LIGHTHOUSE CREATIVITY

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For the groups of students from different high schools across America and the world :

1. Research projects

Research projects in Italy and China on top of advanced research projects conducted in the US, with additional locations announced as partnerships expand.

1.1. Leadership

Designed and led by top tier American college professors – and their counterparts from Italy and China and elsewhere as applicable, assisted by local service providers including those engaged in hospitality and tourism; additional coordination may involve local universities or cultural offices to ensure access to sites and archives.

1.2. Supervision

Supervised by high school faculty for safety and quality control. The faculty may also help ensure academic pacing and communication with parents.

1.3. Focus

Food, culture, society, history, politics, science, and the arts – of each respective country – towards discovery of solutions for real-world problems. Additional subtopics may be included depending on site availability and seasonal conditions.

1.4. Examples of central questions

What implications does polytheism of Rome offer to the present day America? How did religious oppression manifest exactly through catacombs? What are some of the best examples among the foods that connect Rome and the present day Italy, and how does any of them reinterpret for the new culture of relevance in America? What are among the longest surviving scientific inventions made in Italy that continue to impact most advanced technologies today? Additional questions may be introduced depending on local expert input.

1.5. Outcome

Reports, papers, and videos that help enhance perspectives of the many oblivious to the significant influence of Rome that survives to this day. Both the leadership and participating students widen and deepen their abilities to see, think, and act on the newly identified subjects of their intellectual curiosity originating from within the course of each project experience. Each project group's product may be published in different forms for use by many including academia, institutions, media, press, and industries such as food and tourism. Some groups may also be invited to present findings to partner institutions or school communities.

1.6. Evaluation

College professor and high school teacher evaluations may be offered in support of any student that makes meaningful and constructive contribution to the project involved. Their evaluations could be effective in assisting decision makers such as those of college for admission and corporations for employment with their applicant evaluation as their statements detail what specific qualities, abilities, skills, and experiences of each student will be of value adding to their organization. Evaluations may include optional written comments summarizing a student's strengths and contributions.

1.7. Additional services

Additional services may be offered for any student's production, editing, and PR activities including text, photos, and videos to showcase his or her achievements and secure reactions and recognitions from evaluators outside of their school for validation. Students may request assistance preparing these materials upon completion of their project.

2. Sample topics for projects

2.1. Italy : artifacts and heritage

- Catacombs (religion and archaeology)
- Pompeii (trade, mystery, and archaeology)
- Venice (urban planning)
- Culinary culture
- Scientific knowledge of ancient Rome
- Access to specific historic sites depends on travel conditions and local regulations

2.2. China

- A very wide range of historical and cultural subjects
- Topics selected may vary by region and availability of local experts

3. Project group formation

Expanded research themes can be developed under the guidance of professors and through the leadership of students based on the topics below. Student proposals may also be considered when appropriate.

Topic A. Economics and tourism

Why have major tourism-dependent economies, such as Italy and Greece, experienced an economic decline, and why is the recent inflow of high asset capital into these countries only a temporary rebound?

Topic A.1. The DNA of service-dominated economies

When a nation shifts its economic base toward service industries such as tourism, finance,

hospitality, and entertainment, its long-term trajectory changes as its economic DNA reorganizes – from a system built on production and engineering to one optimized for hosting, attracting, and performing. As manufacturing knowledge, engineering capability, and technical labor decline, the country's productive capacity erodes, weakening national resilience and self-reliance. This also diminishes the nation's economic immune system: without strong industrial "antibodies" such as technological development, scientific infrastructure, and redundant production capacity, even small global shocks can trigger outsized disruptions. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the rapid collapse of tourism-dependent nations around the world, revealing how fragile service-heavy economies had become. This pattern is visible in financially concentrated regions such as New York, where prosperity grows but structural resilience quietly thins. As a service-dominated identity deepens, the nation risks becoming more vulnerable to crises, more dependent on external conditions, and increasingly seen as a consumer rather than a creator – ultimately weakening competitiveness and its ability to withstand future shocks.

Topic A.2. How does an economic overreliance on seasonal tourism create structural vulnerabilities?

A heavy reliance on seasonal tourism inevitably creates a cyclical economic pattern characterized by periods of intense activity followed by prolonged stagnation. Income, employment, and business operations surge during peak tourism seasons but decline just as quickly during off-peak periods, making national infrastructure management and long-term urban development planning highly unstable. External investment also tends to flow into short-term or speculative projects tailored to the tourism cycle rather than into sustained innovation or industrial development, leading to chronic capital misallocation. Meanwhile, young, skilled workers often leave in search of stable career paths, contributing to an aging society that becomes disproportionately dependent on tourism revenue. Cities overbuild hotels, restaurants, and tourist attractions while underinvesting in scientific, industrial, and educational infrastructure – the very foundations required for long-term resilience – further weakening the nation's developmental base. These economies become extremely vulnerable to global disruptions, as tourism demand can vanish instantly due to pandemics, natural disasters, political instability, or even rapid shifts in online trends. Ultimately, this recurring cycle of activation and deactivation creates a system that lacks the continuity, predictability, and innovation-driven stability necessary for long-term national resilience.

Topic A.3. What signals indicate that a civilization is entering another cycle of stagnation or innovation?

Civilizations rarely shift into stagnation or renewal without warning; rather, they reveal distinct early signals that indicate which direction they are moving toward. In the later period of the Roman Empire, its bureaucratic structure grew larger, yet the efficiency of tax collection and the quality of administration declined sharply. Stagnation becomes visible when bureaucratic systems expand while becoming less effective, when societies produce fewer original works in science, engineering, philosophy, or the arts, and when cultural energy turns inward, prioritizing heritage preservation over future-oriented development. At the same time, skilled individuals begin to leave in search of opportunities elsewhere, wealth becomes increasingly detached from productive activity through financialization, and infrastructure gradually deteriorates as maintenance and innovation stall. In contrast, innovation cycles announce themselves through active cross-cultural exchange, heightened competition among cities to build and modernize, and bursts of creativity triggered by crises that force societies to experiment. In the mid-twentieth century, for example, many European scientists relocated to the United States, creating a geographic shift toward innovation, and

during the Islamic Golden Age, the fusion of knowledge – Greek philosophy, Persian science, Indian mathematics, and Arab astronomy – sparked intellectual and technological breakthroughs. Because civilizations tend to oscillate between stagnation and renewal, recognizing these early indicators provides a powerful lens for forecasting their long-term trajectories.

Topic A.4. Ambition without capabilities of emerging economies

Many countries – particularly South Korea – proclaim ambitions to become leaders in "physical AI" or advanced mobility systems, yet lack the scientific workforce, engineering talent, and stable research funding necessary to sustain such goals. This reveals a deeper structural contradiction: governments often announce high-tech visions while the underlying ecosystem – human capital, manufacturing capability, and long-term investment infrastructure – remains hollow. In such contexts, pursuing highly abstract or capital-intensive AI fields may be unrealistic, whereas applied physical intelligence – traffic optimization, mobility engineering, sensor-based infrastructure, and data-driven urban flow systems – offers a more attainable path to global leadership. If a nation can conceptualize, prototype, test, and statistically validate these systems, and pilot them effectively, the resulting technologies could become exportable, high-value assets. This raises a critical question: when a country lacks traditional technological depth, can strategic focus on applied physical systems create competitive advantages that service-dependent economies with hollow technological cores could not otherwise achieve?

Topic B. Religion and historic sites

How did religious oppression manifest through the catacombs, and what predictable social, political, and economic instability emerges when religion is driven underground as it was in ancient Rome?

Topic B.1. Discipline branching and formation of alternative systems under pressure

When oppression forces a community underground, as seen in the catacombs beneath ancient Rome, the dominant system of discipline does not disappear but fractures into derivative forms that evolve along new and often unexpected trajectories. These branching rules can strengthen internal solidarity, trust, and creative adaptation, yet they can also harden into rigid codes that restrict dissent or reduce diversity of thought. As exclusion from formal society deepens, parallel social, economic, cultural, and relational structures emerge: informal exchange networks develop their own ethics, encoded cultural symbols acquire new layers of meaning, and underground communities form relational norms rooted in loyalty and collective survival rather than institutional authority. Clear historical examples appear during the Japanese colonial period under Japan, when communities in what is now South Korea created clandestine schools, churches, publishing circles, and communication networks that strengthened national identity and established new internal rules; yet these emerging disciplines were not accepted uniformly, as some members embraced them as necessary codes of survival while others opposed, resisted, or even betrayed them – revealing how alternative systems formed under oppression can generate both deep cohesion and internal fracture. How does a single dominant discipline give rise to multiple derivative forms, and what determines whether these new systems become engines of resilience or sources of exclusion? Contemporary cultural phenomena, such as the rise of K-pop and other formerly peripheral subcultures, reveal similar dynamics: they selectively inherit mainstream norms like professionalism and global branding while rejecting gatekeeping, linguistic conformity, or Western-centric hierarchies. These patterns show how derivative cultures and communities

decide which rules to preserve, which to abandon, and which entirely new ones to create.

Topic B.2. Does religious pluralism strengthen cohesion or introduce new social costs?

The question of whether pluralism strengthens or weakens cohesion becomes especially significant when examining both the past and future of America, a nation built on layered waves of belief systems. Pluralism strengthens cohesion when anchored by shared civic identity, legal protections, and institutions that encourage dialogue rather than ideological isolation; under such conditions, religious diversity enhances social resilience, fuels innovation, and expands diplomatic and economic reach. However, pluralism also carries social costs when competing belief systems become detached from shared reality, when media environments fragment collective narratives, or when economic inequality maps onto ideological differences. These dynamics can turn diversity into tribal fragmentation, erode empathy, and destabilize political structures. America's future trajectory depends on whether its institutions can transform pluralism into constructive energy – making it a new Renaissance – or whether tolerance without shared identity will create fault lines that weaken long-term cohesion and competitiveness.

Site access may require advance coordination with local authorities and institutions.

Topic C. Food and culture

What are some of the best examples among the foods that connect Rome and the present day Italy, and how does any of them reinterpret for the new culture of relevance in America? What patterns emerge when food extends beyond culinary experience to connect with civilization, economics, religion, and migration, and why do certain foods survive for thousands of years?

Topic C.1. Civilization's drivers beyond taste

Ancient foods that link Rome to present-day Italy – bread, olive oil, wine, cured meats, herb traditions – have survived not merely because they taste good, but because they once operated as cultural infrastructures that organized trade, ritual, labor, and identity. When such foods migrate into the multicultural environment of America, they undergo a process of reinterpretation shaped by new economies, new demographics, and new aspirations: an ancient olive-oil tradition may become a health symbol, a ritual holiday dish may turn into a marker of immigrant belonging, and a once-regional pasta shape may transform into a global commodity. Across these transitions, a larger pattern emerges – food becomes a civilizational algorithm that stores and transmits the hidden rules of a society, revealing how cuisine can outlive empires, shift religious meaning, reorganize economic behavior, and mediate social integration in new cultural landscapes. Yet this opens a further set of questions at the very core of culinary evolution: why do certain foods survive even when they are not particularly delicious, while some objectively delicious foods vanish? If taste alone does not determine culinary survival, what forces – ritual value, agricultural stability, religious symbolism, storage efficiency, social cohesion, or economic necessity – decide which foods endure across centuries and which quietly disappear? And more profoundly, when foods continuously mutate across regions and eras, are they changing because they are on the verge of extinction, or because adaptation itself is their strategy for survival?

Topic C.2. Religion governs food, and food expands religion

Foods such as bread, wine, and olive oil became sacred because they were woven into rituals,

liturgy, and communal memory, while fasting rules and meat prohibitions pushed regions toward seafood, vegetables, and preservation techniques in cities such as Florence, Venice, and southern coastal towns, ultimately defining their gastronomic identities. Similar mechanisms appear across civilizations: when Buddhist vegetarianism moved from South Asia into East Asia, it was not doctrinal philosophy that spread first but monastic dietary rules – temple food traditions, meat restrictions, and plant-based cooking systems – which were so structurally influential that they reshaped local agriculture, preservation habits, and even the daily rhythms of monastic and village life. Conversely, in Northern Europe, where grapes could not be grown, the arrival of Christian ritual requirements led communities to import wine for centuries, develop substitute ceremonial beverages, and eventually attempt viticulture itself, proving how religious demands can introduce entirely new ingredients, crops, and economic systems into a region. Food rules, therefore, do more than dictate diet – they determine who controls ritual ingredients, who interprets purity codes, and who oversees sacred meals, revealing how food regulation becomes a mechanism through which religious authority organizes internal hierarchies and distributes power. As these traditions migrated into America, the underlying religious algorithm did not disappear; instead, it recombined, producing Italian-American cuisines that preserved sacred elements (holiday ritual foods), liberated formerly restricted ingredients (meat-heavy dishes), and hybridized symbolic items into new cultural languages. Across these movements, the same core mechanism persists: the foods a society forbids, sanctifies, or ritualizes reveal the architecture of its internal power structures – and they raise deeper questions about why communities accept some rules while resisting others, why certain dietary laws endure even after their original religious rationale fades, and how conflicts over food boundaries expose hidden tensions between orthodoxy and local practice.

Local culinary demonstrations or expert sessions may be arranged when feasible.

Topic D. Historic sites, architecture, and the arts

What structural roles do architecture and urban aesthetics play in a civilization's stagnation or prosperity, and how do the forms of cities – plazas, roads, building layouts, materials, and styles – reflect religious, political, and economic structures?

Topic D.1. Hidden weakness of modern cities

Architecture has always signaled whether a civilization is renewing itself or drifting toward decline, and the contrast between ancient Rome and modern cities across America exposes a pressing paradox. We build cities that appear sophisticated yet often erode social cohesion and collective identity. Ancient plazas, forums, temples, and road networks were designed to pull people into shared civic life, embedding religious authority, political order, and economic circulation directly into the urban fabric. Today, however, multilayered infrastructures – stacked highways, privatized financial cores, isolated residential towers – produce mobility without connection, density without community, and scale without resilience. This forces a critical question: if ancient urban design strengthened community, why do modern cities so frequently generate disconnection, inequality, and fragility – and which structural principles must be rediscovered to prevent our current urban systems from becoming engines of quiet civilizational decay?

Some architectural sites may include guided tours or expert briefings.

Topic E. History, historic sites, and technology

What are among the longest surviving scientific inventions made in Italy that continue to impact most advanced technologies today? Why does technology disappear while some civilizations remember it and others forget?

Topic E.1. When technology outruns social memory

Modern technology now accelerates at a pace far beyond what collective intelligence, social norms, educational systems, and legal structures can absorb, creating a widening gap between what societies can do and what they can understand or manage. Artificial intelligence evolves faster than ethical frameworks can respond, biotechnology advances before public consensus forms, and data systems reshape human behavior long before regulation catches up. This "speed mismatch" generates social confusion, institutional paralysis, and cognitive overload. History reveals that this is not a new phenomenon: in Greece, the early steam engine (the aeolipile) never scaled because society lacked the economic and political imagination to integrate such a disruptive technology; in Rome, advanced hydraulic engineering and long-lasting concrete disappeared after the empire's collapse because the surrounding social systems were not stable enough to preserve or reproduce them. In both cases, technology was not lost due to inferiority but because it arrived faster than the civilization's adaptive capacity. Should societies slow the pace of technological invention, or must they invent entirely new mechanisms that accelerate social adaptation – before progress itself becomes a trigger for collapse?

Topic E.2. Technological power and social capacity

Technological memory often accelerates faster than the societies meant to sustain it, a pattern visible from antiquity to the present. In Greece, the early steam engine and mechanical automata emerged centuries before the economic structures or cultural imagination capable of integrating them; in Rome, advanced concrete formulas, hydraulic systems, and engineering techniques outlived the political and social systems required to preserve them, leaving behind ruins of technologies that were "too advanced for the civilization beneath them." This historical mismatch between technological capability and social capacity reappears today in the rise of artificial intelligence: as AI begins absorbing tasks of memory, reasoning, pattern recognition, and even judgment, human cognitive habits atrophy. The result is a growing dependency in which technology strengthens systems while weakening the minds that rely on them, mirroring the ancient dilemma in a new form. Are we repeating the ancient pattern in which technology advances faster than the civilization that depends on it, and if so, will AI become the modern counterpart to those lost ancient inventions – an innovation so powerful that it ultimately exposes, rather than resolves, the vulnerabilities of the society that adopts it?

Topic E.3. Why did the West accelerate while the East stalled?

Throughout history, civilizations have developed remarkable technologies, yet only some sustain this momentum while others fall into long periods of stagnation or cultural amnesia. This pattern becomes striking when comparing the Western trajectory – where Roman engineering and Italian scientific innovations echo into modern infrastructure, materials science, and design – with the long arc of East Asian civilizations such as China and Korea, which possessed advanced astronomy, metallurgy, mathematics, governance systems, and printing technologies centuries before Europe. Despite this early advantage, East Asia later entered an extended phase of intellectual and technological inactivity, shaped by rigidified Confucian examination systems, aristocratic gatekeeping, and the elevation of memorization over experimentation. Korea presents a unique case: after millennia of scientific and cultural achievement, it reconstructed itself at unprecedented speed in the 20th century, adopting a

Japanese administrative framework while simultaneously generating social tensions that raise questions about whether such institutional structures were intentionally transplanted, unintentionally inherited, or strategically left unexamined. These contrasts reveal that the survival or disappearance of technology is not simply a matter of invention, but of cultural choice, political structure, and institutional will. Why do certain civilizations convert early brilliance into lasting technological memory, while others allow innovation to fade – and who or what determines when a society accelerates, stalls, or forgets?

Availability of archives or museums may vary depending on local schedules.

Topic F. Disaster, civilization, and psychology

Why did most of Pompeii continue life as usual despite numerous warning signs of disaster – odors, and seismic signals – and how does collective risk perception operate differently from individual psychology?

Topic F.1. How societies learn (or fail to learn) from disasters

Disaster preparedness is less a technical capability than a cultural inheritance, formed through repeated storytelling, ritualized memory, and shared behavioral norms. Some societies embed disaster lessons into education, architecture, and communal routines, turning past catastrophes into living knowledge – as seen in Japan, where centuries of seismic devastation produced a culture of constant drills, structural codes, and public awareness that functions as a national reflex. Others allow memories to erode, treating each crisis as unprecedented even when it follows familiar patterns, a dynamic visible in the United States where hurricanes, mass shootings, and climate extremes recur without producing a cohesive cultural or institutional learning system. When risk is culturally encoded, a society develops automatic responses that activate under threat; when risk is forgotten or fragmented, even the most advanced technologies cannot compensate for the absence of collective preparedness. Thus, the real difference between resilient and fragile civilizations lies in what they choose to remember and institutionalize across generations. But beneath this divide lies a deeper and unsettling question: who benefits from pushing a society toward disaster amnesia, and who is actively shaping what is remembered – and what is forgotten?

Topic F.2. Why societies prefer false security

Societies often choose comforting falsehoods over uncomfortable truths, especially when those truths threaten economic continuity, political stability, or emotional equilibrium. Denial becomes a collective strategy: governments downplay long-term risks, businesses soften alarming data, and citizens gravitate toward narratives that preserve a sense of control and normality. This emotional economy makes danger easier to tolerate but harder to confront, gradually weakening a society's capacity for adaptation. Over time, the desire for psychological comfort can outweigh the instinct for survival, while the structures built to maintain stability quietly erode resilience. The dilemma becomes unavoidable: why do civilizations repeatedly choose emotional reassurance over realistic preparation, and can any society break free from the seduction of denial before the consequences become irreversible?

Topic F.3. How power structures silence risk

Power structures frequently suppress or reinterpret risk, not out of ignorance but out of fear – fear of public panic, economic loss, political backlash, or institutional instability. As warnings travel upward through bureaucratic layers, they are softened, delayed, or filtered until they

reach decision-makers in a diluted form that masks their urgency. This creates a civilizational reflex in which the preservation of authority takes precedence over the acknowledgment of danger. In modern contexts such as America, the fragmentation of responsibility across agencies further obscures accountability, allowing systemic risks to accumulate under the illusion of control. How can a civilization survive when its own power systems instinctively silence the information needed to protect it?

Field observations may be supplemented with museum visits or site-specific briefings.

4. Group operation

4.1. Group size

Each project group may consist of 10 to 100 students, depending on the complexity of each relevant topic and its specific requirements. Each group may be further divided into working subgroups as necessary.

4.2. Group formation based on students' aptitude test results

- Advanced group : dedicated to guided research and invention-focused projects
- Entry group : dedicated to experience-based and introductory projects

Placement may be adjusted after initial observation.

4.3. Staffing per group

- A few professors depending on demand
- A high school faculty supervisor
- (• A few local professors depending on demand)
- (• Local service providers)

(Additional assistants may be included for translation or documentation.)

4.4. Assignments for new incoming students

The roles designed for new incoming students for each group include observation logs, interviews and note-taking, data gathering, shooting photo and video logs, presentation slide drafts with charts and tables, and short reflection essays. Additional introductory tasks may be assigned based on location or schedule.

5. Partnership

Authorities such as embassy of each respective country, border control, immigration, culture, and tourism as and where applicable. Additional partnerships may include local universities or cultural centers when appropriate.