MY WONDERFUL WORLD CAMPAIGN LAUNCHES
TO HELP BOOST KIDS’ GLOBAL IQ
National Geographic-led Coalition Kicks off Geographic Literacy Campaign
With Cross-Section of Concerned Leaders

EMBARGOED: For release 10 a.m. (ET, U.S.) Tuesday, May 2, 2006

WASHINGTON—National Geographic and leaders from the business, nonprofit and
education communities today unveiled a public-engagement campaign designed to give U.S.
students tools to become more informed global citizens. The goal of the five-year, multimedia
campaign — My Wonderful World — is to improve the geographic literacy of young people ages
8-17 by motivating parents and educators to expand geographic offerings in school, at home
and in their communities.

Coalition partners include: 4-H, American Federation of Teachers, Asia Society,
Association of American Geographers, Budget Rent A Car, Committee for Economic
Development, Council on Competitiveness, ESRI, The GLOBE Program, iEARN-USA
(International Education and Resource Network), Lindblad Expeditions, NBA Cares, The
National Council for Geographic Education, National Council of La Raza, National Council for
the Social Studies, National PTA, SeaWorld/Busch Gardens Adventure Parks, Sesame
Workshop, Smithsonian Institution, United Nations Foundation and World Affairs Councils of
America.

A rich Web site at the heart of the campaign, MyWonderfulWorld.org, provides resources
for parents to help kids be more geo-savvy. It includes suggestions for simple, outdoor family
activities and ways that parents can work to get more geography into the classroom, links to
geography games and online adventures for kids and teens, classroom materials for educators,
and ways for young and old to test their global IQs. The site also provides tools for
communicating to policymakers and education leaders the importance of geographic literacy.

A new geographic literacy study released today by the National Geographic Society and
Roper Public Affairs provides alarming new evidence that American youth aged 18 to 24, those
who most recently left the education system, still display a disturbing lack of basic geographic
knowledge about the world they will inherit.
Fewer than three in 10 think it is absolutely necessary to know where countries in the news are located.

Even with near-constant news coverage since the war in Iraq started in March 2003, six in 10 cannot find Iraq on a map of the Middle East.

While outsourcing of jobs to India has been a major U.S. business story, almost half those surveyed (47 percent) cannot find the Indian subcontinent on a map of Asia.

Although the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians has been in the news for the respondents’ entire lives, 75 percent cannot locate Israel on a map of the Middle East.

More than half significantly over-estimate the population of the United States.

Nearly three-quarters incorrectly select English as the most widely spoken native tongue (it’s Mandarin Chinese).

Two-thirds don’t know that the catastrophic earthquake of October 2005 that killed 70,000 people struck in Pakistan.

“As Americans, we are connected to the rest of the world more than ever — we buy from and sell to the world, compete for jobs and markets globally, and our co-workers and competitors are from every corner of the world — but our young people continue to demonstrate that they lack functional knowledge of how the world fits together. They can only be good global citizens if they know their world,” said Gary E. Knell, president and CEO of Sesame Workshop and member of the National Geographic Education Foundation Board of Governors and the My Wonderful World coalition. “This coalition is dedicated to making that happen by engaging parents, teacher and kids about the power of geography, and by spreading the word to our diverse audiences.”

“Geography exposes children and adults to diverse cultures, different ideas and the exchange of knowledge from around the world,” said Anna Marie Weselak, president of the National PTA. “This campaign will help make sure our children get their geography — so they can become familiar with other cultures during their school years and move comfortably and confidently in a global economy as adults.”

The coalition is also appealing to parents, caregivers, educators and students with an outreach program that includes a public-service advertising campaign, promotional events, grassroots activities, e-mail campaigns and a one-hour special on geography, “Geo-Challenge,” airing on Thursday, May 4, at 8 p.m. ET/PT, on the National Geographic Channel. “Geo-Challenge” showcases the most compelling geographic stories of our time in an interactive question-and-answer quiz that challenges and tests viewer knowledge of the world from topics ranging from nature to science to history.

###