



Post Fellowship Reporting - Project Summary

Report Title: West Africa: An Exploration through Literature

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Other Team Members:

Program: New York City Program

Trip Dates: 11/30/-0001 - 11/30/-0001

Location Visited: Ghana and Senegal

Post Fellowship Reporting Template: PFR Template 01

Project Summary: We planned to travel to Ghana and Senegal to learn more about West African literary traditions and bring back materials for our classroom. Every year the tenth graders at Baruch High School study African literature, and we hoped to enrich this unit with new information and materials from our journeys.

Throughout our two-week trip, it was interesting to see how much American culture affects life in West Africa and vice versa. For example, the rhythms of African music can be found in American pop music, yet rappers like Akon, who lives and records in America, is from Senegal and quite popular in his native country. The same is true for literature. In almost all of our discussions, we heard about stories that share themes and morals with many classic American stories, including Cinderella-like tales.

We felt welcome throughout most of our journey, and though we do not speak French, we were able to learn so much through our observations of typical life in Senegal as well as Ghana. We are so eager to share more of our experiences with our students when we begin our African literature unit in February.

Career Impact: In Teshie, a shantytown on the outskirts of Accra, Ghana, we visited St. John's Mission School, which educates students from grades K-12. We felt very welcome by the headmaster of the school, who introduced us to a reading teacher and several of her students. We questioned the students about their reading and which books they enjoy most. We were quite surprised by how many books were by American authors, and by the fact that not all books seemed age appropriate. However, when we asked them about stories from their own culture, they told us about several stories, similar to fairy tales, which they were told as children. One of the girls also told us that she enjoyed hearing stories from her own mother's childhood.

By visiting museums such as the Palace Museum in Kumasi, Ghana, and Cape Coast Castle in Cape Coast, Ghana, we learned a great deal about West African culture and history. For example, at the Palace Museum, we learned about the culture of the Ashanti people, hearing about festivals, livelihoods, and the matrilineal lineage of the culture. During our tours of Cape Coast Castle and St. George's Castle in Elmina, Ghana, we were able to see how the inhuman treatment of the slaves by the Europeans affected the history and culture of West Africa. This was an unforgettable experience for us, and it will help to enrich our discussion of West African culture with our students.

Classroom/Community Impact: Although our 10th grade has been studying African literature for a few years, we wanted to make this unit more detailed and more authentic. By speaking to students in Ghana and Senegal of various ages, we learned a lot about how reading is taught and how students view literature in these countries. It was helpful to see how American culture has a huge impact on West African literature and lifestyle and vice versa. In addition to relating our experiences to our students, we will share the information we brought back with our fellow English teachers.

We went to the University of St-Louis, where we met many students eager to discuss the books they love with us. They named some of the novels and authors that our students already read, but they also told us about many more that we plan to incorporate into our tenth grade curriculum. These include *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born* by Ayi Kwei Armah and *Houseboy* by Ferdinand Oyono.

We also visited the IFAN Museum, which featured traditional Senegalese dress, carvings, and tools. Upstairs there was a contemporary art exhibit by local artists. The theme was fecundity. It was interesting to see how even contemporary African artist takes into account the reverence for fecundity and motherhood, an aspect of traditional African culture that still remains highly valued.

Visiting the markets of West Africa was a highlight of our trip. In addition to providing an opportunity to learn about daily life, these markets were a source of important artifacts for our unit. We have masks, jewelry, art, books, music, and photos that will enhance this unit in a new way and help students more closely connect to modern-day West African life.

Open Response: We are looking forward to teaching our African literature unit to our 10th graders in February. We are currently looking into ordering more copies of the titles we discovered to offer a wider variety of African literature to our students.

We also have been in contact with a storyteller who specializes in traditional African tales. She plans to visit our classes and share these tales in an authentic way, both entertaining and educational to our students.

Quote: In travelling to West Africa, we learned that true learning occurs when we find ourselves out of comfort zone but all the more curious for it. This journey was both a challenge and a great learning experience.

Photos:



