

Blake Moore, '04

San Antonio, Belize



During the summer of 2003 Mike Coleman and I spent 6 weeks in San Antonio, Belize teaching math and English to students preparing to enter junior high school. San Antonio is in the Toledo district of Belize, which is its southernmost territory. San Antonio is a Mayan village with a population of a little over 1,000. Most people speak a little English, but the vast majority speaks primarily in a Mayan dialect called Mopan.

We lived in a guesthouse and like everyone else in the town -learned how to manage without things like consistent electricity, reliable running water, and hot showers. Our neighbor, Theodora, prepared our meals each afternoon and evening. Each meal typically included flour or corn tortillas, a local root called jibbi-jabbi, black beans and rice. Often dinner would include pork or chicken.



Our first week in San Antonio was spent rebuilding and reorganizing the St. Luis Ray School where we would later teach. The school's office floor was cluttered with books, broken desks, and tattered clothes. Many donations to the school were unorganized and were still in the boxes they arrived in.

The school's "library" consisted of an amalgam of four incomplete sets of encyclopedias, some of which were partially destroyed. A lot of the desks and chairs were damaged or covered with graffiti so much of that first week was spent rebuilding and painting.



For the 2nd and 3rd weeks, we divided the day in half, teaching mathematics in the morning and English in the afternoon to a small group of children in San Antonio preparing to enter high school. Because our arrival was somewhat unexpected, Mike and I had to create our own curriculum. My English class spent their two weeks doing concentrated writing, speaking, and some poetry.



Each student wrote his or her own story. As a class we managed to read all of *My Antonia*, which was really amazing. The remainder of our time in San Antonio was spent with a younger group of about 30 students. These boys and girls were between 11 and 13 years old.

Because most children don't start learning and speaking English in San Antonio until they enter school at about age 5 or 6, their language skills are fairly underdeveloped. My lesson plan for them emphasized grammar and vocabulary, though we did a little poetry, some expository writing, and some reading comprehension as well.



When Mike and I weren't teaching we were usually lazing in the sun or swimming up at San Antonio's natural wonder, the San Antonio waterfall. Our last day of class, we took all of the kids up to the waterfall and spent the afternoon diving and swimming.



My experience in San Antonio was profound in that I was able to become so close to my students so quickly. Children have this amazing inquisitiveness, which makes them all special, but the children of San Antonio are unique because they aren't cherished in the way we are accustomed to. They are so overly eager and delighted to have people who are interested in them and pay attention to them, are so enthused to be in school, and are so enraptured with learning new things that it made teaching there tremendously rewarding.



Having spent my entire Jr. year of college studying abroad throughout England, Europe and Australia, coming to a country like Belize was a sobering, challenging, and ultimately a rewarding experience. I know I will never forget my summer of service or the children that I had the pleasure of teaching.