
Athens, Spring 2008

Ross School Trip, February 22 - March 02

Ralph Abraham
Dispatch from Athens



Courtney Sale Ross and Ralph at the site of Plato's Academy

The Ross School M-Term Trips

For fourteen years I have been consulting at the Ross School in East Hampton NY. Each year the students get to choose from a number of trips in the “M-Term” – two weeks around the first of March. Last year I was invited for the first time to accompany one of these trips, and went along with a group to the South of Spain. From that trip I posted seven dispatches on my website at:

<http://www.ralph-abraham.org/new/fulspec/spain.2007/>

Mrs. Ross also joined that trip. This year, again, we both took the trip. After one week in Athens they all went on to Florence but I returned home to finish teaching my computer programming course in the Digital Arts New Media (DANM) graduate program at UCSC.

Along with a trip next year to Istanbul, these trips are intended to found curriculum units on cultural diffusion along trade routes, and especially, the sources of our Ancient Greek heritage, and its journey through time and space to the Italian Renaissance.

Our Mission in Athens

Targets

Our itinerary included the Acropolis, Agora, Archeology Museum, other museums, the sites of Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum, and an overnight trip to Delphi.

Our Academy

Each day for several hours (including buffet dinner) the seventeen high school students heard lectures from the teachers, and worked on their projects in teams. I presented a couple of times, on cultural diffusion, the NetLogo programming language, and other topics.

Outcomes

The students were to make portfolios of their drawings, photos, videos, and essays using the Sophie (The Future of the Book) software. Besides a wealth of detail on Ancient Greek architecture, arts, literature, philosophy, mythology, etc, there was to be an emphasis on the cultural diffusion theme.

My Reflections

On the targets

Like everyone, I was overwhelmed by the Acropolis. The antiquity of the ruins at Delphi surprised me ... no amount of reading or web browsing can convey the sophistication of these early cultures. The massive scale and simple beauty of Cycladic art must be seen to be appreciated. For my own edification the trip was a great success.

The student work

On the last evening before departing Athens the students presented a show-and-tell of their Sophie multimedia books and other projects. Not only the books, but also their presentations – entertaining and polished – were amazing. I was astounded by the amount of work (and lack of sleep) they endured to compete for best project. Being on-site is very energizing, but also, it seems we had an outstanding group of students.