

Forget those seminars — go on a trip!

TO THOSE RHODE ISLAND teachers out there who feel frustrated because they do not get the opportunity to study appropriate material for their work in the classroom, we have an offer that they will find difficult to refuse.

The Journal's Teaching Matters series highlighted the frustration of our teachers who are unable to find courses, workshops, seminars and similar opportunities to further their professional development and help make their work in the classroom more exciting, interesting and relevant for their students.

To get kids excited and interested, the formula is really quite simple: First, get the teacher excited and interested and, second, demonstrate how those qualities can be transferred to the classroom.

Suppose you could send some teachers to Japan for a month to study Japanese customs and culture, have them meet with educators, live with families and gather materials to be used in the classroom, do you think that those teachers would be better prepared and more excited when teaching about that country than some teacher who stayed home and read about it? Ten of our Teacher Consultants have done this.

Imagine you, the teacher, spending a week in the Gulf of Maine aboard the *Rose*, the largest wooden tall ship in the country, and manning the ropes, unfurling the sails, navigating by the sun and stars and reading charts; then you would be in a better position to explain some of the rigors of sailing a century ago: whether it was to hunt whales or cross the ocean to come to this country. Twelve of our Teacher Consultants have done this.

Suppose you could bring a student with you aboard a U.S. Navy research vessel in the Mediterranean for a month and while sailing from Italy, by way of Sicily, to Tunisia and then to Greece, you would be taking soundings of water depth, launching and interpreting data from weather balloons, visiting historic sites along the way, examining landforms and studying people and their activities. And can you imagine the authen-

ANNE K. PETRY
CHESTER E. SMOLSKI

ticity with which this teacher would deal with the ancient world in her classroom? Three of our Teacher Consultants have done this with three of their students.

And to get your students to appreciate the hardships of early settlers as they moved West, go to Wyoming, hook up with a wagonmaster and walk, ride a horse and steer and bounce in a Conestoga wagon for a week and you would better understand why so many died along the way. Sixteen of our Teacher Consultants have done this on the Oregon Trail in Wyoming and learned about the rigors of this journey.

If you, the teacher, don't get excited when reading about these trips that we have provided for teachers, then our program is not for you. What we are looking for are teachers with a passion and spirit of adventure who want a first-hand experience with places and people throughout this country and the world, and who are willing to work and study to make it all happen.

Our program, the Rhode Island Geography Education Alliance, is part of a national network to be found in every state that is funded by the National Geographic Society and others to do a better job of teaching geography in both public and private schools, from kindergarten through grade 12.

Over the past seven years that we have been running this program, more than 100 Rhode Island teachers have been trained by us and by the National Geographic in Washington and have received the designation of Teacher Consultant. As TCs, teachers become eligible to participate in all of our activities.

Over this period, we have had our teachers in Russia, Australia, Okinawa, England and the Dominican Republic, among other places, and in many states of this country. Through this program, TCs have made presentations at regional, national and international meetings, garnered a variety of grants and awards, given presentations to school

committees, administrators, other teachers and the public, obtained hundreds of dollars' worth of teaching materials for their classrooms and have joined a national network of teachers who have been through the same process and who share their ideas, materials and methods of teaching.

As a practicing teacher in almost any subject area, you are eligible to join our organization by attending our Alliance Summer Geography Institute, with one week in residence at Roger Williams University and one week commuting to Rhode Island College, from July 6 to 17 and a May 9 day of orientation, all at no expense to you. And in addition, you will walk away with hundreds of dollars' worth of teaching materials, loads of lesson plans, numerous ideas, innovative teaching approaches, a sense of camaraderie with some new teacher friends and a method to make presentations to your peers.

With 26 school districts having TCs in place, we are especially interested in finding teachers from the other 11 districts that still do not have one of our teachers in their district.

Should you join us, a group that now numbers 14,000 throughout the country that have been supported by the National Geographic Society over the past 12 years, all we can promise you is an opportunity to grow, as a teacher and as a professional who will work hard, seize new opportunities, become involved with your educational community in ways you did not imagine, learn more about the world and spark an excitement with your kids in the classroom. And it can be fun.

If interested in this professional development opportunity, you can submit an application by April 24 to: Rhode Island Geography Education Alliance, Rhode Island College, Adams 122, Providence, RI 02908. Applications can be obtained by writing to the above address or by calling (401) 456-8069 and leaving a message.

Anne K. Petry and Chester E. Smolski
are co-coordinators of the Rhode Island
Geography Education Alliance.