

EDUCATOR GUIDE

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MOUNTAINS BEYOND MOUNTAINS

THE QUEST OF DR. PAUL FARMER,
A MAN WHO WOULD CURE THE WORLD

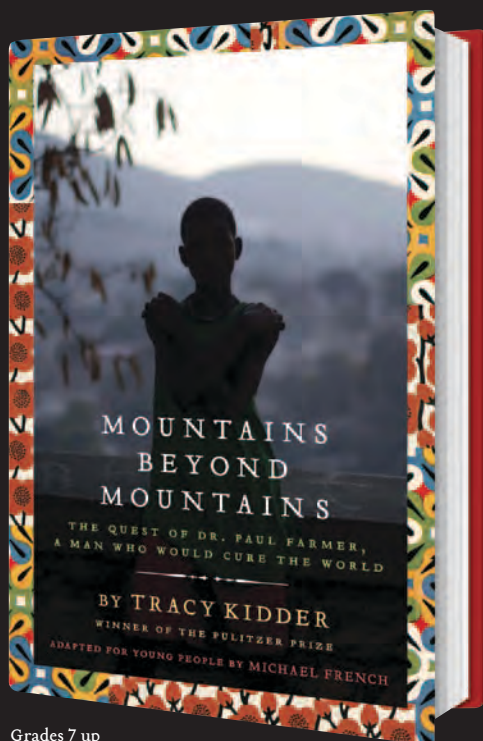
BY TRACY KIDDER

WINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE



ADAPTED FOR YOUNG PEOPLE BY MICHAEL FRENCH

★ “An important story that feels like it breathes a dose of virtuous oxygen right into readers’ heads.”
—*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred



Grades 7 up

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ABOUT THE BOOK

In medical school, Paul Farmer found his life’s calling: to cure infectious diseases and bring the lifesaving tools of modern medicine to those who need them most. Kidder’s magnificent account takes us from Harvard to Haiti, Peru, Cuba, and Russia as Farmer changes minds and practices through his dedication to the philosophy that “the only nation is humanity.” At the heart of this book is the example of a life based on hope and on an understanding of the truth of the Haitian proverb, “Beyond mountains there are mountains”—as you solve one problem, another problem presents itself, and so you go on and try to solve that one too.

Adapted for young people by
Michael French

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

TRACY KIDDER graduated from Harvard University and earned a Master’s degree from the University of Iowa. He has won the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, the Robert F. Kennedy Award, and many other literary prizes. He is the author of *My Detachment*, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, *Home Town*, *Old Friends*, *Among Schoolchildren*, *House*, and *The Soul of a New Machine*. Kidder lives in Massachusetts and Maine.

MICHAEL FRENCH is a graduate of Stanford University and has authored twenty-two books, including biographies, art criticism, and fiction for adults. He has adapted many acclaimed works for young people. French divides his time between Santa Barbara, California, and Santa Fe, New Mexico.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Have students complete an anticipation guide structured in the following manner:

Before Reading	After Reading	Statements
		Providing care and comfort for the sick is a moral imperative.
		Access to quality doctors and medications are the most important factors in ensuring a high level of public health.
		The problems facing societies in the developing world are too great for there to be quality medical care.
		The most important factor in medicine is the relationship between the doctor and the patient.

Instruct students to complete the guide by placing a “+” sign in the box next to the statements with which they agree, and a “0” next to those with which they disagree. They must commit to agreement or disagreement—there are no conditional responses. Students should be assured that there are no correct or incorrect positions.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details R.L. 7.2.; Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration S.L. 7.1., 7.2., 7.3.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- The book opens with Kidder describing a meeting with a U.S. Army officer deployed to Haiti, who has quite a different view of the country’s situation than Dr. Farmer. How would you explain this distinction? How do you think the objectives of the American military mission and that of Farmer affected their perspectives?
- How would you characterize what it is about Haiti that initially drew Paul Farmer there? How does his relationship with the country develop and strengthen over the course of the book?
- How do you think Farmer’s experiences growing up are reflected in his work as a doctor? As the director of an international public health agency? As a friend and colleague?
- Think for a moment about what Dr. Farmer, Dr. Kim, and their colleagues associated with Partners in Health really were working to achieve in “big picture” terms. Do you think it is significant that their mission to accomplish it started in Haiti? In other words, how might explaining the level of health care provided at Zanmi Lasante have been influential in trying to convince officials in Peru, Russia, and even the United States?
- Kidder provides a number of instances in the course of the book where Dr. Farmer works directly with patients. What are your perceptions of him as a doctor, particularly in regard to the doctor-patient relationship or his bedside manner? Do you think this makes him a more effective physician? Are there any ways in which you think it has a detrimental or negative impact on his work?

- The TB outbreak in Tomsk, Russia, provides a particularly interesting scenario. What were your initial reactions to the time, energy, and funding spent to implement the PIH program in a prison population? In other words, did you initially feel that those resources would be better applied someplace other than a Russian prison complex, and did your perspective change after reading the book? Why or why not?
- Clearly, working with and for Paul Farmer can be very difficult, as his demands and expectations are extremely high. What are your impressions of Jim Kim and Ophelia Dahl, who work with Farmer nearly from the beginning of his time in Haiti? In what ways do you see that they all complement each other very well—that each of the three can provide something that covers the shortcomings of the others?
- Farmer contends unequivocally that one of the most important causes of poor health in a population is unrelenting poverty. To what extent do you agree with this statement after reading *Mountains Beyond Mountains*? Discuss some of your opinions on the constant struggle to balance the high costs of sophisticated medical treatment with a humanitarian effort to treat the sick even when they cannot afford it.
- In the background of Dr. Farmer’s work was Boston philanthropist Tom White, who Kidder describes as having achieved his lifelong goal of giving away all of his money (mostly to PIH projects). The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston were also mentioned in the book for contributing significantly. What are your impressions of the role of sources of large amounts of funding such as these in humanitarian efforts? Do you see them as more or less effective than international organizations and governments? What are the challenges that these sources of funding present, both for those giving the funds and those receiving them?
- Using the phrase, “This is a story about . . .” supply five words to describe *Mountains Beyond Mountains*. Explain your choices.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration S.L. 7.1., 7.2., 7.3.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

EXPLORING *MOUNTAINS BEYOND MOUNTAINS* THROUGH WRITING AND RESEARCH

- In a number of instances in *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, Dr. Paul Farmer and Dr. Jim Kim must cut time short on one project to attend to the progress of another. Often this involved persuading government officials, health organizations, and philanthropists to either implement the public health practices developed by Partners in Health or to fund these endeavors. This is an essential element of the work done by any nonprofit humanitarian organization. Compose a short persuasive essay (or alternatively, use the form of a persuasive letter or speech) in which you either:
- try to convince either the government of another developing country that battles infectious disease outbreaks to implement the program established by Farmer in Haiti and Peru, or
 - try to convince a source of funding to invest in PIH’s public health programs.
- In either instance, you will need to use plenty of textual evidence and specific examples to support your case.
- Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details R.L. 7.1. and Writing: Text Types and Purposes W. 7.1., W. 7.2., W. 7.3.

The relationships that Paul Farmer has with his colleagues, his patients, and the numerous people he meets in the course of his work are among the most important aspects of the global health goals that he wants to accomplish. Although he is arguably more committed and tireless in the work than anyone else working with him, he clearly would struggle to do his work without these people. In the end, this is effectively true for all of us. Compose a personal journal entry for Farmer in which you share his thoughts about one of the other individuals in the book. Be sure to answer the following questions:

What is it about this individual that means the most to you or that makes your particular relationship special?

What do you identify as the way in which this person has helped your work most?

As all involved in this work have sacrificed tremendously, what sacrifices has this individual made that you would most like to thank them for?

Because Farmer always expects everyone to do more (including himself), what would you ask this individual to keep doing or to start doing to further his vision for the world?

To culminate, ask for volunteers to share their writing with the class.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details R.L. 7.1. and Writing: Production and Distribution W. 7.4.

Both Dr. Paul Farmer and Dr. Jim Kim were awarded a MacArthur Foundation “Genius” Award for their work in public health. Using library resources and the Internet, research the origin, history, and significance of the MacArthur “Genius” Award, being sure to consider the following:

Who founded the MacArthur “Genius” Award? When was it founded?

What was the purpose of the award?

What are the criteria for becoming a MacArthur “Genius”?

Who are some of the most famous or influential world leaders who have received this distinguished honor?

After gathering facts, create an original slideshow which highlights newly acquired knowledge using a presentation product such as Prezi or PowerPoint.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge W. 7.4.

MAKING THEMATIC CONNECTIONS


Making thematic connections: consider the following themes of *Mountains Beyond Mountains*: perseverance, compassion, service, morality, integrity, humanity, selflessness. Select one of the themes and find examples from the book that help support this theme. Create a sample Life Lesson Chart using the model at: http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson826/chart.pdf.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details R.L. 7.2.

FINDING MEANING BY EXPLORING SETTING

In *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, Dr. Farmer’s work is carried out with the backdrops of the Central Plateau of Haiti; the slums of Lima, Peru; a Siberian prison; professional medical conferences in Europe, the United States, and Cuba; and the esteemed halls of the academic and medical institutions of Boston, Massachusetts. Offer students the opportunity to explore the integral role the book’s diverse settings play in Farmer’s life by completing the following:

- Consider the variety of settings for *Mountains Beyond Mountains*. Why is each of these places important to the development of Farmer’s global program of public health? Using the descriptions provided in the text, illustrate the three places you believe to be most important to



his story. In addition to the illustrations, include a short explanation of the significance of each, and why you believe it is important.

****Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details R.L. 7.1.**

INVESTIGATING PUBLIC HEALTH— CREATE A P.S.A.

At the root of Kidder's story in *Mountains Beyond Mountains* is the important role that public health plays in the stability and productivity of a society. Guiding efforts in this endeavor (just to name a few) include ensuring the safety of drinking water and food supplies necessary for basic nutrition; access to low cost or free medical care and pharmaceuticals for impoverished populations; control and treatment plans for infectious diseases; and special programs for the care of children, expectant mothers, the aged, the infirm, and the indigent. Assign students to research a public health problem, and to develop a public service announcement to promote greater public awareness of the threat or need. This can be done as a poster, a pamphlet, or digitally, using presentation, podcasting, or video resources. To facilitate research:

- Have students investigate the work in their area of research by public health agencies such as the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control, UNICEF, the Harvard School of Public Health, and state/county/municipal departments of health.
- Many medical and pharmaceutical companies have recently increased their efforts to supply public health endeavors cheaply or even free of charge. Students may be encouraged to investigate such efforts on the part of corporate interests.

- This project could also be easily applied on the micro-level. Students may be encouraged to develop a public health program for your campus in which they target things such as sanitation practices, hand washing, healthy eating, and the prevention of spreading illnesses. Consider including school health professionals (such as the school nurse) and the administration in this effort.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge W. 7.4.

ESSENTIAL QUOTES ANALYSIS

The language that an author uses in his work is essential to getting across the intended meaning. Select four quotes from *Mountains Beyond Mountains* that seem to signify key ideas that the author hopes readers take from the text. These might be quotes spoken by characters or from the narration, and page numbers should be included. Have students develop a chart with the following four columns:

Quote

Page Number

Relevance to the Book

Intended Meaning for Readers

The intended meaning should have relevance not only to the characters in the text, but also to the lives of anyone who reads the book.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details R.L. 7.1.

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