

At the Roots of Tomorrow: elementary students from Syria meet their peers from USA

As we believe of the educational value of history, our outreach programs continue to include more students from Syria and abroad in learning about the history of the archaeological site of Tell Mozan.

By the beginning of March 2022, 12 students aged between 11 to 12 years old, from Al-Salam school have participated in our school project. The project aims at engaging children from Syria in discovering the ancient history of Urkesh and then presenting this history to their peers from the USA. The project is divided into three phases: the first meeting to know the participants, then a guided tour to Urkesh with the archaeologist Amer Ahmad, and finally a collective meeting with children from Europe or USA.

To start the project dr. Qassar met the students (virtually) to get to know them and their interests. Our participants have never been in a museum or any historical site or building, therefore, visiting Urkesh was their first time in at archaeological site. After the site visit, another meeting took place to get the feedback of the visitors about the site and its history.

Here is some of their direct feedback:

Limar, 11 years old said *'I was impressed to know that Urkesh contained all these ethnicities and that they were able to live together peacefully'*.

Jolla, 12, said *'I felt the chills going down the Abi and thinking that the ancients called the spirits here'*.

Mazda, 12, said *'I enjoyed the pottery lesson from Hammade-And liked the idea that the ancients were using plates and cups just like we do'*

In preparation for their meetings with the USA students, each student from Syria was requested to read part of the story about Urkesh, and to think of one question (or more) of what they want to know about the life and the culture of their peers in the USA. The same preparation took place in USA by dr. Joy Cox, the teacher of the class.

On 26th of March, participants from Syria met their peers from USA. A group of 10 American students, aged between 9-10 years old. The meeting started with small talk by the American students in which they presented what is to be American for them and their culture in general. Then, the Syrian students started telling the story of Urkesh. Syrian participants were supposed to read parts of the history of Urkesh. However, they felt that it would be nicer to recite these parts without reading, and they were great in delivering it. Their passion, when telling their American peers, about the history of the site was impressive. They were also proud to tell that they have been personally to the site and that they actually live next to it.

When the story was over, the American students commented on it showing great interest and admiration, for the history itself and for the way that the Syrian students presented it.

After that, we opened the floor for questions about each other's culture and life, and here are some of the questions that the Syrian students have raised:

- What is the most dominant language after English in your area?
- What are your hobbies?
- What are the most beautiful archaeological sites in your region?
- What do you know about Syria?

-what subjects do you take at school?

here are some of the questions that the Syrian students have raised:

-How is your day at school like?

-What are the popular sports in your country?

-Do you play video games?

-How many languages do you speak?

-What is the popular music in your region?

In order to answer this, Mazda and Jana played a piece of violin and told their American peers that they were able to do so also in Urkesh.

The feedback after the meeting was very good from both the children and their parents who wrote us to tell us how happy their kids were to have such an experience. And that they felt challenged and curious to learn more about their history, to be ready in case the American peers asked them further explanations.