

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]