

OneVoice from Natomas



The One Voice project is greater than the sum of its parts.

(above) Charter students make their own history in the Hagia Sofia. Famous for its massive dome, the Hajia Sophia, originally a mosque from 1454 to 1931, became a museum in 1935.

(right) Governor Alim Barut of Nigde Province presents Dr. Ting Sun with a token of his appreciation for helping foster understanding between cultures.

Warm, Loving, Welcoming, and Accepting. These were words used repeatedly by the students I interviewed from the One Voice project and Dr. Ting Sun to describe their experience traveling and interacting

with the people of Turkey.

Three years ago, Dr. Sun, Educational Program Director at Natomas Charter School, made her first visit to Turkey where her experience there led her on a journey to change the current negative



messages associated with the Middle East. Her vision of peaceful coexistence through arts and self-expression evolved

into the One Voice project, a multi-media arts performance.

“So much of what we think we know and understand about the Middle East is through the media. A different story—one which focuses on shared values and the positive—needs to be told. What better way to accomplish this than through art. Art transcends language. It has the power to touch people in ways language alone cannot.”

The One Voice Project expresses 8 core values

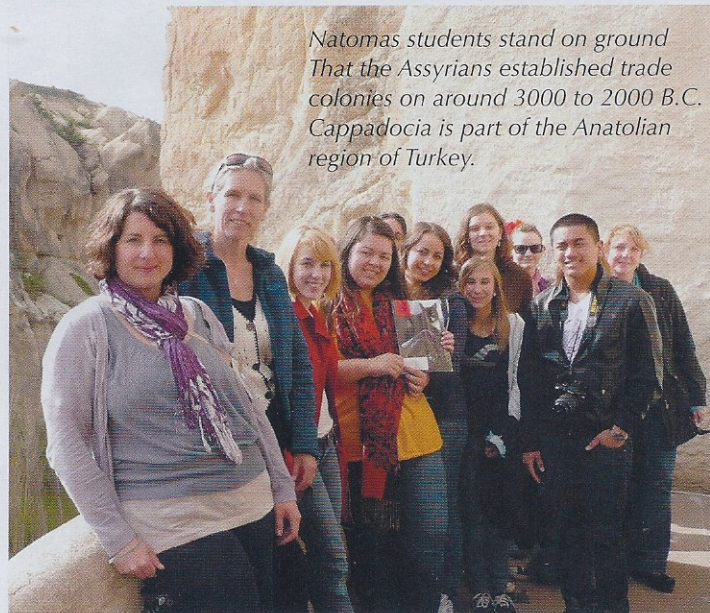
Voice continued on page 12

Voice continued from page 10

through the use of music, visual art, theater and dance—individual self-expression, family, faith, opportunity for growth, education, connecting with others, helping others and peace through understanding—and were developed by teens in Turkey and the U.S.

Last Spring, 8 teenagers from Sungurbey Academy in Nigde, Turkey were invited to

School, shares one her highlights from the trip being a small village called Yukarı Gökdere where she was moved by the warmth and hospitality she received. “We shared a meal prepared by the women in the village, we played cards and games with other teenagers in the village,” she continues, “and at one point, I realized they truly accepted us. We were part of the group.”



Natomas students stand on ground that the Assyrians established trade colonies on around 3000 to 2000 B.C. Cappadocia is part of the Anatolian region of Turkey.

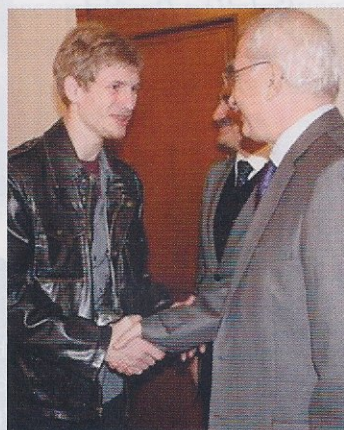
participate in One Voice. The collaboration continued when, last month, twelve ambassador students (who had to undergo a rigorous application and interview process) spent 15 days traveling through Turkey, visiting several cities, towns and historical sites. Several teachers at Natomas Charter School have also been involved in the evolution of the One Voice project, including Jill Stripling and Jeff Pollard who served as lead teachers on this recent trip to Turkey.

Jordan Pittman, a student of theater at Natomas Charter

Charter student Eric Klenner meets Governor Alim Barut of the Nigde Province

Kaylah Pierce, a music student echoed similar sentiments, “The hospitality and spirit of giving of the people in the village had no boundaries. They made me feel at home.”

The last few days of the trip were spent in Nigde conducting artistic exchange



Audiences are the same around the world. They always enjoy a the performing arts.

to spread the message across the U.S. They are currently in the process of applying for an opportunity to perform with the Sungurbey students at the John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts in Washington D.C., where they will continue to build relationships, challenge perceptions, break



Jordan Pittman and Jagger Waters perform on stage in Nigde.

workshops in preparation for a shortened version of One Voice with the Sungurbey students. Student director of the project and theater student at Natomas Charter School, Jagger Waters says, “It was a challenge to coordinate everything. The main goal was to make the art pieces we brought universal. No words were needed. In the end, though, watching everything come together, made the work worthwhile.” One Voice was performed twice over a 2 day period with over 800 community members in attendance. “They really got it,” adds Pierce, “People connected to the message and there was a ripple effect in their excitement to spread the message.”

The Natomas Charter School students experience working with Turkish students and their trip to Turkey is only the beginning. They plan to use the success of One Voice

down stereotypes and promote peace through the arts.

One Voice is truly greater than the sum of its parts. It is more than a collaboration between Natomas Charter School and Sungurbey Academy. It’s more than a connection between a group of teenagers. It’s an ideal to strive toward—An ideal for a better future for our children steeped in understanding, common values, tolerance and above all, peace between people everywhere.

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