

***ELMLE***

# **Tips for Teachers**

**October 2007**

**Tired? Listless? Feels like Thursday but it's only Monday? *You are not alone!* Middle School teachers all over Europe, parts of the Middle East, and in certain areas of the United States are suffering from the same complaint. Relief is at hand!**

**Do you realize that you have been “Tipless” for the opening weeks of the new school year? The European League for Middle Level Education, an affiliate of the National Middle Schools Association in the US, cares! Renew your vigor, achieve more, and regain your confidence with October *Tips for Teachers*. Feel better fast! Read and apply daily. Not available anywhere else. Guaranteed to make you a livelier teacher.**

# How to Achieve That Successful Middle School Trip to a Foreign Country: Planning Makes Perfect

Academic field studies to 'foreign' locations are commonplace throughout ELMLE schools. Students in Paris travel to London, while Londoners go to Paris. Amsterdam visits Venice, while Zurich takes the train to Florence. There are sights to be seen, museums to be explored, artists and inventors to be seen firsthand, orchestras to be heard, and world monuments to be climbed, investigated, and digested. Here are ten ideas to make these trips run more smoothly, achieving good student behavior, and making social and academic learning happen.

1. Plan ahead and teach toward the trip. What is worse than taking 20 seventh graders to an art gallery when they have not studied the art or artists on show? Give them a reason for being there. Forewarned is forearmed, as the saying goes, and students armed with prior knowledge will enjoy the visit more and get much more out of it.
2. Follow Schwartz's Number One Rule of Travel: whenever you see a toilet, use it! Avoid trying to help a child find the loo in the middle of a museum lecture or while climbing the Acropolis by ensuring that everyone has "gone" beforehand. "But I don't have to," they say? Yes, they do! Use it when you can! Who is Schwartz, you ask, and are there other rules? Read on.
3. Practice being quiet in city streets. Locals can often hear us coming long before we get there! Americans are just loud, and in groups – oh, brother! Use this sage advice. Fill in the blank with the name of the city or location you are visiting. Let \_\_\_\_\_ speak to you; don't you speak to \_\_\_\_\_. We are visiting, after all, to savor the sights as well as the sounds of a new location. It is simply polite not to talk loudly while walking down narrow streets or winding village lanes. This is especially true in the evenings when the place has started to put itself to bed.

4. **Sketch.** Even if you are not an art teacher or if the trip is not particularly art oriented, have all participants take along a sketch book and pencils. Spend odd moments sitting beside a Venetian canal doing a perspective study, or drawing Corinthian columns in Delphi. Sketch books come into their own in museums, too, and can be life savers in many situations. Rather than having the kids fill in the blanks on a worksheet, ask them to draw a few specific objects, and gather information from museum labels. Sometimes, even in the best planned trips, you will have an emergency, such as a museum closure or transport delay. Give the kids a sketchbook assignment, and the minutes will fly.
5. Try to do everything you ask the kids to do. That means sketching when they are sketching, being quiet in public, eating and relishing the local food, and setting a good example on how to be a good traveler who tries to blend in with the local atmosphere as much as possible.
6. Put a sticky label on the back of every passport. And on that label write the last name of the passport owner. This makes passports easy to shuffle through at airports or in museums where EU students often get in free upon presentation of aforesaid document.
7. Read a book set in the city or country that you are visiting. This could be the project of an English class, or something extra tacked on. Alice Leader's Shield of Fire is excellent preparation for a visit to Athens, for instance, and Elie Wiesel's Night is a sober prelude to any visit to a World War II site or old town Jewish quarter. Refer to the book during the visit, and when possible visit places mentioned in the book.
8. Enjoy down time. Kids love shopping, so let them at it! This is a good opportunity for them to practice a few words or phrases in the local language, though universal English oils most transactions. Set appropriate parameters and use your remote supervisory skills as you yourself buy the olive oil soap or parma cheese or handcarved replicas of the local cathedral.

9. **Talk about public transport behavior. Airplane, bus, tram, vaporetto, whatever means you use to get where you are going, the trip is more enjoyable for the rest of the passengers if our students are reasonably quiet. It's nice to get a compliment at the arrival airport from the lady whose face blanched when she saw your troupe enter the departure lounge. Her worse fears were not realized because you had discussed public behavior with your kids back at school.**
  
10. **Expect good hotel behavior. Kids always travel within the 'school bubble' and often forget that just because they are in a group their behavior has to be moderated, especially in hotel corridors and rooms. Coming in late after an energy-burning walk, students have to open doors quietly, and whisper in hallways. Or getting up early for a red-eye flight, they have to be aware of other guests' needs.**

**So who is Schwartz? Is Schwartz a cousin of the redoubtable Murphy of the famous Law? Perhaps. But Schwartz is a true and living middle school teacher, retired from the European scene to enjoy life with her grandchildren in Baltimore. Linda Schwartz was for many years a sixth grade teacher at the American School in London, and she always operated every trip with two rules. The first, you know, from Tip Number Two above. The second rule was like unto it: if you see a jewellery shop, go in. A wise teacher will, therefore, plan some student 'free time' (this is when those sketchbooks will be invaluable!) whenever a jewellery shop looms on the horizon.**

**Travelling with middle school kids is one of the great joys and privileges inherent in our ELMLE schools. How fortunate we are that we are able to take our students to varied, interesting, historic locations across the continent and beyond. And how important it is to plan the trip carefully to see that it achieves its goals.**

Vienna ELMLE Conference January 25-27, 2008, is sure to be the highlight of your winter. Visit [www.elmle.org](http://www.elmle.org) for a full line-up of dates, speakers and activities. Conference chair **Connie Miller** of host school American International School of Vienna has organized music, art, and other professionally inspiring lectures and events to make this THE conference to attend. Now is the time to register and to offer your own expertise by presenting a session.

The European League for Middle Level Education is an affiliate of the National Middle Schools Association whose conference takes place November 8 – 10 in Houston. Find out more at [www.nmsa.org](http://www.nmsa.org).

Tips for Teachers is edited by Alan Heath, recently retired from the American School in London after several lifetimes in the middle school classroom. Please send him your November tips to keep colleagues stimulated and connected! [alan\\_heath@asl.org](mailto:alan_heath@asl.org) will do it.