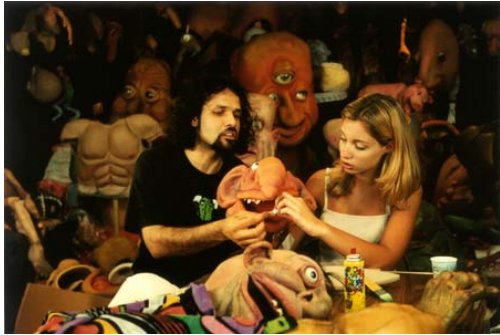


Succeeding together at the Met

by What Kids Can Do with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

REAL WORLD LEARNING

[Reflection and Accountability](#)[Voice and Agency](#)[Sustained Relationships](#)[Home](#)

Photos by Victoria Stilwell and Cal Wolk

*Hi, I'm Abner. I'm a first year student at a school called The Met. At my school, we learn starting from what we are interested in. The Met teaches you the real world. Oh I know social studies, I know that, but you don't know how to explore, you don't know how to go out and do stuff for yourself. — **Met student** (The Learning Cycle, Met video)*

*At first Carlita didn't understand that showing up meant more than being a warm body. It means being productive, preparing for team meetings, and finishing your work—because people are relying on you. At school, showing up unprepared only hurts you. But our work is highly team-focused, so when you're unprepared it hurts everyone. She learned these lessons quickly and made great contributions to the team. — **Met advisor** (Eliot Levine, One Kid At A Time)*

[Click here for more student and staff commentary](#)

“**R**real world learning” at The Met asks students to identify their passions, then meld them into internships and substantive projects that serve real world purposes. It thrusts students into the position of creating from their own interests a series of learning plans that map out their individualized curriculum while meeting the school’s various requirements. Finally, real world learning at The Met asks students to make a habit of saying, “I’ve never done that before, but I’ll try.”

Below, we describe the core elements that simultaneously support and challenge students as they carve out their own real world learning, with links to student work and other artifacts.

LEARNING PLANS

The Met offers neither formal courses nor a standard curricular sequence. Instead, with an advisor, mentor, and parent(s), each student charts quarterly planned activities against the school's five learning goals and a series of questions (for example, "What will I show at my exhibition?"). Parent(s) and student also answer a common set of questions that assess the student's plan in light of his or her strengths, weaknesses, and post-Met goals. For new students, completing the first Learning Plan ranks as an enormous challenge. In time, students also take over organizing the quarterly meetings of their learning team, which includes setting the agenda, facilitating the meeting, and recording and distributing notes.

[Click here](#) for sample student Learning Plan and visual of "Met Learning Cycle."

INTEREST EXPLORATION

In a school that views students' passions as the spark to deep learning, an early task facing Met students is to uncover their own interests. Aware that most adolescents are only beginning to do so, The Met provides building blocks for what it calls Interest Exploration. Individually or as an advisory group, students complete various exercises, including mapping their most important life experiences, imagining the conversation 50 years hence at their retirement party, identifying unmet needs in their community. Once students define general areas of interest, The Met offers step-by-step guides—right down to reminders about punctuality, appropriate dress, hand shakes, and thank-you notes—as students set up, conduct, and keep a log of informational interviews with local businesses or nonprofits with which they might wish to intern. Before finalizing an internship, students go on "shadow days."

[Click here](#) for prompts given to Met students to spark their interest exploration.

LEARNING THROUGH INTERNSHIP (LTI)

The primary vehicle for learning at The Met, LTIs push students to gain knowledge and skills in the context of authentic work and to develop one-on-one relationships with an adult professional—real world learning in name and practice. During the first two weeks of an LTI (which lasts a minimum of three months and occasionally several years), students acclimate to the job, performing tasks for their mentor as they look for ideas for an LTI project that both challenges the student and is of real value to the work site. Aided by their mentor and advisor, students write a project proposal detailing the purpose and scope, areas of research, timeline, and means of evaluation. The resulting products are as diverse as the internships themselves—a survey on teen attitudes towards police for a neighborhood organization, a promotional multimedia production for a computer graphics firm. Students then present what they did and learned in a public exhibition at The Met.

[Click here](#) for examples of LTI student products.

CLOSING ACADEMIC LOOPS

At the same time that Met students take their learning beyond school walls, they also cultivate the skills needed for success in college-level coursework. As a result, The Met expects all students to gain proficiency in reading, writing, math, and science, and to immerse themselves in empirical, social, and quantitative reasoning. Advisors and mentors work in concert to provide students with the academic content needed to complete project-based work, with advisors and other Met staff typically providing whatever tutoring or assistance is necessary back at school.

[Click here](#) for advisor comments on linking academics to student interests and internships.

SUMMER LEARNING

Believing in year-round education, The Met institutionalizes the importance of summer learning. Pursuing summer activities like travel, outdoor adventure programs, apprenticeships, or college classes is a school requirement for every Met student in every grade. The Met adds to this expectation an important twist: that these summer experiences push students into unfamiliar territory—teaching special needs kids in a Pennsylvania camp or building a school in the Dominican Republic. Advisors help students find such opportunities as well as the financial aid or funding they may require. Just as important, advisors coach students on what they will encounter.

[Click here](#) for student reflections and photos from summer travels.

REAL WORLD LEARNING | CLIPBOARD

Sources:

[1] “Forty-Three Valedictorians: Graduates of The Met Talk about Their Learning” by Adria Steinberg (Brown Lab, 2000)

[2] Learning Journeys and The Learning Cycle (Met videos, 2000)

[3] *One Kid at a Time* by Eliot Levine (Teachers College Press, 2002)

On learning how to learn

Freddie: I got to do a lot this year. Anything I was interested in—I worked on the stock market, economics of slavery, what will people do for money... Now you're motivated, because there is something you want to learn. I'm learning adult things like how to act, important words to use, correct English and all that. They try to teach you that in other schools, but then again they just slip down and let you do anything you want. I think I learn more here, because they give you more experiences to learn off of than just learning in the classroom. [2]

Nadia: One thing that I think is helpful is how we learn to seek for resources, since when we're doing projects we ask, “will you help me obtain this for my project or for my exhibition?”...I don't think that a lot of high school students have that, because they haven't had the opportunity, or they didn't need to ask or to search and like we've learned, just get the information, get whatever you need from anyplace that you can—the library, Internet, wherever... That helps a lot, because when you are in college, you don't have a teacher making sure you have everything you need. Or you don't have a teacher making sure you're understanding everything that he's explaining. I mean, sometimes they do try, but it's not the same. So knowing how to seek for resources and how to basically get what I need to get out of the course and raise my hand if I have a question and not be shy to attend any study groups or even organize any, I think that's something that has helped me a lot and is something that we practice here at The Met a lot. [1]

Maya: Compared to other kids, I'm more involved, I guess. I'm more aware of what I want. I always compare myself to my twin sister. We're completely different people. [But] I used to be like her. We were just messy people, don't keep ourselves organized. Now I can't live without my calendar, I can't live without my journal. I just can't go without it. Her, it's like, “I'll remember.” I say, “trust me, you're not gonna remember.” The Met has changed me, it really has. My god it has. If I had gone to a regular school, I would not be like this, no way, no how. I'd have dropped out.

[2]

On persisting

Mentor [about Carlita]: At first Carlita didn't understand that showing up meant more than being a warm body. It means being productive, preparing for team meetings, and finishing your work—because people are relying on you. At school, showing up unprepared only hurts you. But our work is highly team-focused, so when you're unprepared it hurts everyone. She learned these lessons quickly and made great contributions to the team. [3]

Advisor [about Loretta]: *Note: Some students do several shadow days before finding an LTI that interests them. Most find an LTI by November, but for others it takes longer.* Loretta was scared to make [phone] calls. With the help of a fellow student, she set up informational interviews with some stores she liked at the mall. I gave her the name of someone there who had mentored another Met student, but she had left for another job by the time Loretta called. Loretta was so upset that she walked out of school for two days. After that she refused to make calls for a few weeks until her friend stepped in to help. Eventually she did some interviews that went well, but right before her first shadow day the business called it off because of her grunge-style clothing. Loretta was devastated. She's a great artist, though, and in the end she got an LTI with a graphic design company. [3]

Advisor [about Jake]: Many things you love also have parts you hate. Students need to learn that. Jake wants to be a marine biologist, but he's disorganized and hates writing. His internship mentors convinced him that he needs to overcome those barriers to become a scientist, so he wrote a 15-page research paper on the winter flounder. His mentors needed the information for their work. Jake hated every second of it, but he did it. After a dozen drafts he ended up with an amazing, college-level paper. If you get students hooked on their interests, sometimes they're willing to do the less appealing parts. Sometimes they even end up enjoying those parts. [3]

Mentor [about Cesar]: For Cesar's photography project, he wanted to capture the unique relationships among his friends. But in the end, he had little more than random snapshots. We provided lots of support and resources, but he rarely showed the self-discipline to study the techniques he needed. He didn't develop the photos in time for his exhibition, and he was unable to speak with any expertise about the parts of the camera and their functions.

So I gave Cesar two weeks to improve the project and redo his exhibition. And he really did improve his project. It turns out that the pictures hadn't come out because he hadn't loaded the film right. We shifted gears, because it was too expensive to start over again, and because I had underestimated how much difficulty he'd have learning to use the light meter, adjust the aperture, and all that. Instead, Cesar went through a number of photobooks, picked out several pictures that he felt were powerful, and wrote a beautiful one-page analysis of each one. He discussed the symbolism of each picture and also some technical aspects of the photography—angles, lighting, and all that. It was clear that he had developed a real interest—he wasn't just getting it done to meet a requirement. [3]

Succeeding together at the Met

by What Kids Can Do with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation



REAL WORLD LEARNING | ILLUSTRATIONS

- [Quarterly learning plans](#)
- [Met Learning Cycle](#)
- [Interest exploration](#)
- [Internship products](#)
- [Academics](#)
- [Summer journals](#)

See also related student and staff commentary

[Reflection and Accountability](#)

[Voice and Agency](#)

[Sustained Relationships](#)

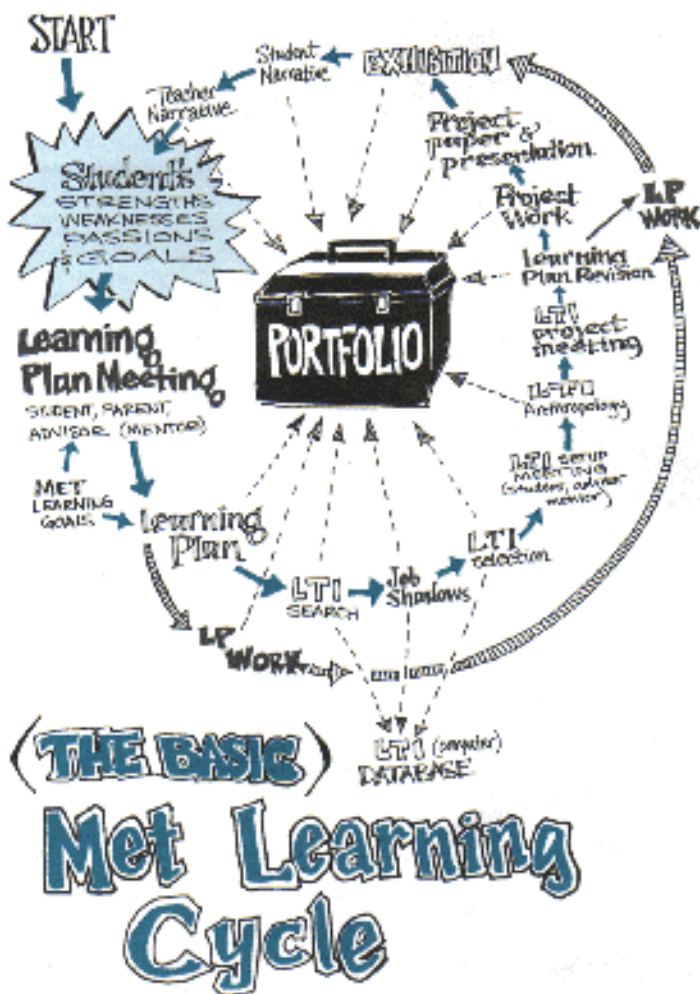
[Home](#)

1.0 Sample quarterly learning plan

[Click here](#) for full plan in PDF format

Sample Learning Plan		Student: Tom Johnson	Grade: 11th	Quart	
Tom's Work	Quantitative Reasoning	Communication	Empirical Reasoning	Social Reasoning	Personal Qualities
LTI Project Work	Adding and subtracting numbers to come up with the correct recipe. Also do number sense and estimating very large and very small quantities of products.	Write out recipes for my mentor into a cookbook. Speak with Donald and listen to him when he is explaining how the dishes are created. Write 2nd project memo, LTI logs written out.	Find information by interviewing Donald and other chefs at the LTI. Find information that has to do with cooking, ask questions about techniques and food processes. Like why does a person get burned when they pick up a hot plate with a wet towel?	Find out what's eatable from the sea and from our back yard, to experiment with in the kitchen.	Demonstrate that I can be committed to my project and my personal goals. Perseverance. Responsibility. Time management.
MET 301	Math in the Advisory as group and keep working on SAT Prep math.	Write in my journal 3x a week. Write in my Super-calendar, read 3 books and Listen well in advisory discussions. Write Poetry in Steve's classes.	Research material at the Library.	Do a service project. Participate in the project committee that decides whether a student will get money for their project.	Persevere in getting all of my work done on time.

2.0 Met Learning Cycle



Graphic by Rachel Brian

3.0 Prompts for interest exploration

The following activity is from *The Big Picture's Advisor Guide 2: Learning and Interest Exploration*—part of the many materials Big Picture has produced for others wanting to start schools with the same philosophy as *The Met*. *Advisor Guide 2* includes an array of tools to help students identify and combine interests with internships.

Activities

Here are some activities to do with your advisory, small groups or for individual students to learn more about what interests them and what opportunities are available in the community.

Conduct Peer Interviews

Break into pairs and interview advisory members about interests.

Interview Older Students

Find students with similar interests to yours and interview them about how they pursued their interests in school.

Write a Journal Entry

Make a list of your favorite things to do—look for common themes.

Search the Mentor Database

Search the mentor database for interesting types of work.

Do an Internet Search

What types of websites interest you the most?

Look Through a College Catalog

What courses look interesting to you?

Look Through the Yellow Pages

What businesses or organizations would you like to explore?

Go to a Bookstore

Find three books that interest you. Write down the name, author and topic—these might be new areas to explore. Look through a magazine rack to see if anything interests you.

Walk Around Your Neighborhood

Break into pairs in advisory. Walk around and write down all the organizations you see that interest you. What else do you notice that is interesting to you?

Explore the Classifieds

Look through the want ads. Do any jobs seem interesting to you?

Read a Biography or Autobiography

Choose a book about someone who interests you. How did they pursue their passions?

Talk to Your Family

What are their interests/hobbies? What did you like to do when you were younger? What skills do they think you have?

Interest Inventories

These are short activities that help students determine their learning styles, interests and strengths.

- #1: Self-Assessment
- #2: Self-Evaluation of Skills and Abilities
- #3: Your World Needs Your Love
- #4: Who Am I?
- #5: Ability Inventory
- #6: Vocational Interests
- #7: Vocational Values

4.0 Internship work products

In 2001-2002, 167 businesses and organizations served as LTI (Learning Through Internship) sites for Met students. Students spend a minimum of two days a week at a worksite, with a mentor, and develop an in-depth project that they work on at the LTI site and back at school. The concrete products students develop as part of their internships yield useful information or new resources for the sponsoring organization: a brochure on depression for teen clients at a community mental health center, a website for a new business, a laminated card with the phone numbers of crisis service providers that city police officers can carry in their wallet, research findings on eelgrass in Narragansett Bay, a minority index to state census figures.

Click below for examples.



As part of her internship at Prevent Child Abuse RI, tenth grader Carleen helped create a newsletter targeted at teen parents. [Click here](#) for sample newsletter in PDF format.



Takesha, through her work at Planned Parenthood and Youth in Action of Providence, prepared a 23-page handbook for teens that mixes straightforward information on birth control, sexually transmitted diseases, and depression with student poetry. [Click here](#) for handbook in PDF format.

5.0 Bringing academics alive

The following excerpts from Eliot Levine's *One Kid at a Time* (Teacher's College Press, 2002) show some of the ways Met advisors and mentors connect academics with student interests and internships.

Reading

"I knew I could draw Cesar into reading *The Rape of Nanking*," Hal says. "It was the vivid descriptions of violence that hooked him, but what he learned was far deeper than that. He was very absorbed with the violence in his own neighborhood, and I wanted him to understand similar problems at other times and places in history. I also knew it would pique his intellectual curiosity, which is one of his great assets."

Miguel's LTI mentor recommended *The Red Badge of Courage*, which helped the ninth grader become a more thoughtful and engaged reader. "It took me a while to read it," Miguel says, "because the last time I read a book was 4 years ago. After a few chapters, I got so used to reading that the words started flowing like I was saying it out loud. At the end of the book, I got so depressed and mad. I couldn't believe that Henry died. After all that, he died. I even read the last few chapters a second time to make sure I didn't miss something, like maybe he didn't really die. It took me so long to realize that the book actually related to me. Just like kids here in Providence, Henry went through so much to be a man just to end up dying so quick at an early age. When the book was over, I didn't want it to end. I've been looking at other books like mysteries and things to read over the summer."

Writing

Tamika's advisor remembers that "when she first came to the Met, she spoke in slang *all* the time. I helped her realize that she knew African-American English, but that she also had to master a second language—standard English. That's something I didn't figure out until I got to college. I had her read *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston. She barely understood a word, because the distinctions between different dialects. Then she did a glossary of slang terms and redefined them in standard English. So she'd write sentences like 'That's a bangin' hat you're wearing' and I'd challenge her to rewrite it as 'That's an attractive hat you're wearing' or something like that. It made her aware that there are other words to use, and at the same time she was having fun and building self-confidence."

Met students write papers, project proposals, self-evaluations, journals, 75-page autobiographies, and more. ... "It's about finding subject matter they're excited about and helping them express it," one advisor said. "Journals are pretty much sacred ground, so I don't make any corrections. But for other types of writing students do lots of drafts, and that's where I comment on grammar, punctuation, clarity, and all that. One student's college essay sounded like a thesaurus, so I helped him cut back on five-syllable words

and find his own voice. Another student had great ideas but a jumbled way of expressing them, so we worked on that.”

Math and science

Julia’s mentor was concerned that Julia hadn’t studied chemistry: “It was a dilemma, because she lacked essential knowledge for working in a lab, and I didn’t know if I’d have the time to teach her.” The mentor laid out what Julia needed to know, and then Julia learned it back at school with her advisor’s guidance. Soon she was mixing solutions, doing tissue cultures, and designing a project to infect liver cells with retroviruses and examine the impact on antigen expression. Rather than following the learning sequence of a conventional textbook, Julia studied the specific topics and techniques that she needed for her project.

Kiyo’s interest in marine biology led to an LTI with the Narragansett Bay Commission. His project was part of an initiative to monitor the bay’s water quality in order to guide public policy and raise public awareness. If they find that high phosphate levels correlate with reduced flounder catches, for example, new legislation might regulate fertilizer use by farms in the watershed. To guide his hypotheses, Kiyo studied how pollution, population growth, and the advent of water treatment had affected water quality. His mentor, a biologist, taught him basic lab skills for drawing and analyzing water samples. With the resulting data, Kiyo helped to create a more accurate profile of water quality in the bay.

Empirical reasoning

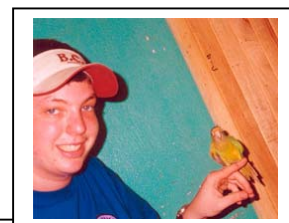
Brenda did her LTI with a Providence police officer, and her main project was to help the department improve relations with teenagers. (She also spent time in a squad car and responded to everything from domestic disputes to homicides.) With help from a Brown University sociologist, she developed a survey and gathered responses from the 120 students in high school classrooms. Two of her findings contradicted the police department’s prevailing beliefs: First, many students reported *positive* attitudes toward the police; and second, students reported that their contacts with police occurred more often in schools and community centers than on the streets. Based on these findings, Brenda’s final report challenged the department’s emphasis on community policing as the best way to improve relations with teenagers. She suggested that the police should increase their positive presence in schools and community centers instead.

6.0 Summer journals

The Met seeks out summer opportunities for all of its students, often far from home. It draws upon its own networks, along with a national foundation called Summer Search, which selects students for program scholarships for two consecutive summers. Some Met students study on a college campus (e.g. Barnard, Syracuse) or in the field (e.g., Caicos Islands, the Navajo Reservation). Others head outdoors (e.g., to Outward Bound programs across the country, wilderness expeditions in Arizona), work as counselors in special summer camps (e.g., for children with HIV), or join leadership programs for teens (e.g., Camp Anytown).

Back at school, through essays and photographs, students share what they learned.

“...I was able to do some serious studying, and reflect a lot about how I live back at home. This is where I figured out what I mention earlier in the essay, the so-called ‘revelation.’ I was walking down a dust road in Potrero to see if they had any salad yet at ‘Las Brisas,’ when I noticed how quickly I was walking. ‘Why am I rushing?’ I asked myself, ‘where is it that I have to be?’ It was like a ton of bricks for me to think about



this, where did I ever have to be that was so damn important. At that moment, (sorry if this is getting too 'spiritual') I was walking right past this really cool colored lizard, and I stopped to examine it. What a cool lizard it was too; it really made me think. 'I wonder what kind of cool stuff is back home that I never take the time to appreciate.' I love times like those, because not only do they make you think whatever your revelation was, but they give your brain a kick-start, a serious kick-start, like jumper cables from a Mac truck." **Jesse (Costa Rica)**

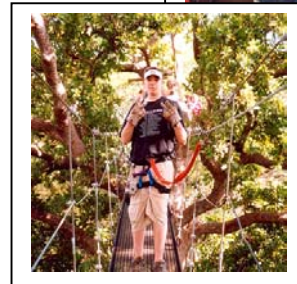


"...In Colorado I had some moments that I'm never going to forget about. I will always remember the day I arrived in the airport and met all the people who were going to be in my group and as I looked toward my group my eyes did not see no other shades of color than white. As I looked at all the people different types of feelings were going through my mind about whether I would fit in or I would have any conflict with them because I am a city kid who is black and not as wealthy as they are." **Derek (Colorado)**

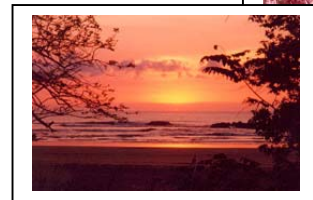
"...[In Alaska] I wore sunglasses because the sun was so bright it reflected onto the ice and made everything light up. The sky was nice and blue and my adrenaline was pumping as I was climbing up the ice. Climbing up the ice with the ice pick was something I will never forget because I am the only person in my neighborhood that can say I have been to Alaska and climbed a glacier...I stayed in a Native American village called Gulkana... Some of the things I saw while I was there were how to gut, cut and smoke fish and how they make some of their foods like porridge, fried salmon and grilled moose. The Natives were making necklaces, singing and dancing. One important thing I noticed while I was in Alaska was about the kids in the village. It felt like they did not care about their culture, but the kids that just moved to Gulkana wanted to learn as much as they could". **Derek (Alaska)**



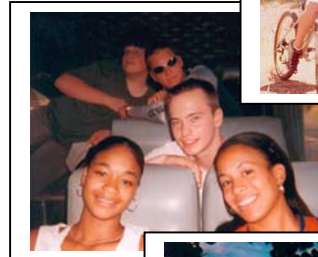
"...We saw the most amazing sites in the world and grew as Jews through different spiritual experiences that they planned for us throughout the trip. Our counselors arranged for us to have a service in the ancient synagogue on top of Mount Massada...The ruins on top of the mountain are from an ancient village that the Jews built to keep themselves from Roman capture... The sunrise on Massada is one of the most beautiful sights in the world." **David (Israel)**



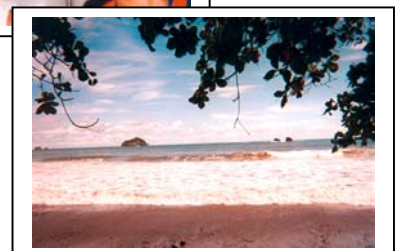
"...Another incredible experience happened during the middle of the course when we were on a 150 ft. schooner for a week. It was like being back in time. It took the whole crew to lift the massive sails. After the group learned how to sail the huge boat, the Outward Bound instructors gave us a chance to run the boat by ourselves, at night. Again, we got up in shifts and rotated jobs. For a while I would be the navigator, then the bow watch, then the person who steers the boat. It was mind boggling to think that a bunch of teenagers were running a 150 ft. sailboat without any problems. It made me feel proud, proud of myself and my group." **Jason (Maine)**



"...[One] resort [we visited] was very isolated, about ten miles from the center of Puerto Viejo which is basically one main street. We drove down a very long windy road that took us deep into the jungle. Our room was just a large cabin with screens for walls. It had a bathroom, running water, and a shower, and was exposed to the rainforest on all sides. This enabled you to be aware of the surroundings at all times. At night all of the insects make quite an assortment of strange and loud noises and were all over the outside of our screen. Some even got inside our room – including many katydids and a good sized tarantula! The coolest part was that there were paths through the lush greenery of the jungle that led straight to the beach. The pristine beach was fringed with the incredibly dense rainforest and stretched on for miles completely undisturbed by human presence." **Colin (Costa Rica)**



"...A major highlight of my last few months in Japan was when I joined a street performance group. It was called Daidengaku, which means 'big street festival.'



There were different groups with different parts that you could join, but my host suggested I do dancing so I did. The instructor pushed us really hard that day, but I was in shape due to Karate so it wasn't so bad...The day of the event is still vivid in my mind. Dressed in traditional Japanese clothing, walking down a long road, wearing a large hat that covered my face, I thought about what I was doing and realized how amazing it was that I was a part of this....When I returned home, a lot of people said that I had changed and I seemed so different. In some ways I don't think I changed much, but I think I've become more the person I want to be." **Chris (Japan)**



"...Here is a Puerto Rican/Guatemalan kid who grew up around Boricuas (full blooded Puerto Ricans) his whole life who dislikes any Dominicans that they might encounter, but here I was friends with almost every boy in that neighborhood. Every day when I would step outside there would be a group of boys outside playing hacky sack and I would join them and that's how we became boys. Man, I miss them." **Juan (Dominican Republic)**

Note: In the summer of 2001, one Met student and his father, a Vietnam veteran, traveled together to Vietnam. Among their stops was a museum that documented the war from the Vietnamese perspective

"...That museum had a profound effect on my father and I. I think we both left there and felt very guilty. I know I felt that way because I am an American and in a sense I felt guilty and ashamed that I am American. I can't imagine how my father felt knowing that some of his fellow soldiers committed some of those horrific acts. Part of me felt that those were some really serious accusations of torture and didn't want to believe it. My dad was quite upset that it was a one-sided story from the Vietnamese perspective. I tried to make him understand that of course they would portray it in that way, just like a lot of our documentaries portray just the American side of the war. I came to the conclusion that night while laying in bed that war isn't a pretty thing and that a lot of horrible things happen, but when it comes down to it, the guilt always lies equally in the hands of both sides. No country is innocent in war." **Joe (Vietnam)**

