

It's a Small World

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"THE FRENCH ARE COM-
ING! THE FRENCH ARE COM-
ING!" There was an excited
chatter leading up to the day 25
ninth graders from Collège Au-
guste Mailloux in Nantes, France,
arrived at Ashland High School.
They were to stay for two weeks
to practice their English and learn
about American culture. The
French exchange students were
hosted by Ashland High School
students currently enrolled in the
French program. French students
and Ashland hosts were matched
by their hobbies, likes, interests
and personality. Ashland hosts
were given no stipend to host and
only did so because of their inter-
est to make new friends, practice/
learn French, and get to know
French culture. Leading up to the
trip, hosts and French students
emailed, sent pictures, Skyped,
and talked on social media to get
to know each other and each other's families.

Our friends from across the
Atlantic landed at Logan Airport
in Boston on a busy Friday—the
night of the Homecoming Game!
They came in time to catch the
second half of the football game
and attend the Homecoming
Dance hosted by the Student
Council the following night. They
laughed at us as we screamed to
Hollaback Girl and taught them
how to Whip and Nae Nae. After

an eventful weekend, the big day
was Monday, their first day of
school in America. As a student
who takes Spanish, I found the
language to be a challenge, but
anyone could tell how excited they
were to be here! Every single one
of them always had a smile on
their face even if they were com-
pletely lost or overwhelmed in a
situation. While they combated
the oh-so-stereotypical questions,
of "How many crêpes do you eat
each day?" and "Why aren't you

comments with their delightful ac-
cents. But the most surprising of
all was their extensive knowledge
of American culture. They were
into the same shows, music, mov-
ies, books, and YouTubers as us!
When we asked them what French
music they listened to, they said
that they actually only listened to
American music, stating that Tay-
lor Swift was one of their favor-
ites. They love the Hunger Games
and The Fault In Our Stars, too!
They even watch Dancing with



Ashland hosts took their French guests out to experience American culture. (Photo/submitted)

wearing a beret?", I realized how
fluent their English was! It was a
pleasant surprise that they could
usually keep up in conversations,
playfully tease, and make witty

the Stars, crushing on the one and
only Derek Hough, as well.

French school is quite differ-
ent from America. The schools
and classes are much smaller,
school starts at 8 in the morning
and ends at 5 p.m. (Don't worry!
There is an hour break for lunch
and an hour study hall to do
homework every day!), there is
much less homework, and gym
class is much more involved.
They were horrified by how early
we had to get up, the enormous
stack of homework we need to
do every night, and that the ma-
jority of kids walk around a track
talking to their friend for an hour
instead of playing the ongoing



Students arrived in Clocktown from Nantes, France, this fall for an experience that both the French and Ashland students will never forget. (Photo/submitted)

game in gym class. While they
were at our school, they still had
a few sessions of classes with their
own teachers. They needed to do
writing assignments, describing
the house they were staying at,
their host, and the school.

They didn't come to Amer-
ica just for school though! They
came at the perfect time to watch
the leaves change colors. They
went to Rhode Island for the
pumpkin carving festival at the
Roger Williams Park Zoo and
Quincy Market, spent a couple
days in Boston visiting Harvard
and went on one of the famous
Duck tours, watched the Celtics
versus the Spurs basketball game,
and visited Plimoth Plantation.
Of course, their hosts took them
to some of the local favorites like
the Natick Mall, Sunnyside Café,
some of the best stores known to
mankind (aka CVS and Target),
and gave them their first experi-
ence eating local Chinese food!

They also arrived just in time
to experience their first Hal-
loween! They went to parties
and went trick-or-treating and
dressed up in costumes for the
first time. Needless to say, getting

free candy is a fun event for kids
all around the world.

This experience was one that
both the French and Ashland
students will never forget! While
I expected meeting people from
around the world would help me
embrace differences, it more im-
portantly helped me realize it's
a small world and we're not all
that different after all. What's so
exciting is that with today's tech-
nology, hosts and their French
exchange students can continue
to stay connected through so-
cial media and texting, allowing
their friendship to last over thou-
sands of miles. Ashland students
might even get the chance to go
to France over April vacation to
stay with the family of the stu-
dent they hosted! It's incredible
that at a time in which Ashland
High School's French program is
at risk of being shut down, there
is a shining light at the end of
the tunnel. Such opportunities
prove how important it is for our
schools to provide at least two
foreign languages, if not more!
Language is the only true barrier
between people, which can easily
and definitely should be decon-
structed. Hopefully, in the near
future, Latin could be offered at
our schools as well!

I would like to thank my
friends, Olivia Beaton and Nec-
harika Chanda, for allowing me
to discuss with them their experi-
ence as hosts for French exchange
students. Their experiences helped
me write this article! For more
about the happenings at Ash-
land High School, tune into my
monthly column :)

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