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Ghana through the eyes of American teenagers

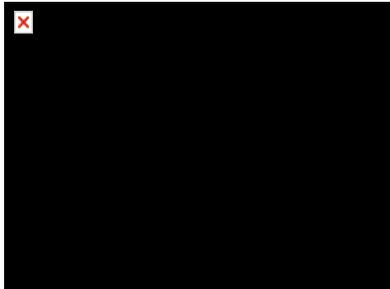
STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Eighth graders from Atlanta's KIPP WAYS Academy made a trip to Ghana
- Community donations made the trip possible
- The students were moved by a visit to slave dungeons

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(CNN) -- Social Studies came alive for Atlanta charter school eighth-graders.



Eighth graders from Atlanta's Knowledge is Power Program take a graduation trip to Ghana.

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They celebrated their graduation with a trip to Ghana, a West African country they only knew from their lessons.

Community donations made it possible for more than 30 KIPP WAYS Academy students and their chaperones to set out on the journey.

While visiting the African continent, they met Ghana's first lady, visited a rainforest and climbed a mountain.

Students visited the slave dungeons where some of their ancestors were held four centuries ago, a moving experience.

Several students put pen to paper so they'd remember their visit forever.

Here is some of what they had to say ...

'I really felt like bawling on the floor'

Ndeye Thioubou, 14

Today we went to the slave dungeons on the coast of Elmina. To my surprise, I didn't really feel anything emotionally when our tour started. I felt kind of bad because within the first five minutes some other people in our group were already crying.

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When the tour was over, I was proud of myself for not bawling on the floor before we finished. When our guide, Mr. Kwadwo, told us we were going back inside the dungeon to do a ritual, I was thinking, oh no, I can't go back in there. They've really done it now.

We went in there and stood in a circle holding hands. Then, the chaperones and others started sharing their thoughts about how it would feel if we were actually slaves. Within seven minutes, people were chanting and I really felt like bawling on the floor then but, you know, I held it together, trying to show that I was strong.

Then, my mother yelled out like she was in some sort of trance or something, then I had to let it go. I started crying, and I couldn't stop. I tried not to look up because every time that I saw someone else cry, I cried even more.

It surprised me because I was really proud when I saw people who I didn't expect to be engaged in the ritual get so emotional. That made me cry even more. I was happy, sad, and angry all at one time.

'Walking in the footsteps of my ancestors'

Deranda Butler, 14

I just went to the slave river, where most of our ancestors took their last bath before they went into the inferno known as slavery. When we got there, we got a little social studies lesson, and then came the big shock.

We walked up to a tunnel-like entrance and our guide, Mr. Kwadwo, said, "your ancestors walked these lands, not knowing where they were going." And then he blindfolded us and ordered us to walk forward. The only thing I could do was depend on my classmate, Nia, who was in front of me, but she was blindfolded too.

I had on sandals and, as we walked, I felt the dirt, rocks and sticks mixed with the cold rainwater underneath my feet. At first I felt disgusted, but then I realized that my ancestors had walked the same trail, then I felt honored to walk it. After a while, our blindfolds were removed, and there we stood in the river where many of our ancestors had walked and bathed before their lives were ruined.

I couldn't help but think about the fact that thousands of people who lived hundreds of years ago with a face I've never seen; a name I've never heard; a touch I've never felt; a voice that I've never heard from had their feet where mine was today. I was emotionally torn, but felt proud at the same time. Our guides were right. I



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am walking in the footsteps of my ancestors. I AM MY ANCESTORS!!!!

'My experience here has been life-changing'

Theresa Jones, 14

My experience here has been life-changing. I have overcome the stereotype that poor black people can't return to their roots. I understand that all blacks in Africa aren't miserable. Africans are more joyful and peaceful without all the technology that we have in America.

Being in Africa just gives me a feeling of relief. It's like all of the anger and sadness in me is going away. I am more emotional and I want to try a lot of new things. Africa just has a special feeling to it.

'Africa is my most favorite place on Earth'

Rakhety Livingston, 13

The thought of actually being in Africa is so invigorating. It took me about a day to realize that I was actually here. Africa is my most favorite place on Earth. I love Africa, but it is also hard to be here. Today we went to the slave dungeons, and I cried the whole time.

How could that happen to our ancestors? When we returned to the dungeons the second time, I fell onto the floor and couldn't get up. I was crying so hard. It was like I could actually hear the voices of my ancestors screaming and crying. It made me very angry. I am glad my teacher, Mr. Edelin, was there to comfort me.

'It seems like I was supposed to be here'

Devonte' Render, 14

The trip has been great and today is the last day. Yesterday we had our cultural performance that showed how much talent we all have. The day before that, we went to the slave dungeons. I saw a lot of people's emotions and how much the Africans really care about their people.

My favorite part so far was when I had to cross the bridges. They didn't look steady at first, but only shook a little once we were on it. Another interesting experience was when we went to the largest market in [Ghana](#) and when I saw one of the Dutch dungeons as we were arriving in Accra.

I am happy to be in Africa. It seems like I was supposed to be here. The people here are so humble. I can't wait to see my little brother and sister, and most importantly, my grandmother back at home. When I get back to America, I am going directly to McDonald's to get some burgers, and I'm going to get a lot of candy!

'Remember those who came before you'

Charles King, 14

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Today I walked in the footsteps of my ancestors; I am my ancestors. We went to worship in the river, where my ancestors had their last bath before they were sent on the Middle Passage to America. It was really emotional because I could feel their presence, and I now know for sure that there is a specific goal for me to achieve in life.

This experience taught me to always have family around me, and to remember those who came before you. I also learned to be aware of my surroundings and be positive. Always have a positive outlook. God is love. Know yourself. [E-mail to a friend](#)

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