

“A Little Literary Alliteration Yields Big Benefits for All or, I Survived Chaperoning 33 Kids for 14 Days in Scotland, England and France”

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New friendships formed, first-hand views of famous historical sites, memories to last a lifetime, epiphany moments of self-discovery and awe – PRICELESS.

Perhaps there *was* something cliched about the 14-day trip 37 of us (33 students, 4 chaperones including me) experienced in July. Booked through EF tours, whose motto is “out of the classroom and into the world,” we all viewed relatively small portions of Scotland, England and France, but it was enough for many to experience life as it is lived by denizens of these countries. More importantly, perhaps, the students, mostly high school seniors, viewed just enough of the world to see themselves in a new way against the backdrop of the lush, green Highland countryside and the bustling cities of London and Paris.

We dubbed our tour “A Little Literary Alliteration” to reflect the fact that the trip, purposefully, weighed heavy on literary sites. In Scotland, the kids begged for more time at Rosslyn Chapel of DaVinci Code fame. The architecture, symbolism and aura of the site truly lives up to its reputation as “one of the most remarkable buildings in the world.” Arriving in the Lake District of England, we toured Rydal Mount, one of William Wordsworth’s homes. From here we stopped in Grasmere where this traveler purchased an authentic English tea pot adorned with daffodils in honor of Wordsworth’s famous poem of the same name.

The Bronte home in Haworth revealed a wealth of information about this prolific literary family. On this stop we also experienced a quaint English village, complete with cobblestone streets, where most of the kids rushed into an ice cream store for a late afternoon treat. Here also, some of us took a walk through the placid countryside. Cameras worked overtime to capture fields of grazing sheep, cattle and horses.

No tour of famous literary sites of England would be complete without a tour of Ann Hathaway's Cottage and Shakespeare's birthplace in Stratford-on-Avon and, of course, we stopped at these two landmarks as well. Viewing the thatched roof of the cottage surrounded by impeccably kept gardens provided another photo opportunity for students. The guide on our tour of Shakespeare's birthplace mentioned that we were standing on the very floor on which Shakespeare walked. "Awesome!" We found ourselves in Stratford just in time for lunch, so many of us decided to try some typical English fare. Some ran with me into Peter's Fish and Chips; others opted to try meat pies. Most all were pleased with their choices, even those who opted for a more familiar site, Subway.

My favorite memory of our day in Stratford will be of participating in a 24-hour Shakespeare Reading in the Old Schoolroom of Guild Hall, the actual site where Shakespeare attended school. Amid desks arranged in a circle, sitting directly under a portrait of the Bard himself, I read parts of "A Winter's Tale" during the read-around. I was pleased to be able to "celebrate the creativity of the Bard," and help "raise funds to support the performing arts in school" as printed on the certificate of participation I received, signed by the headmaster of King Edward School, Stratford upon Avon, July 8, 2006.

Next stop, Coventry Gardens. Our stay in Coventry found us walking right through the area where George Bernard Shaw discovered Eliza Doolittle selling flowers and barking her wares in her offensive Cockney accent. Of course, that experience moved Shaw to write "Pygmalion" which became the famous musical, "My Fair Lady." Here, in the evening, we walked to view the remains of Coventry Cathedral, which was heavily bombed by the Germans during WWII. In the 1960s, a rebuilding project began that now connects some salvageable portions of the original structure to a compatible modern structure.

Our trip to Bath, England, was highlighted by experiencing high tea at Sally Lunn's, the oldest house in Bath. Unfortunately, the establishment was out of scones (is this possible?????) but we had Sally Lunn buns with our clotted cream and loose tea which provided an opportunity for would-be fortune tellers to interpret their tea leaves.

Needless to say, some interesting predictions were uttered that day. A tour of the Roman Baths, for me, was another memorable stop. I'll always remember the metallic-laden taste of the sample of water from the baths which the Romans believed to be infused with healing powers. Jane Austen provided the literary focus of Bath. A tour of the home she occupied for five years offered a glimpse into the author's life and times.

Amid some steady drizzle, we arrived in Glastonbury to view the remains of the legendary castle and King Arthur's burial site. It seemed that the rain added to the eerie aura of the place as it did when we had viewed Stonehenge earlier that same day.

The anticipation of seeing "Antony and Cleopatra" at the Globe Theatre was marred a bit by the fact that we had SRO (standing room only) seats. Some of us were lamenting the fact that, after a day of touring the famous sites of London, including the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace, it was difficult to focus on the play when forced to shift and shuffle our feet for three hours. Yet, the experience of being in the Globe Theatre somehow erases all unpleasant memories, for sure!

A boat ride from the White Cliffs of Dover, England to Calais, France put many of us in mind of the Cape May-Lewes Ferry. The kids had fun playing cards and taking pictures from the boat and, of course, eating!

Our arrival in Paris, where we spent the final four days of our trip, evoked more "oohs" and "aahs" as we drove to our hotel by way of the Eiffel Tower standing majestically in the distance. Our tour of the Louvre was a favorite of many who had a penchant for and appreciation of art. Cameras flashed away at I.M. Pei's modern structure that serves as the entrance to the most famous museum in the world.

Our last night in "the city of lights" found most of the group on a cruise along the Seine where we had one last glimpse of Paris' famous sites under the rays of the setting sun. It had been a long, memorable trip. Many were unhappy that the trip was over but many also knew that "all good things must come to an end" and so, our trip. It may be trite to say that one must venture out of the classroom to experience the world. As teachers, we strive to bring the world into our classrooms every day. This trip showed all of us, students and chaperones, that there is a lot of world out there. We were all grateful to have seen a little literary alliteration and to have made new friendships and lasting memories, as evidenced by the thousands of photographs we, collectively, took.

