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Editor’s Corner

Is your spring blooming with new ideas for the classroom? If not, let Notebook give you the boost you need.

There’s a lot of focus right now on debates—this is an election year, after all. Use our article “Agree or Disagree? Using Class Debates Effectively” to motivate students with classroom debates. We present several ways you can set up debates and use them as a learning tool in both adult ESOL and pre-high school equivalency exam classes. You’ll be able to help students make valid, thoughtful points in their debates.

Workplace language skills, whether to find or keep a job, can be challenging for adult students. The new series from New Readers Press, Building a Strong Vocabulary, includes a book that’s focused on work readiness. In our article “Practice Job Seeking and Build a Strong Vocabulary,” we share an excerpt from a chapter on job searching that you can use with your students.

Most adult education classes incorporate writing practice. Students may be accustomed to writing a couple of sentences, but they may not write enough to pass high school equivalency exams. Our story “Organizing Their Thoughts: Essay Prep for High School Equivalency Tests” shares an approach for helping students to expand on ideas.

Exploring Resources is always full of interesting internet-based information to help strengthen your teaching. This issue, we let you know about two new book series from New Readers Press, a website where students create comic strips to help them learn English, apps related to geography, and information on ProLiteracy’s 2017 conference.

Finally, our Tutor Profile is about Elida Gomez, a Florida-based tutor who rallied many in her community to come to English class and, in turn, helped expand the area’s literacy program. Gomez was a finalist last year for the ProLiteracy Ruth J. Colvin and Frank C. Laubach Award for Excellence in Community-Based Adult Literacy.

Enjoy the issue and, as always, stay in touch with your story ideas. You can email the Notebook editor at notebookeditor@proliteracy.org.

The Editor
Purpose
To present a way for adult ESOL or pre-high school equivalency (HSE) classes to use debates to enhance learning.

Rationale
In this presidential election year, it seems that every time you turn on the TV, there's another presidential debate. But have you ever thought about the value of debates for your students? Debates in the adult classroom can have several purposes, depending on your class focus. They can:

- provide practice on subjects covered in class
- enhance comprehension of a complex topic
- prepare academically-focused students for post-secondary education settings
- give students practice in public speaking
- help students strengthen their arguments for or against certain topics
- foster critical thinking skills

In this article, we present one way that your class could engage in a debate. Also, at the end of the article, we suggest a few other debate formats depending on your class level or desire for variety. Although we've chosen one sample idea for debate in the article—whether classrooms should use electronic tablets only or stick with textbooks—there are plenty more topics from which to choose. See our sidebar on this page for more debate ideas.

The Basic Activity
1. **Get students thinking about the topic.** Ask them to consider the textbooks they use in class. Do they use one textbook? Different textbooks? Do they have to carry their books home, or do they use them only in class? Then ask them to think about other school-related circumstances, such as situations they hear about from their children or even remember from their own schooling when younger. Did they have to carry a lot of books? Why or why not?

   Next, ask the class if they use electronic tablets, such as an iPad or Amazon Kindle. Do they use them at home? At work? Do they know friends who have the tablets?

   Ask the question: Should tablets replace textbooks in schools?

More Information
One resource that can be a tremendous help for class debates is the website ProCon.org. Called “the leading source for pros and cons of controversial issues,” the site provides a compendium of information about topics commonly used in debates. The readings may get too long or complex for some students. However, you can use excerpts on a given topic versus requiring students to read in detail.

The area on the site called Teachers’ Corner includes lesson plans correlated with the Common Core and information on how instructors use ProCon.org. Here are some of the links you may find most useful on ProCon.org:

**Topics A-Z**
A full list of topics with available information on ProCon.org.

**Critical Thinking Video Series**
This video (about 3 minutes long) talks about what critical thinking is and why it’s important. It may be too hard for ESOL learners, but it can be helpful for instructors or native English speakers.

Here are some more topics featured on ProCon.org:
- Social media: Good or bad?
- Climate change
- Milk: Is it healthy?
- Video games and violence
- Illegal immigration
- Presidential election
- Drinking age
2. **Have ready a copy of the readings on this topic from the website ProCon.org.** Go to: http://tablets-textbooks.procon.org/#background (We have more information about ProCon.org on the page 3 sidebar.)

Students should read the first three paragraphs that come up on “Should tablets replace textbooks in K–12 schools?” They should also read the facts that appear under “Did you know?” located at the top of the page. This section presents five facts that relate to the pro or con of this topic.

Work through the reading as you usually might with the class. Make sure students understand new words. Let students know they will debate the topic as a class.

3. **Divide learners into two groups.** One group will support the use of tablets, and the other will support the use of textbooks. If learners have a strong feeling to be on one team or the other, you can give them that choice, so long as the teams are approximately equal in size.

4. **Have learners work with their team to state four reasons to support their opinion.** All group members should take notes about the four reasons they will use. Each group should choose one or two people to present their four reasons to the class.

The ProCon website referred to in step 2 lists about 15 reasons each on both the pro and con sides, but review it first to decide if it would be too much reading for your class. If it’s too much, students can stick to using their own ideas. The site also has related videos and an extended reading on the topic.

5. **When ready, ask each team to share their reasons.** Remind other learners in the class to listen carefully to the ideas. Give each team a specific amount of time to present their ideas.

6. **Once both teams have stated their reasons, ask if anyone now has a different opinion.** Give teams feedback on their reasons (for example, which reasons were well supported and had clear ideas).

### Extension Activities

Here are some ways you can modify classroom debates to make them easier or harder:

- **A.** For students looking for more of a challenge, have each group respond to the arguments presented by the opposing group. Continue until the debate has a designated winner.

- **B.** For students who may be at a lower proficiency level, you could use the four corners approach. Although not a formal debate, this encourages students to reflect on their opinion to something by standing in a corner of the classroom based on their opinion (e.g., strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree). For a full explanation of four corners, see the link on this page’s sidebar.

- **C.** If you like the debate topic featured here but think the reading may be too difficult, focus on just one of the readings we mentioned—such as the Did you know? section in step 2. Then students can use their own ideas on the topic to further their arguments.
Practice Job Seeking and Build a Strong Vocabulary

Purpose

To practice skills related to finding a job with advanced ESOL or adult workplace students using targeted reading and vocabulary practice.

Rationale

Research in second-language acquisition shows that students need multiple contextualized exposures to a new word before they actually remember a word and use it.

One real-life situation where students will apply what they are learning in class is in the workplace. A new book series from New Readers Press called Building a Strong Vocabulary focuses on contextualized vocabulary learning. Each unit in the Work Readiness book introduces a dozen words through a reading passage and includes comprehension questions, writing activities, and practice with grammatical items such as prefixes/suffixes and parts of speech, all related to the vocabulary terms. Each unit culminates in a review of the new words so students can test their knowledge.

On pages 6 to 8, we share an excerpt from the book on the skills our students need to find a job. The pages are best suited for an advanced ESOL class or a workplace skills class for adult basic education students. Below are suggested ways to use the excerpted pages in class. You are welcome to photocopy these pages for your students.

The Basic Activity

1. **These pages would ideally be used during a class focused on finding jobs or improving workplace skills.** Ask students if they have searched for a job in the U.S. or their home country. Was it a hard or easy process? Why? Where did they look for a job? Let them know they will read a passage about searching for a job and practice vocabulary related to a job search.

2. **Provide a copy of the excerpt for each student.** Call students’ attention to the vocabulary words on page 7 of this issue of Notebook. Practice the pronunciation of each word in advance with the class.

3. **Give students time to silently read the passage Finding a Job on page 7 of this issue.** Then continue the reading practice as you normally might (e.g., reading together as a class or reading with a partner). Practice the reading until you think students understand it sufficiently.

More Information

The Building a Strong Vocabulary series includes three books. The series includes Building a Strong Vocabulary for: Work Readiness; Life Skills; and Academic Preparation.

Building a Strong Vocabulary for Academic Preparation focuses on strategies to understand vocabulary that students will encounter on social studies and science tests. Both the academic prep and the workplace readiness books are written at reading levels 6–8. The life skills book is geared toward reading levels 3–5.

Building a Strong Vocabulary for Life Skills covers basic tasks of daily adult life such as communicating with others, finding a place to live, transportation, banking, finding a job, health care, and protecting personal information online.

Each book is 112 pages, and there are 12 eight-page units. Each unit includes practice with vocabulary in context, word parts, parts of speech, and multiple meaning words.

For more information on Building a Strong Vocabulary, go to www.newreaderspress.com/building-a-strong-vocabulary
4. Have students work in pairs to complete the Vocabulary Focus exercise on page 8 of this issue, which allows them to match the new vocabulary words with the correct definitions.

**Answers are as follows for Vocabulary Focus, page 8:**
1. job fair
2. training
3. keyword
4. network
5. benefits
6. hire
7. employment
8. salary
9. temporary
10. apply
11. skills
12. employer

5. Ask each student pair to complete the Use the Vocabulary exercise on page 8 to write sentences with three of the words. Encourage students to share their sentences with the class when finished.

6. Have students work alone initially to write their answers to Work With New Vocabulary in the excerpt below. Make sure they understand the comprehension questions. When finished, they can compare their answers with a partner and/or discuss them as a class.

1. Describe your **skills**.

2. Describe a good **employer** and a bad **employer**.

3. Would you rather have a **temporary** job or a full-time job? Explain your choice.

4. How can **networking** help a person who is looking for a job?

5. If you went to a **job fair**, how would you dress and act? Explain why.

6. How can **training** help someone get a job?

7. Paid holidays, health insurance, and sick days are some examples of **benefits**. Which benefit is most important to you? Why?

8. Who should make a larger **salary**, the U.S. president or a star basketball player? Why?

9. If you were looking for a new job, what **keywords** would you use for an online job search?

10. If you had to **hire** workers, what would you look for?
Looking for a job can be stressful. To be successful in a job search, understand different kinds of jobs and how to find them.

You will need to spend time and energy to find a job. That is why you should treat a job search like full-time work. Before you look for a job, think about your skills and the different kinds of work you can do.

**Types of Work**

There are different types of employment. Many full-time jobs have a 40-hour workweek. Full-time jobs often come with benefits such as health insurance and paid vacation. Some full-time workers earn an annual salary, while others are paid by the hour.

Part-time jobs vary from a few hours to 30 or more hours a week. Most part-time jobs pay workers hourly and do not provide benefits. A temporary job lasts for a set period of time, such as the summer months or the holiday season.

**Looking for a Job**

How do you find job openings? Start by networking, or talking to friends, family, neighbors, and people you worked for in the past. They may know of open positions. You should also visit the nearest workforce center. In most states, these state offices have lists of jobs. They also offer free help to job hunters, such as job training, resume reviews, and interview tips. Job fairs are another place to learn of jobs. These events provide a place for employers and job hunters to meet.

You can also search for a job on the Internet. Employment websites list many kinds of jobs. On these sites, you enter keywords about the kind of position you are looking for, such as “sales” or “restaurant.” The site will show available job listings. Some company websites list their open positions. You may even be able to apply online.

No matter how you look for a job, it is important to talk to the people who hire. Don’t give up if you don’t find a job right away. Finding a job can take a lot of work, but the effort is worth it.

**What other words about finding a job do you know? Write them here.**
1. Vocabulary Focus
Write each word from the list beside its definition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>apply</th>
<th>benefits network</th>
<th>employer</th>
<th>employment skills</th>
<th>hire temporary</th>
<th>job fair training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. an event where companies can meet with people looking for jobs
2. the process of learning skills you need for a job
3. a word that you use to search for information on a computer
4. to connect and talk with other people about work or finding jobs
5. extra things you get from your employer on top of your pay, such as insurance or paid time off
6. to employ or give a job to someone
7. work that is done for money
8. money that a worker gets paid for doing a job
9. lasting for a limited or short period of time
10. to ask in writing for a job
11. the things you know how to do well
12. a person or company that pays people to work

2. Use the Vocabulary
Write about some of the things you can do to find a job. Use at least three words from the vocabulary list. Circle the words you use.

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

FINDING A JOB

Organizing Their Thoughts: Essay Prep for High School Equivalency Tests

Purpose
To encourage students preparing for high school equivalency exams (HSE) to organize their ideas and write longer and more developed extended responses.

Rationale
With a few exceptions, encouraging students to write essays can be challenging. Their tendency is to answer a question directly without expanding on their thoughts. Today’s focus on texting and shorter answers in a social context does not help students develop the skill of effective long-form writing. The challenge of writing longer is especially evident with an academic or analytical writing prompt versus a more fun or fiction-based writing task.

This article gives students preparing for HSE exams a way to gather their thoughts on a topic, organize their ideas, and then develop these ideas for longer writing on extended responses. Keep in mind that the GED® exam now only requires one extended response on the Reading Language Arts portion; however, the answer must be 300 to 500 words and a minimum of four to seven paragraphs. The HiSET® and TASC tests also require an essay, although there is no specific length requirement.

The lesson shared here is modified with permission from TV411.org.

The Basic Activity

1. **Before class, ensure that you will have internet access to show a 3-minute video.** If your class does not normally have internet access, is there somewhere you can go to use it temporarily? Although the video is not mandatory to complete this lesson, it’s a fun way to introduce the topic.

   The video, called *How to Outline a GED Essay*, is available at www.tv411.org/writing/writing-work-ged/video-outline-ged-essay. It shows Laverne, a likable coworker at a big box retail store, helping a coworker organize her ideas for a GED exam essay.

2. **In class, before showing the video, discuss how hard or easy it is for students to organize their ideas for writing.** Do they create an outline? Do they talk about their ideas with fellow students? Do they just start writing without any planning? Talk about what might be the most feasible when taking an exam.

continued on page 10
3. **Show students the video.** Talk about it briefly. Ask students to recall from the video the three steps to outline a GED essay. *Answer:* Step 1: State your position and why. Step 2: Write a paragraph for each reason. Step 3: Sum up your argument. (Note: If your students are taking a test other than the GED, make sure they know that the information is still applicable.)

4. **Let students know they will practice writing an essay using the steps that were shown in the video.** The essay topic will be “Is war a solution to world problems?” Put this question on the board or other class area. Have students brainstorm some ideas, both with a partner and on their own paper, to state their position on this question. Have them review their ideas and pick three of the most solid ideas to use in their essay.

5. **Provide students with a copy of the handout on page 11, called “Outline for GED Essay.”** Review the outline as a class. Point out that the handout suggests different word choices students can use to transition between their ideas. You can also point out that the outline page focuses on someone who is against the idea of war as a solution for the world’s problems. However, students will use their own ideas and state their own positions.

6. **Give students time to write their essay.** For practice similar to an exam setting, give students a time limit (e.g., 30 or 45 minutes). Encourage students to save five minutes toward the end to proofread what they wrote. In the document “Extended Response Quick Tips,” the GED Testing Service advises students to check for or to do the following:
   - vary sentence structures
   - coordinate the parts of sentences
   - avoid wordiness and awkwardness
   - use transitional words to make ideas logical and clear
   - avoid run-on sentences and sentence fragments
   - use the right homophones to ensure the correct meaning (e.g., *to, too, or two*).
   - make subjects agree with verbs
   - use the correct form of a pronoun
   - place words in the correct order
   - capitalize appropriately
   - use apostrophes to make nouns possessive
   - use punctuation correctly

Remind students that better grammar and word usage can make a difference in how their essay is scored.

7. **Decide if you will review essays individually or as a class/pair activity.**

8. **As an alternate activity to writing an essay using their own opinion, you can extend TV411’s lesson and have students write an essay specifically in support of the idea of war to solve the world’s problems.** Go to www.tv411.org/sites/default/files/Writing03_Essay.pdf, and provide students with a copy of page 3. Page 4 also provides some helpful background on essay writing.
INTRODUCTION - PARAGRAPH ONE OF ESSAY
Take your position from Step 1 and write it in a sentence. This sentence will be the first sentence of your introduction. Begin your sentence with I believe... I believe war is not a solution to world problems.

SUPPORTING PARAGRAPH - PARAGRAPH TWO OF ESSAY
Turn your 1st reason from Step 3 into a topic sentence for your 1st supporting paragraph. Begin this sentence with First,... First, war splits up families and creates more problems at home for the children and spouses who are left behind.

SUPPORTING PARAGRAPH - PARAGRAPH THREE OF ESSAY
Turn your 2nd reason into a topic sentence for your 2nd supporting paragraph. Begin this sentence with In addition,... In addition, innocent civilians are killed in wartime.

SUPPORTING PARAGRAPH - PARAGRAPH FOUR OF ESSAY
Turn your 3rd reason into a topic sentence for your 3rd supporting paragraph. Begin this sentence with Finally,... Finally, peaceful solutions can be found for the world’s problems if we take the time to listen to one another.

CONCLUSION - PARAGRAPH FIVE OF ESSAY
Restate your position, changing the words a little. Begin this sentence with In conclusion,... In conclusion, fighting wars is not the answer to the problems that exist in the world.
As Easy as a Song: 15 Ways to Use Music in Your ESOL Instruction

Purpose
To discover several ways that ESOL classes can incorporate music into the classroom.

Rationale
Since the love for music is universal, why not incorporate it more into the ESOL classroom? There are some challenges to using music in an adult class—for example, finding songs that are clear enough for students to understand relatively easily, and finding lyrics that are classroom-appropriate. However, don’t let these challenges deter you. Music can motivate students to want to learn more. For many ESOL students, some of their first exposure to English in their native country was likely through music.

The Basic Activity
1. **Before class, as students filter in, play different types of music in English.** Play a different genre each day, ranging from rock to country to R&B. Ask students which kind of music they like best. Keep a tally. Although this doesn’t teach English specifically, it exposes the class to a wider range of music genres and language.

2. **Play songs according to the type of lesson you’re doing.** The song “9 to 5” by Dolly Parton is great for intermediate learners working on a work unit, says Ellen Clore-Patron, of Arlington Education and Employment Program in Arlington, Va. The song “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes” can be used during a study of body parts. In a citizenship/civics class, students can learn the “Star Spangled Banner.”

   Our sidebar on this page gives some places to find song lyrics and music.

3. **Teach students song lyrics and then use a cloze activity with blank lines for missing words.** Students can listen to the song and write in the blank words. This could be done before they formally learn the words (more appropriate for a higher-level class) or after you’ve practiced the lyrics several times.

4. **Using a handout with lyrics, have students identify the parts of speech for words to a particular song.**

5. **Teach a song that uses certain slang or idioms.** Examples include “I Heard It Through the Grapevine,” by Marvin Gaye, or “True Colors,” by Phil Collins or Cyndi Lauper.

More Information
Here are several places where you can find music or song lyrics.

**YouTube**
www.youtube.com
You can often find both songs of interest and lyrics on YouTube. Just put in the name of the song and the word lyrics in your search engine.

**iTunes**
www.apple.com/itunes/

**EFL Club Songs**
http://eflclub.com/2songs/songs.html
This website from EFL Club features lyrics and music for several famous songs by The Beatles, The Monkees, and Louie Armstrong. The site also features several ready-made cloze exercises for these songs.

**Metrolyrics**
www.metrolyrics.com/
This is an example of just one of many websites that have song lyrics. You can search “music lyrics” online and find other sites; some may have many ads.

**The Best Music Websites for Learning English**
http://larryferlazzo.edublogs.org/2008/01/30/the-best-music-websites-for-learning-english/
This site from teacher Larry Ferlazzo has links to a variety of potentially helpful sites. Since the article is from 2008, make sure to double check that a link you are interested in still works.
6. Use music to teach about particular holidays, such as Christmas.

7. Use songs to practice particular pronunciation points (for example, the r sound, b or v, i versus e).

8. Have a lip sync contest. This idea from EnglishClub.com (see link in the sidebar on page 12) could be an animated way to get students familiar with song lyrics. Could a karaoke competition be next?

9. Have students vote for a song they want to learn. Many students will be familiar with music from artists like The Beatles or John Lennon. The class could select a certain song it wants to learn and you could provide the lyrics, go over the song, and use some of the activities listed here for additional practice.

10. Engage in a class discussion about what song lyrics mean. Do the lyrics say anything in particular about the artist who wrote them or the time period during which they were written?

11. Have students write alternate lyrics to a song. Could they modify certain verses of a song they’ve learned? To spark creativity, students could work in pairs or small groups to complete this.

12. Cut song lyrics into lines, and have students put them in the correct order. (This would be done after they’ve learned the lyrics.)

13. Ask each student to play a favorite song for the class and talk about why they like it. For this activity, you may want to allow them to play a song that is not necessarily in English.

14. Have students listen to a song and tap the syllables to the words with their fingers or by clapping.

15. Play a song and have students write what comes to their mind when they hear the song. They may write word associations (e.g., happy, party, fun) or other ideas. Once the song is over, students can share what they wrote.
**COMING SOON! 2017 ProLiteracy Conference on Adult Literacy**

www.proliteracy.org

The ProLiteracy Conference on Adult Literacy focuses on adult literacy and basic education issues that help attendees discover new tools and strategies, implement dynamic programming, enhance leadership skills, and engage with a diverse group of peers from organizations of all types and sizes. Stay tuned for details on the next conference, coming in October 2017!

**New Readers Press Resources Help Prep for High School Equivalency Exams**

www.newreaderspress.com/hiset-test-preparation-series

www.newreaderspress.com/core-skills-series

Help students taking the HiSET test prepare with a new book series from New Readers Press. The series includes *Language Arts for the HiSET Test*, *Science for the HiSET Test*, *Social Studies for the HiSET Test*, and *Mathematics for the HiSET Test*. Each 192-page book provides valuable information and testing tips to prepare students for the exam.

For students who are at the pre-high school equivalency (HSE) level, the *Core Skills* series (see second link) provides basic content and foundational skills to advance students to HSE work.

**Everyone On: Helping Everyone Connect to the Internet**

www.everyoneon.org/proliteracy

Are your students looking for more affordable ways to access the Internet? ProLiteracy’s partnership with the organization Everyone On can help. On the website for Everyone On, students need only put in their zip code, and they’ll find out about low-cost internet and computer purchasing options in their area. The site also shares places to get internet training (for example, at local libraries). If the site asks for a partner code, it’s “proliteracy.”

**Innovative New York State Program Helps Students Learn English by Calls, Texts**

http://tinyurl.com/jmsbm34

A program underway in New York state, offered by the Office for New Americans, allows students to learn English through phone calls and texts on their own time. The article at the link above explains how the program works and how some students are benefiting from it. Perhaps it will give your state or your program some ideas for the future.

**Low-Cost Dental Health**

www.dentistryfromtheheart.org

http://dentistryfromtheheart.org/blog/events

http://dentallifeline.org/

http://dentallifeline.org/our-state-programs

Help students find low-cost dental health options with the information above on Dentistry from the Heart, which organizes volunteer dentists and hygienists to provide free care, and Dental Lifeline Network, which provides services to medically at-risk patients. The second link from Dentistry from the Heart details upcoming events. At the second Dental Lifeline link, students can learn about care programs in their state and if they qualify.
Share the Latest Numbers on Social Media with Your Students, Colleagues

http://tinyurl.com/hb9ksbd

Did you know that nearly two thirds of American adults use social networking now? That’s according to the survey “Social Media Usage: 2005–2015” from the Pew Research Center. The survey reveals how the use of social media is changing. For instance, although young adults are avid social media users, adults 65 and older have tripled their use of social media since 2010. Check out the survey for more interesting factoids that can provide good general background or that may be useful to share with your classroom.

News for You 2016 Voting Guide


Presidential election years are a good time to help adult students better understand our civics process, but much of the information can be confusing. For a guide that’s geared toward adult education students, check out News for You’s Voting Guide, updated for the 2016 election. The guide includes helpful articles on who votes, political parties, how a president is chosen, and how to register to vote.

MakeBeliefsComix.com Resources for ESOL Teachers

www.makebeliefscomix.com/ESOL/

Short comic strips can be an easy and fun way to read or write in another language. The website MakeBeliefsComix.com has used this approach for several years, and it now has a special teacher resource section to help students learning English or strengthening their literacy skills. The site includes fill-in comic strips for students to complete, printables to encourage writing, and comic strip starters.

Boost Geography Knowledge With Free or Inexpensive Apps

Find apps at itunes.apple.com or play.google.com

If geography is part of your lessons, then you’ll want to know about some free or low-cost apps to give students extra practice. In Guess the Place (free on iOS), users see a photo from a particular city or country. You then spell what you think the correct answer is. There’s a similar game on Android called 4 Pics 1 City, but it shows four pictures from one city and you guess which city it is. National Geographic World Atlas (only on iOS) provides just what you’d expect from a National Geographic product—a reliable source of information and maps from around the world.
You may have great ESOL or literacy classes, but people may not always know your classes are available if your program is in a rural area.

Literacy Services of Indian River County, in Vero Beach, Fla., wanted to change that. They knew they’d have a great potential student pool in the tiny community of Fellsmere, an area that’s 90 percent Latino. Many of the residents work at the nearby citrus packinghouses. First, the program needed to reach out to the community.

Elinda Gomez, who is now the program’s North Country coordinator, was initially brought in to make contact with Fellsmere residents. She began to attend a variety of local civic-minded meetings to let people know about the program. She wanted to remove barriers that were facing many residents. She found space in Fellsmere for residents to meet with tutors, eliminating the need to commute.

She focuses more efforts on outreach when residents are not working long hours during the citrus season from November to April.

Gomez, originally from Mexico, is bilingual and a longtime Fellsmere resident. This helped boost her ability to communicate with Fellsmere residents. The program started with one student from Fellsmere. Now, not even five years later, it has nearly 100 Fellsmere students, all of whom are matched up with volunteer tutors.

The main reason that Fellsmere residents want to learn English is to help their children in school, Gomez says. They also want to provide a more stable school life for their children than they may have had; some Fellsmere residents had migrant parents who moved the family from state to state for seasonal agriculture work. Other reasons for learning English include wanting to find a better job or pass the GED® exam.

Students have been successful meeting some of those goals. Some have become U.S. citizens; others have gotten a driver’s license or have become homeowners. And their enthusiasm for learning is evident—one of the first Fellsmere students that Gomez met still sees her tutor regularly and uses Skype to continue classes when the tutor goes back north for a couple of months.

Gomez’s dedication to the job has helped the program gain more community respect, says executive director Mary Silva. The program’s financial resources have almost doubled, and the program secured its own tutor training center recently. “These are things that never would have happened without the success in Fellsmere due to Elida’s efforts,” Silva says.

Gomez reminds tutors that the positive work they are doing has a domino effect on others. “If you’re helping one adult to learn English, you’re helping the whole family,” she says.