

A View of Cultural Neighborhoods of Chicago

A Student's Account of a Field Trip



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On Monday October 29, Conant High School's AP Human Geography classes took one their most anticipated field trips of the year to three of Chicago's cultural neighborhoods- Humboldt Park, Chinatown and Pilsen. Conant teachers Samantha Serrano and Timothy Harte, Social Studies teacher Amy Spizzirri, and Palatine Social Studies teacher James Lange were each in charge of one bus, each bus stopping at neighborhoods in a different order to avoid overcrowding.

At 8:05, we boarded Serrano's bus. While waiting to leave, Serrano told us to set up the "Goosechase" app, the platform we would use to play Scavenger Hunt, snapping photos relating to the neighborhoods and course vocabulary words and answering trivia questions on the bus ride to the neighborhoods.



By 8:20, we left Conant! We had a long bus ride ahead of us to our first stop, Humboldt Park, the Puerto Rican neighborhood. On the way, we answered the "Bus Trivia" questions, ranging from "When was Schaumburg founded?" to "Snap a photo of a Brian Urlacher Restore Hair billboard along I-290".

At 9:20, we arrived at Humboldt Park. Even before loading off the bus, we noticed the incredible amount of Puerto Rican pride in the neighborhood. Flags, murals and a massive steel sculpture of the Puerto Rican Flag that arched over Division Street are just a few examples.

We stopped at [Nellie's Restaurant](#) to try some Puerto Rican food! We tried two different types of plantains, maduros, sweet plantain, and tostones, fried plantain. Along with the plantains was mayoketchup, a dipping sauce with equal parts of mayonnaise and ketchup with some garlic. Everything was so delicious, students got seconds!

We left the restaurant and began our walk down Division St. We got to see the various murals and the tiendas (stores) along the way back to our bus. The murals were incredibly vibrant, continuing to display the amount of Puerto Rican pride in Humboldt Park.

We hopped back on the bus for a quick two minute drive to the “Founder of Modern Geography” Alexander Von Humboldt’s statue. German immigrants lived in this northernmost part of the West Park System during the 1860s, and in 1869 requested that the neighborhood should be named after Humboldt. It was not until the mid-1950s when Puerto Ricans began to move into the neighborhood. Serrano told me that just around the statue were buildings built of German architecture styles.

After we took photos with the statue as a part of their scavenger hunt, we traveled to Chinatown. During this leg of the trip, we were given an hour on our own to explore what Chinatown has to offer. Some students and I visited MiniSo and various smaller restaurants and shops. The restaurants were surprisingly packed for 10:15 in the morning. We also spent a good chunk of time looking for a good boba place, but unfortunately all of the locations were closed. By the time we found a place, it was time to return to the bus to go to our next destination, Pilsen!

The bus dropped us off right in front of the murals on 16th Street. We spent about 15 minutes walking down 16th street and admiring the murals and graffiti art. Similar to Humboldt Park, the murals on 16th street had various undertones to them.



After our walk, we drove to the Panaderia, which translates to bakery in Spanish. Unlike a traditional bakery, we roamed around the bakery and chose what we wanted, taking it out of the glass case using metal trays and tongs. I ended up buying some churros and a peach drink that was in a fridge near the cashier. Outside of the Panaderia, I noticed cempasúchil, marigolds, for sale. These flowers are commonly used on ofrendas, altars, during the celebration of Dia De Los Muertos, the Mexican holiday celebrating the dead.

Fortunately, Serrano told us that we had an hour until our tour at the [National Museum of Mexican Art](#), so we were able to walk and enjoy Pilsen and the beautiful weather that day. We arrived at the museum with some downtime and were able to explore the exhibits and gift shop.

The gift shop had so many cool things. My personal favorite were these figurines featuring luches libres, wrestlers, and skeletons for Dia De Los Muertos. I ended up buying a keychain representing one of the cards from the Mexican card game Loteria and a sticker saying No Te Rajes, meaning don't give up.

In the museum, our tour guide took us through the their Dia De Los Muertos exhibit and explained to us the idea of ofrendas, alters, and their significance to this Mexican holiday,

Then, he explained a few pieces that explored death. All of the pieces were very different from each other so it was interesting to see how they all shared this common theme!

Afterward, we left the museum and headed back to Conant!

Serrano and the other teachers treated the students to a ramen party in the cafeteria. Students from all classes sat together and shared their experience on the field trip and enjoyed their ramen.