

# BEYOND OUR BORDERS

## Chicago Teens Experience Moroccan Culture

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**F**ourteen Walter Payton students left Chicago, expecting nothing more than six days of travel, fine foreign cuisine, and shopping. After a dauntingly extravagant visit to Morocco, Walter Payton students began to appreciate the subtle differences between Casablanca and Chicago teens.

Walter Payton students and Peace Journey went to Morocco to visit their overseas sister school named Ben M'Sikh in March.

Before Payton students went to Morocco, they spoke with Moroccan students through two videoconferences and through emails.

When Walter Payton students arrived at Ben M'Sikh High School, students were greeted with a spectacular reception by the teens in Morocco. Payton teens left the tour bus and were greeted with a fast-paced drumbeat and news reporters and cameramen from the three Moroccan news channels.

Payton students searched frantically for their pen pals lost among the sea of curious students. Once they were found their pen pals, they were yanked away from their American peers and taken to numerous classrooms to meet teachers and to see a student art exhibit.

In place of six wheel trucks to transport produce, they had donkey-drawn carts and hand-pulled wagons. Where there are street vendors selling knock-off Kate Spade bags.

They have peddlers selling fruits, vegetables, and bread. While the United States have eight-story shopping centers and strip malls, Morocco has canopied bazaars.

The 350-foot Twin Center towered over the rest of the city, much as our 1450-foot Sears Tower casts a shadow on Chicago.

The people, however, were surprisingly similar to Americans.

The girls flaunted tight shirts, jewelry, and high heels. The guys strutted around in Diesel designer jeans, baseball caps, and sunglasses.

They sang and clapped on an hour and a half bus ride, and danced to techno music and rap. They laughed at our jokes, despite the fact that they couldn't understand the punch line, and graciously wore the Cubs shirts we brought them although they didn't fit.

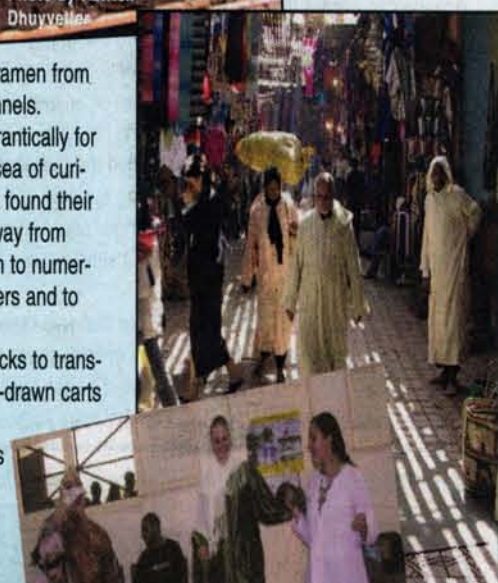
The teens revealed they left Chicago as tourists, and returned as friends and diplomats of Morocco.

Walter Payton students said they appreciated the graciousness they experienced in Morocco, and it far surpasses anything they have ever known at home.

They welcomed Chicago teens into their homes for lunch and tea, accommodating vegetarians and picky eaters. They applauded the Chicago teen's miserable rendition of "It's a Small World."



Photo by Patrick Dhuyvetter



Photos Submitted by Walter Payton .

Photos by Lana Fagman



Chicago teens meet Moroccan teens.

Photo by Patrick Dhuyvetter

### Moroccan Youth, Modernity

By Claire Denton-Spalding &  
Donnie Moore  
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What are your assumptions about Muslim teenagers? Before we came to Morocco, we had very skewed assumptions. We thought the youth would be extremely conservative, wearing headscarves and heavy robes. Our books led us to the impressions that the culture prohibited boys and girls from having relationships- platonic and sexual. However, we were dead wrong.

One of the biggest shocks was the apparel worn by Moroccan youth. Instead of wearing concealing garments, most girls wore tight shirts and high heels. A few girls who wore headscarves, but most girls styled their hair. The boys were very stylish. They wore clothing brands like Diesel and Fubu.

We also wanted to know what relationships between boys and girls were like in Morocco. A pen pal, a teen boy named Samir, had a female friend named Soukina, who he introduced as one of his best friends. Ayoub, another pen pal, had been friends with Hind since the beginning of high school.

Another shock was the style of teens dancing in Morocco. The pen pals danced to rap, techno, pop, and traditional Moroccan music. Dancing was mixture of traditional Moroccan

dance, rapture, and American style juking.

We talked with our Moroccan pen pals about topics anywhere from dance to relationships, and found that dance is vital to Moroccan culture.

Ayoub Salann, 18, said, "The Moroccan people say we can't live without bread. Dance is the same thing- we cannot live without dance."

This proved true throughout the trip. During the trip, we danced at least once a day out in public, or at night-clubs.

However, relationships between boyfriends and girlfriends are very different.

Fassy Youseff, 19, said, "To talk with our parents [about relationships] it's taboo. Moroccan parents condemn relationship between sexes that are not platonic- it is forbidden by Islamic culture."

Ayoub added, "In Chicago...you can make sex. But we can't. It's forbidden. We have limits for that."

However, boys and girls still date. Moroccan teen, Fatima, 17, said, with a hint of regret, "I had a boyfriend, I loved him very much. We broke down...we broke up."

When we asked if they were going to raise their children with the same restrictions, our Moroccan pen pals replied "No!" "Never!" "No, no!" Our pen pal's generation will change the face of Morocco.