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EDUCATION

From Castle Walls to Curtain Calls

Our week, in our own words
Stratford-upon-Avon and London · 24–30 October 2026



Castle towers, Shakespeare’s family homes, live theatre, university museums and conversations around the dinner table: our week has brought together serious study, new discoveries and plenty of laughter.

The students’ own words tell the story, from birds flying overhead to decoding Shakespeare’s language and becoming a group of friends.

Warwick Castle



Warwick Castle offered a memorable combination of history and entertainment. The guides made a particular impression on **Azzurra**, who felt that the guide “made the tour very entertaining by explaining very well.”

Alice especially enjoyed the stories behind the buildings: “I particularly liked the tours of the castle, both the history tour and the ghost tour. I think many of the stories that the guide shared were memorable and interesting.”

Exploring the chambers, hearing ghost stories and tackling the escape room attraction brought different kinds of excitement. **Alice** valued “an opportunity to have fun as a group,” while **Umberto** remembered having “a great time with my classmates.”

The Falconer's Quest



Eagles and other birds sweeping just above the audience prompted a mixture of nervousness, fascination and delight.

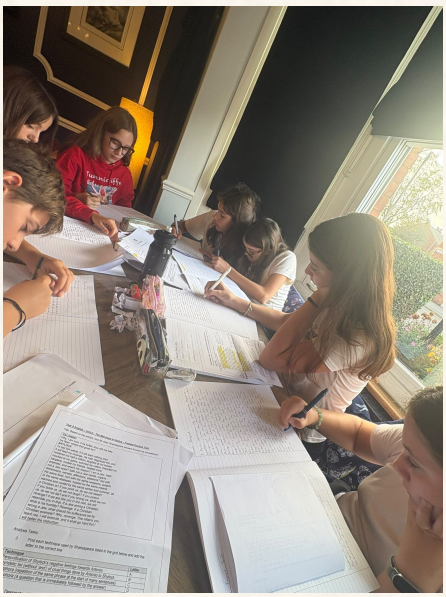
Melissa captured the spectacle vividly: "Watching the majestic birds of prey glide silently just inches above the crowd at Warwick Castle was an unforgettable, and breathtaking experience." Her favourite moment came at the end, when "they were flying freely in the sky."

Alice remembered "feeling excited when the birds flew just above our heads," while **Umberto** was struck by "the power of their wings." **Azzurra**'s description, "elegant and majestic," summed up the impression they left.

Academic seminars

Our seminars and workshops focused on Shakespeare's play The Merchant of Venice. Over the course of the week, students studied the language and form of the play in detail, familiarising themselves with the social and historical context of the time, and exploring the key themes of the play.

At the end of the week the students completed an extended writing task allowing them to critically contemplate the themes of the play and helping them to develop their analysis and essay writing skills.



Alice described the workshops as "an important part of the trip, and also one of the best ones," adding: "I learned to analyse, reflect upon, and examine the historical context of the play."

Livvy's teaching was warmly appreciated. **Alice** described her as "always open to questions" and someone who "explained everything thoroughly." **Azzurra** also valued her explanations and patience.

Luce and **Azzurra** emphasised the opportunity to "reflect, through discussions, on important themes Shakespeare wants to evoke."

Shakespeare's Stratford



At the Guild Chapel, the surviving wall paintings encouraged students to look closely and ask questions. Seeing the remains alongside a digital reconstruction helped **Melissa** understand how the elements once fitted together. Walking into the chapel felt as though she had "stepped right back in time."

Holy Trinity Church, where Shakespeare was baptised and is buried, created another connection between the writer and the town. "I felt like I had gone back in time," **Alice** recalled.

Luce and **Azzurra** found their own memorable description: standing in the place where "the wizard of literature was honoured."

Shakespeare’s Birthplace



Visiting Shakespeare’s Birthplace made his childhood and family life easier to imagine. Students noticed the rooms, the beds, the garden and the space associated with his father’s work.

“It was so cool walking around the actual house where Shakespeare was a kid,” **Melissa** wrote. For **Luce** and **Azzurra**, the domestic details brought the visit to life: “His bed, the ornaments, the room felt alive.”

The people welcoming us into these places mattered too. As **Alice** put it, “Everyone who showed us around was very kind and helpful.”

Anne Hathaway's Cottage



At Anne Hathaway's Cottage, **Azzurra** remembered "a huge beautiful garden and a pretty house," while **Melissa** particularly liked the thatched roof.

Alice appreciated hearing about the cottage and the people who had lived there before going inside. Listening to the guide first, she explained, meant "I was able to appreciate its interiors even more."

The excellent guides helped students connect the buildings with the lives once lived within them. Their stories made looking around each home a richer experience.

Shakespeare’s schoolroom



The schoolhouse visit brought another opportunity to imagine Shakespeare’s world. Students listened to the costumed teacher, tried writing with quills and took a turn in the teacher’s chair wearing period clothing.

Alice singled it out in her reflections: “I really appreciated visiting the Guild Hall and Schoolhouse Shakespeare studied in.”

The experience combined close listening with opportunities to join in, making the schoolroom another memorable part of our exploration of Stratford.

Quills, costumes and classroom discoveries





Students experimented with unfamiliar writing tools and entered into the spirit of a very different classroom. Concentrating on a line of writing with a quill, then trying the teacher’s chair in period clothing, brought together learning and enjoyment.

From page to stage



At The Play's the Thing, **Alice** particularly enjoyed the actors' costumes, which helped her picture Ophelia and Desdemona. **Azzurra** remembered acting part of Hamlet. **Melissa** found another favourite: "I really liked the insult chair, which made us laugh a lot." The exhibition connected theatre with "fun and exciting experiences."

That evening, As You Like It at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre gave us a professional performance to discuss. **Alice** described it as "both fascinating and confusing," explaining that "understanding the language was like decoding a message sent from the past."

Melissa noticed the layers of disguise: male actors playing women who then disguised themselves as men. For **Alice**, the challenge became part of the value: "I am grateful for the confusion because it made the humour and overall experience more authentic."

A different view of London



Our London excursion took us through Marylebone and Bloomsbury, with a stop at the Sherlock Holmes statue and opportunities to explore museums, bookshops and university buildings.

Alice noticed the changing atmosphere as we moved between busier streets and calmer surroundings. The buildings and university campuses became part of her memories of the city, while **Azzurra** particularly remembered the statue and the museums.

Exploring together gave students opportunities to use English, ask questions and discover a different side of London.

A fairytale bookshop



Exploring London together

Daunt Books inspired some of **Alice**'s most imaginative writing: "The bookshop looked like it came out of a fairytale. It may have been my imagination, but the books released an energy that filled each room with magic."

For **Azzurra**, recognising books she had read during primary school prompted thoughts about "how I grew up as a reader." **Umberto** enjoyed finding "so many fabulous books and a lot of knowledge."

The visit connected the pleasure of browsing somewhere new with memories of books already loved.

An unexpected encounter



Meeting Michael Gove in Marylebone was an unexpected addition to the day. He kindly spent time talking with the students about connections between England and Italy.

Alice remembered him as “very friendly and open to conversation,” and reflected on the cultural similarities between the two countries.

For **Melissa**, hearing Italy discussed warmly had a more personal significance. She explained that it “made me also feel important, being from Italy.”

A brief conversation became a meaningful part of the students’ experience and another memory to take home from London.

Wellcome Collection

At Wellcome Collection, The Coming of Age and Being Human introduced questions about ageing, health, identity and our relationship with the world.

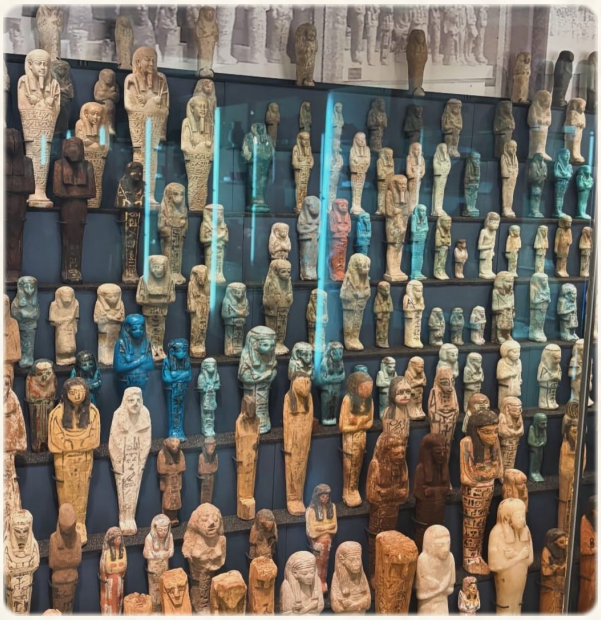
The exhibitions prompted different reactions. **Alice** particularly valued The Coming of Age because “I could connect many of the topics discussed to my own experiences.”

Luce and **Azzurra** considered how “the importance of ageing in our life is undervalued.” They appreciated the opportunity to think about ideas they had not previously given much attention to.

Azzurra also valued the way complex subjects were presented, describing the museum as “adapted for our age.” The explanations, artworks and immersive experiences helped students approach unfamiliar questions in ways they could understand.

The visit brought science, art and personal reflection into a week rich in literature and history, giving students new ideas to discuss together.

The Petrie Museum





The introductory talk encouraged students to think about the history of the collection as well as its objects. **Melissa** enjoyed discovering the story behind the museum.

Amelia Edwards's role particularly interested **Alice**: "I found that the role of the female figure in the museum's foundation was especially interesting." She singled out "a beaded dress," while **Azzurra** enjoyed seeing artefacts she had wanted to encounter in person.

The Grant Museum of Zoology



The Grant Museum produced lively reactions. **Melissa** described it as “pretty wild and a bit creepy,” remembering “the glowing glass tower with tiny illuminated microscope slides” and “the jar of whole preserved moles.”

Alice found that the specimens preserved in liquid raised questions, while **Azzurra** enjoyed discovering unfamiliar animals. **Luce** and Azzurra were struck by the variety of specimens and the unexpected facts accompanying them.

Umberto’s verdict was especially enthusiastic: “The best museum ever.”

UCL: imagining the future



Exploring UCL and its exhibition marking 200 years of history gave students a glimpse of a university environment.

Azzurra remembered the scale of the campus and the new information they discovered. For **Alice**, the visit prompted thoughts extending beyond the week itself: “Visiting UCL definitely made me reflect on my future choices regarding education.”

The campus became somewhere to imagine future possibilities as well as somewhere to visit. Seeing university life through its buildings, museums and history added another dimension to our London day.

Our English home



Having Hathaways Guest House entirely to ourselves combines the comfort of a shared home with the convenience of guest-house accommodation, in a traditional English setting.

Umberto described it as “a really welcoming house,” with “a lot of space and comfort.” The small group helped everyone get to know one another. **Melissa** explained that “we were able to talk to everyone, and it created a more personal feeling.”

Azzurra remembered the laughter and the pleasure of spending their free time together. For **Luce** and Azzurra, the best part was “the memories we have collected all together being a real group!”

Livvy's cooking and life around the table

Livvy has done most of the cooking, bringing English and Italian influences together, with Shakespearean recipes adding another connection to our studies.

"I loved **Livvy**'s cooking!" wrote **Melissa**, who particularly remembered the tomato soup, pasta and cotoletta. **Umberto**'s verdict was equally clear: "The best English food ever."

Vittoria also enjoyed discovering a different style of cooking: "I loved **Livvy**'s cooking and all the meals were delicious. The different style of cooking was very new but at the same time wonderful to eat."

Azzurra's memories included bacon and eggs, tomato soup and "yummy burgers." The anticipation became part of the fun: "**Sara** and I flew down the stairs into the dining room."

Shared meals gave everyone time to talk, laugh and enjoy daily life together. These everyday moments have helped make the week their own.

Memories to take home



Travelling and discovering together

Alongside the visits and lessons, the students' reflections return to friendship, laughter and the pleasure of discovering new places together.

Luce and **Azzurra** offer a fitting closing thought: "Thank you for this trip full of memories and new places discovered."

More photographs from our week: @tunnicliffe.international