

¡HOLA, ESPAÑA!

SOMOS TACONIC HILLS!

Over the past few months, middle school Spanish teacher Jennifer Bentivegna Li, with the help of the **TH** technology coordinator Bram Moreinis, has used video conferencing to allow her students to interact live with students in the town of Liria, Spain.

“Our students met a group of 15-year-olds living in the Valencia region,” Mrs. Li said recently. “It was an eye-opening experience.”

Kristen Davenport, one of the **TH** students who participated in the project, said that “meeting” the Valencia youths made her appreciate the complexity of Spanish dialect and regional customs.

“When we asked them what their favorite holiday was, they started talking about a holiday we had never heard of,” Kristen said. “So after the first video conference, we went back and studied the region and learned that there is a particular holiday that only people in that area celebrate, Las Fallas.”

The cultural exchange project evolved in a three-fold manner. First, a bilingual question-and-answer time was prepared for the Spanish students to establish a relationship with the **TH** students. After that, students shared conversations with each other on a web-based bulletin board. The Taconic Hills students then spent a week in the computer lab doing research on Valencia and designing web pages about what they had learned. They discussed this work with the Spanish youths in the second video conference. The third video conference entailed the creation of a digital movie, in which students transferred video into a computer software program and edited it into a polished electronic narrative, which they sent to Spain. The movie showed the Taconic Hills building, featured interviews with **TH** teachers and shared a visit to Catamount and to a local farm, narrated both in Spanish and English. The students in Spain sent a video of their school and their town in return.

Mr. Moreinis said that the technology of video conferencing is opening up new horizons for classroom teaching, engaging students with the real world in highly motivating ways.

“In addition to partner schools like this one, many universities, museums, science labs and other places provide video conferences that Taconic Hills teachers can use with their classes. This technology allows students to visit a world-class museum without ever leaving their classroom, meeting experts, asking questions and getting answers as they go.”



SAY “QUESO” These Taconic Hills Middle School students got ready to meet counterparts in Spain through the magic of video conferencing.

“Setting up video conferences can be complicated and requires coordinated preparation and testing before each session,” Mr. Moreinis said. “The Spain video conference presented some unique difficulties because it was international. The actual technology didn’t work as well as we wanted it to. But it’s only a matter of time until everyone gets better at this. You’re going to see more and more teachers using the video conference medium with their students.”

“We gained a great deal of cultural awareness,” Mrs. Li said. “For example, we didn’t know much about Las Fallas when we started. It turns out it is a very old, week-long festival of fires. The people burn enormous paper sculptures and stage quite elaborate pyrotechnics.”

“There was both a lot of technology learning and authentic Spanish learning,” Mrs. Li said. “Mr. Lampilla was instrumental with the movie production technology. The students were very enthusiastic and hard working. Video conferencing with students from around the world is not a typical middle school experience.”

“Seeing the Spanish students face to face, being able to ask questions and hear the language spoken by natives, is a very positive motivational learning experience,” Mrs. Li said. “This project was supported by a grant from the Taconic Hills Educational Enrichment Fund (THE E Fund) of the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation. I hope that opportunities like this be will available for my students in the future.” ▲