



The Importance of Learning About World Heritage (Making Connections)

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In the summer of 2018 I traveled to India and Nepal with a group of teachers from the Philadelphia area. Our trip was coordinated and associated with the University of Pennsylvania South Asia Department, GEEO and Global Philadelphia. The purpose of the trip was to personally visit and learn about World Heritage sites in those countries and to bring back our experiences to our classrooms. An extra benefit to visiting these sites personally is that one learns about a people's history, traditions and customs in action on a daily basis. You can see, hear, smell and taste a culture.



When we visited Nepal we went to the Boudhanath Stupa, a World Heritage Site in Kathmandu. As we observed the Buddhist coming to pray and pay homage to their holy site I heard a song, "Om Mani Padme Hum", coming from what seemed like everywhere. Every shop, restaurant, art gallery I went into I heard this song. My ears were saturated with it. I began singing it without realizing it. I saw the words of the song displayed on T-shirts. I took my phone out and recorded a piece of the song.

When I started to prepare for lessons about India and Nepal for my students I researched this song via Internet. I discovered that the song is a mantra that the Buddhist devotees chant over and over as they walk around the stupa. The significance of the words is as follows:

Om	it is blessed to help you achieve perfection in the practice of generosity,
Ma	helps perfect the practice of pure ethics,
Ni	helps achieve perfection in the practice of tolerance and patience.
Pad	helps to achieve perfection of perseverance,
Me	helps achieve perfection in the practice of concentration
Hum	helps achieve perfection in the practice of wisdom.

In a recent lesson in Music class I introduced the mantra to my students. Some of the children wanted to learn to play it on their instruments. Others told me that they were familiar with the chant because someone in their family sings it or they heard them sing it. It was a nice surprise for me and I embraced the good moment with them. I transcribed the song, changed the key and passed it out to any students who wanted to learn the song on their instrument. A week later four

sting student brought their instruments in for a lesson. They played the song for me in class. We had a violin/cello arrangement performed live in class.

That same afternoon as I was leaving my work I stopped by the Office to put my keys away. I noticed a parent and two young boys sitting in the Office waiting for the principal or the secretary to help them. She brought her children in to be admitted to our school. She appeared to be anxious and nervous. She had some papers in her hand. Her children were on each side of her sitting very close. When the secretary asked if she could help her the parent had difficulty explaining herself in English. It was obvious that she was much more fluent in another language. She could not express her needs well enough to make her request. I noticed that she was wearing a beautiful dress that reminded me of the traditional clothing I saw the women wearing in Nepal just last summer. I took a guess and said to her, "Nepal?" She nodded "yes". Her children looked at me. In my school we usually have a bilingual counselor but by this time in the day they had left the building. The language struggle continued. The parent gave the secretary her paperwork. She sat back down next to her children. When there's a language barrier it's difficult to trust in the process of handing over paperwork and making sure your children will be safe. The secretary continued with her duties but as I was preparing to leave I started singing, "Om Mani Padme Hum". The song was in my head that day. Immediately her children smiled. They looked at their mother and pointed to me. I kept singing. She smiled the biggest smile I've seen on a parent this year! They intuitively knew that I knew something about them other than where they were from. It pleased them immensely. All the anxiety and nervousness disappeared on her face. I had shown them respect and I had offered some comfort.

A few days later I saw her children in Music class. They were happy to be there.

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