ranking Tool*, have students complete the prioritizing steps in writing.)

- Set up a project called *Life Expectancy*.
- Use the country or region name to create Student Team IDs.
- Describe the project and include the following prompt: *Which action do you think would be most beneficial in increasing your country's life expectancy rate?*
- Populate the list with the ideas established by the class.

Each team should rank the list of options from the point of view of their country or region. The team should rank the actions in the order in which they would implement them, and explain why they chose the ranking using the comment feature of the tool. After teams have finished ranking and commenting, have them compare their lists with the lists that were ranked by other teams. They should read each other's comments about the relative merit of each option.

Creating Proposals

Discuss the role of the United Nations (UN), read the [Preamble to the UN Charter](#)^{*}, and present the [Slideshow](#)^{*} to impart its basic tenets for global health and harmony. Take a [Virtual Tour](#)^{*} of the UN. The UN site will help you set up a [Model UN](#)^{*}.

Using their ranking and research, explain that students should develop proposals and a slide presentation to inform the class about their top recommendations. Share an example of a [student presentation](#) and the [project scoring guide](#) with the class.

Proposals should include the following:

- Background of country's/region's circumstances
- Previous actions taken to improve life expectancy
- Graphical display of data
- Description and explanation of the team's prioritized action plan
- Reflection on the Essential Question

Select a student to be the President of the General Assembly and hold a Model United Nations Conference. After each alliance has presented, have the Model United Nations participants discuss the proposals.

Have students reflect on the connection of the Essential Question and the presentations by writing a short essay. They can respond to the following prompt: Using information you gathered through your research and by listening to the presentations, reflect on the Essential Question, *How does where we live influence how we live?*

Finally, have the entire class discuss the several proposals and ask that the class come to consensus on each proposal—should it be shelved? amended? funded? Create a poster to record the class's decision on each proposal. Assess the presentations with the [project scoring guide](#).

Prerequisite Skills

- Prior experience using the Internet, citing references, and working with spreadsheet software

Differentiated Instruction

Resource Student

- Provide modifications as dictated in the student's IEP
- Use cooperative grouping
- Employ written and oral instructions in a variety of ways
- Allow extra time for completing assignments
- Work with parent/teacher's aide for assistance
- Offer checkpoints and positive reinforcement throughout the duration of the unit

Gifted Student

- Encourage broader and deeper research by requiring the student to analyze differences over time in different countries
- Have the student work independently through the [Life Expectancy Learning Module](#)* on the World Bank Group's Web site

English Language Learner (ELL)

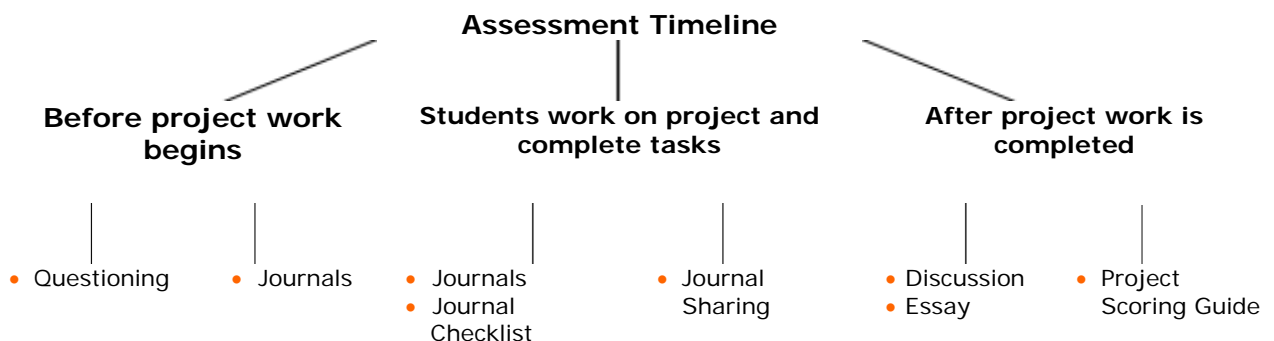
- Encourage support from common language speakers who are more proficient in English
- Provide extra time for completing assignments
- Work with parent/teacher's aide for assistance
- Provide teacher-created templates/graphic organizers for the student to fill in
- Use visuals, manipulatives, and illustrated text
- Promote work in cooperative groups

Credits

Dana Dawson participated in the Intel® Teach Program, which resulted in this idea for a classroom project. A team of teachers expanded the plan into the example you see here.

THINGS YOU NEED (highlight box)

Assessment Plan



Questioning strategies are used throughout the unit to probe students' understanding and assess their learning. Students reflect on their learning throughout the unit in journals. Students self-monitor their journal entries using the [journal checklist](#), while the teacher assesses the journals with the same [checklist](#) during journal sharing time. Discussion throughout the unit helps the teacher to gauge student understanding and interest level, and to adapt the project accordingly. Final presentations are assessed with the [project scoring guide](#). Students reflect on the Essential Question in a final essay.

Targeted Content Standards and Benchmarks

Targeted National Standards

[National Geographic Standards](#)*

Standard 4: The Physical and Human Characteristics of Places. Students need an understanding of why places are the way they are. This understanding enriches their own sense of identity with a particular place, and it enables them to comprehend and appreciate both the similarities and differences in places around their own community, state, country, and planet.

Standard 5: The People Create Regions to Interpret the Earth's Complexity. Through understanding the idea of *region*, students can apply geographic knowledge, skills, and perspectives to solving problems. Most importantly, studying regions enables students to synthesize their understanding of the physical and human properties of the Earth's surface at scales that range from local to global.

Standard 6: How Culture and Experience Influence People's Perception of Places and Regions. Culture and experience shape belief systems, which in turn influence people's perceptions of places and regions throughout their lives. With a growing understanding of culture, students will appreciate the diverse values of others in a multicultural world, and will be able to engage in accurate and sensitive analysis of people, places, and environments.

Standard 11: The Patterns and Networks of Economic Interdependence on Earth's Surface. Students understand world patterns and networks of economic interdependence and realize that traditional patterns of trade, human migration, and cultural and political alliances are being altered as a consequence of global interdependence.

Student Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Learn about different countries from students living in those countries
- Understand how world events and conditions impact health and longevity
- Use a spreadsheet to collect and display data
- Use a database to manipulate data and identify relationships
- Synthesize data to identify problems and possible solutions
- Present information in a way that meets a prescribed goal (that is, prompts change)
- Communicate data in graphic form to support a position
- Learn collaboration skills that allow them to form alliances and solve problems in a mock UN meeting

Technology and Resources:

Internet Resources

E-mail Communication

- I Will Follow...Services
www.iwillfollow.com
E-mail etiquette resource
- ePALS Classroom Exchange
www.epals.com*
ePALS online community

Country Research

- BBC News
<http://news.bbc.co.uk>*
Online news source
- CIA World Factbook
www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html*
Source for information on a variety of countries
- CNN
www.cnn.com*
Online news source
- Globalis
<http://globalis.gvu.unu.edu>*
Interactive world atlas
- NationMaster
www.nationmaster.com*
Tool for generating and comparing graphs based on numerical data
- The World Bank Group
www.worldbank.org*
Source for information on poverty and living standards of people in the developing world
- United Nations Cyberschoolbus
www.cyberschoolbus.un.org*
Online education organization promoting international issues and the United Nations
- U.S. Census
www.census.gov/ipc/prod/ib98-2.pdf*
Resource covering a wide range of topics
- U.S. News
www.usnews.com/usnews/home.htm*
Online news source
- World Health Organization
www.who.int/en*
Health information for countries around the world

United Nations

- Model UN Headquarters
<http://cyberschoolbus.un.org/modelun/index.asp>*
- UN Online Slideshow
www.un.org/Pubs/CyberSchoolBus/unintro/unintro.htm*

- UN Virtual Tour
www.un.org/Pubs/CyberSchoolBus/untour*

Technology—Hardware

- Internet connection for e-mail and research
- Projection system for database tutorial

Technology—Software

- Database to store country demographics
- Multimedia for creating the proposal as a slideshow presentation
- Spreadsheet software to create comparison of life expectancy data