

About us

Hello again! We're the pupils of Westgate College and we've got our own online newspaper called XOL – *Xpress Online*. Remember us? For more of our stories, read on!

Jess

I'm Jess Adams, I'm fourteen now and I'm still the boss. But I'm really not bossy. I'm the best at organizing XOL, that's all. I just wish I knew who our mystery writer was. My friends say I get too serious about things like anti-litter campaigns. Well, maybe. I haven't got much time for that silly new girl, Cat. Not like Donny, who thinks she's amazing.

Spud

Hi there, I'm Spud. I'm fourteen too, and there are lots of things I like doing. I hate lessons and homework of course, but I still have fun at school! I love drawing cartoons and painting on the school's new graffiti wall. I'm always coming up with new ideas for making money. Just don't talk to me about rare birds, OK?

Josie

Hello, my name's Josie. I'm in Year 8 now, and I'm thirteen years old. Sophie still helps us with XOL but she's got a boyfriend in Australia now so we don't see much of her. I haven't got a boyfriend yet. There's a new girl on the team this year, and all the boys fancy her. We hated her at first but actually she's OK when you get to know her.

Mike

I'm Mike Wilson, I'm nearly thirteen and I'm in Year 8 too. I'm really into digital photography, so there's lots of work to do for Jess and her XOL. Actually, it's not hers really, she just thinks it is. School's OK this year. That walk in the woods is one night I'd rather forget! But the school musical's fantastic, and you should see my photos of the Prom!



Donny

Hey, Donny McArthur here. I'm fifteen and still at Westgate – they haven't kicked me out yet! It's a busy year for me, as the main ideas man for XOL. Thanks to me, Jess gets a really good interview ... and an exciting camping trip to Stonehenge. And Cat's cool ... super pretty with a great voice. Just had a thought – maybe Jess is jealous?

Cat

Hello, my name's Catriona but everybody calls me Cat. I'm fourteen and I come from Scotland. I loved living in a city. I didn't like it here at first. Too quiet. The girls all hated me, the boys were OK but lots of people laughed at my Scottish accent. I'm into music, so the school musical was great for me and I made some really good new friends.

Amy

I'm Amy Bell, Year 9, nearly fourteen. I'm interested in lots of things, from sport to History. I'm not a teacher's pet, though, and when the Head starts making stricter school rules, I'm the first to complain! Jess is still sort of my best friend but she can be mean to people. She's been horrid to the new girl, just because Cat's so pretty and talented.

Darren

Hello there. I'm Darren Sweeney, and I'm in Year 8. I'm thirteen years old and I can't wait to be old enough to get a scooter and then a car. I've got lots of hobbies but they all need money and I've never got any. School's quite boring and we get much more homework this year. But we do some cool stuff in the XOL editing room, you'll see!



A fresh start

New blood

Donny Hello! I don't think I know you, do I?

Cat You don't, no.

Donny You're going to Westgate College too, aren't you?

Cat Amazing – are you a detective?

Donny Hah! Your school uniform gave me a clue! I'm Donny, hi. I can tell from your accent that you're not English, are you?

Cat No, I'm from Scotland. My name's Catriona, which is really difficult to spell, so everybody calls me Cat.

Donny Cat? Cool!

Cat That's original! You weren't born around here either, were you?

Donny No, my family lived in California before, and I started at Westgate last year. When did you move here?

Cat Just this summer. We had an apartment which was right in the centre of Glasgow, so this place seems weird to me. I mean, it's much smaller and quieter here than in the city. Not much going on.





Donny

We're going back to school after the summer holidays, but it's not so bad! Not when you meet a very pretty new girl. It's good to have a chat at the bus stop.

How do you go to school? By bus? Or do you cycle or get a lift in a car? How long is the ride?

Donny This town's OK. Safer than a big city.

Cat That doesn't mean it's better. More boring, probably. What's the college like, then?

Donny You're going to find out soon, here comes the bus!
Hiya! How are you doing?

Bus driver Good morning young man, I'm fine.
How about you?

Donny Fantastic, thanks! This is Cat, by the way. She's coming to college too.

Cat Yeah, return, student fare please.

Bus driver Have you got your bus pass?

Cat No. Nobody told me anything about a bus pass. How much is a day return?

Donny It's going to be more expensive that way. Just buy a single, and I can get you a pass from the school secretary.

Bus driver That's right, love, you stick with Donny here. He can look after you.

Cat Big deal. So what does a single cost?

Bus driver Seventy pence to you, love. And that's 30p change.

Cat Thanks. Wow, you know everybody. And they all know you - how sweet!

Donny Didn't you have any friends in Scotland?

Cat Of course I did! But the bus drivers didn't know my name, and I think I prefer it that way.

Donny Wait and see! I can introduce you to lots of nice people! You're going to like them all.

Cat Hmm, maybe.

Donny Anyway, they're certainly going to love you!

Catching up

Amy Jess, look! We've got a new teacher for English this term. Mr Jackson.

Jess Oh have we? That's a shame, I rather liked the teacher who taught us last year. I can't imagine that this new guy is going to be as interesting as she was. Are we in the same group for Maths?

Amy I think so. Hey, Josie! Hi! You look amazing, so brown. Where did you go to get a suntan like that?

Josie We went to Canada, which is a great country. We visited Montreal and the most exciting thing we saw was Niagara Falls.

Jess Canada's a country I don't know much about. Anyway I'm just the sad person who stays at home all summer.

Amy Niagara – that's the biggest waterfall in the world, isn't it?

Josie No, but it is the most powerful. You can do a boat trip, the noise is incredible and the water soaks you to the skin!

Jess Sounds like a stupid thing to do.

Amy So you had a good time, then?

Josie It was brilliant, thanks, Amy. We had a really great time. What about you? Did you have a good holiday?

Amy Yeah, I did thanks. My dad wanted to go camping, but my mum was determined to stay in a hotel this year. She hates tents and I agree with her.

Josie So? Where did you go?

Jess Didn't the whole class go to North America?

Amy You know very well I didn't go to America, Jess. I sent you at least three postcards and told you all about it when we got home, so don't pretend I didn't! We went to France, and we hired a caravan, which wasn't as uncomfortable as a tent, but cheaper than a hotel. Hey, there's Donny and Mikey over there! Did you hear about their holiday?

Jess Not yet, but no doubt I'm going to hear all about the things they did and the people they met.

Josie I chatted to them both online last night.

Jess Who's that over there, with Donny?

Amy Where?



Jess

It's the start of a new term, and my friends have got stories about their holidays and all the different, amazing things they did. Most British families go abroad for at least two weeks in the summer.

Is it the same in your country? Where did you go this summer? Did you have a good time?

Jess He's talking to somebody I don't know.
A new girl.

Amy Wow, she's pretty, isn't she?

Josie Cool hair.

Jess Do you really think so?

Amy She's got amazing green eyes.

Josie Contact lenses, do you reckon?

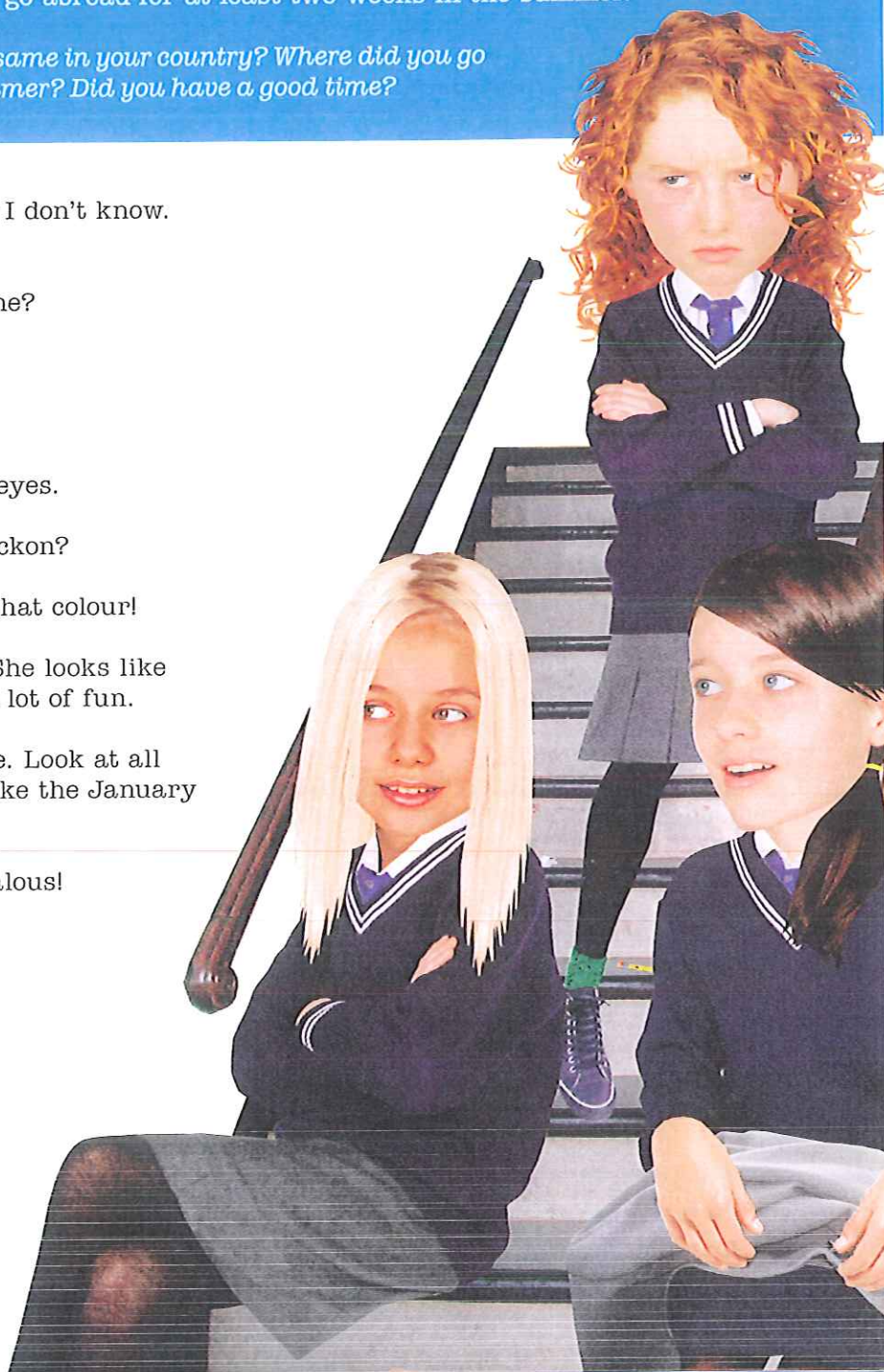
Jess Yeah. Nobody's got eyes that colour!

Amy Jess, don't be so horrid. She looks like
somebody who could be a lot of fun.

Jess A lot of trouble, more like. Look at all
the boys round her, it's like the January
sales!

Amy Jessica Adams, you're jealous!

Jess Who? Me?



Cat among the pigeons

- Amy** You wanted an amusing story about the summer holidays for the first issue of XOL this year, didn't you Jess? Unless you intend to write it yourself of course.
- Jess** How can I? My parents didn't take me anywhere.
- Amy** I wonder if the new girl's any good at creative writing.
- Jess** She's not interested in XOL, she's too busy chatting up the boys. Look at her! She's not exactly the academic type, is she?
- Josie** I hope she's not going to do the fashion page, anyway. That's my job.
- Amy** Give her a break! You don't even know the poor girl yet.
- Jess** No and I don't want to either.
- Josie** Guess what her name is?
- Jess** No idea.
- Josie** Cat!
- Jess** Cat!? She's got cats' eyes.
- Josie** Do you think that means she's catty?
- Amy** You two certainly are! Just because she's the prettiest girl in the school ... They're coming over here. Try to be nice Jess, OK?
- Donny** Now I can introduce you to the friends I told you about, Cat. This is Jess, and Amy, and Josie ...
- Cat** Hello.
- Donny** And this is Mikey, who came to the States with me this vacation. Everybody, this is Cat, she's Scottish.
- Amy** Hello Cat. My name's Amy. Jess here is the person who runs our online journal – she's in charge. Er, do you want to join the team? What are you good at?
- Cat** I can sing.
- Donny** You're a singer! Wow.
- Jess** A singer! Wow! Well that's a novelty, we haven't got a singer on the news team yet.
- Donny** Oh, by the way Cat, I've got the application form you need for your bus pass.
- Cat** Great, thanks. When did you get that?



Cat

I'm from Scotland and the English kids at my new school all sound a bit posh to me. Donny's American though and he's really nice and friendly. He even helped me get a bus pass, and that makes buses cheaper.

Who gets bus passes in your country? How much does it cost you to get to school?

Mike

He skipped lunch and queued in the office for it!

Jess

Donny went without lunch to get your pass! Well, well, what a gentleman. Isn't he helpful, Cat?

Cat

Yes, and he told me all about his journal on the bus this morning.

Jess

Oh did he?

Cat

But don't worry, Jess. The only thing I can write is songs.

Donny

Songs are really cool.

Jess

Well if you think we're going to include songs in XOL, you can think again!

All

Oh, I don't know ... Everybody loves songs ... I think we could have ...

Jess

Oh no, here we go ...



A trek in the desert

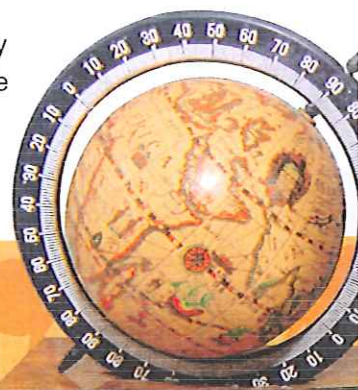
A trek across the Sahara Desert on a camel was not on my list of dream holidays. But it was the most awesome holiday you can imagine!

There were fifteen of us on the Families Worldwide trip – seven adults and eight kids aged between five and thirteen – and we each had our own camel. Forget all you hear about camels being bad-tempered and spitting. We all fell in love with them. They are the most patient, peaceful and hardworking creatures in the world. They carried all of us, and all the stuff we needed, including tents, food, water and clothes.



We travelled 35 miles, with the incredible Berber guides looking after us. They prepared and cooked our food and drinks, made campfires and played drum music at night. Every morning, we scrambled to the top of the highest sand dunes to watch the sunrise, while the Berbers made us hot chocolate or coffee and baked fresh bread for us in the sand! They also led, and helped us on and off our camels. That's an art, I can tell you. Camels sort of rock backwards and forwards as they zigzag up to their feet. You have to hold on tight to stop yourself falling off, but once they're up, it's a surprisingly comfortable ride.

When I first knew about this trip, I thought it was going to be a bit boring. I can honestly say I wasn't bored for one single second. It was just the most amazing experience – life was like it was 2,000 years ago. There aren't any street lights in the desert. And yet, it wasn't as dark as I expected, the stars were so unbelievable, both in number and brightness. You could see without a torch, the stars were so bright.





I admit that I wimped out and slept inside my tent, but some of the other kids slept on the sand, watching the shooting stars streaking across the sky. The silence at night was almost spooky.

We all enjoyed playing in the world's biggest sandpit. My brother Barney planned ahead, and when he packed he took his skateboard with him (minus the wheels). He used it to surf down the sand dunes, and it worked brilliantly.

Then, all the adults took turns, even the Berbers joined in! When we left, Barney gave the board to Khalid, our 23-year-old guide.

It was an unforgettable trip that I can recommend to everyone!

What do YOU think of this holiday?
Write in and tell us!

www.familiesworldwide.co.uk

