



**National
Peace Corps
Association**

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I AM SOMETHING: A shea butter conundrum unlocks a story of Peace Corps success

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Introduction

Four times a year for a number of years now the editor of WorldView magazine has emailed me the articles that will appear in the next issue. I read them and consider which one could be the basis of an interesting lesson plan. Probably because I had just attended a reunion of graduates from the high school where I taught in Liberia almost 50 years ago and met a former student who remembered and had used in his own teaching the local history booklet I assigned his 7th grade class to research and produce, the article that grabbed my mind and heart this time is “I am Something.”

The author, a currently serving volunteer in Ghana, tells about a woman she met who describes two 1960s Peace Corps teachers from who told her she could be something. This is a story not only about Peace Corps success in particular but teacher success in general. It is an apt and uplifting reminder about the importance of teachers as a new school year begins.

The shea butter conundrum is a story within the story that also has a more general application beyond work in so-called developing nations, raising the question: what is the role of machines, technology as opposed to the role of human beings in modern economic production? And one of my favorite Ghanaian proverbs comes to mind: “It is the human being that counts. I call cloth, it does not answer. I call gold, it does not answer. It is the human being that counts.”

My ideas for using the article may not fit into your curriculum – and you will have others -- but do read the story.

Materials:

Article in the Fall 2010 *WorldView* magazine:

- “I Am Something” by Maria Karlya

Teaching Ideas:

- Could an English class read this article and then interview adults and ask them about favorite and appreciated teachers? Maybe the result could be a video production? Could individual students write about teachers the students had in earlier grades who were influential? Maybe these could be written as actual letters to the teachers.
- Ask students to express in their own words the moral of each story and share and refine those. Then ask students to write their own story based on one.
- Could a social studies class focus on the shea butter conundrum and consider the roles of machines and technology and people in 21st century societies? Do they have to be in opposition? Can we have high tech and high touch? A couple ideas for research by students: use of cell phones in African countries, use of robots in Japan, social networking via technology in the U.S. Since the technology is now available perhaps the class could come up with questions to discuss with a class in another country or another part of our country.
- Ask students to research development strategies and to find successful projects to highlight. Remember one moral of the shea butter conundrum: ask the people involved. Look at NGO websites such as Oxfam, Heifer Project. Consider then involving students in a Peace Corps Partnership Project.