

I was sitting in Blackstone's bookstore in London in the middle of June. It had been less than a week since the school year had ended, and summer vacation had begun. In that week, I had already traveled halfway around the world to Delhi, but I was now back in London after some problems acquiring an Indian visa. I was now looking at a travel guide for Turkey as I was about to leave the next day for Istanbul. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a paperback copy of Ibn Battuta's *Travels*. Ibn Battuta was a fourteenth century Islamic *qadi* (judge) who left his native Tangiers, Morocco in 1325 for a pilgrimage to Mecca and did not return until 1354. Ibn Battuta also is one of the most significant travelers in world history, and an individual whom I spend a week or so discussing in tenth grade world history. I had read many excerpts from Ibn Battuta before, but I had never read the entire *Travels* before. It seemed the perfect opportunity to read the whole book. It also seemed the ideal book because, like Ibn Battuta, I had now found myself traveling not according to a preestablished itinerary, but where the tides carried me. It did not matter that I wasn't sailing anywhere. My travels seemed to be out of my control, and I was being carried by some force I could neither control nor fully comprehend.

The next day my ten-week odyssey began. With my copy of Ibn Battuta in hand, I found myself sitting outside Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. Hagia Sophia was originally built in 537 by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian. In 1453 the Ottoman sultan Mehmet converted the church into a mosque. It was to be the centerpiece of the newly conquered Constantinople, or Istanbul as the Ottomans renamed the city. Like Ibn Battuta, I found myself in awe of the architectural genius of the building. The domed ceiling does truly seem to float in mid-air. After a few days in Istanbul, I plotted a rough course that would carry me eastward through Turkey. I would then turn south and travel through Syria, Jordan, Israel, the West Bank, and Egypt.

As I moved from place to place, I found myself walking through history. One day I could be sitting in the same Umayyad mosque in Damascus that Ibn Battuta had visited, and the next I was strolling along the stone streets of the old city in Jerusalem. Everywhere I visited, the writings of Ibn Battuta were never out of my reach. Ibn Battuta had become my guide on this historical journey through the modern Middle East.

Often I did step out of the world of Ibn Battuta and into the modern world. There was a day visiting the suburbs and malls of Amman Jordan, five relaxing days on the beach of Dahab, Egypt, and numerous conversations with locals about soccer (football to the rest of the world). But no "detour" was more significant than my visit to the El-Bireh Boys School in Ramallah, Palestine. Ramallah has unfortunately become most well known as the site of Yasser Arafat's compound. Ramallah is also home to a 150 year old Friends school. I spent one early August morning with some faculty and staff from the El-Bireh Boys school learning about how a Friends school manages to teach Quaker values to Palestinian Arab male and female teenagers in the middle of an occupied territory. I heard stories about students who struggled with Quaker notions of pacifism when all around them is violence. I learned about students and teachers who never know if they are going to be able to make it to school on time because they don't know how long the line at the security checkpoint will be. I also came to understand that the Friends educational philosophy of experiential education meant learning from the world around you, and that these lessons can take place in almost any setting. This "detour" from the historical route of Ibn Battuta was the most powerful moment of my trip. I also like to think that that Ibn Battuta, a man who often found himself in places that he had not planned to go, would have approved.

Two days after I returned from my travels in the Middle East, I found myself back at Friends preparing for my classes. There were the expected feelings of culture shock, but I was also excited to take what I had learned and incorporate it into my classes. No amount of reading

and research could have taught me as much as my travels had. And it was made possible by the Third Century Grant program for teachers.