



Lesson Plan: Volunteer to Address Local Literacy Needs

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will learn about a Colombian man who took action to provide residents in isolated communities in his country with access to reading materials. Students will then examine literacy rates for their own communities and develop strategies for volunteering to support local literacy efforts. Ideally, students will also complete the volunteer work as a service learning opportunity and a way to develop civic responsibility.

The clip used in this lesson is from the film **Biblioburro**, a documentary about a project started by Luis Soriano. On Saturdays, Soriano loads crates of books onto his donkeys and travels for hours over rough terrain to remote villages, where he reads stories to children and lends books to villagers. Please note that the film is in Spanish with English subtitles.

For more information on Colombia and the Biblioburro project, please see the [Related Resources](#) section of this lesson.

POV documentaries can be recorded off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from their initial broadcast. In addition, POV offers a lending library of DVDs and VHS tapes that you can borrow anytime during the school year — FOR FREE! Get started by joining our [Community Network](#).

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Discuss the personal benefits of reading and how people who read can help their communities and countries politically, economically and socially.
- Determine the influence and impact of a literacy project in Colombia.
- Identify the literacy rates in their local communities.
- Conduct research and develop action plans for volunteering to address local literacy needs.

GRADE LEVELS

9-12

SUBJECT AREAS

Civics, Geography, International Studies, Language Arts, Current Events, Service Learning

MATERIALS

- Internet access and equipment to show the class online video and conduct research
- Map that shows the location of Colombia
- Handout: [Volunteer Action Plan](#) (PDF file)

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED

One 50-minute class period

FILM CLIP

Clip: "A Visit From Biblioburro" (length 17:37)

The clip begins at 26:55 with a man on a burro walking through some trees. It ends at 44:32 when a man climbs on the back of his burro and they begin moving.

ACTIVITY

1. Give students a few minutes to provide brief written responses to the following question: What role does reading play in helping you to succeed both now and in the future?
2. Pair students with each other and ask students to compare what they have written with what their partners have written. Then, invite a few to share their ideas with the class. Expand the discussion to have the class consider how people who read can help their communities and countries politically, economically and socially.
3. Show the class where Colombia is on a map. Explain that violent conflicts among armed groups have plagued the country for more than 40 years. Often, people in villages — including children — are forced from their homes or are the victims of horrible crimes. These conditions, combined with poverty and isolation, make it difficult for many children to get an education or have access to reading materials.
4. Tell students that one man looked at these challenges and decided to do something about it. Each Saturday, he loads crates of books onto his donkeys, travels hours to remote villages, reads stories to children and lends books to villagers. His project is called "Biblioburro."
5. Show the class the clip "A Visit From Biblioburro" (length 17:37). Focus student viewing by asking students to determine what the man in the video hopes to accomplish with Biblioburro.
6. After watching the video, ask students to explain why they think Luis Soriano spends his Saturdays traveling in the heat over rough terrain to take books to people who do not have them. What is he trying to achieve? How is he influencing the lives of children and their families? What impact might his efforts have on the future of his community and possibly his country?
7. Ask students if they think literacy and access to reading materials is an issue in their communities. Then, as a class, view the U.S. Department of Education's state or county literacy estimate (<http://nces.ed.gov/naal/estimates/>) for your area. Your city may also be ranked in Central Connecticut State University's 2009 list of America's Most Literate Cities (<http://www.ccsu.edu/page.cfm?p=5392>). (Local agencies may also be able to provide details about literacy in your area. Try an Internet search with the name of your city or county or state and "literacy rate.")

8. Point out that, like Luis Soriano, students can help improve literacy in their communities. Distribute copies of the handout and challenge students to develop action plans for volunteering to address local literacy needs.

EXTENSIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

1. Provide extra credit for students who carry out their action plans. Ask them to keep journals in which they can reflect on their experiences.
2. Learn more about local literacy challenges. Invite someone from a local literacy organization, public library or local PBS station to visit the class and share stories about the work being done in your community to improve literacy. Consider having students bring in gently used books in advance of the visit and present them to the speaker to thank her for her time.
3. Study the Rubén Darío poem featured in the video clip for this lesson. Read and analyze “Margarita, How Beautiful the Sea” and discuss the challenges of effectively translating the poem (<http://www.textetc.com/workshop/wt-dario-3.html>) from Spanish to English. Then, have students use the poem or the Biblioburro project as a prompt to write their own poetry.
4. Determine how Colombia’s history has had an impact on the education and literacy of its people. Have students read POV’s Background Information and conduct additional research on this topic. Then, have them work in groups to create graphic organizers that illustrate the causes and effects that they identified.
5. Compare education-related attitudes shown in **Biblioburro** with those at your school. As they watch the video clip for this lesson, have the students observe and take notes on the attitudes that the children show toward books, the teacher and learning opportunities. Ask students how what they saw compares with the attitudes of their peers. Capture class ideas about similarities and differences in a Venn diagram.
6. Build student literacy, critical thinking and writing skills by asking students to write reviews of their favorite books. Use a resource like Purdue University’s “Writing a Book Review” (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/704/01/>) to guide students through the process of planning and drafting their reviews. Then have students work in small groups to give each other feedback on their drafts and to make revisions. Finally, publish the reviews on a class blog or wiki.
7. Compare and analyze literacy rates in different parts of the world. UNESCO’s Official Source of Literacy Data (<http://www.uis.unesco.org/literacy/Pages/default.aspx?SPSLanguage=EN>) provides country profiles and literacy rates by age and gender. Have students collect data for specific countries your class has studied and then create bar graphs or other data representations that allow for easier comparisons. Students should also research what countries with low literacy rates have in common with each other and how these countries are different from those with higher literacy rates. Challenge students to use their data and information to develop

hypotheses for why literacy rates are low in certain countries and recommendations for how to improve conditions.

RESOURCES

CIA World Factbook. "Colombia."

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/co.html>

This profile of Colombia includes information on its economy, geography, people and more.

Human Rights Watch. "Colombia: Displaced and Discarded."

<http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11574/section/7>

This article describes some of the obstacles in Colombia that make it difficult for displaced children to go to school.

POV Background Information: Education and Literacy in Colombia

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/biblioburro/>

The POV Discussion Guide addresses the marked contrast between education standards in rural and urban areas of Colombia, describes educational challenges and provides literacy statistics.

Reel, Monte. "A Four-Legged Drive to Help Rural Leaders." *The Washington Post*, September 5, 2005.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/04/AR2005090401379.html>

This article on Luis Soriano and Biblioburro explains how and why he started the program and the benefits he hopes it will bring to Colombia.

Romero, Simon. "Acclaimed Colombian Institution Has 4,800 Books and 10 Legs." *The New York Times*, October 19, 2008.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/20/world/americas/20burro.html>

This story provides biographical information on Luis Soriano and describes what he hopes to accomplish with the Biblioburro project and how it has grown.

STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects

(http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf)

SL, 9-10, 11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on [grade-appropriate] topics, text and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

WHST. 9-10, 11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

WHST. 9-10, 11-12.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem;

narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

WHST. 9-10, 11-12.9 Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research.

Content Knowledge: (<http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>) a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning).

Arts and Communication, Standard 4: Understands ways in which the human experience is transmitted and reflected in the arts and communication.

Behavioral Studies, Standard 1: Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity and behavior.

Civics, Standard 10: Understands the role of voluntarism and organized groups in American social and political life.

Geography, Standard 10: Understands the nature and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics.

Language Arts, Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

Language Arts, Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing.

Language Arts, Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

World History: Standard 44: Understands the search for community, stability and peace in an interdependent world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cari Ladd, M.Ed., is an educational writer with a background in secondary education and media development. Previously, she served as PBS Interactive's Director of Education, overseeing the development of curricular resources tied to PBS programs, the PBS TeacherSource website (now PBS Teachers) and online teacher professional development services. She has also taught in Maryland and Northern Virginia.