



Post Fellowship Reporting - Project Summary

Report Title: Nomadic Life in Mongolia **Name:** Erika Tepler
Other Team Members:
Program: NYC - Asia Program
Trip Dates: 11/30/-0001 - 11/30/-0001 **Location Visited:** Mongolia
Post Fellowship Reporting Template: PFR Template 02

Project Summary: As I took off from Ghengis Khan Airport and the brown rolling hills of the Gobi filled my window, tears welled in my eyes and I realized that that my life had been changed forever. I had landed in Ulaanbaatar, greeted by the same view, a month earlier, just after the close of the school year. I had come expecting an adventure and with the hope of gaining insight into a culture entirely foreign to my own- Mongolian nomadism. Mongolian nomads move anywhere between 4-20 times per year with their animals. Traditionally goat and sheep herders, they rely entirely on their environment for survival. When subjected to droughts or large snowfalls, they suffer greatly. Conversely, when steady rain and little snow allow their animals to fatten, they prosper. Every aspect of their lives is governed by mother nature. Their small houses are made of sheep's felt, camel hair rope and wood. Their diet lacks anything that must be cultivated, including any fruits or vegetables. Even their biggest festival, Naadam, which I attended reflects their environment with a 30km horse race being the most popular event. I chose to visit Mongolia for a closer look at these unique habits in order to enrich a curriculum in geography, specifically human-environment interaction and world cultures. Most of my stay was spent in the homes of these nomadic families learning about everything from making fermented camel's milk to playing games with nothing but a set of sheep and goat's ankle bones. I gained a rich understanding of an ancient and disappearing culture in a specific geographic context that I can now pass on to my students through hands on activities with real, foreign artifacts such as clothing, musical instruments and toys along with incredible photos and matching first-hand stories to tell.

Career Impact: The actual travel and living conditions involved in this fellowship were challenging without taking the unique cultural immersion into account. For more than three weeks I lived without access to running water or electricity. On a twelve day excursion, I slept in a tent and had very little food to eat. For five days, the temperature in the Gobi reached 120 degrees with whipping winds that sucked all of the water out of my body. The only water available was hot and smelled of goat. It was constantly physically uncomfortable and it was also emotionally taxing. I traveled alone and most of my stay was spent with Mongolian families with no other tourists in sight. I had to quickly learn basic Mongolian to keep from going insane! After such a serious adventure I was more excited than ever to begin a new school year. I was inspired by the music, religion, food, clothing, shelter, games and grinding poverty that I had witnessed. It was easy to begin the year with an positive outlook, eager to share what I had gained with my students and school community.

Classroom/Community Impact: I spent days in markets collecting authentic materials for my students to enjoy. Students will not just see pictures of traditional clothing, they will be able to feel different fabrics and try on the authentic Mongolian costumes. They will also be able to play games with actual ankle bones, try their hand at small horse head fiddles and and listen to both modern and traditional Mongolian music. I also learned about how to make dairy products from Mongolian women and I am excited to make them with the kids. While it's great to have such unique materials and skills to enjoy with my students, I am bringing back an attitude that is invaluable. I am more excited, invigorated and eager to teach than ever before.

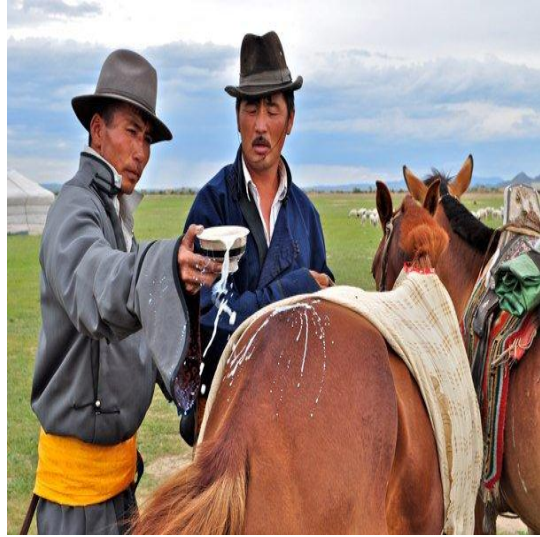
Open Response: Having been so intensely impacted by the experience, I feel compelled to share Mongolian customs and history with my students every day. Students have started the year with a focus on geography and world cultures and I am currently designing hands on projects involving felt making and clothing designing that students will complete after winter break. I hope to spark curiosity about different people and places around the world.

Quote: The classroom will come alive with the sights, smells, tastes and sounds of a foreign and remote land.

Photos:



A nomadic home in Bulgan province.



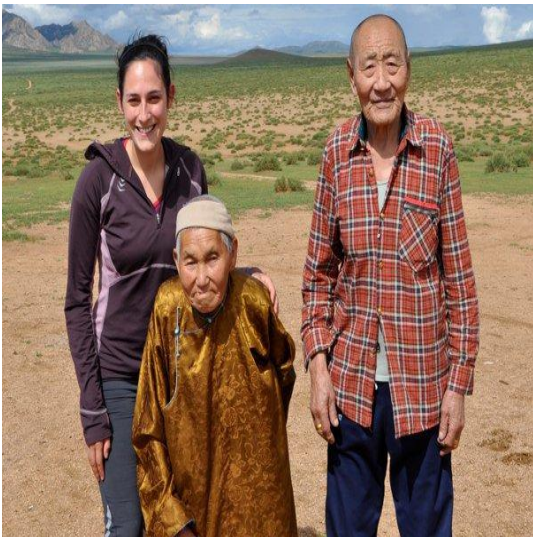
Men pour goat's milk to bless a race horse for the Naadam festival.



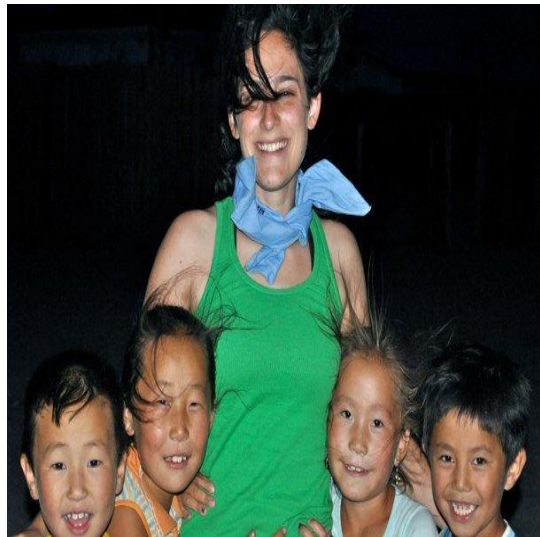
I pose with the son of one of my hosts in their yurt.



A child races a horse bareback during the Naadam festival.



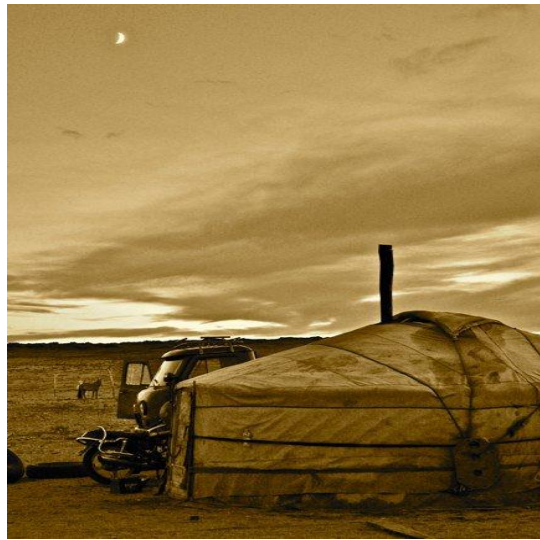
I pose with my hosts in Bulgan province.



Playing around with children of Sakhan Ovoo Soum, a small town in the Gobi.



A hot and dry day in the Gobi.



A ger, the nomadic home, at dusk.