

GNS Round Square Exchange Opportunities *in the Middle School*



Celebrating and encouraging student travel and school internationalism!

Introduction

This handbook is intended as a source of information for Middle School parents and students who are either contemplating or applying for a GNS exchange. If at any time you have any questions about the Middle School Round Square Exchange Program, please contact Kim Waugh, Young Round Square Coordinator (kwaugh@mygns.ca).

Once students arrive in the Senior School, they may apply to have a second, longer exchange to a school outside of North America. Depending on the student and the scenario, 1.5 to 3 month exchanges can be arranged from Grade 9 to Grade 11. If you have any questions about the Senior Round Square Exchange Program, please contact Sarah McKerlich at smckerlich@mygns.ca.

Objectives

The Middle School Round Square exchange program at GNS involves the pairing of students from other parts of North America to encourage a cultural exchange. This program started in order to celebrate and encourage student travel and school internationalism. On an individual level, it offers students opportunities to experience another culture, either in a homestay or in dormitories at the partner school. It is an objective of this program that GNS students on exchange will grow personally in the areas of independence, cooperation, leadership and personal challenge. By hosting their exchange partner, students also learn about partnership, flexibility, cultural responsibility and cultural differences.

Two week exchanges can be organized for Grade 8 students. These are arranged in schools in North America. The selection of the exchange partner school is determined by a number of variables including which schools have students applying for exchange, the age and gender of those students, and the time of year of the proposed exchange. Students may not always get their first choice of placement.

The exchange coordinators do their best to find the best fit for each student and family based on the placement opportunities that are available. A minimum of two GNS students go on exchange at a time due to the fact there is no teacher chaperone to assist with travel.

Questions to consider:

1. Why do you want to go on a Round Square Exchange?
2. What qualities do you possess that make you a good ambassador for GNS?
3. Do you feel ready to leave your family and travel by yourself?
4. What will you do to make your exchange partner feel welcome?
5. What do you want to learn from your exchange? What do you think you can learn from your exchange partner?
6. What are some strategies you have thought of if you are feeling homesick?
7. How will you support your exchange partner if they are feeling homesick?
8. If you are having trouble communicating with your exchange partner/family, what are some strategies you could use?
9. Do you have any questions for the Round Square Coordinator?

Criteria

In order to participate in the exchange program, students must be:

- in Grades 8
- a member of Young Round Square
- successfully accepted into the exchange program
- supported in this exchange by their teachers
- academically sound in order to miss up to two weeks of school at GNS
- willing and able to adapt to an unfamiliar environment
- willing to share the experience on return by giving a presentation to the school about the experience.

“It was such an amazing experience and it’s an awesome program. I could not say enough great things about our exchange program and I would encourage everyone to apply!”



– Jasmine Lee '19

Please note that students may participate in a maximum of two exchanges during their time at GNS—one in the Middle and one in the Senior School.

Costs

Costs to the student and family:

- Airfare to and from the exchange school’s city.
- Out of country medical insurance if applicable.
- Spending money.

Timeline/Application Process

The application process begins in May. Please start the process by talking with your Young Round Square Coordinator and then read this handbook as a family and fill in the application form. Exchanges will be confirmed as places become available.

Prior to the exchange, there will be an information meeting to outline the exchange process. Parents and students should attend.

Roles and Responsibilities

Exchange Coordinator’s Responsibilities

- The overall administration of the program
- Coordinating the matching of students and partners
- Advertising and promoting the program
- Screening applications
- Ensuring school staff is informed of the arrival of incoming student
- Assisting the exchange student in preparing course timetables
- Mailing letters of introduction, and school and course information to incoming exchange student, and
- Mediating any difficulties that arise.

Host Family’s Responsibilities

The entire family must be willing to welcome an additional family member for two weeks. There must be space in the home for another adolescent. A separate bedroom is desirable but not essential. A separate bed is essential as well as some ‘private space’ where the exchange student may be alone if he/she desires. Parents are expected to meet exchange students at Victoria International Airport upon arrival and deliver them to the same point for departure.

As a non-residential school, GNS exchange families also have the responsibility to encourage visiting students to take part in all of the opportunities that the GNS community has to offer. On top of these school-based opportunities, we encourage families to share with

visiting students local landmarks and popular tourist destinations. If there is more than one exchange student visiting GNS at the same time, we encourage you to connect with the other host families and perhaps to find activities (like a welcome barbeque, for example) to do together.

The Round Square Coordinator will be meeting with the visiting student every week for a check-in, to ensure their needs are being met and that they are meeting the expectations of the exchange. It is important to note that this is an academic exchange, and therefore, visiting students are responsible to keep up as much as they can with their GNS coursework. Just as GNS students away on exchange may have GNS homework to do, so might a visiting student. It is the family’s responsibility to encourage the visiting student to try their best and get involved. Typically, this is a time of great personal growth and emerging independence, however these students are still quite young and in a new environment. We encourage clear familial communication on house rules and expectations, just the visiting student is expected to follow all GNS school rules.

Student Responsibilities

This program is for **you** and only your efforts will make it a success. A positive attitude, an open mind and a serious commitment on your part are required, as is a sincere desire to learn from cultural differences.

A high priority must be given to the exchange. Part-time work and other relationships should not be allowed to interfere.

These exchanges are academic in nature; GNS students are expected to see all of their teachers a month before their departure to check in on units that they will be missing, and to see what units of study they can arrange to take with them. This being said, we do not want GNS exchange students to miss out on trying new things in their host schools; we encourage and expect GNS students to do their best in their new courses and participate in several co-curricular activities. Upon their return to GNS, students will be expected to present their key learnings and highlights in a school assembly. GNS exchange students will be asked to fill out a feedback form on their experience when they return. The Round Square Coordinator will receive an effort/academic report from the host school as well.

Special requirements must be clearly indicated on the application (diet, allergies, medical, etc.). Do not expect the host family to adjust to your requirements or habits if they were not specified. House rules of the host family or dormitory must be respected (i.e., curfews, chores, outings, field trips). Smoking, non-prescription drugs and alcohol are forbidden. This exchange is considered “school time” and the appropriate sanctions are in place.

“I would 100% recommend an exchange any GNS students who are interested. You may think that you don’t want to leave your friends at GNS or you don’t want to miss your sports, but when you put things into perspective, high school is the perfect time to go experience the world. GNS offers us many advantages as a Round Square school that I think students need to take full advantage of. Even if you are the slightest bit interested in exchange, apply because it’s an amazing once in a lifetime opportunity!”

– Christopher Graham ’19

Communication with the Exchange Family

Correspondence between families before the exchange will help in getting acquainted; Skype or e-mails are encouraged. Students, as well as parents, are encouraged to communicate.

What to write? Suggestions for students include giving your exchange partner more information about:

- Yourself: photos, daily activities, household chores, weekend activities, friends, hobbies, etc.
- Your family: typical evening/weekend activities, photos, any special family events that may take place during their stay
- Your school: photos, school activities, typical day at school, clubs, music, etc.
- Your community: recreation facilities, geographic location, population, cultural and sports facilities, weather, (include photos, maps, newspapers)

Suggestions for parents include giving the exchange partner’s family more information about the home situation, such as household chores, curfews, church, family activities, medical or diet requirements, clothing, climate, etc. We have a parent discussion guide available.

Arrival and Hosting of Exchange Students

Make the arrival or first few days special (e.g., with flowers, a party, BBQ, dinner) As soon as possible, provide a tour of the home and a review of the household routine. This may need to be repeated a few days later to ensure complete understanding.

The First Week

The first weeks are important when trying to establish a relationship with the exchange student. Ensure that he/she feels welcome and is treated with respect. However, try to emphasize at the start that he/she is considered a member of the family and is not a special guest.

House Rules

Establish at the start that everyone is expected to take part in family activities and chores and to respect the house rules. The sooner this is

done, the better. It is suggested that you provide a short, written list of expectations to avoid possible misunderstanding regarding:

- meal times (week and weekend)
- shower schedules
- curfews (week and weekend)
- family chores, setting table, dishes, etc.

At School

When you take your exchange partner to school the first person he/she should meet is the exchange coordinator, followed by the Principal. He/she will follow you to your classes. Inform him/her of the school rules (e.g., morning routines, Dining Hall, gym) help him/her get a locker and schedule, meet your homeroom teacher, and give a tour of the school.

Religious Requirements

Discuss your exchange student’s religious requirements, and please try to accommodate these as fully as possible. They may not choose to attend church at all, however, if they do wish to, and you are unable to assist, call the church for assistance. They may be happy to accommodate the request.

Communications

Occasionally, the exchange partner may wish to contact home. Please ensure the student has access to Skype or something similar and let them know they must pay for any long distance calls.

Daily Transportation

Parents in both countries are expected to pay for daily transportation costs to and from school for the visiting student. This reciprocal arrangement seems to be the most convenient for both sides.

Insurance, Medical and Dental Expenses

Individuals must purchase adequate medical/dental/travel insurance before they travel.

“I strongly recommend an exchange to everyone because the experiences and the memories you make are incredible. I personally feel much more independent and confident and believe that everyone here changed me for the better.”

– Tina Fischer, Switzerland



Exchange Students at GNS

School attendance is mandatory during this exchange. This is an academic exchange and must be treated as such. Special approval to miss a day to travel with the host family may be arranged with the permission of the exchange coordinator. Each exchange student will be required to give a short presentation in assembly about their school, country and family.

Friends/Social Life

The GNS student should try to have some of his/her friends meet the exchange partner soon after he/she has arrived in Victoria. However, the host family/partner is not expected to provide instant friends. Friendships take time to flourish and should not be forced. The exchange students should be encouraged and supported in this regard.

Preparation for Your Time Away

Families of exchange students are responsible to ensure that their son/daughter is physically (immunizations, appropriate luggage) and academically prepared. Before departure, the exchangee and the parents will meet with the Round Square Coordinator and ensure that all areas of the worksheet (passport, travel plans, visa, gifts, etc.) are accounted for. It is the responsibility of the Round Square Coordinator to ensure that the exchangee has a formal letter of invitation in their possession for customs/visa if applicable.

Passports (if applicable)

Please ensure you have a valid passport with more than six months left prior to expiry.

Medical/Accident/Liability Insurance

Is the individual's responsibility to purchase adequate insurance coverage. This must be purchased before departure, either through your travel agent or another agency of your choice. Cost will depend on the nature of the coverage. Some students may be covered by their parents' extended medical plan, however, please check the coverage carefully. Dental work can be expensive in other countries. Before leaving, students should have a check-up and necessary dental work completed.

Eyeglasses/Contact Lenses

It is suggested that an extra pair of glasses or contact lenses with a copy of the latest prescription be taken on exchange. If glasses/contact lenses are broken, the spares will prevent frustration and a costly eye exam.

School Participation

When you arrive at the school the first morning, have your partner introduce you to your exchange coordinator. This should be the first person you meet. You may not receive a timetable immediately. You are to go to classes with your partner. You will need to take your uniform. You are a visitor to the school, however, you will be expected to take part in all activities and complete the same assignments as the other students. You must remember that you are responsible to keep up with your work in all your classes while you are away. You will be expected to write the full exams in your subjects at the end of the school year.

In all other subjects, you will be expected to complete only those portions of the course work that were covered while you were not on exchange. For these subjects, your exams may be modified.

Attendance

School attendance is mandatory.

After the Exchange

You will be expected to give a short (five minute) presentation to a school assembly upon your return. You can show the students where you were and what it was like.