



October 2009

Newsletter for English Teachers

About the USA – Virtual Classroom

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Nobel Peace Prize for President Obama

On October 9, “the [Norwegian Nobel Committee](#) has decided that the Nobel Peace Prize for 2009 is to be awarded to President Barack Obama for his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples. The Committee has attached special importance to Obama’s vision of and work for a world without nuclear weapons. [...] His diplomacy is founded in the concept that those who are to lead the world must do so on the basis of values and attitudes that are shared by the majority of the world’s population.” [Announcement](#)



Health Care Reform

The U.S. Congress is grappling with proposed legislation to substantially reform America’s \$2.5 trillion health care system, despite the daunting challenge posed by solutions that may conflict with one another.

In a nationally televised address to a joint session of Congress September 9, President Obama implored representatives and senators to overcome doubts and considerable misinformation that has plagued debate on reform since earlier this year, and support his proposals. Five committees in the Senate and House of Representatives are considering comprehensive reform proposals and four have completed work on bills. The White House did not submit its own proposed legislation, but instead submitted its objectives.

It is likely that differences in legislation from the Senate and House will have to be resolved in a joint conference committee before a final bill can be sent to the president for his signature into law.

The U.S. Census Bureau reported September 10 that 46.3 million people in the United States had no health insurance at some point during 2008, a sharp increase from 45.7 million in the previous year. In 2006, the total stood at 47 million. Many economists have said recently that with the economic recession, the number of uninsured likely would surge along with rising unemployment. The Census Bureau also reported that the poverty rate in the U.S. reached 13.2 percent in 2008, an 11-year high.

Supporters and opponents of health care reform share an overriding concern: how much reform might cost, and how it would be financed. The United States, unlike many other advanced economies, does not have a universal health care system funded by the national government or state governments. The country has a mix of private nonprofit and for-profit insurance coverage and public programs. [...]

Cost and Spending: According to Lyke’s CRS report, the U.S. spends nearly 17 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP), which is the total value of goods and services, on health care services and products, far more than other advanced economies. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that spending on health care in the U.S. increased from 7.2 % of GDP in 1970 to 12.3 % in 1990 and then 16.2 % in 2007, and to 17 % this year. [...]

At the same time that spending has risen for health care services, health insurance premiums on average rose by 114 percent from 1999 to 2007, while the rate of growth in medical care prices between 1980 and 2007 rose 4.7 percent, and the cost of living measured by the consumer price index over the same period rose 2.5 percent, according to Lyke’s report. Source: [America.gov](#) | [Transcript of the President’s Remarks](#)



©AP Images/ Doctor treats a child in Lexington, Kentucky. Many Americans are concerned about health care costs.

“I suffer no illusions that this will be an easy process. It will be hard. But I also know that nearly a century after Teddy Roosevelt first called for reform, the cost of our health care has weighed down our economy and the conscience of our nation long enough. So let there be no doubt: health care reform cannot wait, it must not wait, and it will not wait another year.” – The President on February 24 -



© WhiteHouse.gov: [Reality Check](#)

Public opinion polls taken by news organizations after President Obama’s address to Congress show that 67 percent of Americans who watched the speech favor his plans for reforming the health care system.

Dear Teachers, we very much appreciate your input. [Please send us your comments and suggestions.](#) Thank you!



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Watch the [full episodes](#) for free!

Links

- [National Park Foundation](#)
- White House Blog: [America's Best Idea](#)
- National Park Service (NPS): [America's Best Idea Today / History](#)
- NPS: [Facebook page](#) + [Twitter feed](#)
- [NPS Facebook Application](#): send a postcard from your favorite park

Teaching Material

- [PBS Lesson Plans](#): The lessons on this site were developed to help teachers use THE NATIONAL PARKS: AMERICA'S BEST IDEA in the classroom. Activities are appropriate for grades 7-10 but are easily adapted to different age ranges. Many of the lessons incorporate video clips from the film as well as additional resources found on this site.



© False-color image acquired in Sept. 2002, by NASA's Terra satellite.

Links

- Museum of the City of New York: [Recognizing 400 people](#) who have helped define New York City for the past four centuries.
- Voice of America: [New York City Celebrates 400th Anniversary](#) (Sept. 26, 2009)
- English Teaching Forum (2008, v46, #1): [New York, New York \(PDF\)](#) by Thomas W. Santos
- [Exploring New York City \(PDF\)](#) by Bradley Horn
- PBSkids.org: [Big Apple History](#)

Explore the United States

The National Parks – “America’s Best Idea”

President Obama and his family recently visited the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone National Park. Writer and historian Wallace Stegner called the national parks in the United States “the best idea we ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst.” In 1872, Yellowstone National Park became the first national park in the world, its creation spawning a worldwide national parks movement.

“Over the course of more than 150 years, a once-radical idea has evolved into a cohesive national parks system, with a sometimes conflicting two part-mission: to make the parks accessible to all and to preserve them for future generations.”

Check out the timeline charting the evolution of the park system. ([PBS](#))

The National Parks: America’s Best Idea, a new documentary by Ken Burns premiered on PBS September 27.

The film chronicles a century of giving that created national parks from southern Florida to the frozen tundra of Alaska, from the rocky coast of Maine to the volcanic Hawaiian Islands. Premiering September 27th on PBS, the 12-hour, six-part documentary series traces the birth of the national park idea in the mid-1800s and follows its evolution for nearly 150 years. Told through the stories of the people who helped create them and save them from destruction, it is both a biography of compelling characters and of the American landscape. Read more [about the series](#).

- [Episode ONE: 1851–1890 - The Scripture of Nature](#)
- [Episode TWO: 1890–1915 - The Last Refuge](#)
- [Episode THREE: 1915–1919 - The Empire of Grandeur](#)
- [Episode FOUR: 1920–1933 - Going Home](#)
- [Episode FIVE: 1933–1945 - Great Nature](#)
- [Episode SIX: 1946–1980 - The Morning of Creation](#)

“New York’s 400th”

2009 marks New York’s Quadracentennial celebration commemorating 400 years of history on the Hudson River, New York Harbor and Lake Champlain.

In 1609, a decade before the Mayflower landed in New England, two European explorers simultaneously explored the northern and southern waterways of what is now New York State. With their voyages, the history of America began to take shape. That July, French explorer Samuel de Champlain, who had founded the city of Québec a year earlier, journeyed into another area of incredible splendor. Its most magnificent feature was a lake, now known as Lake Champlain, where he encountered Native American people.

Two months later, Henry Hudson, an Englishman serving the Netherlands, sailed into New York Bay on the Half Moon. While traveling up the river later named for him (reaching a point near present-day Albany), he noted the region's beauty, natural abundance and commercial advantages. He also traded goods with Native Americans who lived along the shore.

These simultaneous journeys, coming within miles of meeting, changed the world forever. Within a century, the waterways explored by Champlain and Hudson would merge into one vital corridor at the epicenter of global commerce, politics and ideas. [ExploreNY400.com](#)

➤ [“New York’s 400th – Celebrating the past, planning for the future.”](#)

Did you know?

- Hudson’s expedition was commissioned by the Dutch West India Company, which 17 years later bought the island from the Canarsie Indians for the equivalent of \$23.70. The Dutch named their new land New Amsterdam and, with its population of 270 residents, the settlement had a fort, houses and farms.
- In 1653, the governor had a 9-foot-tall barricade built to keep out potential invaders from the north. (The street upon which this wall was built remains today as the famous Wall Street.)
- New York served as the United States’ first capital after the young nation won its independence from the British. George Washington, the first U.S. president, was sworn in at Federal Hall in 1789. [Source](#)

Literature

Lisa See - Shanghai Girls

In 1937, Shanghai is the Paris of Asia, full of great wealth and glamour, home to millionaires and beggars, gangsters and gamblers, patriots and revolutionaries, artists and warlords. Twenty-one-year-old Pearl Chin and her younger sister May are having the time of their lives, thanks to the financial security and material comforts provided by their father's prosperous rickshaw business. Though both wave off authority and traditions, they couldn't be more different. Pearl is a Dragon sign, strong and stubborn, while May is a true Sheep, adorable and placid. Both are beautiful, modern, and living the carefree life ... until the day their father tells them that he has gambled away their wealth, and that in order to repay his debts he must sell the girls as wives to suitors who have traveled from Los Angeles to find Chinese brides. LisaSee.com

Reviews

- ❖ "Only the best novelists can do what Lisa See has done, to bring to life not only a character but an entire culture." - Arthur Golden, author of *Memoir of a Geisha*
- ❖ "See is a gifted writer, and in *Shanghai Girls* she again explores the bonds of sisterhood while powerfully evoking the often nightmarish American immigrant experience." - USA Today
- ❖ "A buoyant and lustrous paean to the bonds of sisterhood." - Booklist

Lisa See, author of the critically-acclaimed international bestseller, ***Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*** (2005), has always been intrigued by stories that have been lost, forgotten, or deliberately covered up, whether in the past or happening right now in the world today. For *Snow Flower*, she traveled to a remote area of China - where she was told she was only the second foreigner ever to visit - to research the secret writing invented, used, and kept a secret by women for over a thousand years. Amy Tan called the novel "achingly beautiful, a marvel of imagination." Others agreed, and foreign-language rights for *Snow Flower* were sold to 36 countries. The novel also became a New York Times bestseller, a BookSense Number One Pick, and has won numerous awards domestically and internationally.

Ms. See was born in Paris but grew up in Los Angeles, spending much of her time in Chinatown. Her first book, ***On Gold Mountain: The One Hundred Year Odyssey of My Chinese-American Family*** (1995), was a national bestseller and a New York Times Notable Book. The book traces the journey of Lisa's great-grandfather, Fong See, who overcame obstacles at every step to become the 100-year-old godfather of Los Angeles's Chinatown and the patriarch of a sprawling family. More: LisaSee.com - About the Author

Quote

People call me bookish, which even in 1937 is not considered a good thing. But as smart as I am, I don't know how to protect myself from my father's words. -- Chapter 1, Page 1

Links

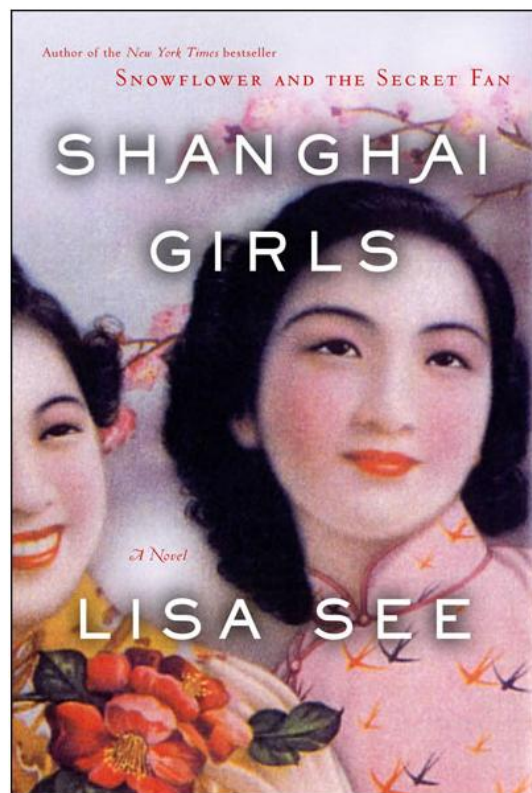
- LibraryThing: Lisa See. Lisa See is a LibraryThing Author, an author who lists their personal library on LibraryThing.
- Random House: Lisa See
- Barnes&Noble: Meet the Writers - Lisa See
- LA Times Article by Lisa See: The 'Shanghai Girls' author says the neighborhood informed her new book.



© LisaSee.com

Links

- Shanghai Girls: Book Club Questions
- Shanghai Girls: Q&A
- Sample Chapter - Chapter 1: Beautiful Girls



© LisaSee.com - Shanghai Girls

Reading in Frankfurt

The English Theatre Frankfurt presents

Lisa See: Shanghai Girls (Töchter aus Shanghai)
Thursday, October 15, 2009 at 7.30pm

Tickets: € 5.00 / Students: € 3,00 / Tickets are available online.

Töchter aus Shanghai aus dem Amerikanischen von Elke Link und Andrea Fischer ist im September 2009 bei C. Bertelsmann erschienen.

Reading in Berlin

October 9, 2009 from 18:00-19:30

Venue: Hessische Landesvertretung,
Ministertgärten 5, 10117 Berlin
Moderator: Christian Rohr, C. Bertelsmann
Reception following
Registration: IRCBerlin@state.gov

The reading and discussion will be conducted in English. Simultaneous translation will be provided.



In Focus: New eJournal USA

The September 2009 edition of *eJournal USA*, [Climate Change Perspectives](#), explores how governments, international agencies, nongovernmental organizations, communities, and individuals working together might effectively mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. State Department Special Envoy for Climate Change Todd Stern outlines the crises and remedies from the perspective of the Obama administration. Award-winning journalist Michael Specter discusses the reality of global warming. And local experts and activists from Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kenya, Russia, and the United States present their perspectives.

The experts discuss what is being done within their countries to address climate change mitigation and adaptation and how they envision mutually beneficial international partnerships. These issues will be considered in-depth at the December 2009 meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark, of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) 15th Conference of Parties (COP15). The goal is a viable agreement that satisfies the nearly 200 countries concerned.



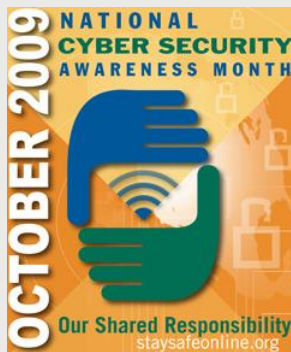
© [U.S. Forest Service](#)

Fall Colors

Beautiful shades of red, orange, and gold are starting to appear. Take a look at [fall foliage hotspots](#). If you're curious about the science behind the changing colors, check out this [explanation from the U.S. Forest Service](#).

Teaching Material

Teachervision: [Autumn Teacher Resources](#) - Many of the changes that occur in the fall provide outstanding educational opportunities for students of all ages and grade levels. Utilize TeacherVision's cross-curricular collection of lessons, printables, reference articles, activities and more this autumn.



National Cyber Security Awareness Month Proclamation by President Obama

National Cyber Security Alliance:
[Stay safe online](#)



2010 Doors to Diplomacy

The Department of State and the Global SchoolNet Foundation announce the 2010 "Doors to Diplomacy" award competition, recognizing the student-created **Global SchoolNet Web projects** that best teach others about the importance of international affairs and diplomacy.

To qualify, middle school and high school students will work in small teams with teacher-coaches. Projects must be completed by March 15, 2010, and winners will be announced in May 2010. Every team that enters a project will receive a special "Doors to Diplomacy" certificate recognizing their achievement. Each student member of the two winning teams - one American and one international - will also receive a \$2,000 scholarship, and the winning coaches' schools will each receive a \$500 cash award. For a complete description, visit <http://globalschoolnet.org/qsndoors/>.



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About the USA is a digital collection of background resources on American society, culture, and political processes. In addition to featuring selected websites, it provides access to documents in full text format (E-Texts) on topics ranging from the history of German-American relations, government and politics to travel, holidays and sports.

This newsletter is produced by the Information Resource Centers/U.S. Diplomatic Mission to Germany.

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