

高校生対象・英語エッセイコンテスト
第13回 IIBC エッセイコンテストの受賞者が決定
 ～最優秀賞は慶應義塾湘南藤沢高等部 矢野 絵理奈さん～


日本で TOEIC® Program を実施・運営する、国際ビジネスコミュニケーション協会（IIBC）（所在地：東京都千代田区永田町、理事長：大橋圭造）では、毎年、高校生を対象に『私を変えた身近な異文化体験』をテーマに英語エッセイコンテスト「IIBC エッセイコンテスト」を開催しています。13 回目を迎えた 2021 年は、本選に 140 校・218 作品、奨励賞に 39 校・1,753 作品のご応募をいただきました。このたび本選 218 作品の中から、審査を経て、最優秀賞（1 名）、優秀賞（1 名）、優良賞（1 名）、特別賞（5 名）、アルムナイ特別賞（1 名）、日米協会会長賞（3 名）計 9 名（複数受賞者 2 名含む）の受賞者が決定いたしましたので、発表いたします。

■本選受賞者：9 名（うち 2 名は複数受賞） ※受賞者のエッセイ本文および内容は 2 ページ目以降でご覧いただけます。


＜最優秀賞（1 名）＞

 やの えりな 矢野 絵理奈さん けいおうぎじゆくしやうなんふじさわこうとうぶ 慶應義塾湘南藤沢高等部（神奈川県） 1 年
 タイトル：Face the Discomfort


＜優秀賞（1 名）＞

 みぞぐち りこ 溝口 理子さん しづやきやういぐくえんしづやこうとうがっこう 渋谷教育学園渋谷高等学校（東京都） 1 年
 タイトル：Everybody Needs Some “Osekai” In Their Life

＜優良賞（1 名）＞

 きのした さくら 木下 桜さん ふじせいしんじよしがくいんこうとうがっこう 不二聖心女子学院高等学校（静岡県） 3 年
 タイトル：The Bridges to True Peace

＜特別賞（5 名）＞

 あいばら ゆうた 相原 侑汰さん とうきやうがくげいだいがくふぞくこくさいちゆうとうきやういぐくがっこう 東京学芸大学附属国際中等教育学校（東京都） 5 年 タイトル：Making the whole world my “comfort zone”

むらた 村田 キムさん さかいでだいいちこうとうがっこう 坂出第一高等学校（香川県） 2 年 タイトル：A Smile Has No Language Barriers

ゆま ミルン アラナ 由真さん めいけいがくえん 茗溪学園（茨城県） 3 年 タイトル：Don't Judge a Book by Its Cover


はやみ しゆい 速水 思惟さん おうみこうとうがっこう 近江高等学校（滋賀県） 1 年 タイトル：Something important is close to me

いさだ まあや 伊佐田 真礼さん とうきやうおんがくだいがくふぞくこうとうがっこう 東京音楽大学付属高等学校（東京都） 2 年 タイトル：The Magic of a Simple Question

＜アルムナイ特別賞（1 名）＞

 矢野 絵理奈さん 慶應義塾湘南藤沢高等部（神奈川県） 1 年
 タイトル：Face the Discomfort

＜日米協会会長賞（3 名）＞

 矢野 絵理奈さん 慶應義塾湘南藤沢高等部（神奈川県） 1 年 タイトル：Face the Discomfort
 溝口 理子さん 渋谷教育学園渋谷高等学校（東京都） 1 年 タイトル：Everybody Needs Some “Osekai” In Their Life
うめむら とむひと 梅村 知仁さん せいこうがくいんこうとうがっこう 聖光学院高等学校（神奈川県） 2 年 タイトル：Doing is more difficult than knowing

第 13 回 IIBC エッセイコンテスト結果詳細はこちら (https://www.iibc-global.org/iibc/activity/essay/2021_result.html)

【第 13 回 IIBC エッセイコンテスト概要】	
テーマ	『私を変えた身近な異文化体験』
表彰内容	【本選】最優秀賞：1 名／優秀賞：1 名／優良賞：1 名／特別賞：5 名 【アルムナイ特別賞】1 名。過去の受賞者（アルムナイ）が審査員となり、独自の観点で優れた作品を選出 【日米協会会長賞】3 名。一般財団法人 日米協会（会長：藤崎 一郎氏）が、本選応募作品の中から国際理解や国際交流の観点で優れた作品を選出 【奨励賞】1 校 20 名（20 作品）以上の応募校へ贈られる賞

審査員の紹介はこちら (https://www.iibc-global.org/iibc/activity/essay/2021_entry.html)

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■本選受賞 9 作品

<最優秀賞/日米協会会長賞/アルムナイ特別賞>

矢野 絵理奈さん 慶應義塾湘南藤沢高等部（神奈川県） 1 年

留学中、様々な教科で歴史に関するディスカッションが行われた。最初は多様性に富むクラスメートに母国の歴史をどう伝えるか、またどう思われるかを気にした。しかし、それは自分の固定概念であることに気が付いた。

Face the Discomfort

Not one page of my literature journal had ever been left blank so far. Literature had always been my favorite subject, especially with all the discussions held at my multicultural boarding school. Each page was cherished and used wisely, overfilled with words. Except one. Actually, it did have a small scribble at the right edge along with the title: The Relationship Between Japan and America (WWII). Anybody would notice the reluctance and timidity in the smudged handwriting. The letters on this page were closer to fading away than the dull sunlight on a November morning in Boston. Finally looking up and gazing out the window of my literature classroom, I noticed the same grayness in the sky as my scribble. Never in my life had I despised literature class as I did that day.

The blank page was for me to do background research on the topic we were going to learn and discuss about. I had been avoiding this “uneasy topic” for the longest time. In a classroom filled with friends from countries that Japan had mistreated, I thought this was an untouchable topic. As the teacher started talking, a million doubts wandered inside my mind. Will my friends start viewing me another way? Will they criticize Japan? Will they not like me anymore? Now pale, I looked at the familiar faces, praying that I was just overthinking as the discussion started. I felt as if I was going to be confronted for something I did not do.

However, a few minutes later, I found myself being shocked by their ability to maintain courtesy within straightforwardness. One student from the US brought up the attacks Japan had triggered, but simultaneously, he clearly stated that there were both sides to the war and there was nobody to blame, as many other countries had done the same. As expected, other classmates bashed Japan and brought up many of its war crimes as well; but to my own surprise, none of them made me feel uncomfortable at all. Every one of them never failed to show respect, while their opinions- whether it was for or against Japan, spoke from their heart with clear reasoning. I noticed myself nodding my head to every single one of their opinions. My years of deliberate ignorance had been cut off at this exact moment.

What also astonished me was the amount of knowledge and fluency they had mastered. They thoroughly explained their home countries’ positions in the war and eagerly presented their knowledge from discrimination to government relations. Despite receiving different education from around the globe, everyone gave a wide range of unbiased information and stories from their home countries. It was enough to blow all my worries away and look at the history from a brand new point of view. Though being hesitant, I decided to work up the courage and speak up, followed by my classmates. Returning information the same way was my only way of thanking them for what they had taught me. After my short speech, the faces lit up as they did to me, and I felt as if I completed my duty as a Japanese student to show my perspective and how I have been educated in Japan.

This class taught me an immensely important lesson that no other experience could. The past is the past no matter how agonizing it may be, and we must openly discuss it at times. Unnecessarily avoiding such topics can have an opposite effect; with respect, no topic is awkward or unfair. Accepting each other and sharing unprejudiced information allowed me to get out of my comfort zone and gain a deeper understanding of history from different perspectives. At the same time, I was ashamed that I hadn’t actively tried to learn the history of my own home country. My classmates knew these pieces of information from researching themselves or asking a parent. Though I was satisfied with my delivery, I could have educated myself more outside of school. Indeed, this once-in-a-lifetime experience taught me that feeling “uncomfortable” was not an excuse to escape from such a significant topic. Never have I left my journal page blank after this. [695 words]

昨年私はインドネシアに転校しましたが、コロナ禍より直ぐに帰国を余儀なくされました。短い滞在でしたが、現地の方々の「お節介」とも言える優しさに触れ、心に残る異文化体験となりました。豊かな日本では忘れがちな、貧富格差の社会問題や相互扶助の精神を胸に刻み、今の自分に可能な恩返しをしようと思います。

Everybody Needs Some “Osekkai” In Their Life

“Selamat Pagi, Miss Riko!”, my driver Andi would always greet me enthusiastically every morning as I climbed into the car, returning his greeting in broken Indonesian. This was our morning routine when he would pick me up for school in Jakarta. During my time in Indonesia, my enlightening interactions with him opened up a new perspective of kindness and social disparities.

A side that I admired was his genuine “nosiness”. This may sound like a negative attribute because in our language, there is a word called “osekkai”, commonly used as an insult for nosy people. During my stay in Indonesia, I experienced an unusual level of “osekkai” in various instances. For example, when I fainted at school, Andi showed an astonishing display of generosity. Despite being on holiday, Andi immediately rushed to the school and drove me home, while sending constant updates to my mother. This refreshing kindness was not simply limited to Andi but also the staff at the hotel I resided at. Even when they were off-duty, they would hand me some Kopiko, an Indonesian confectionary, or attempt to converse with me through English and Japanese. At first, I was under the mistaken impression that it was a part of their duty but I came to realize that they were genuinely curious and wanted to have a conversation. After living in Japan for most of my life, I had become detached from this type of generosity, simply because of the negative innuendo surrounding it. In Japanese culture, there is an invisible limit to kindness because one may consider it as crossing boundaries. Being exposed to this new dimension of generosity, I pushed myself to reevaluate the way I treat peers.

My experience in Indonesia was memorable but also disheartening and eye-opening. My life became starkly different from my normalities in Japan. I was exposed to a bizarre dimension of wealth that came with a personal driver, affluent friends and a jacuzzi. My family swiftly adapted, yet I struggled adjusting to this lifestyle. Whenever I looked out of the window in my airconditioned car, I would see children running around with bare feet or small run-down houses that were poles apart from the luxury hotel I resided at. This sight tugged at my sense of guilt and would sink down in my car seat. During the course of my stay, I learnt at school that the majority of Indonesians do not have health insurance because they cannot afford the price. As a person who grew up with health insurance as a standard aspect of life, I was appalled upon learning this. Behind the smiles of many people that I saw everyday lay a dark reality of no access to actual medical treatments. I had grown up in a bubble, unknowing of the cruelness world. While it may lead to bliss, ignorance about the world is perhaps the most deadly weapon of all. The experience of living in Jakarta, a wild city where extreme wealth and poverty coexist side by side, pushed my mind to reexamine my privilege.

As people born in a first world country, we are in a way blessed but also cursed with low exposure to foreign cultures. Learning from the kindness of Indonesian people, such as Andi, and the harsh social inequalities I witnessed, I will continue to remember this precious experience. It taught me that it’s okay to occasionally be “osekkai” and that it’s not okay to turn a blind eye to social issues. My thoughts can be perceived as idealistic but there can be no realism without a hint of idealism. After returning to Japan, I swiftly started to take action. Firstly, I signed up for a volunteering organization that aids homeless people. Additionally, I started my internship at a non-profit-organization specializing in human rights. I currently handle social media, seminars, and fundraisers. While one may argue that these actions are not meaningful, I see them as building blocks for the future. My goal is to become a diplomat and work for the ODA in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For the future, I will continue these small deeds, with hopes that they will one day reach someone. Until then, Selamat tinggal! [698 words]

長崎平和公園で中国、韓国から贈られた平和のモニュメントを目にしたことで、平和や国際協力に対する私の考えが一変した。人種や国籍の垣根を越えて、共通の目標に向けて連携し合うことの大切さを学んだ。

The Bridges to True Peace

“Men build too many walls and not enough bridges.” This quotation from Joseph Fort Newton, an American Baptist minister, indicates that, in order to understand each other, we need more bridges, not walls. The relationship between Korea, China and Japan is often said to be getting worse year by year. My image of Koreans and Chinese was formed in family discussions. Both my grandfather and father have a negative image of them. They say, “I don’t trust Koreans or Chinese. They still complain about Japan even though the Japanese government has officially compensated them. They are misusing the postwar compensation!” As a result, two members of my family avoid using products or services from those countries. Naturally, having listened to their opinions, I gradually developed the same outlook as theirs. However, one experience totally changed my point of view.

Since last year, I have been working as a “Hiroshima Nagasaki Peace Messenger.” The movement of Hiroshima Nagasaki Peace Messengers started in Nagasaki with a call for world peace and the abolishment of nuclear weapons, by sending high school students to the United Nations. Through this work, I have been learning about atomic bombs, people’s lives during wars, and the history of the development of nuclear weapons in the world. Sometimes it is very sad and even shocking to learn about this history. However, it is our mission to learn about it from the people who experienced the war, because we are probably the last generation that can listen to them directly.

One day I visited Nagasaki as a Peace Messenger. I went to the Nagasaki Peace Memorial Park, which was a prison when the atomic bomb struck. I was lost for words there. I saw many peace monuments sent from many countries, including Korea and China. It was as if all the prayers for world peace had been gathered there together from all over the world! Then, another fact shocked me. On August 9, 1945, many Koreans and Chinese were killed or injured by the atomic bombing, too. Before that, I had only focused on Japanese victims of the bombing. I didn’t even imagine that almost all of the Korean and Chinese victims were forced to work there and kept captive in a prison. Japan often tells the world that it is the only country that has experienced atomic bombings, which suggests they consider only the Japanese to be victims. However, how many Japanese people know about what happened to the Koreans and Chinese during the war in Nagasaki? Today, in 2020, there are 13,400 nuclear weapons in the world and over 2000 nuclear tests have been done up until now. There are also 443 nuclear power plants in operation around the world today. This made me realize that it is natural that nuclear victims should be found all over the world, gradually leading me to the belief that we should cooperate with each other toward the same goal as we know the reality and consequences of atomic bombs.

So, what prevents us? Why didn’t I know the facts behind the history? Why do some people mistrust other nationalities without knowing much about them? History, of course, matters as much as world security. However, in fact, our understanding of these factors, sometimes causing misunderstandings, prevents us from creating connections and uniting together to solve the same world problems. We should not be easily swayed by these factors. In the end, we are the same human beings, who have loved ones and emotions. Everyone wishes for happiness and we should live fully to fulfill our mission in life. I myself have found my own mission in my life through my work as a Nagasaki Hiroshima Peace Messenger. To realize world peace, I want to listen to people from different backgrounds and know more about them. This will, I believe, help remove our misunderstandings and prejudices towards others. As global citizens, we need to connect to each other not just at the national level but also as individuals. Until we appreciate the common humanity that binds us together, we will never be able to build the bridges towards true peace, like the many foreign monuments gathered in Nagasaki Peace Memorial Park.

(699 words)

言葉が通じない状況下でも人の役に立てる事があり、人とつながっていれば必ず理解者は現れる。できないと線引きせず、人を思いやること、人の存在意義を認めることでどこでも心地よく過ごせるということを学んだ。

Making the whole world my “comfort zone”

From the moment I moved to the US, I was “the person who came from another country”, or in other words, an outsider. I especially felt alienated when I first flew to this unknown (to me) continent, surrounded by people that didn't understand my native language. Every day was gut-wrenching. The worst part of it all was that I had no close friends as a support group. I was in what can be called a “prison of the mind”, and very much alone. As I couldn't express my true self, this added to the fact that I had no one to express it to. When I started playing football, everything changed quickly. A sport that I only started for the sole purpose of wanting to utilize my speed became a life changer. Football is a team sport that requires cooperation in order to achieve victory. I desperately tried to make communication with my meager English skills and used gestures to their full potential. My circle of friends expanded as we practiced hard. As a result, our team won the district tournament and advanced to the finals. Before that important game, our coach said to us, “Our team has Yuta.” At that moment, I was able to feel that I was actually worth something in my existence on American soil. And that I could be of assistance. When the time came to go back and live in Japan permanently, incidents that I never would've thought of were coming my way.

As a returnee student, I experienced inter-cultural differences not only when going abroad, but also when coming back. I thought I could live a life without any discomfort in my home country, but that wasn't the case. Although some of my classmates were friends of mine since I was young, my new mindset and the difference in my way of thinking distanced me from the others. What staggered me the most was the fact that although I can speak and am Japanese, I still wasn't able to feel like I was “in the loop”. I felt that everyone valued their circle and had a high sense of camaraderie, ultimately making them avoid the “outsider”. This time, it wasn't a classmate or teammate that got me on my feet, it was a teacher. This was my Football coach and teacher at the same time, and he offered heart-warming conversation and advice. He would always bend his ears towards me and would lend a hand.

From these two experiences, I perceived that even if a person can't speak the language or doesn't feel like they belong in a specific place, they will feel joy when they feel connected to others. By actively joining a circle of people, someone who understands them will surely appear. When people start to recognize the value of their existence, it enables them to demonstrate their abilities many times over. I changed in many ways through these experiences, but the two biggest changes I went through is that: one, I started to think that no matter the situation, I shouldn't just start thinking of reasons why I can't or shouldn't do it, but rather take a leap of faith, and expand my comfort zone by joining a community. Two, I realized the importance of recognizing and caring for the significance of other people's existence, and since then I have kept this in my mind.

Through these experience and the changes I went through, I was able to grasp a clear vision of the future, which I continue to value making connections with people, embracing diversity, learning and acquiring a broad perspective, or in other words, expanding my comfort zone, so that I can play an active role in further developing Japan in the world. No matter what kind of difficult situation we are in, the world can only develop if we value our relationships with people and value others' existence, which leads to the extension of their comfort zones. This method can be utilized by anyone in the world and is paramount in growing as a person. By doing this, it will surely create a positive domino effect on life, and the world.
[694 words]

母国から日本へ越して言葉の壁に直面し、疎外感で苦しんでいた自分を救ったのはバレーボール部での活動であった。体の動きで気持ちが伝わる経験を通して、メンバーの一員としての一体感を得られた。身体言語により言葉の壁を越えられることを、同じ悩みを持つ人に知ってもらいたい。

A Smile Has No Language Barriers

I moved to Japan from the Philippines in my second year of middle school. I was really excited to start my new life here in Japan; excited for a new school, a new environment and new friends. But it wasn't what I expected it to be. Unable to master the language or culture, I felt so out of place. I struggled, and had mental breakdowns.

One day, while I was on my way home, I passed by the gymnasium. I saw the volleyball club practicing and I was amazed by their passion. I wanted to be a part of it. So the next day, I talked to my homeroom teacher about joining the club and became a member the day after.

However, this became yet another challenge. Communicating on the court was difficult as I wasn't able to speak and understand Japanese well. Not only that, but I had never played volleyball before! I couldn't understand what was happening on two levels—the sport, and the language my teammates were speaking.

So, I started to rely on a new language: the language of gestures, touch, expressions and tone.

When I missed a ball, I raised my hand and nodded instead of pronouncing the difficult Japanese words my teammates used. Whenever a problem happened on the court, my teammates and I showed each other everything is okay by smiling. When stretching before games, I could copy my teammates' body movements and join the rhythm naturally. We all laughed and high fived each other when we got a point. Day by day, I began to feel connected to the team. I realized that not being able to speak Japanese well didn't matter!

Through volleyball, I came to understand how powerful sports can be. When playing a sport, you can participate fully and learn from watching and copying body movements even if you don't share a language with your teammates. Sports' rules are also universal, and you can enjoy playing no matter where you are in the world. For example, in volleyball, a hand down means that a ball is in bounds, and a hand up means that it is out of bounds. Two fingers up from the referee means "double contact"—If the same player touches the ball twice the other team gets a point. Every sport has its own rules and its own language of nonverbal communication. This language allows us to build friendship and closeness through few words.

Today, most major professional sports teams have foreign players. In America, Shohei Ootani is the hottest topic in baseball, and the fact that he doesn't speak English fluently has not stopped him. In Japan, fifteen of Japan's national rugby team players were born outside Japan. Team sports can even overcome the deepest divisions. In 1914, during World War I, groups of British soldiers and German soldiers famously played football matches together on no-man's land, even though they had to fight each other the next day. With just a hand movement, a smile, or a friendly touch, the language and culture barriers fall away.

In the years since I moved to Japan, I have changed a lot. I know that if you communicate with respect and kindness, others will reciprocate that kindness to you, and later on, you can learn from them by sharing your own experiences and culture, too. The more you learn about a person, the more you can communicate and express yourself to them with ease. Most importantly, I understand that even if we don't speak the same language, we always have the innate human language of the body. I am much more used to the language and culture of Japan, so I don't rely on body language as much. However, I am thankful for it! When we cannot use our spoken language, movement is the tool we use to make ourselves understood, and it is a doorway to connection—to being a part of a team. [654 words]

Gonzalez, Alden. "Shohei Ohtani Can Hit, Pitch -- and Keep His TEAMMATES LAUGHING." *ESPN*, ESPN Internet Ventures, 12 Sept. 2019, www.espn.com/mlb/story/_/id/27597381/shohei-ohtani-hit-pitch-keep-teammates-laughing.

Settai, Takashi, and Connor Cisló. "Diversity Strengthens Japan on and off the Rugby Pitch." *Nikkei Asia*, Nikkei Asia, 5 Oct. 2019, asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Rugby-World-Cup/Diversity-strengthens-Japan-on-and-off-the-rugby-pitch.

"WW1 Christmas Truce Marked in Army Football Teams Match." *BBC News*, BBC, 17 Dec. 2014, www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-30498509.

小学6年生の私は、二重国籍であることに対しての悩みを抱えていました。そんな中、イギリスの学校で出会った先輩に“a cover is not a book”という素敵な言葉とともに、自分に自信を持つことの大切さを教えてもらいました。

Don't Judge a Book by Its Cover

“A Cover is not the book ,so open it up and take a look. 'Cause under the covers one discovers that the king may be a crook! ” sings Marry Poppins and Michael Banks in the movie *Marry Poppins Returns*¹. When I hear this jolly tune, it always reminds me of a boy that I met in the UK that changed my perspective, and possibly my life.

When I meet somebody, they always ask me the very same question: “Are you mixed blooded?” Yes, I am racially mixed, to answer this question. My father is Scottish, and my mother is Japanese. Because of this unique identity of mine, I had a time where I could not put my finger on what my identity exactly was. This was quite a burdensome problem for me, and I had a rough time, especially through elementary school. People thought my appearance and identity as sort of a weird thing ,which eventually forced me into thinking that being the minority was wrong. No matter how hard I tried to look “normal”, I knew that I truly could not deep down in my heart.

When I was in the 6th grade of elementary school, I had an opportunity to visit a private school in the UK. I was excited to go there, since in Japan I looked Scottish. I thought that if I go to Britain, my appearance will fit. I was really looking forward to visiting, thinking that I could finally find a place where I could be comfortable being Alanna!

Unfortunately, this feeling would not last forever. When I arrived at the airport, I was really happy. Heading to the customs, I noticed there was a big mirror. Casually looking into it, I noticed one grave thing: I looked very Japanese! I heard my heart shatter into tiny pieces. My display was not suitable for both of my home countries, and this made me devastated. This feeling became worse once I arrived at the private school. As it was a noble private school, every student had the Anglo-Saxon features, and I did not see any students with the Asian looks. I did not want to spend even a minute there, since it felt like there was no place for me.

When I was at the cafeteria eating lunch, feeling very nervous, I saw a senior student approaching to my table. He was a boy with orange hair and freckles. “Can I sit here?” he said as pointing at the empty seat in front of me. I was surprised but happy at the same time. At first, I was a bit scared that he will point out something about my features, but surprisingly, that did not happen. When I said I was from Japan, he was eager to hear about my culture, not making fun of me at all. I was utterly astonished.

After an hour, we finished eating our lunch and was walking out of the cafeteria. I noticed he said nothing about my features, and did not tease me like the students in Japan. This was so eccentric to me that I spontaneously asked him this one question: “Am I weird?”. As soon as I said this, we stopped walking. The boy looked eminently surprised, and the minute I saw his reaction, I regretted saying that from my heart. Suddenly, he laughed and said “No, of course not!” Followed by that, he started talking about his past. Apparently, he was having problems with his appearance and identity too. Some students bullied him for being Ginger, which made him lose confidence. “Have you heard the idiom, the cover is not a book?”, he said. While explaining it, he made me realize something: It is impossible to identify a person just by their looks. Being Ginger or Asian is a part of our identity, but not everything. It made me recognize that I could be Alanna no matter where I was. Being yourself is absolutely fine!

In the future, I really hope to be an open-minded and strong person like him. Remember, as the song goes, “A cover is nice, but a cover is not the book!”. [699 words]

¹ *Marry Poppins Returns* (Marshall, USA, 2018)

日曜日も鐘の音で朝6時に起きて、クリスマスも祝うことはない、少し変わった環境で私は育ちました。そんな家に違和感を感じていましたが、過去の出来事を知って私の考えは変わりました。身近なものを大切にすることがどれだけ幸せなのかを伝えたいと思います。

Something important is close to me

Groaning sound of the bell awakens me every morning. I live in a temple. My father is a priest. But he is also an office worker. I have a little strange lifestyle.

My typical day starts at six a.m. when my father rings the temple bell in my house everyday. After waking up, we always listen to buddhist chant reading by my father. It's just 15 minutes. Then, we prepare for school or the office. However, I sometimes feel that it's a waste of time. I want to be in bed for that time. But my father is very strict about religious events. When my father found I was drowsy, I was scolded badly. I always hated these situations, and I wish if I was a child of a normal house.

The biggest difference between my home and others is really serious for childhood. I haven't believed in Santa Claus since I was a little child. That is because my parents told me, "Santa Claus doesn't live in the real world." This means, of course, that I have never got a Christmas present from Santa Claus or my parents. Many children said that they got a present from Santa Claus. I was shocked. My parents told me not to tell other children that Santa Claus doesn't exist. I became alone on Christmas and I felt an invisible wall between friends and me. Christmas is the ordinary day for my family. I didn't like Christmas day and didn't like the temple because I couldn't celebrate Christmas events.

One day, there happened to be nothing heard at 6 o'clock a.m. It was just because my father was going on a business trip so no one rang the bell. Then, some neighbors hurried to come to our temple and said, "Something must have happened to the priest! Today I can't hear the bell! Is he all right?" I was surprised. I thought it was an exaggeration. I thought that they didn't hear the bell and it was just noisy. Until then, I didn't notice that my father had played an important role not only in telling the time, but also as the symbol of the town.

I was also shocked by the story I heard from my mother later. She said that the temple was once burned down before I was born. My grandfather thought that it was difficult to restore, so he decided not to rebuild it. However, neighbors around the temple gathered to discuss what they should do to keep the temple and collected enough money to rebuild the temple standing now. When I heard the story, the temple is my home as well as the home of many local people living around here. I found out that they loved the temple very much.

Gradually I changed my mind about the temple after hearing these stories. It is because I realized the people around me care about the temple and time spent in that place and social disposition, and they tried to protect. Then, as a daughter of the temple, I also need to cherish it. I began to think about that.

I decided to do something I can contribute to the temple. I took a "Tokudo." "Tokudo" means training and test for becoming a monk. I refused his offer many times because it was very hard and require patience. After practicing hard, I could complete "Tokudo" and became a monk. Now I can understand why my father is always strict and punctual. He has experienced such a hardship and gained dignity and respect among locan residents.

After that, I started to participate in temple events that I hadn't attended because I was too lazy. I became more social and could talk with more people. Through these, I learned the importance of taking care of things near me. It's often difficult to see what's right in front of your eyes. If the field of view is narrow, I may miss something important. Now that I was able to find what is important, I am sure I can be a part of protecting the temple as my home.

Majestic sound of the bell tells the time as it always is. [696 words]

私はアメリカでたくさんの友人に恵まれました。その友人たちは、違いを受け入れることの大切さを私に教えてくれました。まず人を知るために魔法のフレーズを使ってみましょう。きっと心の距離を縮められるはずです。

The Magic of a Simple Question

"Where are you from?" If I had lived in Japan my entire life, I might not have been asked this question, but because of my father's job, I spent a year living in the USA where I answered this question many times. It may come as a surprise, but I made a lot of friends through this question. This magic question became my own personal magnet connecting me to more people than I could have imagined.

I went to a local public school in Baltimore. I remember the first day that I rode on the school bus. I decided to sit alone and kept my head down. However, the one moment that I raised my face, "please sit next to me," a girl said with a warm, friendly tone. She gave me the window seat where she sat. The first question she asked was, "Where are you from?" I could answer with confidence. She smiled, which made me smile. I immediately felt like I had found my footing.

At school, I made many friends of different races, languages, cultural habits, and more. I learned the importance of understanding them through many encounters. I'd like to think that I wasn't prejudiced, but, upon reflection, I realized that I had felt socially distant from them. However, the friends I met didn't judge people on their appearance. I marveled at how they would often talk positively, without hesitation. They tried to get to know the other person by first asking "Where are you from?" This is an easy question which anyone can answer. For me, it used to take me a long time to gather my thoughts before talking to people whom I met for the first time. Through friends, I learned that the most obvious questions are the most effective as the first step in communicating. Maybe we can talk about our home countries, special native products, and their relationships to Japan. With that in mind, wouldn't it be fun to learn about other countries?

My friends in the USA were quick and natural at finding another person's good qualities and being generous with compliments. It made me realize that we first need to acknowledge the other person. They had the extraordinary power to make people smile. I think this is a characteristic that we should emulate. There are many countries that have severe problems in the world, but by trying to understand people without prejudice; we can learn to understand them, their culture, and their religion.

It's important to look around the world, but we can also focus our energies locally. Last year, I moved to Tokyo, but I have a different accent because I was raised in Fukui. At first, I was embarrassed to express my differences, but then, my new friends asked me "where are you from?" That was when I could reveal my true self, and I found myself talking about my hometown more, and began to beam with pride and confidence. Please consider the spirit of "Where are you from?" when we communicate with new friends. Let's try to understand other people. I encourage everyone to make an effort to search for positive attributes in others instead of negative attributes.

People are born with many differences. Fostering a spirit of respect for each other will lead to the creation of a bullying-free society and a peaceful world. We can feel much joy and learn more about the world by getting to know people. I think that the heart that accepts differences and acknowledges people is the heart of compassion, one of the most positive qualities I've seen in others.

Through my experience, I learned the courage of talking to people by asking "where are you from?" without hesitation or prejudice. I also learned the importance of trying to understand others, getting to know each other after acknowledging differences but moving beyond any judgement based only on appearance. Making new friends in a foreign country was an unforgettable experience where I was able to gain valuable, irreplaceable perspectives. I'll never forget how it all started with the simplest of questions; "where are you from?" [686 words]

昨夏に参加した日中青年会議において、中国の高校生と話をした際に頭で正しいと思っていることを実行に移せなかったことから、様々な社会の問題を解決するためには、理解するだけでなく、行動に移すことも大切だと実感した。

Doing is more difficult than knowing

Living abroad and facing other perspectives inspired my way of thinking as well as my emotion. I had thought I gained a precious experience, but it mattered when I really did something.

When I was seven, I moved to Shanghai. Living in apartments organized for Japanese overseas workers and going to Shanghai Japanese School, at first, I had few occasions where I realized I was living abroad. However, I had to have that sense when a dispute between China and Japan happened. In 2012, the Japanese government declared the nationalization of the Senkaku/Diaoyutai Islands, which had been a controversial issue between both countries for years. On account of this, many demonstrations against Japan took place anywhere in China including Shanghai. This suddenly changed my young life. My school sports festival was canceled, and I was not allowed to go out alone. I was strongly surprised at this immediate change, while I also felt anger against both countries causing this conflict, which deprived me of my normal life in Shanghai.

At the same time, however, I found that some Chinese people still have positive feelings towards my country. At an event for introducing Japanese culture which I was invited to go to, many Chinese visitors actively asked Japanese staff about sights and cultures in Japan. I could happily experience the reality like this on many occasions and began to think that showing genuine interests and trying to mutually understand them is necessary to solve conflicts like the Senkaku/Diaoyutai Islands issue.

However, this proved not enough when I participated in the Sino-Japan Youth Conference as a Japanese representative last summer. It was a conference held online over four days, and participants came from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan. They were divided into nine groups, talking about the Sino-Japan relationship. I was very excited to join the conference and curious about what students in other regions think about this relationship.

On the final day, I joined a history session, where each group creates a new high school textbook in a neutral way. Our group's topic was the Nanking Massacre in the Sino-Japanese War. The session started with reading current textbooks. I was given a textbook in the Japanese language and three regions' textbooks translated into English. Reading them through, I found there is a difference in the number of victims; the number in the Chinese textbook was twenty times as large as that in Japan's. After reading them, participants were supposed to share their views about their own country's textbooks. The discussion starts, a participant from China being the first and a member from Hong Kong being the second. My turn came. Everyone realized the difference in the number and asked me about the tone of Japanese textbooks and the intentions of the Japanese government. I could not choose what to say at once because I had two options in my mind; "The Japanese government is neutrally telling the truth" in one mind, and "Japanese government actively hides the fact in a biased way" in the other. In my view, my answer is slightly the latter, but with everyone in the group looking at me, I was too afraid and ashamed to tell my opinion. I thought that meant Japan and I are to blame. Instead, I said, "The Japanese government does not actively hide the truth, but does not truly show the fact." Then, a Chinese participant said the Japanese government hides the truth. I could not say anything. Although he is now a friend of mine, I regret that I should have told my true opinion because being honest was the only thing that I could do, facing the reality.

This experience gave me an important lesson; doing something is sometimes impossible even if I know what to do. In the real world, too, many problems are left unsolved although each stakeholder knows what is the key to solving them. Telling a lie to yourself or blurring the answer does not lead to the actual solution. What is necessary is to be honest and try what you must do. In this way, I hope even one more problem will be solved in the future. [696 words]

■奨励賞 39 校

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東京都立雪谷高等学校	姫路市立琴丘高等学校
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