At the heart of those travel experiences has always been the imagination, resilience, and tireless efforts of the deans, teachers, and administrators responsible for planning our local and global treks. The 2020–21 trip planning team—led by Dean of Student Life Hillary Freeman and Eighth-grade Dean Cynthia Kosut—and the grade-level deans took on the challenge this spring of “traveling” during a pandemic.

During the week of May 17 through 21, Nueva students engaged in five days of virtual travel. Students and their faculty chaperones visited museums, met with experts from around the world, entered the homes of indigenous people across three continents, attended cooking classes, and toured schools, sanctuaries, and remote locations around the world. Many of these experiences were live on Zoom, and hosted by our travel partners from past, in-person trips.

“Built on the foundation of why we travel, we worked on the design of an immersive academic and cultural experience for each grade for our middle and upper school students,” Cynthia shared in her first letter introducing the travel week program to middle and upper school families.

“So, why do we travel? Collectively, our trips develop a sense of global citizenship and expand our students’ academically, socially, and emotionally.”

While the experiences at each grade level were uniquely tied to the distinctive, year-long thematic foci, all of the 2021 trips were built around the pillars of the Nueva experience, including environmental citizenship, design thinking, social justice and equity, and social-emotional learning.

“New this year, as well, was one common theme throughout all of the trips: diaspora.”

With this theme in mind, faculty chaperones were asked to identify how this theme of diaspora connected to the content they already have planned. Just like in normal years, the goal was for our community to share in authentic and informed travel experiences.

“This year required a pivot into parts unknown,” Hillary reflected. “Because of our collective ‘yes, and’ and can-do spirit, our cohort of Nueva educators made the magic happen. My sincere hope is that each person involved will reflect on their own personal learning and recognize it when it appears over and over again in their lives.”

Purposeful and immersive travel is a cornerstone of the Nueva experience. The places we go, the people we meet, and the way we reflect on our experiences as an entire community reaffirms and develops our understanding of the world. Travel—and the studies, preparation, and sense of shared responsibility that precede it—helps us to live up to our mission of developing informed and engaged global citizens.
When I first heard that Nueva was doing a virtual trips week, I was somewhat apprehensive about how well the experience of traveling and experiencing a new country could be replicated in a meaningful way on Zoom. What I didn’t realize was that the trips team hadn’t just planned a series of talks on video calls. The interactive sessions—most notably building and learning to play a cajón, pottery workshops, and a cooking class on sopa seca, a traditional dish—gave me the opportunity to experience some of the wonders of Peru from my very own house!

What was most exciting to me is that this year, rather than focusing only on Cusco, students get to experience a much wider geographical area, view the beauty and diversity of the country, and learn about the fascinating and, at times, challenging history.

Jo Newman, ninth-grade dean
A Deep-Dive into Pueblo Culture

Raya I., Fifth Grade

During Travel Week 2021, the fifth graders were able to experience the culture and beliefs of the ancestral Pueblo people firsthand, through a multitude of activities and lessons.

Archaeological Dig with Zubin: We would know nothing about the lifestyles of the Pueblo people if it were not for archaeology and digging. With Zubin, we journeyed down to Crocker Road to try and dig up clues of the past and unearath the mysteries that have been there for a long, long time. We got to use metal detectors and giant magnets to search the hillside for clues. My group didn’t discover anything momentous but this dig simulated some of the struggles and rewards that real archaeologists face in trying to dig up clues of the past.

Hogan Making with Zac & Louis Williams: Some could say that the entire essence of all of these activities a classes ties back to humanities, and I would agree. In all of this, we are learning about a culture and applying it to our modern life. We are taking information from long ago and absorbing it, using it, interpreting it in new and creative ways. For the humanities portion of travel week, we were visited by Louis Williams, a member of Navajo Nation, and, along with Zac, I learned about the history of the Navajo hogan, which means home in Navajo. We learned about the different types of hogan, male and female, and then constructed our own using pretzels and cream cheese frosting mixed with confectioner’s sugar. It was harder than you would expect, and the history was fascinating!

The fifth-grade travel week was a deep exploration of the ancestral Pueblo culture. Through all of our activities, we journeyed back in time to try and infer what life might have been like back then. Though we were not really at Crow Canyon, it was fun, enlightening, and humbling to participate in these classes just the same.

TH GRADE PROTOTYPE PROJECT

Using two sheets of paper and no adhesive (glue, tape, etc.), sixth graders were challenged to design a way to raise as many clementines off the table as possible. Sofia Z., applying engineering techniques she learned from Dan Sweeney of the MIT D-Lab to sketch and then build her idea in nine steps. Her final result was a success, with her two sheets of paper holding up 11 clementines!

6th Grade Prototype Project

TH GRADE TRIP

A group of 11th grade students visited the National AIDS Memorial Grove in Golden Gate Park as part of their trip focused on the AIDS movement. Led by Alegra Beckley, Rachel Dawson, and Alleen First, students walked the grove, heard from quilt conservator and “Mother of the AIDS Quilt” Burt McMullen, who has had a hand in sewing all 40,000 panels.

AIDS Quilt

Gert McMullin, who has had a hand in sewing all 40,000 panels.

TH GRADE TRIP

A memory I have from the week is making blackberry couli and spilling 20 percent of it on me right after I took it off of the stove.

Nikhil S., Sixth Grade

I learned that when you are trying to solve a problem you should experience it yourself so you have a better understanding on how to help.

Julia C., Sixth Grade

I hope I can speak for everyone in my travel group when I say that this week almost felt like a return to normal, and I am very thankful that after this past year of challenges we could close out our senior year with an experience this enriching and straight out filled with fun.

Alex Chen, 12th Grade

TH GRADE TRIP

My favorite experience was learning the traditional way of painting using ‘Mao bi’ (a calligraphy pen used throughout most of Chinese ancient history). Because of my passion for art, it was really fun to experiment with this medium.

Brendan W., Eighth Grade

APPRECIATIONS AND TAKEAWAYS

Thank you so much for some of the most amazing two hours I’ve ever had! Seeing, hearing, and, above all, learning about all the wildlife in the cloud forest ecosystem was absolutely amazing.

I loved it!

Charlotte A., 10th Grade

I really enjoyed making the tapas, dancing, decorating fans, making tiles, and talking with all the cool teachers and leaders. I learned so much about Spanish culture and I especially enjoyed learning about how different cultures influenced what today is known as Spanish culture.

Tatiana S., Eighth Grade

I learned that when you are trying to solve a problem you should experience it yourself so you have a better understanding on how to help.

Julia C., Sixth Grade

I hope I can speak for everyone in my travel group when I say that this week almost felt like a return to normal, and I am very thankful that after this past year of challenges we could close out our senior year with an experience this enriching and straight out filled with fun.