



Post Fellowship Reporting - Project Summary

Report Title: MORE THAN THE SILK ROAD... **Name:** Sonjah McBain
Other Team Members: Sarah Caufield
Program: NYC - Asia Program
Trip Dates: 11/30/-0001 - 11/30/-0001 **Location Visited:** Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam
Post Fellowship Reporting Template: PFR Template 02

Project Summary: On July 17th, 2010 I woke up amazed at the journey set before me. I never imagined that an opportunity like this would be available to me, at least, not at this point in my life. However, in a matter of a few hours I would be on the other side of the globe, in a foreign land, in an unfamiliar culture. I did not know what to expect. Although I was riddled with traveling anxiety, my goals remained in line: I would open myself to new experiences, new places, new people and I would bring this experience back to my students. With a hungry eye I set out to observe the convergence of the many cultures along the maritime silk route. I expected to be impacted by my travels; I didn't expect my life and my entire outlook to be affected. My experience in Southeast Asia has transformed me forever as a teacher, a student and overall as a human being. In the twenty-seven days that followed, I was exposed to so many remarkable cultural and learning experiences that serve to enrich my life and my teaching every day. My primary focus in my travels was the maritime silk route along Vietnamese trading ports as a source of cultural exchange and commerce. However, the tour group I booked my trip through included ten days in Cambodia. I'm incredibly thankful for the opportunity to have included Cambodia (another maritime silk road country) in my journey.

There is hardly enough space on this page to explain my travels, but to be brief - I volunteered teaching in local schools and met with lots of people who have far less than anyone I've ever known, but who were eager for their lives to improve. I visited relevant cultural sights ranging from temples of learning, study and religious practice. I explored the many bodies of water in South East Asia and spent time in Sihanoukville, making my way up to the Mekong-Delta, Halong Bay, Nha Trang, Hoi An, Danang, and Hanoi documenting the experience and developing lessons about the Maritime Silk Road's literary and oral story telling tradition. I feel completely filled with knowledge and I look forward to sharing this experience with my students for years to come.

Career Impact: Cambodia has been etched into my memory and my heart forever. I entered the country almost completely ignorant of its history or rather ignorant to the impact of the country's recent history on the nation. I expected to delve into the ancient history, but the modern day history was unavoidable and soon after my arrival it engrossed all my attention. Upon my entry I was surrounded by stark poverty and desolation. I imagined that I might visit a few impoverished areas within the country; I didn't expect that, bleakness and poverty would be the norm. I felt so overwhelmed and saddened; the extent of destitution I've known was nothing in comparison to what I saw. The Cambodian citizens emitted an incredible energy. They were generous beyond their means and showed kindness that I never thought possible given their situation. I have decided that I cannot complain about life any longer and I will not allow others around me to complain. Instead, I am grateful and inclined to give so much more. As Americans, we sometimes fail to see all that we have been blessed. Simple things that I have taken for granted- food, clothing, shelter, and water - have taken on an all-new meaning.

Classroom/Community Impact: *This educational grant has allowed me to develop internationally relevant lessons and grow as a person and teacher.

*I've introduced two new courses to the school's English curriculum using the many artifacts and text I've acquired through my travels:

- Ethnic Literature: strong focus on Southeast Asian experience
- World Mythology: strongly focusing on the water mythology, creation mythology of Southeast Asia

*The numerous artifacts, pictures and texts that I have accumulated on my travels have been a tremendous addition to my instructional resources.

Open Response: *To be brief, I traveled with an international group of teachers who were extremely engaged in local culture and educational practices. This network continues to grow as we communicate and build on all we learned and participated in while we explored Cambodia and Vietnam.

* I volunteered teaching in local schools and met with lots of people who have far less than anyone I've ever known, but who were eager for their lives to improve. I intend to introduce my students, friends and family to many of the organizations. Providing exposure and encouraging those I know to assist those in need.

*I visited relevant cultural sights and spent time on the water documenting the experience and developing lessons about the Maritime Silk Road's literary and oral story telling tradition.

Quote: "The Maritime Silk Road opened my eyes to the world."

Photos:



Jumping for joy on the Mekong Delta Ferry...



Overlooking the canals in Hoi An...



Navigating the Perfume River in Vietnam.



Vietnamese transportation!



Exploring the country by land and by sea...



Fund for Teachers on the Mekong.



Eager to learn: www.NewHopeCambodia.com



Cultural exchange: I was an unusual sight for many of the people I met.