



# Girls' Lives Around the Globe

By Pamela Wasserman



Two girls in their classroom in a village near Jodhpur, India. Both were married as young children but are striving to remain in school before their *gauna*, or date of effective marriage. Photo: Rose Reis, Courtesy of Photoshare

## Teaching Our Teens About Child Marriage

An awareness of gender inequalities is key to understanding the fertility and economic trends that shape life in the least developed parts of the globe. Our PopEd Program has several teaching activities that examine the status and well-being of girls around the world. These are designed for use in middle and high school social studies classes that focus on world cultures, human geography, and contemporary global issues.

For a new activity module, “A Girl’s Life,” part of our new *World of 7 Billion* curriculum, we used available online photo essays and videos of girls around the world telling their own stories on four aspects of their lives: school, work, early marriage, and pregnancy and motherhood. As illustrated in this issue’s articles, child marriage has devastating consequences for girls’ futures. It typically means the end of their formal education, early fertility, poor health, abuse at the hands of older spouses and family members, and a shortened life. In deciding how to present these sobering issues to young people, we looked for multimedia resources that would personalize child marriage, but also present hopeful signs that girls’ advocates are making strides to eliminate the practice.

As part of the activity, students watch the online video, “Child Brides: Stolen Lives” produced for *NOW on PBS*. This hour-long documentary examines the lives of girls in India, Niger, and Guatemala, taking a close look at cultural issues that define marriage, pregnancy, and girls’ education in their local areas. The program also highlights how committed individuals and organizations in these countries have been working to empower girls and give them greater freedom to make their own choices about their futures.

The worksheet that we developed to accompany students’ viewing of the video includes questions to gauge their comprehension and analysis of what they heard and saw, as well as opportunities to express how they felt about the girls’ stories. Students are asked to examine why child marriage persists as part of some cultural traditions, how this practice impedes a country’s development, and how it can be viewed from the perspective of human rights.

Students are also encouraged to extend their learning about child brides and other issues affecting girls around the world through contemporary literature, such as *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini and nonfiction works, such as *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression*

*Into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn.

Recommended essay topics on gender roles are also part of the lesson plan:

- Why do you think the “traditional” role for women in many parts of the world has been subservient to men? If women do “hold up half the sky,” why are they often not afforded equal respect in many cultures?
- Are women’s roles in our country different today than when your mother was your age? How about when your grandmother was your age? Talk with women of different generations in your family or community to find examples to support your assertion. Are there changes you would like to see in gender roles as you enter adulthood?
- How does greater equality between the sexes contribute to a society’s progress?

See the full lesson plan, “A Girl’s Life,” at [www.Worldof7Billion.org](http://www.Worldof7Billion.org). The poster, *A Quick Trip to 7 Billion*—described on the next page—can be purchased on the same website, while supplies last.

## Teachers Rave About World of 7 Billion Resources

Thanks to the hard work of our PopEd staff, many more teachers are using Population Connection curricula in their classrooms this school year. In the October 2011 issue of *The Reporter*, we included our new two-sided wall chart, *A Quick Trip to 7 Billion*. Over 50,000 of these colorful, data-rich posters were distributed directly to social studies and environmental studies educators around the country over the past few months, and we continue to fill requests for more.

“Such a wonderful resource that I can use in hundreds of different ways with different lessons.”

—Brian Ade, Chicago, Illinois

“They’re great. I’d really like one sent here. Get it translated into Tamil. What do you think? We work creating awareness of climate change issues in teacher training colleges.”

—Apeetha Arunagiri, India

“Thank you for the poster. It came at the perfect time. My students are doing a similar timeline as a project this week.”

—Marie Lamkin, Arlington, Texas

“Thank you for your materials. They are well thought out and very enlightening.”

—Sandra Halpin, New Hartford, New York

“Beautiful piece—fantastic publication, I was very impressed.”

—George Ek, Arvada, Colorado

During the fall, over 24,000 visitors from around the country and the world (over 4,000 of those on the Day of 7 Billion—October 31<sup>st</sup>) visited our website. Looking at a geographic breakdown of visitors, we found that more teachers from Texas visited the website than any other state, followed by California, New York, Minnesota, and Michigan.

We distributed hundreds of posters at our exhibit booth at the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Convention in Washington, DC in early December and spoke with many enthusiastic teachers who had received them through our mailing or as part of the October issue of *Social Education*, the magazine of NCSS.

**W**ith a grant through the Minneapolis Community Foundation, we were able to send surveys to those teachers in Minnesota who had received the poster. Their feedback was overwhelmingly positive and 90 percent of the respondents offered specific ideas on how they intend to use the wall chart in their classrooms. Nearly a third of those surveyed had already visited [www.Worldof7Billion.org](http://www.Worldof7Billion.org) to find teaching activities to accompany the wall chart.

“Awesome website. The current Pop Clock was a nice touch.”

“The activities inspired me to create a women’s issues course.”

“I’m using many of [the activities]. Love the website!”

“Have used ‘Day in the Life of School Girls’—excellent, and several others upcoming. Especially like how resources add detail.”

“I have already used ‘7 Billion: Where Do You Stand?’ and ‘Food for Thought’ and enjoyed both.”

“Each one inspires new thoughts about ways to present the population info we currently use.”