

A Bittersweet Taste of Water

As a human, we have always had experiences in which we felt shocked to be in a different environment. Because I lived in a foreign country for more than 7 years, I was not used to life in my homeland, which was Japan. My key experience occurred when I was a junior high school student who had just come back from the United States. I was going to drink water while the teacher was giving a lecture, but when he discovered that I had drunk something during class, his warning blared inside the classroom. I could not hide my startled expression.

I figured through this experience that adapting to an environment is required in order to live on in an area with different customs. I couldn't comprehend the fact at first, since I believed that students had the right to drink water or tea whenever they wanted to—a custom in the United States. It was hard for me to get used to this “unusual” custom. Furthermore, I had many questions. What if a student gets dehydrated? How will we overcome the hot, humid summers in Japan? However, I realized that I neither had the right, nor the strength to oppose these rules and customs in Japan. As a matter of fact, even if I resisted this situation, I would only have plummeting grades and looks of embarrassment from other students who obey the strict rules in schools. There is a vast gap of power between students and teachers in schools in Japan. A word

of opposition will be considered “rude” and “unacceptable”. On the other hand, American schools tend to focus on equal rights between teachers and students. I realized through this event that I had to learn to get used to life in my Japanese Junior High School, and blend in to the environment around me, or else I would only get left behind. This, in fact, made the distance between me and my fellow students shrink, though I joined them in the second year of my Junior High School.

Getting to know about the different culture and analyzing it is also a requirement, if you happen to come across a unique situation, such as cultural dissimilarities. I was surprised when I was told that taking a drink of water was prohibited in Japanese Schools. I was bewildered because of the difference I encountered between Japanese and US schools. The differences were in the culture of Japan and America. To begin with, rules exist to maintain order in society. The fact that Japan has many tough rules means that Japan has a culture that prioritizes social order among anything else. Also, Japanese schools have many class events such as Chorus Competitions and athletic events which help strong bonds to appear, which, as a result, creates a more consolidated team or class. In comparison, students in US schools are more solitary and independent. In Japan, the happiness of society depends on whether each and every member

obeys the rules decided by others. I inferred that this was the reason the strictness of rules differ between the schools in Japan and America. By considering the contrasting characteristics, I could visualize how I would try to change myself so as to begin a new phase in Junior High School.

To sum up, my experience of being warned while drinking water may have occurred due to my carelessness. However, this episode caused me to know more about what being a global person is all about. Being a global citizen means to be a person who is able to adapt and analyze the other culture under any circumstances. This was a small experience, and lasted only about a week. However, the lesson it taught me could be used for my future. I want to suggest this to any person who wants to go see a different world outside the environment they are used to.

Being able to examine and accommodate a different culture enables us to get used to, and blend into a dissimilar setting—which turns us into a character who can truly live internationally.

[683 Words]