

Why Learn Chinese Competition 2018

February 10th, 2018

AWARD WINNERS

2018 WMLC

GRAND PRIZE: Abby Artman from Skyline High School

SCENE 1: INT SCHOOL COUNSELING OFFICE EARLY MORNING

JOHN sits alone in a comfortable armchair after being directed to the counseling office by the secretary, impatiently tapping his fingers upon the armrest. He looks around at the various trophy cases and certificates won by both the school, and its students.

COUNSELOR

Good morning Mr. Lum, how are you today?

JOHN snaps back into reality from his relentless gazing, straightens himself up into a more proper posture and clears his throat quietly

JOHN

I am doing quite well, thank you for asking. And you?

COUNSELOR

Also well, thank you.

There is a moment of awkward silence between the two, neither wishing to continue the ritual of small talk, and formalities. JOHN once again clears his throat, this time with a little more vigor.

JOHN

Well I'm sure you've been told what this meeting is about- I'm worried that my son will not fare well in this school. So few people speak our language, and his English is already sub-par. I'm worried that he'll be treated badly, or even bullied because of it.

The COUNSELOR does not pause for a slight moment, his words seeming to flow in pace with JOHN'S

COUNSELOR

I believe that once your son steps foot into our school, you will see for yourself that here, everybody is welcome, and nobody at all is made to feel otherwise.

JOHN sits back in his chair, slightly shocked and stunned by the bluntness of the COUNSELOR'S speech. He pauses, tilts his head downwards and thinks, leaving the room in an uncomfortable silence. When he turns his head back upwards, his face is twisted into a curt scowl.

JOHN

No. I know your kind. You think you know how to assist people like us, but you don't. When I was my son's age, my father was in the same position I am right now. And when I entered my school on the first day I was an outcast. People knew nothing of my culture! My language! My customs! Someone just like you assured my father that I would be accepted, that I would fit right in! That was a lie! They took one look at me, and I was their Fu Manchu! I was that unknown entity that they had only heard of before in the papers or movies! I was the boy that they called chink.

JOHN points an accusing finger at the COUNSELOR as he delivers his last line, becoming more and more riled up at the thought of his childhood.

COUNSELOR

Sir, calm down. You are not your father, and your son is not you. I'll tell you what, shortly before the school year starts, we will be holding our cultural fair. Why don't you come and bring your son? Many students will be there, and you can decide then if this school is right for him.

JOHN takes the COUNSELOR'S words into consideration and sighs in defeat, coming to the realization that perhaps society has changed since he was a child decades ago.

JOHN

Okay, we shall do just that. We'll see just how accepting your school is of others.

SCENE 2: INT JOHN'S HOUSE AFTERNOON

JOHN has just arrived home, and proceeds to call his son down from his room, ready to explain what they will be attending in just a few short weeks.

JOHN

林立文！请过来！

林立文 Comes walking down the stairs from his room, his head bent down over his phone, only looking up when he is only a few feet away from his father.

林立文

什么？ 你要我帮你做晚饭吗？

JOHN lets out a short sigh, lamenting the current state of the modern teenager before explaining to 林立文

JOHN

你不得帮我做饭。开学前几天有个文化博览会，我想我们一起去。

林立文 *shrugs his shoulders in dismissal, before giving his father an answer*

林立文

为什么不？

林立文 *walks off, presumably back to his room and his video games, thinking little of the exchange he had just had.*

SCENE 3: INT SCHOOL GYMNASIUM MIDDAY

林立文 *and John enter the gymnasium together, seeing what can only be described as the most standard school event one might ever see. Poster boards as far as the eye can see, and an array of students attempting to each give their own presentations.*

林立文

你知道我不懂英文。我在这里应该做什么？

林立文 *speaks in an exasperated tone, having just woken up an hour ago, completely forgetting about his agreement to come to the fair.*

JOHN

White people, white people, and more white people. There is Russian, Spanish, French, German.
Where is the Chinese section?

JOHN *is muttering to himself, when suddenly a Chinese character catches his eye. His eyes widen and he hurriedly drags **林立文** over to the area to see a blond child, not much older than his son, dressed in a Chinese jacket, reminiscent of those that he wore in Hong Kong directing an audience of twenty people in a simple lesson of Kung Fu.*

JOSH

-- now you see here a forward block transitioning into a forwards strike, another tenant of Wing Chun.

*The pair watch for a while, taking in the sight. JOHN laughs, remembering taking lessons similar to these in his early childhood days back in China. **林立文** watches in amazement, thinking back to his kung fu movies, and the stars that he always wanted to like. Ip Man, Jackie Chan, Bruce lee.*

林立文

功夫。你是孩子的时候，你做到了。对吗？

A smile crept onto JOHN'S face, his childhood memories flooding back to him.

JOHN

It's things like these that truly make us feel welcome.

First Place: Qianlin Yang from Bellevue High School

多元文化，多彩生活

如果我们的成长是知识大海上乘风破浪的船只，那么多元文化就是在慢慢长夜里指明道路的灯塔。如果我们的未来是即将开启的宝库，那么多元文化就是那块指向大门的路牌。如果我们的梦想是一个五彩斑斓的气球，那么多元文化就像一阵有力的清风，承载着我们探索广阔的天空。

多一种文化，多一份理解。几年前，11岁的我和父母去旅行。在熙熙攘攘的地铁上，疲惫的我靠在地铁车厢里的栏杆上，视线穿过人群被下一个车厢里穿着很特别，行为也显得有些不合群的一群游客吸引了。他们浩浩荡荡的一群人穿着浅黄色，白色或黑色的长袍，头上围着纱质的头巾。一群人里既有昏昏欲睡地坐在轮椅上的老人，左看看右摸摸的小朋友，还有包裹地严严实实的小婴儿。他们当中一个中年男子拿着一份地铁线路图抓耳挠腮，妈妈们手忙脚乱，小朋友们玩累了都疲惫地坐在了地上。地铁里不少人都在暗暗地打量着他们，但是没有人起身主动伸出援手。这幅情景让我印象深刻，但我想这并不是因为人们变得冷漠。我见过刚刚坐下又马上站起来给老人让座的人，也曾见过主动帮一个疲劳的妈妈搬运婴儿车的热心人士等等。几年后我去到国外接受教育，回想起来这件事情的发生极有可能是因为文化之间的碰撞。这些人们属于两种不同的文化，而这两种文化彼此之间并不熟悉，人与人之间没有建立起对彼此的信心，所以人们没有勇气贸然地出手相助或是寻求帮助。多元文化的环境让我有一颗包容的心，包容来自不同文化的人们，理解在不同文化的影响下多样的生活方式。在多元文化的熏陶下，我更愿意去将心比心。当我自己变成那个正在融入新的文化的人，我也迫切地希望有人可以理解我，帮助我。现在的我会很乐意地帮助在售票口不知所措的俄罗斯女孩，在机场迷路的巴基斯坦大学生... 现在在我的学校里，来自十几种不同文化的人都可以做朋友，我们帮助对方了解新的文化。而多元文化这座灯塔也指引着我拓宽眼界，放眼看世界。

多一种文化，多一种情怀。我从小开始学习一种中国民族乐器——葫芦丝，这是一种类似于箫的乐器。它的音色独特，婉转，诉说着中国傣族人民的故事和文化。我带着葫芦丝去看望家乡养老院里的老人们，用它把歌唱给爷爷奶奶们听。他们闭着眼睛静静地听，像是在努力回忆着什么。表演结束后，一位老爷爷拉着我说他年轻时候在听过这首歌，他老伴也会哼这首歌给他听，但是他好久没听到了。看着他脸上被回忆唤醒的笑容，我心里也充斥着一种忧愁的思乡情。后来，我来到了国外接受教育，我再次把葫芦丝的声音演奏给国外的学生们听。他们好奇地看了看这个素未谋面的乐器后就彻底把它抛之脑后，却没有人懂得欣赏它。在国外，我学习了长笛，它属于现代管弦乐的高音乐器。它的音色清亮，优美，唱着属于西方文化的歌谣。我加入了管弦乐队演奏新的音乐。每一场音乐会结束，我们总能收获热烈的掌声和满足的笑容。我的心里也跳动着欢乐的音符，对于从小在西方文化渲染下成长的听众们来说，这就是他们的情怀。在多元文化的熏陶下，我相信不管欣赏哪一种音乐，不管它属于哪一种文化。我都会扬起笑容，给予掌声。如果说我从不同的文化里接触到的音乐是一座宝库，那么多元文化的影响就是那块指明道路的路牌。

多一种文化，多一种审美。在拥有着多元文化背景的校园里，我常常遇到来自世界各地的同学们。我们在不同文化的影响下成长，每个人都是如此特别。我的朋友们激发了我进一步探索这个世界的欲望。在与来自法国同学们交谈的过程中，我对法国的食物产生了兴趣，法国的城市也让我心生向往。于是我开始加入法语课，学习更多关于法国文化的知识。如果把时间退回到几年前，我却从未产生过这个想法。我的同学们都在同一种文化背景下成长，却鲜少有人会想背井离乡，到外面的世界看一看。多元文化的背景就像一个那缕推着我缓缓上升的清风，它带我飞上天空，赋予我欣赏其他文化的能力，让我拥有勇气去探索一个未知的世界。

文化是源远流长的历史长河里的结晶，它不仅带给我们物质财富，也充实了我们的精神内在，它把每个人塑造的如此相近，又如此特别。对于我而言，文化让我拥有去欣赏世界的能力，而多元文化让我看到事物的多样性，让我保持一颗宽容的心，让我感受到不同文化的魅力，让我有学习一门新的语言的勇气，促使我不断历练，成为更好的自己。

Second Place:

a. AN NGUYEN – CHIEF SEALTH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Multiculturalism and Amorphous Boundaries

An Nguyen

2018.01

Why Learn Chinese – “What does multiculturalism mean to me?”

“Living in this world, the person we are most unfamiliar with is probably ourselves” – 张艺兴

The definition of multiculturalism can be conveyed in many concepts; from being a descriptive word to depict a mixed ethnic community, to referring to the acceptance and respect towards different cultural and ethnic communities. There aren't really any limits to define 'multiculturalism' as there aren't any boundaries in place to explain the contexts of this word. It's simply a shapeless word, one that isn't restricted to any definitions but open to a range of sociological, philosophic, and everyday meanings. Which is honestly, the overall ideology of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is an idea in which differences are accepted, that people of diversity are accepted and their traits are integrated into the mainstream world. But the general idea of multiculturalism is quite doubtful.

When a person comes to a new place, their differences are automatically counted. What makes them, them, is converted into something shameful or alienated— their heritages and whatnot are usually tossed to the side for something more 'conventional' and 'normal'. What was previously just another individual, is now a total stranger. “the people we are most unfamiliar with is probably ourselves”; we strive to achieve, to fit the criteria of 'perfect'. But what really is perfection? Disfiguring and throwing away pieces of ourselves to fit the standards of others? From being something unique and different, to being identical to any other person in the room. In this world, we want to be accepted by others— but to gain the acceptance of others usually results in the creation of carbon copies.

The theory of a 'butterfly effect' is basically a concept that means “small causes will eventually result in larger effects”. Multiculturalism is an idea where people of different heritages and cultures are accepted and respected, creating a diverse community. But in a racist and judging world like this, most people just want to be the same. From changing their appearances to fit the presences of others, to forgetting where they came from. From one person to another, it just grows bigger. Until we don't know anyone. Instead of embracing ourselves for who we are, we throw ourselves away— piece by piece. Instead “of a world where all people of all races work together in harmony”, like Nelson Mandela envisioned, we're at each other's throats for not being subdued. Our skins are muted. Our cultures are subtly there yet at the same time not. Our languages are twisted into soft gibberish. We're suppressed into an invisible barrier— that transforms us into what they want. It's like trying to catch a butterfly yet in the end all the butterflies ending up flying away, until they become hazy, muddled creatures in the far distance that you can't reach.

Multiculturalism isn't just an idea where diverse communities are integrated into society. It isn't just an idea where we respect one another for being who we are. It's a movement to ingrain acceptance into others. Rather than obstructing someone from being at home, it's an act of welcoming them with open arms to their new home. Whether she speaks Vietnamese or English. Whether he worships God or no one. Whether they eat baguettes or foie gras. We're all created to be different. And we should treat others with respect for that. Multiculturalism is an idea that cultures can strive together in harmony rather than disharmonizing and going out of tune. It's a concept where we can live to find our true selves. But, then again there isn't really a true definition for multiculturalism. And there also isn't a true definition for what is 'normal'.

b. RACHEL HALL – GLACIER PEAK HIGH SCHOOL

When I look at the crowd, I see beautiful color. Distinct reds, yellows, whites, browns, and blacks, with infinite shades in between. Their luminous tones are equally lovely, and my eyes eagerly move back and forth to take in the sight. Each one of these colors have a specific makeup. The colors are a result of blends and mixtures, and they also hold vast history. They represent honor, sacrifice, freedom, justice, joy, peace, and so much more.

A few months ago, my eyes did not quite see it this way.

It was summer break and I was visiting Taipei for two weeks to see my family, friends, as well as explore other cities in Taiwan. It had been two years since I last visited, and I was so glad to be back home. The food, the people, the city life, and the childhood memories all came flooding back to me. To say the least, I was in my element. But what had also come back to me was the staring. It could have been because I was speaking more English than Chinese or because I was taller and not as thin as everyone else, but deep down I knew it was because I was different. My skin was lighter, my eyelashes longer, my eyebrows thicker, and my face shape narrower; I was foreign to them. I knew people meant no harm, some kind grandmas even called me 美女, but I stood out nonetheless and that was abnormal in an endless sea of hustling Taiwanese people.

The feeling of difference stays with me in this country as well, even if there is no staring involved. I live in a predominately white area. With 76.9% of the people in my high school being white and 79.3% of the people in my town being white, I have always been labeled or seen as Asian. My dark hair and smaller, almond shaped eyes put me into a category that I do not quite belong to, and unless they have previous knowledge, people do not know who or what I am. For a while, I did not even know who I was.

See, all my life, I never felt like I belonged, which is the one thing I truly longed for; it is the one thing most people long for. Unfortunately, I still feel white in the country that I was born in. But, in reality, I am just as much Caucasian as I am Asian, I am just as much Taiwanese as I am American. And I am a very proud to be a beautiful mixed color that my parents and the countless other interracial couples throughout history have fought so very hard to create.

Even if I could, I would not choose any other life because being biracial has brought so many experiences, as well as different mindsets, and the ability to look at everything from two different perspectives. I can relate to both Taiwanese people and American people, as well as understand and the two cultures. Any person of just one race would not necessarily be able to say the same. So even though I may sometimes feel out of place, I have realized that my iridescent color is a masterpiece and living a multicultural life has been the biggest blessing.

c. YIFAN WANG - BEAVER LAKE MIDDLE SCHOOL

多元文化对我的意义

这个暑假，我度过了一个美好的假期。我参加了由中国华侨办组织的寻根夏令营，回到了中国。这是我来美国六年后第一次回国。我二零零五年出生在北京，不到七岁来到美国，今年我十三岁，可以说在美国和中国的时间正好是一半一半。

在北京的时候，我的父母利用周末和假期，带我走遍了北京几乎所有的名胜古迹，而且还去了杭州，深圳和香港很多地方，让我认识到了中国的地大物博和渊源历史。我仍然记得在中国上完了幼儿园，还认识了一两个特别要好的朋友。我们一起玩，一起闹，做什么都在一起。在那个时候，我觉得我们会永远地在一起。

所以当我登上了去美国的飞机的时候，心里一阵迷茫和思念。在那一刻，我发了誓，从不忘记我儿时的家和朋友。

可是现在，如果问我更喜欢中国还是美国，我就会很纠结，而且我知道，再过几年，我的答案很可能是美国。

可我是中国人，我还拥有着一颗爱国的心。受到了中国文化的熏陶，让我永远揣着一颗竞争的心 ---- 我要当第一。虽然有很多的压力，但是我喜欢每次赢了的心情。即使现在生活在美国，我也时常感觉到周围华裔的勤奋和努力，使我有一种鼓舞和振奋的感觉。

相较之下，美国人生活得更惬意，更有秩序一些，我也很享受被友善得对待，享受这样的生活环境。有时候在路边遇到陌生人，他们也会点头，微笑；或者一个简单的问候，让我心里感到很温暖。

另一方面让我感到自豪的是中国的饮食，我觉得中国的菜肴太丰富了。常常听到人们说起中国有“八大菜系”，尤其川菜已经遍布世界。我去夏令营的时候，尝过中国很多的菜，什么小龙虾，红烧狮子头，夫妻肺片等。同样的食材做出各种不同的味道，太神奇了！将来如果我有机会生活在中国，我一定要尝遍所有的菜品。不过，在空气和环境上来说，美国的确比中国好多了。我出生在北京，但是现在听说那里的空气越来越差，出门都得带口罩。我在美国的这几年还从来没有经历这么差的空气质量。我现在住在 **Sammamish**，一个美丽，绿色的城市。虽然经常下雨，而且也很少看到太阳，但是一个安全平静的地方。

美国现在只是一个年轻的国家，只有三百年的历史。中国已经有五千年的历史，有更多的文化，更多的文明，和更多的人类发展的积累。比起中国来，美国像一个孩子，她还有许多发展的空间。中国虽然比美国老，但它确不是一个年迈的老头子，这几十年的发展，说明中国依然健硕。所以她更像是一个处在中年的成人，比美国更有经验，更成熟。

我的父母一直告诉我，在未来，中国会比美国有更多更好的发展。而且有人预测在 2037，中国也许会代替美国成为新的超级大国。老实说，我并不感到惊讶。中国是有被打垮的时候，但是它每次都爬起来，继续搏战。我觉得这就是为什么中国会成为最好的国家。因此我的父母也一直要求我，学好中文，这是立足于未来的一个基本，而且我还是个地道的中国人，学好中文更是义不容辞。

Third Place:

a. MAX YUAN – INGLEMOOR HS

多元文化是由不同信念、行为、肤色、语言的文化组成，彼此关系是相互支持并且均等存在。多元文化使我变得更加聪明，它还让我的生活变得更加精彩。身为出生在美国的中国人，多元文化让我更加了解中国文化和传统。它让我理解中国人是怎样生活，过日子，在中国生活的人拥有什么习惯和爱好。

美国是一个多元文化的国家，大部分的人都是移民过来的，来自于不同的国家和民族。这也让我学习到许多其他地方的文化，也让我更了解身边的人，并且能和他们成为好朋友。学校是一个支持多元文化的地方，在那里，有许多印度人、墨西哥人、英国人等等。多元文化让我更加懂得和这些人怎么样交流，应该怎样尊重这些人。我五岁就开始学中文了，还在中国生活了三年，这段经历让我学会了该如何和这些人有礼貌的交流，尊重他们的习惯和看法。如果世界上只有一种文化，我不会像现在一样会说中文和英文。我也不可能像现在一样和我来自不同国家的朋友关系那么得好。

去年，我有机会参加“亲情中华”北京夏令营，参加这个活动的人都是来自世界各地的，比如澳大利亚、意大利、美国、加拿大等等，营员们都要求会说流利的中文。我们在这种环境下生活三个星期，我更加深刻地了解到了他们是怎么生活和交流的，有些地方的人见到朋友时会拥抱，有的握握手就行了。所以这次看见有很多人用拥抱来打招呼的时候，我非常惊讶，感觉很夸张。到后来我才发现他们大多数都是这样的，也就不大惊小怪了。

我是一个美食爱好者。每种食物都有一个独特的味道和做法。比如说，鲁菜的代表食物九转大肠被定名为九转大肠因为是一个非常喜欢九这个数字的人发明的。每个人都有他们不同的爱好，和优点。来自不同国家的菜都有不同的味道因为不同地方的人都会有不同的生活方式和环境。生活在美国我感到非常幸运，因为能吃到韩国菜、中国菜、墨西哥菜和美国菜等等。

多元文化能让我了解这个世界是多么精彩，也让我们的生活更加丰富多彩。

b. NUOYAN ZHANG – PINE LAKE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Multiculturalism; Something that I Love

1942;

It's 1942, Pearl Harbor was bombed last year
The camps were created, for the Japanese
But I am Chinese

Still, when I walk into the classroom,
Heads turn and stare.
Heads, silky blonde with bright blue eyes.
Staring
Because I'm different.

Because of my skin, my black hair, my brown eyes.
They call me names, like Chin, and Jap
I can feel that I don't belong,
But I want to.

It feels so wrong, to be assumed that I'm all Chinese
Sure I am, but I was born here
Here, in
America

I'm not only one culture, I'm two.
I'm not just Chinese, or Japanese, or Lebanese,
I'm a mix,
An American born Chinese.
I can have both cultures, can't I?

Can't I honor the traditions from my origins, and love my home at once?
I think I can,
But the people in this room don't

Maybe one day multiculturalism would be accepted,
I hope it will,
I wish it will,
I know it will,

2005;
It's 2005, I'm a grown woman now,
There's more Chinese people around here now,
I'm one of them

When I walk into the classroom,
Heads turn and... beam
They welcome me with glowing eyes, different colors
Different ethnics, different cultures,
I love it.

No matter how young these children are,
They are breathing different cultures.
They are happy with who they are,
Not ashamed of their cultures,
But proud.

I reflect back, and now I think I know something.
I think I know what multiculturalism means to me now,
It's something that makes you happy,
It's something that makes you confident,
... makes everyone belong,
... surrounds everyone in this world,
... that makes you who you are
I'm proud of being Chinese,
But also American, just like any other person

Most of all, my wish,
Has been fulfilled,
Multiculturalism

c. ARIA TANG – INTERLAKE HIGH SCHOOL

When I was little, I despised learning Chinese. Like the many other parents of Chinese-American children, my parents insisted on sending me to Chinese school. I often complained to my parents. Why do I need to learn Chinese if I'm never going to live in China? They would always answer me with the same response. Because it is part of your culture—now go and study.

But it wasn't always like this. When I was a child, the first language I learned was Chinese. My daycare center, friends, and teachers were all Chinese. In other words, I was at the center of an Asian bubble. But not for long. My bubble popped when my parents sent me to my first "American" daycare.

Being the only Chinese in a predominately white daycare, my greatest wish was just to fit in. Thus, I focused on English and it became my primary language very quickly. No longer did I speak Chinese to my parents at home anymore, and they gradually started to speak to me in English rather than Chinese as well.

This desire to fit in continued throughout my elementary school years. I gradually put aside more and more of my "Chinese" heritage and tried to replace them with American ones. Instead of Peking duck at thanksgiving, I demanded turkey. Instead of a decorated bamboo tree, I demanded a "real" Christmas tree. But there were some things I couldn't change. Like how my parents insisted on bringing me Chinese food to school that other kids would wrinkle their noses at. As a result, I felt torn between two cultures. On one side, I just wanted to fit in with the other kids. But I also knew that I looked and acted in ways that were clearly Chinese and there was nothing I could do to change that.

On the other hand, I wasn't "Chinese" enough either. As I had given up on Chinese I ended up only being able to speak the most basic phrases. There were many cultural differences too. In America, I picked up the habit of licking my fingers after eating greasy food. But that type of behavior is looked down upon in China, and still I remember people looking at me when I did that much like those kids in the cafeteria back in America when I brought "exotic" foods.

I never fully knew what was "normal". While in China, I would miss my home back in America. But back in America, I would miss China.

But things changed for me in seventh grade. I don't know if it was one event or a gradual change in mindset, but I started to look towards my Chinese heritage in a new way. Perhaps it was the influence of my Chinese friends or the fact that part of our school curriculum was to study Chinese history, but either way, I gained a thirst to know my roots. I started to embrace my Chinese heritage, instead of pretending to be "normal". That summer, I made the decision to pick up learning Chinese again.

It was no doubt an arduous process for me, but I persevered throughout the summer, and when fall came I went back to Chinese school. By learning Chinese, I gradually learned more about Chinese culture

through music, poetry, and more. Another curious thing happened. The more I studied Chinese language and culture, ironically, the less I felt “torn” between two cultures. Sure, there were many differences in American and Chinese culture. But there were many more similarities as well. Instead of saying I was “American” or I was “Chinese”, I realized that I was not just a person fit into a certain “category”. Being “Chinese” or being “American” was not mutually exclusive. I represented parts of both cultures and I embraced that the most.

Of course, it was difficult to adapt to the cultural norms in each country. But after a while, I found a place to call home in both countries and I reminded myself I was never fully alone. There were always my friends in America and my relatives in China. Most importantly, being part of two cultures broadened my outlook on life. Instead of just seeing one-side to every issue, I saw at least two. So, what does multiculturalism mean to me? It means a lot of things to me—the way I talk, the way I feel, the way I express my ideas. Perhaps life would be easier if I were just fully “American” or “Chinese”. But then I doubt I would have the same outlook on life as I have today. Perhaps I would be more narrow-minded, or, perhaps not? But either way, being multicultural is, and will always be, at the core of my identity.

d. HARRY HUANG – ISLANDER MIDDLE SCHOOL

I am Harry Huang, a thirteen-year old Chinese-American born and bred in Seattle. I have been teaching Chinese since I was eight. In these five years of teaching, I have developed some sense of what multiculturalism, and bilingualism means and does for me. I have expressed a few thoughts of mine herein.

Multiculturalism. It is the quality of one person understanding two or more cultures. All multilingual people are to a degree, however, the multiculturalism of the American born Chinese is unique. These children’s homes are mini-Chinas; their parents act Chinese, look Chinese, speak Chinese, they are Chinese. A person might as well be in China for all the difference. However, in school, they develop an identity too, that of an average American kid. Thus, two separate identities are formed: that of an overseas Chinese, cognizant of the intricacies of Chinese culture and language, and a separate one in school, an all-American kid, equally knowledgeable of the intricacies of American culture, eventually learning to slip easily between the two identities, as suits the purpose at hand.

As these children matriculate into adulthood, and into the workforce, these separate identities begin to serve another purpose. The Chinese community in the United States is constantly growing, and a great deal can speak no or minimal English. I have yet to meet a single Chinese immigrant who does not feel more comfortable speaking Chinese than English, regardless of English proficiency. This means, in the professional world, those children who have acquired said two identities can easily attract Chinese customers, who, as I have seen firsthand, are infinitely more likely to choose a Chinese professional over an American or foreign professional, a factor that is sometimes even stronger than that of the expertise of the professional. Thus, multiculturalism gives those children blessed with it a running start in career and

life.

Language is not just a vector for our thoughts. It stores the culture of a people within its little idiosyncrasies. Language and culture are inseparable. Learning at least some of the language is necessary to understand a people's culture; the actions done during a ritual are often of little significance, rather, the true meaning and purpose of the ritual is contained within what is said during it. The converse is also true: All the idioms, slang, and expressions of a language is what makes it different from other languages; otherwise, all the world's languages might as well be dialects of each other. However, all of these have no meaning bereft of the culture underpinning them. When translated into different languages, these words lose their meaning, becoming nonsensical. For, they have lost what gives meaning and context to them: Culture.

Culture also shapes one's identity as a speaker of a language. A study by Nairan Ramírez-Esparza, an assistant professor at University of Connecticut, found that when people took an English version of personality test, they scored higher on extroversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness than when they took the test in a different language. A later, yet unpublished follow up study found that the circumstances in which a language is learned also affects one's identity in that language. Those who learned the language in a country in which it is spoken adopted the identity that a native speaker would have, while those who learned in a classroom or on their own formed an identity based around stereotypes that were held and the instructor's identity and beliefs. Therefore, it is important to also understand thoroughly a culture, lest one develop an incorrect, or even offensive identity, and in order to obtain the correct impression of a people, and its culture and language.

All of this is fueled by my own experiences. As a volunteer teacher in the organization Education Without Barriers, a group almost entirely made up of Chinese college students, I was forced to use Chinese at almost all times. The only time I used English was when communicating with one of my fellow teachers, an experience that made it clear that their command of English left much to be desired. However, when the same teacher communicated with me in Chinese, his language became coherent and articulate. The salient fact in all of this is that his mistakes were grammatical. They caused because he had utilized Chinese grammar, i.e. Chinese mindset to write, resulting in something that would be unintelligible to a person utilizing the American mindset. Only when I considered his writing from a Chinese mindset did I understand it.

In conclusion, what multiculturalism is a valuable tool for communication and diplomacy. It permits us to peer into other minds and place ourselves in their shoes, to understand others' needs and wants, and balance them with our own, promoting world peace and global prosperity. In short, multiculturalism is what makes the world go round.

e. MIKE SHIDE ZHANG – SKYLINE HIGH SCHOOL

Multiculturalism is a fascinating word, a word that people increasingly use to describe themselves. Simply put, it means being apart of more than one culture. However, to me, multiculturalism means more than that. Multiculturalism is a window into different worlds.

Growing up in a Chinese family, I started learning Chinese from a young age. Despite that, I only recently understood what being fluent in Chinese truly meant. Before that, I learned Chinese to please my parents or to obtain good grades in Chinese class. I only spoke Chinese at home, in Chinese class, and sometimes while being an usher at church.

However, this year while ushering at church, I had to rely on my Chinese abilities. I was in charge of welcoming new high school students to church and this time found myself welcoming a ninth grade girl, who had only come to the United States recently. At first, I talked to her in English but soon realized she felt uncomfortable conversing in English, so I quickly switched to Chinese. We continued to talk over the next few weeks and soon became friends. Later, she told me she was very grateful to find someone at church she could talk to in Chinese and it made her less homesick. At this point, it dawned on me that I have been able to speak to her only in Chinese and that is when a realization hit me. Besides my parents, I had never had someone else that I purely spoke Chinese to. It made me realize how important my multiculturalism was to me and the real reason to study Chinese. It wasn't to pass a test, or because my parents wanted me to, or so I could add another skill to my resume. While those are adequate reasons to learn Chinese and perhaps more practical, I wanted to learn Chinese so that I am able to connect with people and build relationships that I would not be able to without Chinese.

My multiculturalism and Chinese abilities allowed me to get to know someone I never thought I would have the chance of meeting. Just a year ago, the thought of me having a close friend that only spoke Chinese I would have made me skeptical. Now at the end of the year I have multiple friends whom I only spoke Chinese to! Everytime I talk to these friends, I'm just so thankful that my parents taught me Chinese and the fact that I am multicultural. It has been interesting seeing how their thought processes and views differ from me. One of them confided to me that Americans seem too unsociable and it feels like no one wants to talk. Another complained that the cities seem so empty and that she couldn't go anywhere without a car. I had never been a student in China and only spend a few summers there, but talking to them, I feel like I'm able to glimpse into a new world: one that I would have never experienced without them.

To me multiculturalism and learning Chinese has been such a blessing. It has opened my eyes to countless views I would have never seen. It has opened so many doors of opportunities to me. It has opened a brand new world for me to explore. But most importantly, it gave me a friend that I cherish.