

Queen Mary Expedition Fund Award Report: Costa Rica

This summer I spent two weeks voluntary teaching at Saint Mary School in San Jose, Costa Rica, running my own curated arts programme called 'Who am I?' to two classes of first graders. It included discussions about identity, how to describe ourselves in English, drawings and finally self-portraits. Aside from teaching two lessons a day, I also assisted in every class, including one-to-one reading, language arts, mathematics, science, technology, art and Spanish.



Class 1B's self portraits

Although my job was to speak to them in English as much as possible, my Spanish improved massively as many of the staff did not speak much English and my students neither. This also gave me the opportunity to improve my teaching style, making sure I was as clear as possible when giving instructions and responding and asking questions, making sure no student was left behind.

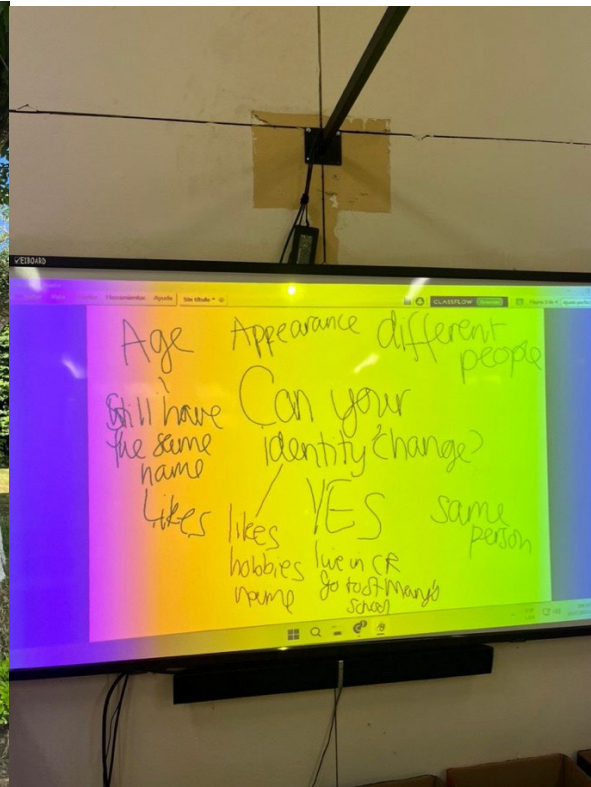


Class 1A's self portraits

Alongside teaching, I was able to indulge in the cultural festivals at the time including Anexion de Guanacaste, celebrating the anniversary of the joining of the providence of Guanacaste in North Costa Rica which used to be part of Nicaragua, La Dia de la Virgen, a Catholic holiday, La Festival de Santa Ana and El Tope, Costa Rica's horse parade. Many of these we celebrated at Saint Mary school, for example, for Anexion de Guanacaste we had an assembly of typical dance, singing the national anthem and other patriotic songs, recounted the history of this holiday and ate traditional food from Guanacaste. For La Dia de la Virgen, it is custom to take a pilgrimage, Catholics walking all over Costa Rica, some even on their knees. In the preschool and elementary school, we took a walk around the perimeters of the grounds of Saint Mary and enjoyed an assembly from the local priest.



La Dia de la Virgen at Saint Mary



Discussion of identity

This trip will contribute to the way I teach at my part-time job but will also contribute to the way that I learn English and Drama at Queen Mary University. My interests include multilingual and diasporic art, literature and performance and in getting to know these children and my own family even more, I have understood this subject deeply. The Expedition Fund Award helped contribute to my flights there and back, allowing me to improve my Spanish speaking skills, give me the opportunity to teach different kids and learn about the culture. It was truly an unforgettable experience.