

## FRENCH TEACHER COLLABORATES WITH ART MUSEUM IN EXCHANGE PROJECT

In October 2006, I traveled to Montpellier, France where I visited English classes and a local museum. I met students with whom my students exchanged work and ideas about works of art in their respective local art museums. Here then is a summary of my work this past year on the project.

In January 2006 Danielle Steinmann from the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, MA, asked if I would be interested in working on an exchange involving art museums and language classes. The Clark had received a grant from the French Regional and American Museum Exchange (FRAME), an association of 24 museums in France and the U.S. which engage in cultural exchange programs. FRAME's grant supports the development of pilot lessons to be shared with member museums. The Clark is working with my classes and with the *Musée Fabre* in Montpellier, France, which, in turn, is working with an English teacher at the *Lycée Joffre* in Montpellier.

Over the summer 2006 I worked up lessons on six pictures in the Clark collection which Danielle had selected for this project. In early October, my students worked on the tasks we had developed. All was completed before I left for Montpellier in mid-October to present their work to the students in Nicole Ameille's English class at the *Lycée Joffre*.

I arrived in Montpellier on a Sunday afternoon and was on my own for two days. I spent many hours exploring the old city as I walked the medieval streets. I took two guided tours of the old city, attended a symphony concert by the *Orchestre de Montpellier*, and saw the film *Indigènes*. I ate in cafés and restaurants, and regularly visited the *cybercafé* to send messages home. I took lots of pictures and even recorded some short conversations so when I returned to the classroom my students were able to see where I had been and could see their new pen pals and where they lived.

On Tuesday morning I met English teacher Nicole Ameille outside the *Musée Fabre* which has been closed for five years for major renovations. Curator Sylvain Amic arrived and gave us a tour of the new museum, scheduled to reopen in February 2007. It was fascinating to see the finishing touches being put to the spaces. Newly arrived from storage, paintings were casually leaning on the walls in the rooms where they were about to be hung. Sculptures still wrapped in protective coverings were peeking out of wooden crates waiting to be placed on pedestals. Large frames for paintings lay on the floor; gloves to wear while handling the works of art lay nearby. In one room a team of conservators was working with black lights, a computer, and chemicals to remove

a layer of discoloring varnish from a large painting.

Sylvain and Nicole and I talked about the work to date and decided that as a final activity both classes of students would visit their respective museums, and we would film them speaking about the work of art they had studied in front of the original work. This presentation would then be shared with their exchange partner classes.

Nicole took me to meet her students to show them the work my students had done. With the French students we discussed the paintings my students had studied. I also played tape recordings of the American students' conversations in French based on the painting they had studied. We also passed out postcards from the American students and some Halloween candy. The French students read the postcards and quickly wrote replies for me to take back to my students. It was clear from their interest in the study of the painting, their sympathetic reaction to Americans learning French, their curiosity in reading and writing notes, that the French students were captivated by this contact with my students and the paintings in an American museum.

Later in the week, after Danielle had joined me, we returned to the *lycée* to visit another class, and we repeated the experience. Again we found the students interested in both the art and the contact with young Americans.

My business in Montpellier was done, and after just a little more shopping I headed home. Upon my return, I showed the students my pictures, and they began e-mail correspondence with the French students. I also prepared the students for the presentation about their painting. Because time was short, I decided that the whole class would prepare a PowerPoint presentation of their artist's life. When all was completed we met in our small auditorium to view the completed PowerPoint projects. Each class saw its own work as well as that of the other classes. It was then time for a visit to the Clark to see the works in person.

In December, Danielle came to visit the classes before our trip to the Clark. She viewed the PowerPoint presentations and prepared the students for their projects. Two days later at the Clark, a film crew captured each class talking about their artist and the work they had studied, in front of the work itself.

After sharing the experience of these visits, we hope that the students will continue their correspondence with each other. I plan to continue this exchange activity next year with Nicole Ameille's classes. And with the help of FRAME and the Clark, Danielle and

I hope to encourage other French teachers to undertake similar exchanges.

To see samples of our work, go to my Web page at [[www.shenet.org](http://www.shenet.org)] and follow the following links: Shen High School, LOTE Department, Mrs. Munson, French 12, art links). This project was supported with a grant from NYSAFLT and an AATF Small Grant.

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