

The WORLD PRESS PAGE of Geotrees.Com:
A Concept Proposal

Dedicated, with Great Respect,

to

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to

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and to

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Table of Contents

Introduction 2

Basic Description 2

Desired Outcomes..... 2

Supporting Goals..... 3

Learning Approach - General..... 3

Leaning Approach - Specific 4

Constraints and Conditions 4

Learning Activities 5

And In Conclusion - 6

Introduction

One of the ironies of our time is that while modern communications reaches out to embrace a world that grows larger and smaller at the same time, giving everyone unprecedented access to the histories, cultures and ways of other peoples and other times, so many of us remain sturdily locked within the viewpoints and perspectives of our own upbringing. This predicament is especially poignant for our young people, who emerge from formal schooling with a half-century or more of world citizenship ahead of them. Their prospects of facing those decades with insight, intention, creativity, confidence and skill improve when they can begin to see the world from others' eyes, on others' own terms. The implications for "the history of the future" are profound.

Geotrees' World Press Page, or WPP, is offered as a step in that direction. This introduction describes the page itself, how to use it, its intended benefits, and some suggested activities that will enable adults and young people alike, in and out of the academy, to build on it creatively.

To see the page, click on this link: <http://www.geotrees.com/wpp.html>.

Basic Description

The World Press Page was born from Colman McCarthy's "Learning Peace" class at American University in Washington, DC, in the spring of 2008. As of January 2009 it has grown to be a collection of links to English language newspapers, press agencies, and bureaus from around the world. Our emphasis is on those societies least understood by and most adversarial to the West in recent decades, and to those urgently strategic to world peace and stability.

International press collections already exist on line. But typically they include all the outlets available, sometimes sorted by nation or continent, and offer so many that the bewildered student and conscientious teacher alike can hardly know where to begin! The sheer number is often overwhelming, with little guidance on selecting one over another.

The WPP, on the other hand, offers a compact, manageable selection of resources chosen for their diversity of perspective. The page consists of press links, organized by country, each with its distinctive logo and brief description. For most countries, links to basic national facts, geography, etiquette, and diplomatic mission in Washington or New York are included. The fully mature version will also offer links to lesson plans, learning activities, interdisciplinary materials and background, and more.

The page is on line at this time, at <http://www.geotrees.com/wpp.html>. As of January, 2009 it offers regional links to the Middle East and Africa as continent, and to the individual nations of China, North Korea, Burma, Gaza, Iran, Israel, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan, Kenya, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. Others will be added shortly.

Desired Outcomes

The page, and its basic school course, is intended to produce young people who bring curiosity, empathy, understanding, and intellectual rigor to their engagement with current events.

They will become less rigid and fixed in their own perceptions and opinions, and actively pursue unfamiliar knowledge and opinion. They will see the personal, human impact of events on others' lives and their own. They will begin to appreciate the interplay of geography, history, culture, and economics; they will start to explore the possibility of influencing the future by developing communication, knowledge and understanding in their own lives. And they will become comfortable and skilled in discussing important issues and diverse points of view with others, peer and adult.

The WPP supports these outcomes with two basic goals, both intended to bypass the filters of government, corporate media, and other conventional mass channels as much as possible: (1) To give Americans easy access to others' points of view, in those others' own voices; and (2) To furnish a means for Americans to give "feedback" to address others directly, in as personal, citizen-to-citizen a fashion as possible, utilizing such things as Letters to the Editor, reader fora, blogs, discussion groups, etc. - all based in the foreign press' own nation.

Supporting Goals

During the course, students will cultivate a well-rounded "kit" of supporting skills - they will:

- Learn to become conscious of the content of what they're reading, listening to, or viewing. "Is anything missing? What has the piece included, and what has it left out?"
- Learn to honor their own curiosity and, at times, skepticism. "What do you want to follow up on here?" "Let's get another version of this story."
- Develop critical reading and thinking skills, becoming conscious of the distinctions between fact, analysis, and opinion. "Are this piece's 'facts' something I can check up on for myself? Is there a consistent thread or theme, from one source to the next?" "Does their analysis connect logically with the facts?" "Do the opinions - which may be expressed without any present facts - sound cogent and credible? How do the authors want this to appeal to us?"
- Inquire into context: History, geography, economic life, culture, etc. "Russia was invaded repeatedly for centuries, from every direction. How did this help shape the 'Cold war'?" "How would the world be different if we weren't so dependent on oil?" "Has the need for national self-respect played a role in Cuba/US relations?"
- Develop empathy with others, and begin to inquire into human nature, its needs, motivations, and the role of conscious choice.
- Learn to consider and discuss multiple points of view, and to "juggle" two or more at one time.
- Learn to express, articulate, write and defend alternative points of view.
- Develop research skills, conventional and on line.

Learning Approach - General

The WPP is currently an activity of Geotrees.Com, which brings certain assumptions and approaches to civilization-building learning. These shape the background and foundations of the World Press Page. Here are some of them.

- World crossroads cities, such as the Washington, DC metro area, are rich in materials of all kinds, reflecting knowledge and perspectives "horizontally" across the breadth of contemporary societies, and "vertically," into millennia of our deepest history. They afford unprecedented transparency into the wealth of the human adventure.

- Learning experiences can be derived, organized and created from these materials, these people and their stories, even those not conventionally seen as learning sources. The region itself is an ocean of human experience, which can be organized into a “university without walls or frontiers.”
- Learning processes should include intention and outcomes, and be observed and evaluated as it progresses.
- When one learning activity is completed, ideally it will lead organically to others.
- Learning activities should parallel and connect to those of real life as much as possible.
- Activities should take place out of the academy and in the field as appropriate. In a sense, the formal academy is a place where material gained in the world becomes knowledge and understanding through study, reflection, and discussion.
- Learning is cross-disciplinary, centered on the knowledge involved, and the students involved.
- Learning is a mix of individual and group activity, and can include “real world” people from beyond the academy’s walls.
- Students are encouraged to engage the process interactively and creatively, to experiment, to take risks.
- Teachers are also encouraged to be creative, to experiment; to take risks.
- Teachers and other resource people often guide and mentor students, rather than direct or manage them.

Learning Approach - Specific

The WPP course, at any level from middle school on up, will rest on certain approaches that give the work direction, coherence, and room for creativity:

- Young people can tackle public issues, subject matter in general, and learning activities at a more mature level than we often give them credit for.
- The WPP can be a portal not only into current events themselves, but also into the importance of their particular contexts in history, geography, culture, economics, and human nature and behavior.
- Conversely, students can integrate this varied knowledge into a well-rounded, wholistic understanding of the subject.
- Classes will be built on three basic pillars: The events of the day, the media outlets that connect us with them, and building a set of attitudes and skills that students can use lifelong to becoming informed and engaged.
- Where possible, classwork will be reinforced with in-person visits to local diplomatic, cultural, academic, and other organizations and people representing the societies being considered - including peers of their own generation.

Constraints and Conditions

Our students will be dealing with some of the most sophisticated and well-informed people and organizations on the planet - a daunting prospect at any time, but especially so when those people have experiences, ambitions, cultures, histories and interests fundamentally alien to the students’. Some will represent governments, societies and social orders whose mores differ radically from those we take for granted, even when they present themselves as conventionally “modern” in the Western sense. Thus, students and teachers alike need to recognize that certain conditions may influence the style and accuracy of the material they study.

- In any society, events take place within certain contexts, which include geography, economics, culture, history, statecraft, religion, and human nature itself - and the choices people make, from one minute to the next, in engaging those contexts.
- In some lands there are serious divides between the urban and rural populations - profound divides in education, economic status, worldview, and more. When you approach a press outlet, whose voice do you hear? Do the journalists you hear speak for the population at large, or for an atypical sub-population?
- Is your source a government or corporate mouthpiece for concentrations of wealth or power of some kind, official or otherwise? If so, how reliable are they? How does this skew their accuracy and integrity? Teachers may want to offer some examples.
- If your source is an official mouthpiece, how do they want you to perceive them?
- How can we be alert to bias in the press? What can we learn from biased journalism?
- Are sources available that do speak accurately for average citizens?

Learning Activities

The World Press Page lends itself to a wide range of activities, adaptable to the students' maturity and the resources available, within the school and beyond. And in turn, they can serve as lively springboards for larger projects and activities. For example:

1. Each student can keep a log or journal of their activities, noting each nation, region, city, issue, and newsmaking personalities, along with their personal reflections. As they accumulate and deepen, students' activities and writings (i.e., growing perceptions and discernment) will themselves become a subject of the course.
2. Over the course, the class as a whole will visit outlets in each region and country of interest.
3. Each student will also select a region, a nation, or an issue to follow or "major in" through the course, preferably foreign to their own background.
4. GEOGRAPHY: "Find your subject nation, region or city on a map." "Point out the fertile agricultural parts of Sudan / Pakistan / China / Saudi Arabia..."
5. "Find and read a story from an overseas source on the same topic as one of interest in the domestic media."
 - "List the points made."
 - "Distinguish between fact, analysis, and opinion, and sort the list accordingly."
 - "Be alert to 'embedded' opinion. Does the writer's vocabulary suggest a bias? If so, in what direction?"
 - "How well does their analysis reflect the facts cited? Discuss! How else can the same facts be analyzed? How do you analyze them?"
 - "Does an opinion have a connection with fact in that story?"
 - "How do their selection of facts, their analysis, and their opinions compare to those in the domestic version?"
6. Students may wish to role-play a newsmaker or commentator, individual or in a panel, and develop cogent analyses and opinions of their own. They may present to this class, or to another.
7. Students may also wish to role play historical figures, or "ordinary" citizens of an interesting time or place. A good opportunity to develop research skills, as well as some social behaviors from the novel nation.
8. "How would you put that article in your own words? Would you want to add

- something, or leave something out? Cover all the points, and remember to make any logical connections.”
9. Journalists, diplomats, peer students, or others from the subject country may visit the class to see role plays, debates, and other presentations!
 - If possible, recruit eyewitnesses to or actual participants in historic or similarly interesting events.
 - Invite feedback from class guests. Encourage students to discuss, perhaps to challenge, this feedback. Develop a conversation.
 - Cultivate follow-on or ongoing involvements between class and the guests and their organizations.
 10. “Research any background that the article may refer to.” (NOTE: There is certain basic background that the students should gain throughout the course. The split between students and educators, as to who gets that background, may vary according to students’ knowledge, grade, and skill level. Goal: Bring their research skills up to a TBD standard in the course of the course.)
 11. Organize student debates: Engage research, organizing, writing skills; also listening, patience, empathy and logic.
 12. Letters to the Editor: Find, utilize such sections in foreign media. Approach the editors if they don’t have one. Propose, to those editors, creating a “window” in their papers for American students and others; for other foreign nationals.
 13. Create a radio show that engages peer students from overseas.
 14. Within the school: Create a paper, web page, blog or email group to present foreign press content to the school, and to its parents and friends.
 15. Create a page or blog that reaches out to students in other countries, perhaps one whose space is shared, cooperatively, with such students. Does the school have a sister school relationship with one or more peer schools overseas? Can the class create such relationships?
 16. Visit embassies, embassy events, local press bureaus. Do these have libraries or archives that our students can use?
 17. Get actual newspapers and magazines from overseas. In English; with more advanced language students, in the native languages.

And In Conclusion -

This has been a general introduction to the objectives, tools, and activities possible to an organized approach to the world press. Intended mostly for middle and high school students, it offers foundations for adult-level skills and practices, and can be adapted to many adults as well in these poorly-informed times. Such activity will certainly grow and deepen in actual learning practice, and as students - and teachers - take the activity into their lives as world citizens. It would be a pleasure, in years to come, to hear how they deepen and broaden their grasp of the human adventure as a result.

The page's author is a former teacher, nonprofit conference manager, and international school student in '60s Japan; he would welcome the opportunity to return to education with a convergence course built on the world press and its related subjects. To inquire, contact Charles Stevenson at anjinsan@geotrees.com.