THE INFLUENCE OF TRAVEL

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Leslie Grace is an elementary art teacher in South Philadelphia at Nebinger Elementary. She also adjuncts at the University of the Arts and Moore College of Art and Design. In addition, Leslie is also PAEA's current sitting Past-President

Travel has long been considered an important part of education, as it exposes individuals to new cultures, languages, and ways of life. But its influence on teaching is just as important, as it can help educators bring new perspectives and ideas to the classroom.

I have always wanted to travel the world. As a child growing up in the Low Country of South Carolina, I would dream of places that would allow for new realities that I could experience. I imagined lands where the mountains met the sea, and traveling to faraway places that I could not yet imagine existed. Needless to say, as soon as I was able to, I found the means to travel. The wanderlust found a place in my soul and I travel and explore as much as I possibly can.

One way in which travel can influence teaching is by broadening the cultural understanding of educators. When educators have the opportunity to travel to different parts of the world, they are exposed to

different cultures, customs, and ways of life. This can help them better understand and relate to the diverse backgrounds of their students, which can lead to more inclusive and effective teaching practices.

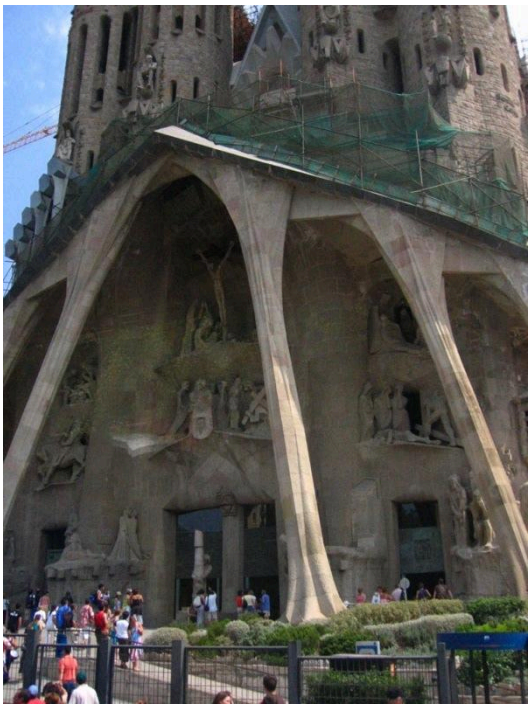
Travel can also inspire educators to incorporate more hands-on and experiential learning into their curriculum. For example, visiting historical sites and landmarks can give educators new ideas for how to teach history and social studies. Or, visiting a foreign country and experiencing the local culture first-hand can give educators new ideas for how to teach language and cultural studies.

Another way in which travel can influence teaching is by helping educators stay current with the latest educational trends and methods. Travel allows educators to attend conferences, workshops, and other professional development opportunities where they can learn about new teaching techniques and strategies, which can help them improve their teaching skills and stay current with the latest research in education.

My first two years of teaching I was an Advanced Placement Art History instructor at a high school just outside Atlanta, GA. Young and ambitious, I decided to lead a group of students on a trip to Europe. I thought, “What better way to teach my students the history of Western Art than to bring them directly to it!” As a new teacher on a new teacher pay scale, this was a clever way for me to experience travel. Through the tour company I used, I was able to travel for free as the chaperone as long as I was able to secure at least 6 travelers. 6 more, and another chaperon could travel for free, or a stipend could be offered scaled-based on the number of trip participants after the original 6. I ended up with 8 students going and combined my trip with a teacher I student taught under at another nearby high school.

It was such an amazing opportunity for me and my students to experience Italy, Spain, and France together. We visited Florence, Rome, Madrid, Toledo, Barcelona, Nice, Arles, and Carcassone. We saw Il Duomo, The Ecstacy of Saint Theresa, Guernica, The Garden of Earthly Delights, and stood where van Gogh once stood! It was truly a life-changing experience for us all.





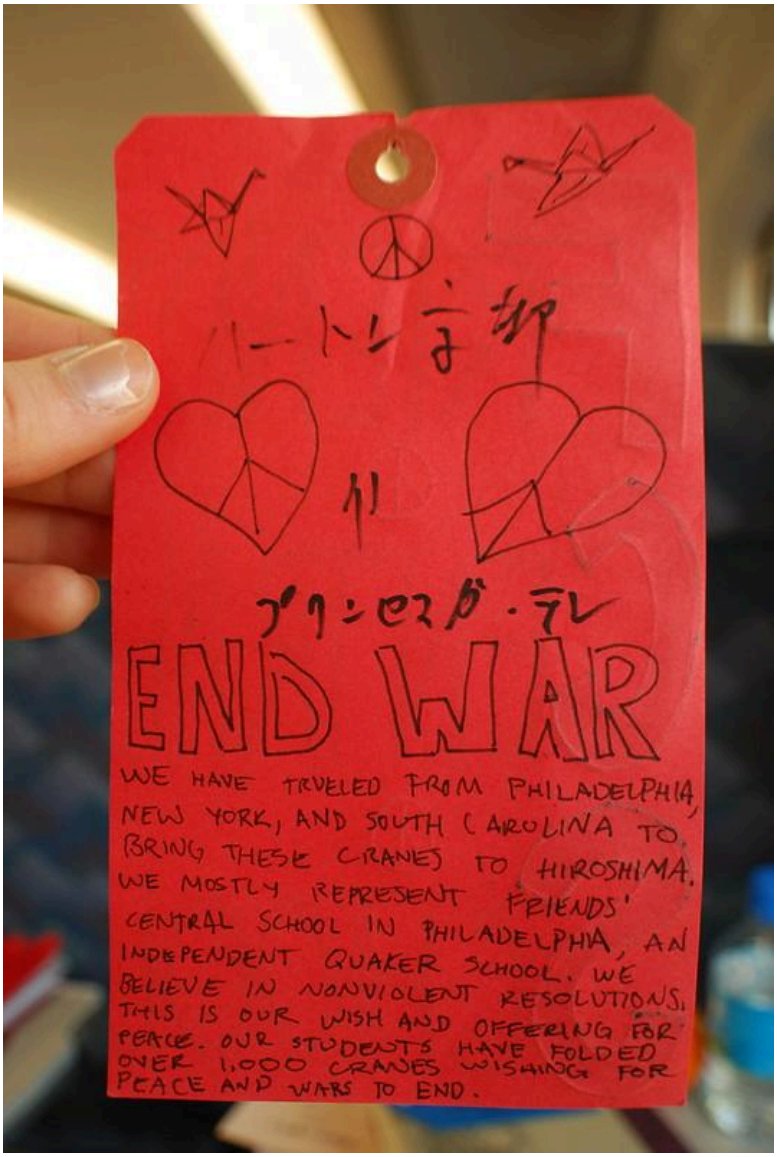




After that trip, I began to consider the impact of traveling on the lessons I would bring to my classroom. I thought about how I could build lessons from the different cultures, and how by experiencing different cultures I could better understand their histories and the people who inhabit this world.

In the summer of 2007, after I moved to Philadelphia, I was one of 200 teachers chosen to travel to Japan as a Japan Fulbright Memorial Fund Scholar, with the trip funded by the Japanese government. The teachers were split up into smaller groups of about 15 and each group explored a different part of Japan. I visited schools of all levels in order to learn about the Japanese education system, and we visited many cultural sites like shrines, castles, and museums. One of our excursions involved learning more about what happened in Hiroshima and how the dropping of the atomic bomb affected the civilians there. We heard from an older gentleman who was a survivor of the bomb. He spoke to us with gentle kindness and offered an apology for Japan's part in the war. He went on to thank us for traveling to his country to better understand a culture different than our own, how he believed that the only way to peace amongst peoples is through global understanding, and how we were taking those first steps. I could not help but be struck by his words, which have impacted me forever more.

As part of the program, all teachers involved made an agreement to implement Japanese culture into our lesson plans. After listening to the survivor from Hiroshima, I decided to include an element of Peace Education within my lessons. I wanted to share the story of Sadako Sasaki with my students and teach them about origami cranes and their cultural significance. As I developed my lesson plans, I started to think about the possibility of a trip with my middle school students and parents to Japan to hand deliver the cranes we made to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. The journey to Japan would be a sort of Pilgrimage as we found our way through Tokyo, Kyoto, Nara, Osaka, Miyajima, and then to our final destination of Hiroshima. I lead a trip of families in 2008 and 2009 and was able to experience new parts of Japan and Japanese culture, learning alongside my school community.









My travels to Japan inspired many lessons that I carried out with my middle school students. All lessons were inspired by art or articfacts from Japan and lessons were delivered with a heavy ethnographic

background explaining the purpose or significance of Japanese culture. Furthermore, I asked my students to be inspired by the themes and styles but to interpret them in their own culture and personal significance. Students created; Emakimono inspired scrolls with their own personal stories, miniature Byobu-inspired screens inspired by Takashi Murakami and dreams students had, animal masks inspired by Japanese Noh masks, polymer clay sushi inspired by the faux food designs outside of Japanese restaurants, monochromatic Manga-inspired self-portraits, Manga inspired reinterpretations of classic paintings, and linoleum personally significant landscape print designs inspired by Japanese woodblock prints.















It goes without saying, but I will say it anyway for those in the back row, that the point of multicultural lessons is not to appropriate and engage in mimicry, but to understand what inspires that culture as well as how and why the art and artifacts were created. Then, in my opinion, students are tasked to reinterpret or reenvision work with the new knowledge gained and in a voice that is authentic to the individual. I believe that art-making can be a truly unique and expressive way to learn about other cultures, and hopefully to gain a stronger understanding of people other than themselves. In order to teach multicultural projects that honor the culture, the lesson should be built on the ethnographic histories of a people.

I believe in travel. I believe that through travel we learn more about the world we live in. Through travel, we can come to understand and accept differences among people and cultures and embrace our similarities. I hope to bring all the knowledge I gain with every trip to influence the work my students make and to help them understand cultures other than their own. Perhaps in the process, we find ways to peace through global understanding.

In conclusion, travel can have a significant influence on teaching. It can broaden educators' cultural understanding, inspire them to incorporate more hands-on and experiential learning into their curriculum, and help them stay current with the latest educational trends and methods. So, travel not only benefits the traveler, but it also benefits the students and the educational system as a whole.

Get out there and see the world. You will not regret it.