

Italy Reads Volunteer Testimonials. 2015-2016

Amanda Frazier

Study Abroad student from Chicago.

Q: How many school visits did you go on?

A: I visited four different schools, for a total of six visits. I also went on a weekend trip to Padula, which was my favorite visit.

Q: What did you think about the schools? The facilities? Was it similar to anything you experienced in America?

A: The schools were built in a very interesting way, like nothing I have ever seen before. It felt like they had been remodeled from old apartment buildings, so the structure itself was a different thing for me.

The setup of the classrooms was also a new thing to see. The fact that the teachers were the ones who moved from classroom to classroom instead of the students. It seems a disadvantage for both the teachers and the students. For the teachers because they don't get to personalize their classroom with things that interest their students. They don't have the space to express themselves visually about their subject. For the students because they stay in the same group, and don't get to interact as much with people outside their class.

Another thing that was interesting was the fact that they have 5 years of high school, as opposed to four like in America. Also,



their school week is often Monday to Saturday, whereas in the States it is Monday to Friday.

Q: What was your impression of the teachers?

A: All the teachers were kind and very excited to have us in their classroom. They were very welcoming to us. They let us lead the conversation like it was our classroom, but they helped us when we needed.

Q: What impression did you get from the students?

A: The students were very shy when it came to speaking English with us. It was better when we broke into smaller groups. They would often start their sentences with phrases like 'My English isn't very good'. However, I can understand,

because I would be the same talking to a native Italian speaker.

Q: What did you talk about with the students, besides the book? Did you find you had similar interests?

A: They asked a lot about America. I found they were very interested in the crazy, highly publicized, politics of America, and I was asked several times what I thought of Donald Trump. I asked them where I should go in Italy, and especially in Rome, and where they would want to go if they were to go to America, or if they had ever been there. I told them to look me up if they ever came to Chicago. We also talked a lot about food.

Q: What was the hardest part of this program for you?

A: Transportation at times could be difficult. For example, I had to walk 30 minutes one time to get to a school at 7AM.

Another thing that can be difficult, especially if you are a timid person, which thankfully I am not, is that it can get awkward sometimes when the students are shy about speaking English. So, the classroom gets quiet, and it's up to you to push for the conversation.

Q: Why did you join the Italy Reads Program? What advice would you give

to another JCU student who is thinking of joining?

A: For me, because I'm an education major, it was about helping someone learn something. I would say if you enjoy being a mentor to someone, or, you are doing something in education or literature, or you simply enjoy reading and talking, this is an amazing program to help develop those skills.

I think it is cool to watch someone's pronunciation get better because of you, by helping them practice their English with a native English speaker. Since they generally learn English from Italian speakers who very often have an Italian accent, it is a rewarding experience to help them learn the correct pronunciation, and hopefully help them become more confident in speaking English.

Q: Are there any anecdotes that you would like to share that you have not already mentioned?

A: In Padula, near Salerno, on the night we arrived, Amanda, the other Italy Reads Volunteer, and I went out for dinner with a group of students around the same age as us. As we were sitting around the table, they were speaking to each other in Italian, and we could not understand a single word they said. It was just a crazy experience to be sitting around a table with people, and not understand a single word exchanged.