

Italian Language and PIZZA!

I. I. (March 30, 2016)



The art of pizza craft used to deepen understanding of both the Italian language and lifestyle. The workshop is organized by the Italian American Committee on Education (IACE) and it is part of a series of fun and interactive outside-the-classroom educational events ('Mangia Sano e Parla Italiano') for American students of Italian aimed to expose learners to the full flavor and richness of Italian language and culture.

Last week at Sottocasa Pizzeria in Williamsburg, Brooklyn 23 students studying Italian at John P. Stevens High School Edison NJ attended a very special hands-on workshop where the art of pizza craft was used to deepen understanding of both the Italian language and lifestyle.

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Furnished in advance by their Italian teacher Elisabetta Schiavone with the basic vocabulary they would need to navigate the pizza kitchen(see the cartoons/teaching material below) the students were able to follow the very specific Italian language instructions of Laura and Luca Arrigoni (founders and owners of Sottocasa Pizzeria) to make an authentic pizza napoletana.

Angelika, a third-year Italian student, asks shyly if the typical New York Pizza is the real deal or a pale imitation of the Italian original. Luca proudly answers that the main difference consists in the use of a brick versus electric ovens, the type of dough, and the fresh and simple ingredients (pomodoro, mozzarella and basilico). They explain that Sottocasa strictly follows the oldest Italian tradition and recipes in the art of making pizza. According to Luca “making a real pizza is like making a real piece of art”.

After a brief introduction about the many virtues of pizza napoletana, the students were invited to work on the impasto (dough), literally con le mani in pasta (hands on), and experience firsthand how difficult it can be. Laura meticulously guides them through the delicate process of mixing and patting the dough with the tips of the fingers stressing that it is like a “gesto d’amore” (gesture of love). Rebecca, who studies Italian because her grandparents are from Naples and would like to be able to communicate with them in their native language, is very surprised at how hard it is to make the dough without breaking it.

Back in the kitchen Luca, with the help of three student helpers, chosen among those who gave the right answers in Italian about the pizza’s ingredients, is preparing focaccia (hard to make and hard to pronounce) and pizza in the brick oven. Students could finally taste and enjoy the delicious pizza they have been so anxiously hearing and learning about.

Jordan, a senior studying Italian because “it is cool”, was amazed that the pomodoro (tomatoes) really tasted like pomodoro (tomatoes), the mozzarella really tasted like mozzarella and the cornicione (crust) was so incredibly thin!

Ilaria Costa-IACE Executive Director- explains that this initiative, among other similar events sponsored by IACE (educational trips to EATALY, Barilla Restaurant, Ferrari showroom and Opera for kids) fully reflects IACE’s Educational Philosophy that “learning Italian is cool”. This approach (technically called ‘CBI’ Content Based Instruction - acquiring a second language through a fun cultural content) has been proven very effective in promoting the Italian language and culture in the American public and private school system.

Today IACE supports Italian language courses in over 150 schools in the tri-state area (from Pre-k to 12 grade) and reaches around 34,000 students who are offered access to the best culinary experiences that Italy has to offer, all while learning the language. Through the use of very simple ingredients (dough, tomatoes, basilico and mozzarella) the students were be able to appreciate the authentic made in Italy brand, to experience a “slice” of genuine Italian culture, while at the same time learning vocabulary, conversation skills, and most importantly, having fun...the best possible way to export our “eccellenze italiane” abroad.

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