

# Lucca Students Crossing International Barriers

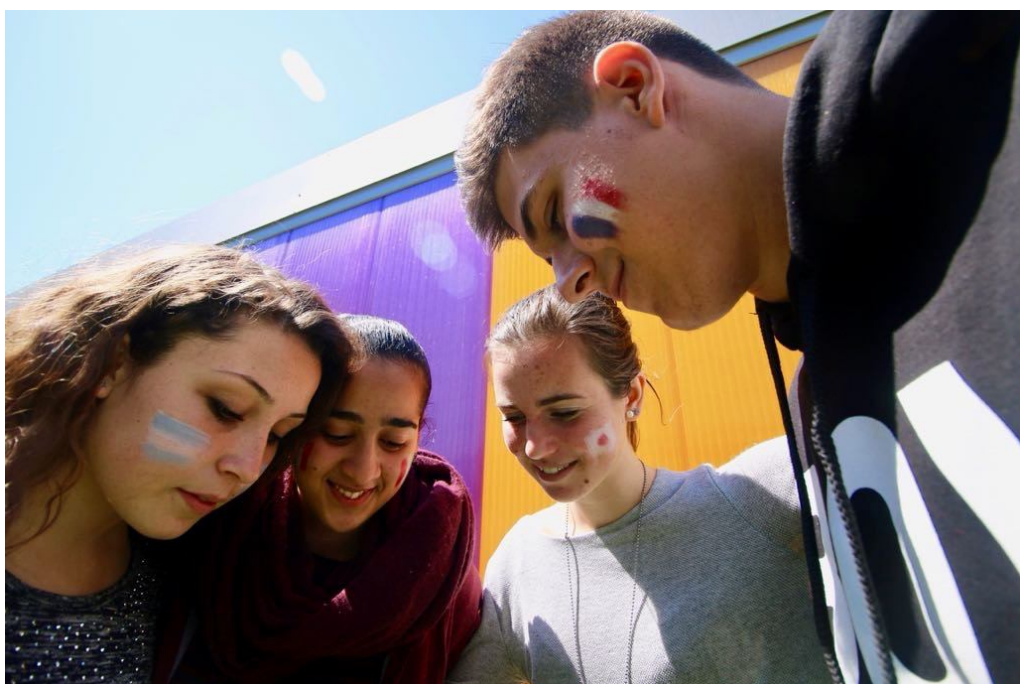
**W**e were born at the start of a new Millennium. We are the Millennials, the “Me, Me, Me Generation” as *Time Magazine* defined us in the May 2013 issue. Apparently, among other things, we are lazy, fame-obsessed, narcissistic. We have little civic engagement and low political participation. We interact all day texting. We continuously check our phones and many of us experience phantom pocket-vibration syndrome. We lack empathy, we don't feel concerned for others. We've been swallowed by technology. We admit that there is some truth in this, which means that at least we are capable of self-criticism and we understand our limits, but there is also a positive potential in us and we want to work on that. We believe that technology, like surfing the net, has allowed us to acquire a wider perspective on the world. It has stimulated our curiosity. We feel broad-minded and capable of building bridges, not walls. Our belief is supported by Joel Stein in *Time Magazine* when he says we are “more accepting of differences, not just among gays, women and minorities but in everyone” than previous generations.

We are a group of fifteen students from the Liceo Scientifico A. Vallisneri, and we are truly international. The microcosm of our class, 3LD linguistic course, is the mirror of our times, made up of continuous migrations of people. Argentina, Australia, England, Morocco and Romania are well represented in our class (until last year also Cuba and Croatia). Integration is a slow and difficult process, but we are doing our best to promote intercultural exchange. Friendship is the basis.

Joel was six when he moved to Bagni di Lucca from England and cannot forget the nightmarish experience of his first day in an Italian school. He was crying his eyes out and parents and teacher had to literally drag him into the classroom. He just could not fit. He had serious problems in learning the language and refused to take part in school activities. His only dream was to go back to his old life in England. When he became more fluent, though, friendship came and made the difference. He now sees his experience from a totally different perspective: “a big chance like that defines you; this experience made me who I am” and when he goes to England he realizes that his horizon has widened: “I feel international!” he proudly recognizes. Besides, we couldn't do without Joel's British humour.

Myra came to Lucca from Romania when she was ten. She says that Romanian students are generally more respectful than Italian ones, and teachers are stricter. This was a bit of a problem at first. She could not approve of what she considered immature behavior on the part of Italian students, and was therefore isolated. Fortunately, also in her case things slowly developed. Friends and mutual respect came and they made the difference. Now Italy is a home to her, a home where she has brought politeness and a joyful love for dancing, which is an essential part of Romanian life.

Jamila was born in Lucca but her parents are from Morocco and most of her relatives live there. Living between two worlds has always been a resource for her, never an impediment.



*Morena, Jamila, Laura and Sean from class 3LD Liceo Scientifico A. Vallisneri*

According to Jamila, the attitude towards food serves as a bridge between these apparently so distant worlds. For both the Moroccan family and the Italian one, food is not simply a means of survival. It requires a long preparation and is a pleasure in itself, but it mainly represents socialization, conviviality and joy. It unites the family. When she smells spices, as on her recent visit to the spice market in Marseilles during a school trip, her imagination makes her fly all the way to the land where her relatives live. Jamila, though, has two homes and in Lucca friends are fundamental to make her feel that this is home. Painting their hands with henna is certainly good fun!

Morena was born in Argentina and came to Lucca when she was just one year old. Basically, her friends have always simply considered her as a Lucchese. They have hardly been aware of her being strongly connected to her country of origin. Family bonds, in particular, make her feel the difference, because in Argentina they matter even more than in Italy. She would never miss the Sunday family gatherings around Argentinian food, and on New Year's Eve she prefers dining with family than with friends. Her mum is very young, much younger than her friends' mothers, and she has a wonderful relationship with her. Morena believes that the Argentinian habit of having children very early in life is great because it makes the dialogue between generations much easier. Going against the mainstream trend, she believes she will be able to achieve professional self-realization and, at the same time, have children while still young. Noisy, loud and joyful, *sangre caliente*, she makes a delightful contrast to the more reserved Lucchese attitude!

*– by 3LD students, Liceo Linguistico Vallisneri  
(photo by Nicolò Urbani)*

*This article was submitted as part of a professional experience created by Liceo Scientifico A. Vallisneri and Grapevine, for and with the English language class of Chiara Calabrese.*