

## Nonfiction Resource Packet for English IV Honors Summer Reading

### **Mountains Beyond Mountains**

by Tracy Kidder

#### **Synopsis:**

This beautiful book takes us from Harvard to Haiti, Peru, Cuba, and Russia, as Dr. Paul Farmer changes minds and practices through his dedication to the philosophy that “the only real nation is humanity”-a philosophy that is embodied in the small public charity he founded, **Partners in Health**. He enlists the help of the Gates Foundation, George Soros, the U.N.’s World Health Organization, and others in his ambitious quest to cure the world. At the heart of this book is a life based on hope, and on an understanding 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. Mr. Kidder reveals how radical change can be fostered through the story of one man who sets out to heal the world.

### **Dr. Paul Farmer**

(A Short Biography)

“If access to health care is considered a human right, who is considered human enough to have that right?”

Medical Anthropologist and Physician Paul Farmer has dedicated his life to treating some of the world’s poorest populations, and, in the process, helped raise the standard of health care in underdeveloped areas of the world. A founding director of Partners in Health (1987), an international charity organization that provides direct health care services and undertakes research and advocacy activities on behalf of those who are sick and living in poverty, Dr. Farmer and his colleagues have successfully challenged the policymakers and critics who claim that quality health care is impossible to deliver in resource-poor areas. Paul Farmer began his lifelong commitment to Haiti in 1983 when still a student, working with villages in Haiti’s Central Plateau, determined to bring modern health care to the poorest people in the Western Hemisphere. Starting with a one-building clinic in the village of Cange, Farmer’s project has grown to a multi-service health complex that includes a primary school, an infirmary, a surgery wing, a training program for health outreach workers, a 104-bed hospital, a women’s clinic, and a pediatric care facility. It has become a model for

health care for poor communities world wide. Born in Massachusetts into a family of six children, Farmer grew up in Florida. He received a bachelor's degree from Duke in 1982, and both an M.D. and Ph. D. in Anthropology from Harvard in 1990. He has written or co-written over 100 scholarly papers, as well as books including *Infections and Inequalities* (1998), and *Pathologies of Power* (2003). In 2003 author Tracy Kidder wrote a best selling book about Farmer and his work, *Mountains Beyond Mountains: the Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World*. This book brought international attention and support to Farmer's work. Among the numerous awards Dr. Farmer has received in the last decade is the Heinz Award for the Human Condition. Its citation reads, "To say that Dr. Paul Farmer is a life saver does not begin to describe the impact of his work. Dr. Farmer and his extraordinary organization have been a force in making the world confront the health care needs of those who historically have never had access to proper care. Because of his dedication and compassion, critical health care services are now being administered around the globe to people who previously would have been left untreated."

## ***MOUNTAINS BEYOND MOUNTAINS***

**by Tracy Kidder**

### **Sample Discussion Questions\***

1. Paul Farmer finds ways of connecting with people whose backgrounds are vastly different from his own. How does he do this? Are his methods something to which we can all aspire?
2. Paul Farmer believes that "if you're making sacrifices...you're trying to lessen some psychic discomfort" (24). Do you agree with the way that Farmer makes personal sacrifices? For what kinds of things do you make sacrifices, and when do you expect others to make them?
3. Kidder states that Farmer is dissatisfied with the current distribution of money and medicine in the world. What is your opinion of the distribution of these forms of wealth? What would you change, if you could?
4. Farmer designed a study to find out whether there was a correlation between his Haitian patients' belief in sorcery as the cause of TB and their recovery from that disease through medical treatment. What did he discover about the relative importance of cultural beliefs among his impoverished patients and their material circumstances? Do you think that this discovery might have broad application – for instance, to situations in the United States?
5. The title of the book comes from the Haitian proverb "Beyond mountains there are mountains." What does the saying mean in the context of the Haitian culture, and what

does it mean in relation to Farmer's work? Can you think of other personal or societal situations for which this proverb might be apt?

6. Paul Farmer had an eccentric childhood and his accomplishments have been unique. Do you see a correlation between the way Farmer was raised and how he's chosen to live his life? How has your own background influenced your life and your decisions?

7. Compare Zanmi Lasante to the Socios en Salud project in Carabayllo. Consider how the projects got started, the relationships between doctors and patients, and also the involvement of the international community.

8. Kidder explains that Farmer and his colleagues at PIH were asked by some academics, "Why do you call your patients poor people? They don't call themselves poor people." How do Farmer and Jim Kim confront the issue of how to speak honestly about the people they work to help? How do they learn to speak honestly with each other, and what is the importance of the code words and acronyms that they share (for example, AMC's, or Areas of Moral Clarity)?

9. Ophelia Dahl and Tom White both play critical roles in this book and in the story *Partners in Health*. How are their acts of compassion different from Farmer's?

10. Tracy Kidder has written elsewhere that the choice of point of view is the most important an author makes in constructing a work of narrative non-fiction. He has also written that finding a point of view that works is a matter of making a choice among tools, and that the choice should be determined, not by theory, but by an author's immersion in the materials of the story itself. Kidder has never before written a book in which he made himself a character. Can you think of some of the reasons he might have had for doing this in *Mountains Beyond Mountains*.

\*Questions courtesy of Random House Inc., copyright 2004.

### **A Brief History of Haiti**

The following is an edited version of the history provided by the [American Friends Service Committee](#) using supplemental material from [The Library of Congress Country Studies](#).

As a French colony in the 1700s, Saint Domingue (later Haiti) was perhaps the most valuable territory in the world. Through the extensive use of slave labor from West Africa, plantations produced cocoa, cotton, sugar, and coffee. By 1789, half a million slaves produced goods that accounted for over one-third of French trade. Saint Domingue was the second largest trading partner of the United States. In the United States, the slave population totaled nearly 750,000. Though only 1/6 the size of Virginia, Saint Domingue enslaved 500,000 people.

In 1791, the slaves rebelled and in 1804 declared independence from France and established Haiti, the first Black republic in the western hemisphere. Haiti, or Ayiti in Creole is the name given to the land by the former Taino-Arawak peoples meaning

“mountainous country.” Given the politics of slavery in the United States, the U.S. refused to recognize Haiti until 1862. The French recognized Haitian independence in exchange for 150 million francs.

Though a free republic, the Haitian population was divided into a small mulatto, city-dwelling elite and a majority population of former slaves living in the countryside farming small plots. The elite controlled the government, commerce, and military.

In the 1890s, the United States, Germany, and other European countries saw Haiti as an important source of wealth and an important geo-political location for military bases. Between 1915 and 1934, the U.S. Marines occupied Haiti, controlling its government and finances. The U.S. Marines force peasants into *corvée* labor to build roads. A peasant rebellion is put down in 1919.

From 1957 until 1986 François Duvalier or "Papa Doc" and Jean Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, ruled the country mostly through terror. Under the Duvaliers, 80% of the population was rural and poor with over 70% of pre-school children suffering from malnutrition.

By the early 1980s, members of the Haitian majority organized several uprisings. In 1986, the U.S., fearing instability in what was now known as the poorest country in the western hemisphere, facilitated the departure of Jean Claude Duvalier to France. Though the end of the dictatorship was marked with violence and several coups d'état, grassroots organizing by peasants, trade unions, church groups, human rights groups, women, and youth brought the victory of Father Jean Bertrand Aristide in the 1990 presidential election.

Changes made by the Aristide government in public health and education threatened some of the traditional elite, the military and the U.S. supporters. This fear led to the September 30, 1991 coup d'état that ousted President Aristide. In the following three years, a brutal military dictatorship persecuted popular leaders and over 4,000 people were killed. On October 15, 1994 President Aristide returned to Haiti. However, with his term ending in 1996, Aristide stepped down and René Prével, Aristide's former prime minister, was elected president and sworn in on February 7, 1996. In November 2000 Aristide was reelected as president.

Despite Aristide's return, the situation in Haiti remains unstable. The rate of inflation continues to rise, creating a very difficult situation for a country that imports most of its subsistence goods. The majority (80%) of Haitians continue to live in poverty.

### **Miscellaneous Web Resources:**

[Library of Congress website](#) provides 1) data on Haiti's population, economy, religion, political system, and geography 2) histories for select periods including the U.S. occupation.

UNEP (United Nations Environmental Program) allows you to view graphs that compare nations on health, environment, economy, and education.

Paul Farmer, “Haitian Refugees, Sovereignty and Globalization” in America, September 15, 2003.

comparisons of Cuba, Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, Columbia, Honduras, Haiti on eight United Nation Goals

## **Three Cups of Tea**

### **Introduction**

*Three Cups of Tea* is the true story of one of the most extraordinary humanitarian missions of our time. In 1993, a young American mountain climber named Greg Mortenson stumbles into a tiny village high in Pakistan's beautiful and desperately poor Karakoram Himalaya region. Sick, exhausted, and depressed after a failing to scale the summit of K2, Mortenson regains his strength and his will to live thanks to the generosity of the people of the village of Korphe. Before he leaves, Mortenson makes a vow that will profoundly change both the villagers' lives and his own—he will return and build them a school.

The book traces how Mortenson kept this promise (and many more) in the high country of Pakistan and Afghanistan, despite considerable odds. The region is remote and dangerous, a notorious breeding ground for Al Qaeda and Taliban terrorists. In the course of his work, Mortenson was kidnapped and threatened with death. He endured local rivalries, deep misunderstandings, jealousy, and corruption, not to mention treacherous roads and epic weather. But he believed passionately that balanced, non-extremist education, for boys and girls alike, is the most effective way to combat the violent intolerance that breeds terrorism. To date, Mortenson's Central Asia Institute has constructed fifty-five schools, and his work continues.

Mortenson initially approached Karakoram as a climber and he never lost the mountaineer's appreciation for the region's austere beauty and incredible physical challenges. His coauthor David Oliver Relin deftly evokes high-altitude landscapes haunted by glaciers, snow leopards, and the deaths of scores of climbers. As Mortenson transformed himself from down-and-out climbing bum to the director of a humanitarian enterprise, he came to appreciate more and more deeply the struggles that people of the region endure every day—struggles that have intensified with the recent explosion of war and sectarian violence.

In the course of this narrative, readers come to know Mortenson as a friend, a husband and father, a traveling companion, a son and brother, and also as a flawed human being. Mortenson made enemies along the way and frustrated his friends and family. Relin does not shy away from depicting the man's exasperating qualities—his restlessness, disorganization, sleeplessness, and utter disregard for punctuality. But Mortenson never

asks others to make sacrifices that he has not already made himself time and time again.

The war-torn mountains of Pakistan and Afghanistan appear in the news as the breeding grounds of terrorist training camps, Al Qaeda hide-outs, and fierce religious extremism. In *Three Cups of Tea*, Mortenson and Relin take readers behind the headlines to reveal the true heart and soul of this explosive region and to show how one man's promise might be enough to change the world.

### Discussion Questions

1. There is a telling passage about Mortenson's change of direction at the start of the book: "One evening, he went to bed by a yak dung fire a mountaineer who'd lost his way, and one morning, by the time he'd shared a pot of butter tea with his hosts and laced up his boots, he'd become a humanitarian who'd found a meaningful path to follow for the rest of his life." What made Mortenson particularly ripe for such a transformation? Has anything similar happened in your own life?
2. Relin gives a "warts and all" portrait of Mortenson, showing him as a hero but also as a flawed human being with some exasperating traits. Talk about how Relin chose to write about Mortenson's character—his choice of details, his perspective, the way he constructs scenes. Is Mortenson someone you'd like to get to know, work with, or have as a neighbor or friend?
3. At the heart of the book is a powerful but simple political message: we each as individuals have the power to change the world, one cup of tea at a time. Yet the book powerfully dramatizes the obstacles in the way of this philosophy: bloody wars waged by huge armies, prejudice, religious extremism, cultural barriers. What do you think of the "one cup of tea at a time" philosophy? Do you think Mortenson's vision can work for lasting and meaningful change?
4. Have you ever known anyone like Mortenson? Have you ever had the experience of making a difference yourself through acts of generosity, aid, or leadership?
5. The Balti people are fierce yet extremely hospitable, kind yet rigid, determined to better themselves yet stuck in the past. Discuss your reactions to them and the other groups that Mortenson tries to help.
6. After Haji Ali's family saves Greg's life, he reflects that he could never "imagine discharging the debt he felt to his hosts in Korphe." Discuss this sense of indebtedness as key to Mortenson's character. Why was Mortenson compelled to return to the region again and again? In your opinion, does he repay his debt by the end of the book?
7. References to paradise run throughout the book—Mortenson's childhood home in Tanzania, the mountain scenery, even Berkeley, California, are all referred to as "paradise." Discuss the concept of paradise, lost and regained, and how it influences Mortenson's mission.
8. Mortenson's transition from climbing bum to humanitarian hero seems very abrupt. However, looking back, it's clear that his sense of mission is rooted in his

- childhood, the values of his parents, and his relationship with his sister Christa. Discuss the various facets of Mortenson's character—the freewheeling mountain climber, the ER nurse, the devoted son and brother, and the leader of a humanitarian cause. Do you view him as continuing the work his father began?
9. "I expected something like this from an ignorant village mullah, but to get those kinds of letters from my fellow Americans made me wonder whether I should just give up," Mortenson remarked after he started getting hate mail in the wake of September 11. What was your reaction to the letters Mortenson received?
  10. Mortenson hits many bumps in the road—he's broke, his girlfriend dumps him, he is forced to build a bridge before he can build the school, his health suffers, and he drives his family crazy. Discuss his repeated brushes with failure and how they influenced your opinion of Mortenson and his efforts.
  11. The authors write that "the Balti held the key to a kind of uncomplicated happiness that was disappearing in the developing world." This peaceful simplicity of life seems to be part of what attracts Mortenson to the villagers. Discuss the pros and cons of bringing "civilization" to the mountain community.
  12. Much of the book is a meditation on what it means to be a foreigner assimilating with another culture. Discuss your own experiences with foreign cultures—things that you have learned, mistakes you have made, misunderstandings you have endured.
  13. Did the book change your views toward Islam or Muslims? Consider the cleric Syed Abbas, and also the cleric who called a fatwa on Mortenson. Syed Abbas implores Americans to "look into our hearts and see that the great majority of us are not terrorists, but good and simple people." Discuss this statement. Has the book inspired you to learn more about the region?

### Reviews on *The Blue Sweater*

#### Review #1

Jacqueline Novogratz's writing is not particularly elegant or original, but her stories are powerful. She has worked all over the developing world as a consultant who helps poor women start businesses. She is a strong believer in the transformative power of capitalism.

She could be right about that. But some of her stories, particularly the ones about Africa, seem to point more to the rampant corruption that ruins attempts to improve lives than to the small successes that micro financing sometimes creates. Her hopefulness and faith in people, despite this endemic corruption, is commendable, but at times it seems a bit romantic, although she often decries this over-optimistic romanticism in other Western development workers.

Her stories about Rwanda are the most riveting. She worked in Rwanda in the 1980s before the genocide and then returned often after the genocide to find her friends and hear their stories. The stories, not unexpectedly, are harrowing. Many women lost almost all their relatives and children; one was in prison for inciting genocide.

Her meditation on the efficacy of bed nets to prevent malaria is thoughtful and convincing, and she discusses honestly the pros and cons of selling versus giving away bed nets.

The reader comes away with a detailed picture of life in the developing world, in all its beauty and horror, and with admiration for the people who keep trying to help despite the enormous obstacles.

**Review #2:**

Most of us have chosen to live a smaller life, one focused on our work, our families and our neighborhood. It's easier that way.

In this urgent, timely and timeless book, Jacqueline shows us a different way. Jacqueline's world gets bigger every day, not smaller. Her interactions increase possibility, they don't diminish it. Her investments enrich communities, they don't take from them.

When you hear the joy in her voice, or feel the emotion in her stories, you will realize that the world is bigger than you ever imagined.

More important, you'll understand the power of connection, the necessity of interaction and the power you have, right now, to change the world.

Too often, we judge a book by its cover, or a song by its opening riff. The Blue Sweater is a deep book, one that you'll want to reread and then share again and again.

I hope you'll suspend disbelief just long enough to read this book. It will change you, for the better.

### Review #3

There are so many things in the world that want changing -- how does a young, committed college graduate decide where to begin? Jacqueline Novogratz was an international credit banker on the fast track with Chase Manhattan Bank, but her work in Brazil showed her that big commercial banks had nothing to offer the poor. Having always planned to change the world, she turned her back on high finance and took a position in West Africa with a nonprofit microfinance organization.

Her early days in Nairobi were not a great success. The project was intended to provide microloans to poor women, but the local women leading the project did not appreciate a brash young American who knew nothing of their culture. Sidelined from any role in that enterprise, she wound up in East Africa where she developed a deep commitment to the women of Rwanda. Knowledge of banking principles was not enough to assure success, and she gradually attained the insights necessary for her work to succeed. Rwandan women were traditionally excluded from economic rights, and large international aid projects offered them nothing they could use. Novogratz soon learned that if you help a woman, you help a family. Her goal was to provide microloans AND the skill set necessary to start and grow business. The concerns of the women were food, clothing, and shelter for their families, clean water, basic health care, irrigation for the crops they chose to grow. Aid that fosters these basic services is a necessary adjunct to the development of income, if families are to lift themselves out of poverty.

Novogratz's trial-and-error stories are frank and sometimes funny, but the reader is constantly aware that a young woman alone in Africa is living on the thin edge of danger. After more than two years, during which time she formed strong bonds of friendship and established important local institutions in Rwanda, she was aware that she needed to know more about leadership to go further. She returned to the U.S. to attend business school at Stanford, and took a position with the Rockefeller Foundation where she established the Philanthropy Workshop, a four-week course offering training in the principles of strategic giving; and The Next Generation Leadership, a program for the development of leaders. She then founded and currently runs the Acumen Fund, a nonprofit venture fund for investment and development in the world's poorest regions. "Patient capital" is their term for bridging the divide between traditional charity and traditional business investment, using principles of moral leadership and empowerment.

Novogratz knew from childhood that she wanted to change the world. Easier said than done! But walk with her beside women who have nothing but dreams, hear the first-hand horror of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, read about well-meaning but meaningless aid projects, and experience a hundred little epiphanies about leadership and economic development; and you'll begin to believe in the possibility as well as the need. "The West wants easy answers for modern atrocities, revolving around ancient tribal hatreds, international aid gone astray, or political corruption. The real world does not oblige," Novogratz writes. The world wants to punish and prevent "...atrocities that can come only from a deep-seated fear of the Other in our midst; and such fear is fueled in a world where the rich feel above the system and the poor feel entirely left out."



