

International Partnerships

News

learning to realise potential



SummerTerm 2023

Winchmore and Kyiv Students Connect Classrooms via Zoom

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Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Winchmore School extended the warmest of welcomes to students who had moved from Kyiv to London. From the moment they arrived, we wanted to reach out to the schools from which they came and create a partnership. One extremely talented student, Mariia Gasiuk from the Novopecherska School, Kyiv organized an on-line meeting between students from her school in Kyiv and students from Winchmore. It was an extremely informative and positive meeting as students from both schools talked about their school day, their lessons, their lunches, festivals, hobbies and of course, the weather.

More on-line meetings took place with more teachers participating. A partnership was emerging with minimum assistance from the adults. This needs to be stated and celebrated. A close partnership was growing because of the initiative, creativity and compassion shown by students in both schools. They were determined to make something happen. By the beginning of the summer term 2023, the leadership teams from both schools had met in an on-line meeting to introduce themselves, consolidate friendships and put our partnership on a formal footing. Our vision for the future is to organise student and teacher exchange visits between London and Kyiv, but we need to be patient, and for the time being we need to develop our partnership in other ways.

Our next step was to extend our small-group, online meetings to include a whole class of students. For example, a Year 8 class from Winchmore School, sharing teaching and learning with a class in the Novopecherska School. First hurdles, were the language barrier and the time difference. These were easily overcome. The big question however, was what subject to choose as the focus of the lesson. Shakespeare features prominently in Novopecherska's curriculum. We agreed to create a lesson on a famous scene from Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet'. A class in the Novopecherska School, had already studied the play, and therefore looked forward to deepening their understanding of Shakespeare with this innovative arrangement.

Further on-line meetings were held between English teachers from both schools and a well-planned, well rounded lesson was prepared for delivery. It needs to be stated however, that although the time difference and the language barrier were challenges, there was another obstacle that needed to be considered and approached with sensitivity. The security situation in Kyiv is distressing with siren alerts and black outs which disrupt the smooth running of the day. One of our online sessions with Novopecherska needed to be postponed, at the last minute, due to an electricity power cut. We were occasionally reminded that the teachers and students were often very tired during the day, because they had been kept awake by sirens, alarms and security drills during the night. Although we agreed not to dwell on security issues, it was a subject

at the back of our minds and required discretion. Our over-riding objective was to develop our partnership on as normal and routine a footing as possible. This was a window of opportunity with a view beyond conflict. Despite these challenges, the students made it happen.

On Tuesday 13th June, Year 8 Winchmore students performed a scene from 'Romeo and Juliet'. This is the famous scene where Lord Capulet, Juliet's father, insists that she marries Paris, the man of her father's choice. The scene was full of passion and emotion in which Juliet breaks down in tears and Lord Capulet storms into a violent rage. There was piano accompaniment which added tension to the scene. The scene began with Mendelssohn's 'Wedding March', with the music slowly fading in total discord and disharmony. The scene ended with a powerful rendition from Prokofiev's ballet 'Romeo and Juliet', The 'Dance of the Knights', better known in the UK as the theme tune to the famous competition for entrepreneurs 'The Apprentice'. The big surprise for our students from the Novopecherska School, was that the Winchmore pianist was one of the students from their school! The whole event was met with rapturous applause and 'encore'.

The performance was followed by 'hot seating' the main characters from the play. Juliet for example, was seated upright, centre stage as she was quizzed about her role by the student's in Kyiv and in Winchmore. The discussion opened up to everyone as they considered how audiences would react to Capulet's tirade in Elizabethan times and how they would react today. We also talked about any different responses from a UK audience compared with that of an audience from Ukraine. The lesson concluded on an outcome upon which everybody agreed. The lesson conveyed important messages. First, any kind of bullying is wrong. Second, nobody should be forced to do something against their will, and third, equal opportunities for all, regardless of background, is non-negotiable at all times.

We were all so proud to connect with Ukraine. The lesson had been a great success. Feedback from the students indicated that learning had taken place in a new and dynamic way. The acting, lighting, music, costumes and set were all excellent. The script and follow-up tasks created a truly engaging lesson with opportunities to convey key messages and process ideas. Asked for any constructive criticism, some suggested that it 'would be even better if' we can do more of it, and with other schools in America, Spain and France. Our Year 8 class also wanted to widen our Shakespearean repertoire with more great scenes from well-known classics like 'Macbeth', 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', 'Hamlet', 'Julius Caesar' and so many more.



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As we had met, planned and prepared to connect our classrooms, what we didn't realise at the time, was that we were preparing a template for a lesson which could be used with any other school around the world. Although, we connected with Ukraine at a time of challenge for them, we had together created a platform from which we could reach out to all nations in a spirit of cooperation, peace, friendship and shared learning. Every cloud has its silver lining.

We hope that by sharing learning with students and staff from the Novopecherska School, we are joined in a spirit of community, closeness and hope for the future. Our aspiration is that they can learn as much from us, as we can from them. The whole experience has helped to move Winchmore forward. Not only have we been able to extend our international reach

to such an amazing school in a wonderful country, we have also worked together to create a format for connecting classrooms with other schools in our international partnership especially USA, Spain, France and China. We hope that through this venture more and more young people will be able to experience something of the 'awe and wonder of the world'.

To conclude, here is the exchange of emails between our schools following our shared lesson:

