

LATIN VIA OSTIA

Abstract: This paper describes how high school Latin teachers collaborated to transform a site-visit to Ostia into an interactive lesson more appealing than the traditional stop-and-lecture routine. The collaboration resulted in a scavenger hunt with clues in Latin and mini-presentations at each clue-location.

Every other summer, the sponsors of the Indiana Junior Classical League gather together to take high school Latin students from across the state on a customized educational trip to Italy.¹ This collaboration allows students from very small schools to participate and lets all the students benefit from having so many teacher “experts” at their disposal. The trip has typically lasted 14 days and has involved a week in Rome and the surrounding area, followed by a trip to the Bay of Naples area. Side trips around Rome have included excursions to Etruscan tombs, Ostia, Tivoli, Florence and Assisi. The southern leg includes a day on Capri and a climb up Mt. Vesuvius.

In the summer of 2005, I participated in my fifth trip, along with 12 students, a parent, my fellow Latin teacher and his wife. We comprised half of the entire group this year. While we were visiting Hadrian’s villa, one of the teachers idly commented that it would have been fun to have held a scavenger hunt there. Thus was born our idea for our visit to Ostia.

The five teachers on the trip spent the next evening huddled together, picking locations, creating clues, making copies and creating teams. The clues were written in Latin; we debated over them until we had vocabulary that we thought was within the reach of each team. We also tried to be sure the teams were balanced with similar numbers of beginning, intermediate and advanced students. Finally, we had to make sure that our maps had all the locations clearly marked.

When we reached Ostia, we sent the teachers out to their respective locations while I started the tour of the site with the students. The students and I visited the *vigiles’* barracks, where I stalled to give

¹ These trips are open to any IJCL member, even if their teacher is not going. The first such trip occurred in 1992, and the program has continued every second summer since then. Each trip is planned by one of the teachers in the state with input from the other sponsors. The itinerary is sent out for bids; companies that have been used include ACIS, NETC, eTrav and Passports. My first trip was in the summer of 1997 with only two students; the state trip was the only way we would have gotten to Italy.

the other teachers time to reach their hiding spots. After enough time had elapsed, I split the group into the five teams and gave them their first clue. They could not believe that the clues were in Latin; but these students from all around the state immediately started working together, not only to translate the clues but to correctly interpret them. I was extremely pleased that our students were engaged in an active use of the language that went beyond the occasional translation of an inscription.

Each team received a different clue, so they all ended up hunting for a different location first (e.g., for the theater, *Ambulāte ubi Rōmānī ludōs scaenicōs spectant*). When they found their first location, the teacher there told them a bit about that site and then gave them the next clue. Each teacher did this differently; one gave his talk in Latin, while another took on the persona of Diana, the owner of the house and shop across the street (the clue for Diana's house: *Sī vultis et edere et casam pulchram vidēre, ambulāte ad casam sororis Apollinis*). After the presentation, the teachers gave each group the same clue, to keep them circulating through all the points of interest. To get to the laundry, they were told *Sī togae vestrae sunt sordidae, ferte eas ad hunc locum*, and they were directed to the latrines with *Sī vōs bibistis nimium vīnī, vobīs necesse erit festināre/properāre ad hunc locum, prope Forum*. To send them to the Capitol, the clue was *Sī vultis adorāre Iovem et Iunōnem et Minervam, necesse est ire ad templum in Forō*.

When the fifth and final group arrived, the teachers had a special "omega" clue to give them (*Sī vultis vincere, praeterite Forum ad macellum*). This clue sent them to the fish markets just beyond the forum, where I had found my way after wandering by the other teachers and the running students. The winning team received gelato from my favorite gelateria when we returned to Rome.

The students' reaction to the scavenger hunt in Ostia was extremely positive; it helped them make better sense of a site that often proves daunting for students meandering through on their own. It allowed us to guide them through the site and teach them about specific locations without having them endure the forced march/lecture format they had wearied of long before Ostia. The students got a better sense of the expanse of the city and paid more attention than they would have normally. The added bonus for us was that they were able to apply their classroom studies and use Latin in a place where it would have been spoken over 2000 years ago, creating a bond between them and the ghosts of the past.

Several of the original teachers have shared this activity with various audiences² and have received suggestions and modifications.

² Many thanks to the audiences at meetings of the Indiana Foreign Language Teachers Association, CAMWS, the ACL and the National Junior Classical League for providing helpful feedback, suggestions and possible modifications. An additional

If I were going on a trip without multiple teachers, I might have my advanced students research particular buildings at sites such as Ostia or Hadrian's Villa prior to the trip. They then would be able to fulfill the role of "expert" as the rest of the group carried out the scavenger hunt, and would become my additional teachers. Another suggestion was to have each group of students use a camera to prove that they had reached the intended target. If I were to go that route, I might position myself in a central location and have the students bring me the pictures after each building, so that I could share information about the building with them and give them the next clue. This approach might take more time, but for those traveling solo, that is the reality. For those not traveling to Italy, sites such as the VRoma Virtual Rome MOO (www.vroma.org) can allow for a simulated experience with clues deposited in various locations that direct students to other structures within the city of Rome. This will never replace the thrill of stomping around an ancient site in the same dust and dirt that Cicero walked, but it is an acceptable substitute for those who cannot afford international travel.

We have now had an opportunity to repeat this activity, but in 2007 we visited Ostia on the first day of our trip, when part of our group had just arrived in Italy and had not been able to eat yet. We gave everyone an hour to wander through the area, which allowed the hungry portion to satisfy their hunger at the café. This turned out to be a wonderful modification, as the students were able to acclimate themselves to the site and explore on their own before we started the game. We told them to pay attention to what they were seeing and where they were going, because they would need that information later. We all met at the café after an hour to begin the game. Starting from the café also turned out to be somewhat fairer, as it was more centrally located in relationship to all the sites. The student reaction to the game was even more positive than the first time, ensuring that we will continue to incorporate this activity in all our trips.

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