

“Around the World in Rooflines” Jane Shipman

"A traveler without observation is a bird without wings." — Moslih Eddin Saadi

International travel not only provides an opportunity to experience ‘getting-to-know-you’ moments with the people one meets but also offers personal exposure to other cultures than one’s own; for *real* learning there is nothing like it. Travel has offered opportunities to try new foods, learn tiny bits of new languages, observe different customs – and evaluate one’s own, and, certainly, exposure to worlds far different from our own in scent, in texture, in sound, and, most of all, visually.

My travels have led to a realization that I *love* architecture – the variety that says ‘here is our past’ as well as that which says ‘here’s what we are capable of today’. Rooflines speak to me. They talk of times when lifting half-ton stone was a miracle, when a culture could determine the status of a man by the ornament on his roof – or the lack of it - when amalgamation or assimilation of a culture showed in style and innovation. For me, it started with doors... those carefully-crafted entryways into new worlds. Then whole buildings. Now rooflines. They say so much! Some may be weather-related: snow should slide off to avoid leaks. Some should offer protection: flat roofs were essential to provide a higher place from which to engage the battle, towers provided a ‘last stand’. But what of Chinese rooflines which are created to produce the poet’s ‘beaded curtain’ of rain? Or those domes and spires which point us to religious sanctuary? These are serious cultural signifiers and students need to be pointed in their direction to understand more about the countries they are visiting.

The purpose of this presentation is simple: **engage** high school students with the idea of travel through an element I appreciate. Its format is equally simple – a power point with embedded moviemaker examples of three different cultures’ rooflines – architecture from the British Isles, from Spain, and from China. And the requested response is again a simple one – a brief personal writing (observation, imagination, speculation, question) shared with individually-selected photographs as a prezi. This project addresses the following standards from the new common core.

Common Core Standards

11.W.6

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new information.

11.SL.5

Make strategic use of digital media in presentations to enhance understanding...and to add interest.

11.L.5

Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

Technology is significant in this project. The technology I chose was selected to draw students into the subject quickly. They watch 30 power points every week and eyes rolled when I added another. But when the first moviemaker started there was obvious interest – the movie was quick, dense with pictures, done. As the second started, student intensity was obvious; they were both listening to the music and watching, processing the pictures and the connection. The third, because of our Chinese partnership and because students had traveled or would travel, because we talk about China, held their interest as well. Ending with an example of their assignment was intentional; it left them with a direct expectation. They could see that my expectation was not of some lengthy research or difficult topic analysis, but that they look at pictures, make connections, and write about that personal connection. The intention is that their interest in international travel be sparked, ignited, that they look at travel as both fun and a learning opportunity.

After the initial presentation in class, students have asked for more – rooflines not only from these three countries but from other countries to which I have traveled – most notably France and Italy. Because of that interest – and my willingness to comply – their prizes will be a little delayed but broader in scope.