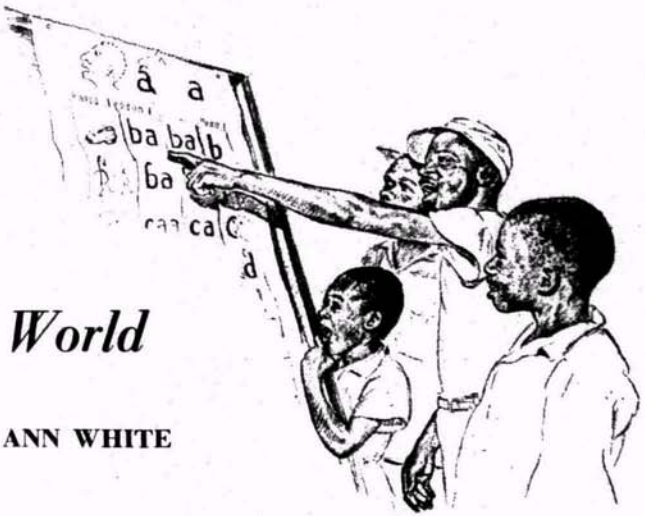
Gifts for a Better World



RUTH ANN WHITE

The UNESCO Gift Coupon Plan described in this article represents an extensive effort to meet educational needs in other lands and to extend and improve human relations throughout the world.

DEVELOPING better human relations among all the peoples of the world is the urgent need of our time. Since technology has eliminated distance and removed the barriers of space, the world has shrunk to such an extent that all of its peoples are neighbors and must understand and appreciate each other if there is to be peace. No longer do we live isolated and apart. We believe that all people are more alike than they are different. We are faced, however, with the problem of really becoming good neighbors to all of those who may differ from us in color, race, culture and mode of living. We find ourselves in a small world which requires broad understanding.

We in America are shocked that one-half of mankind is still illiterate. Illiteracy and ignorance, along with hunger, disease and poverty, have kept most of the world impoverished, sick and a prey for communism and demagoguery.

In 1945 in London after the United Nations Charter had been written, giving education its rightful recognition as an important instrument for bringing about world peace, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was formed to serve as the agency for education. "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed" (written in the preamble to the charter), states its philosophy.

One great barrier to freedom and peace is illiteracy, and UNESCO's prime objective is to eliminate illiteracy. So much progress has already been made since 1945 in attaining its goal that UNESCO is commonly called the "educational arm" of the United Nations. The fact that sixty-eight nations are now members of UNESCO is one evidence of the hope and confidence that the free world has in this agency.

Of the seven departments into which the work of UNESCO is divided, the largest and most important is the one concerned directly with education. This is well because people must first be able to communicate with one another if they are to understand and appreciate one another. Envy and selfishness and other unwholesome attitudes tend to disappear or at least to be lessened when there is common ground for understanding. Secondly, education brings a higher standard of living.

In its program of education UNESCO is promoting compulsory education and fundamental education. It encourages not only the teaching of the "three R's" and other academic subjects but also training in the fundamentals of living in order to help people raise their living standards. It helps them improve sanitation, combat disease, modernize farming methods, develop natural resources and improve generally other areas fundamental to living. Upon a nation's request, UNESCO attempts to help its people help themselves.

There are obstacles that are hampering rapid progress. One of the greatest is the lack of supplies and of tools for learning. Many schools which were completely destroyed during the war are now being replaced. The desire for learning is so great that many new schools are being built. All of these need equipment.

A Plan Is Adopted

In order to help meet this handicap, the UNESCO Gift Coupon Plan was launched in 1950 in the United States. It has proved so successful that the United Kingdom, France, Australia, the Netherlands and the German Federal Republic have also adopted it. During this year other countries are expected to join in its promotion.

The UNESCO Gift Coupon Plan helps struggling schools and other institutions of learning in underdeveloped and war-damaged countries. It also provides a very satisfactory avenue through which organizations and groups can carry out programs of international friendship. Previously, organizations had experienced some difficulty in learning details about worth-while assistance projects. Buying, packing and shipping supplies often presented troublesome, complicated problems. Fund raising for sending gifts abroad had become increasingly difficult.

The UNESCO Gift Coupon Plan eliminates transportation and currency problems. It enables groups to send coupons abroad to institutions of learning whose needs have been thoroughly investigated and certified. The donors send the coupons directly to the recipients, who may buy their equipment directly from a recognized supplier in their own country.

The plan has now reached the point at which the business of redeeming gift coupons and book coupons amounts to approximately $85,000 per month. The rate of redemption at the present time is steadily increasing.

The National Education Association and some of its departments were among the first groups in the United States to endorse the UNESCO Gift Cou-

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pon Plan. This was due to the realization that it enables members of the organized teaching profession in this country to aid their fellow workers in other lands. The plan, therefore, helps to unite the teachers of the world. It assists in strengthening the educational opportunities for the children and adults of the world.

The Department of Classroom Teachers of the National Education Association, through its state departments last year completed projects totaling $25,000. This year (1952-53), the state departments have adopted projects totaling at least $55,000. Teachers generally are enthusiastic about the plan. These comments from two different teachers reflect their reaction: "I personally feel that the UNESCO Gift Coupon Plan is a very good one since it allows everyone to participate by contributing a little." "My personal reaction to the coupon plan is that it gives us an opportunity to join other teachers of the nation in making a worth-while contribution to the welfare of others and to aid in a small way the work for world peace."

Grateful letters from the recipients show their appreciation. Here are excerpts from some of the acknowledgments: "Thank you for your gift of $200 representing a donation from your group. This came to us on the 2nd of October, 1952. We of the Committee join with the villagers whom you are assisting in expressing our deep appreciation for your help and interest. It is only with support such as yours that our project can possibly be successful." These words came from a chemistry teacher in Salonika, Greece.

The president of the Philippine Normal College writes, "With profound thanks and appreciation we wish to acknowledge receipt of $350 worth of UNESCO Gift Coupons which have been so generously donated to our institution. Please extend our sincere feeling of gratitude to the contributors of these valuable gifts. We have taken steps to order the many things we need, and I am sure that these articles, whose purchase was made possible through your generosity, will go a long way toward helping us push our education program."

"The presentation of the UNESCO Gift Coupons at Janata College (India) was a real event with inspection of the work and buildings first and then speeches. When you see what the conditions are and the efforts of the leaders to do so much with so little one could only wish that one could help more." This statement was taken from a letter by an American visitor in India.

From Bombay City comes this message, "My committee was greatly thankful to you for your gifts. . . . We feel that friendly relationships can exist between all nations."

Scores of other letters reflect the same sentiments. This is one way in which each person can help with UNESCO's work. It is a means whereby each person can help improve human relations throughout the world.

The projects vary in amount from a few dollars to thousands of dollars. They represent specific aid to schools in Afghanistan, Greece, Ceylon, India, Italy, Japan, Burma, Philippines, and in other lands. The projects assist various kinds of children: the handicapped, the blind and the crippled; those in secondary schools, universities,



elementary schools; those at audio-visual centers, teacher training institutions, adult education and fundamental education centers, and at other centers of learning.

UNESCO Gift Coupons may be used only for educational, scientific and cultural supplies and equipment. They cannot be used for the purchase of food, clothing or similar relief items. Typical projects are those for educational films, sound projectors, textbooks, equipment, material for basket-weaving, sewing machines, yarn, needles, braille paper, maps for teaching geography, charts for teaching science, kitchen utensils, microscopes and similar supplies that schools need.

The following is a project that the classroom teachers in one state have adopted this year. This is the letter sent by the chairman to the members:

"We are again given the opportunity to help the United Nations succeed in building 'peace in the minds of men.' We can do this by supporting the UNESCO Gift Coupon Plan, which is offered only to organized groups.

"This year our project is the promoting of education in a girls' school in Kabul, Afghanistan. In this country the education of girls has been greatly neglected. There are schools for only one girl in 300; whereas there are schools for only one boy in 20.

"Recently some secondary schools have been opened for girls, but they can attend only with their parents' consent.

"UNESCO experts have recommended that a teacher-training section be formed in the Girls' Lycee in Kabul. Eighty girls are enrolled in the special teacher-training classes. They are to replace the Europeans who have until now staffed the few high schools. No other girls can study until these have finished their course, since it is forbidden for girls to have men teachers.

"Our contributions will help open the 'doors which have always been locked for the girls and women of Afghanistan—the doors to lives of their own in the modern world.'

"Gift coupons can be used only for education, scientific and cultural sup-

plies and equipment. Our contributions will be used in buying a sound projector, films, and textbooks for the girls' school in Kabul.

"This is an opportunity of service that the teachers of our state should not miss. If every teacher in the state would buy one twenty-five-cent UNESCO stamp, we could easily reach our goal of $1,440 and help lay bricks and mortar of enduring world peace."

The UNESCO Gift Coupon Plan works only through organized groups. The order of procedure for a group in the United States to follow is for it to write to the UNESCO Gift Coupon Office, United Nations, New York, 17, New York, asking for information concerning available projects. UNESCO will then offer the organization a wide choice of schools in various countries that have serious needs which can be met through this plan.

After looking over the list of specific projects, the organization must decide on its first, second and third choices; and estimate how much money it counts upon raising for its project.

With this information, the UNESCO coupon office in New York will then send the group its project and the UNESCO Gift Stamp booklets. Each booklet of 40 Gift Stamps, when sold, pays for a $10 UNESCO Gift Coupon.

At the completion of the project, the organization sends the money to the New York office made out to "UNESCO Gift Coupon Fund." The office sends the organization the UNESCO Gift Coupons bearing the name of the organization. The organization then sends the Coupons directly to the recipient abroad with printed instructions for using the coupons.

Acknowledgment of the coupons will come directly from the recipient to each group donating ten dollars or more.

The recipients use the coupons as "foreign exchange" to buy the specific items they need from an approved supplier of their choice. The supplier then sends the coupons to UNESCO to be redeemed.

In addition to teachers groups other national organizations have reserved UNESCO Gift Coupon projects this year and are working on these at regional, state or local levels. These groups include the Altrusa International, American Dietetic Association, American Federation of Soroptimist Clubs, the National Grange, Pilot International, and other organizations interested in attaining UNESCO's objectives.

State, regional and local groups use various devices for selling the twenty-five-cent stamps, forty of which are in a booklet. At meetings and conferences, stamps have been sold. At a conference last summer, teachers bought $140 worth of stamps and the conference sent the coupons in its name to a vocational school in India for the purchase of a sewing machine, scissors and tape measures.

Several groups use the slogan "Buy one, sell one." Since the stamps themselves are of no value, the buyers sometimes wear them, pin them on their purses and display them in other ways in order to publicize the campaign at meetings.

The UNESCO office will send complete descriptions and pictures of the schools in other lands whose projects have been adopted. This information can be used in bulletins and magazines to inform the membership.

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