

高校生対象・英語エッセイコンテスト
第11回 IIBC エッセイコンテストの受賞者が決定
～最優秀賞は岩手県立不來方高等学校2年 竹内 彩翔さん～

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: 室伏貴之) 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。11 回目を迎えた 2019 年は、本選に 138 校・205 作品、奨励賞に 37 校・1,545 作品のご応募をいただきました。このたび過去最高の応募数となった本選 205 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)、日米協会会長賞(3 名)計 8 名(ダブル受賞者 3 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。表彰式は 2019 年 11 月 9 日(土)13 時 30 分より、ホテルニューオータニ「シリウスの間」にて開催を予定しています。

■本選受賞者: 8 名(うち 3 名はダブル受賞) ※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)>



たけうち あやと いわてけんりつ こずかたこうとうがっこう
竹内 彩翔 さん 岩手県立不來方高等学校 2 年
タイトル: Listening to Silence

<優秀賞(1 名)>



ながとみ あゆみ ひろおがくえん
永富 亜結美 さん 広尾学園高等学校 1 年
タイトル: What Oba-Chan Taught Me

<優良賞(1 名)>



もり えいみ ふじせいしんじょしがくいん
森 えい実 さん 不二聖心女子学院高等学校 3 年
タイトル: How an Overseas Experience Opened My Eyes

<特別賞(5 名)>



にれい りいず きちじょうじよし
楡井 理泉 さん 吉祥女子高等学校 1 年 タイトル: From Coexistence to Better Communication
かみなが みみ きねんこくさい
神長 美海 さん クラーク記念国際高等学校 梅田キャンパス 2 年 タイトル: More than just a problem child
おおむら りさ はままつにつたい
大村 梨紗 さん 浜松日体高等学校 1 年 タイトル: Outsider
かわもと りんこ ユナイテッド・ワールド・カレッジ ISAK ジャパン 3 年 タイトル: Instant Ramen
わかばやし かなこ きねんこくさい
若林 加奈子 さん クラーク記念国際高等学校 京都キャンパス 3 年 タイトル: Is Nature a Museum?

<日米協会会長賞(3 名)>



もり えいみ ふじせいしんじょしがくいん
森 えい実 さん 不二聖心女子学院高等学校 3 年 タイトル: How an Overseas Experience Opened My Eyes
たけうち あやと いわてけんりつ こずかたこうとうがっこう
竹内 彩翔 さん 岩手県立不來方高等学校 2 年 タイトル: Listening to Silence
ながとみ あゆみ ひろおがくえん
永富 亜結美 さん 広尾学園高等学校 1 年 タイトル: What Oba-Chan Taught Me

【第11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』 家族や友人、先生など、身近な相手とのコミュニケーションにおいてどのような「異文化」に出会い、何を感じ、考え、どのように「異文化」を持つ相手とのコミュニケーションギャップを乗り越えたか、英語で表現する。
表彰内容	【本選】1 校 2 名(2 作品)までの応募、受賞者 8 名を決定。 【奨励賞】1 校 20 名(20 作品)以上の応募校へ贈られる賞。 【日米協会会長賞】一般社団法人 日米協会より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 3 名に贈られる賞。

受賞 8 作品、奨励賞受賞校および同コンテストの応募要項につきましては、
IIBC エッセイコンテスト <https://www.iibc-global.org/iibc/activity/essay.html> をご覧ください。

本リリースに関するお問い合わせ先

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■受賞8作品

<最優秀賞/日米協会会長賞>

たけうち あやと さん いわてけんりつ こずかたこうとうがっこう
竹内 彩翔 さん 岩手県立不來方高等学校 2年

エッセイ内容:私の身近な異文化体験は、聴覚障がいを持った父母との日常だった。「音のある世界」と「音のない世界」を旅することで、私は人の気持ちを「聴く」ということの重要性を学んだ。

Listening to Silence

Every day I travel between two different worlds; one filled with abundant sounds and the other with no sound at all. Both worlds exist at the same time, but it always takes me a while to adjust when I go from one world into the other.

Both of my parents have a hearing impairment. They lost their hearing when they were very young, and so cannot respond immediately when their names are called. As such, they usually communicate with each other through sign language. Unlike my parents, I have no difficulty hearing, and I used to think that it would be really stressful to live such a life with abundant limitations. I am embarrassed to say that I am not very good at using sign language. Therefore, when I communicate with my parents, I try my best to speak slowly so that they can read my lips. Ever since I was young we have carried out our communication this way. However, as I grew older, my thoughts and ideas became more complicated and I found it harder to communicate what I really wanted to say to them. In failing to make myself understood, I grew increasingly frustrated. Gradually, I began to think that it was not only my parents who were handicapped. It seemed that I too, having been raised by physically disabled parents, was handicapped. This world of silence became a more and more uncomfortable place to live. I have lost count of how many times I have wished that they could listen to what I had to say. I was desperate to be heard.

One day, I asked my mother why she had chosen to marry my father who also has the same hearing disability. "Wouldn't it be harder for you if your husband is also hearing impaired?" I asked her. Her answer was not at all what I expected. "That's precisely why I married your father." She replied, "We have the same disability and it helps us to understand each other naturally. Mutual understanding has been indispensable for us to overcome the hardships we face in our daily lives. Sad to say, it is very difficult, but not to say impossible, for people without impairments to understand our situation and our feelings perfectly." That was the first time I really "listened" to my mother. I realized that I had never before tried to understand her true feelings about her disability. Instead, I treated the topic as a taboo and tried my best to avoid it. While I was so desperate to be heard, it was I who had refused to listen to their voices.

Since then, I have been trying to become a bridge to connect these two worlds. My parents cannot stay in their world of silence all the time; every so often, they have to cross the border and communicate with the inhabitants of the "normal" world. Of course, I have seen my parents struggle with miscommunication, but I have also seen many people who are willing to support and listen to them. Seeing such warm-hearted people helping my parents is a precious experience for me as well. It is a rare opportunity for me to feel the goodness in human relationships, which I would never have experienced if my parents were "normal." I have come to believe that my parents' disability is not a handicap but a great advantage.

Thanks to my parents, I am able to experience these two entirely different worlds every day. Thanks to them, I have learned the importance of listening to other people, both with and without sound. Thanks to them, I have come to think seriously about how to lower the physical and mental barriers between those with and without disabilities. What I have learned from my parents is true of cross-cultural relationships as well. People tend to focus on speaking, on how to express themselves logically and convincingly. However, in my opinion, we should prioritize listening instead, whether on a personal or international level. I am trying to become a person who can listen to people's hearts regardless of differences in our language, culture or method of communication.

(691 words)

<優秀賞/日米協会会長賞>

ながとみ あゆみ ひろおがくえん
永富 亜結美 さん 広尾学園高等学校 1年

エッセイ内容: 認知症を患った祖母とコミュニケーションが少しずつ取れなくなっていく日々。どんなに祖母との間に壁を感じても、おばあちゃんの強さと優しさを見習い、理解する気持ちを忘れずに心を交わし続けようと決意した。

What Oba-Chan Taught Me

The persistent rhythm of the wiper furnished the silence in the car. My mind wandered to the same question that had occupied my mind throughout the week. Facing my mother, I finally asked her why grandma is acting so different. My question caught her unexpectedly, making her hesitate to find the right words for a second. Her response turned my fear into a reality: my grandmother is suffering from Alzheimer's disease. While this revelation opened my journey of struggles, it also opened a journey of finding a true communication.

My grandmother, Oba-Chan, was my mentor throughout my childhood. She epitomized what it meant to be a traditional Japanese woman. Through her actions, she taught me to be a good samaritan: always respect everyone and help others in need. The memory of her kind-hearted self, always welcoming everyone with a warm embrace, is imprinted on my heart. While being traditional is often conceptualized as being conservative, Oba-Chan was fierce and progressive. Experiencing the Second World War as a child and losing her daughter and husband in early years, she underwent so many struggles in her life, yet she stood tall. She passed on her way of living through teaching me to never let others, or my fears, stop me from achieving my goals. She believed in me when I couldn't believe in myself— that I can be whatever I desire to be.

In the years after the revelation in the car, it seemed that the seasons became limited to a bleak and unforgiving winter. Just as the color of the leaves faded away, her condition deteriorated as the days went by. When she couldn't remember the way to the park we visited all the time, when she stopped making her famous strawberry jam... slowly her illness took away the parts that defined who she was. Seeing my family member slowly detaching from the rest of the world, I was immersed in despair. However, one day, my anger at the ruthless disease altered into a resentment towards grandma herself. I threw my distress to her, asking why can't she remember the simplest things anymore. Finding a demarcation, I slowly distanced away from her.

The first time Oba-Chan did not recognize me, I faced an overwhelming devastation. The reality never seems to get easier; this illness made me grieve the loss of a person who is still here. Having been asked for my name by the person who had engulfed me with love throughout my life, I finally became aware of the magnitude of the illness. I realized how ignorant I was for wasting so many days in sorrow, when I could have spent the time meaningfully, while her memory of me was still present.

The research conducted by Alzheimer's Disease International disclosed that someone in the world is diagnosed with dementia every three seconds, with approximately fifty million people battling this disease today. Nonetheless, despite the normality of this illness, no cure has been developed yet. While struggling with the illness, there comes a moment when the families of the patients feel their loved ones drifting worlds away. However, especially during those moments of hopelessness, we have to try our best to bring back the lost connections.

A couple of months after Oba-Chan stopped recognizing me, I found a stack of blank flashcards in her drawers. As I skimmed through the cards, I noticed one that was filled with Oba-Chan's handwriting. Written were my name, my age, and my date of birth. I believe she wrote this when she was starting to lose her memory, to hold onto her recollection of me as long as she could. Through spending time with Oba-Chan, I now understand that to have true communication, we must cherish every interaction we have with gratitude and kindness. As my grandma's efforts to remember show, we can never cease our efforts to understand others even when we face differences and difficulties with them. I promised myself never to give up on Oba-Chan and continue to love her even if she doesn't remember who I am anymore. Just as she always loved me with her warmth, I will now give her the embrace she once gave me. [697 words]

<優秀賞/日米協会会長賞>

もり 森 えい美 さん 不二聖心女子学院高等学校 3年

エッセイ内容:カンボジアで過ごした7日間の経験は確実に私の異文化に対する見方を変え、視野を広げるものでした。

How an Overseas Experience Opened My Eyes

Last summer I participated in an educational trip to Cambodia. Before I took part in this program, I did not have a good image of Cambodia. What I could find in Japan was only negative information about the civil war, land mines, and orphans. However, I was completely misled by such information, because it was an extremely bright country in practice. Through the one week program, my perspective on different cultures has changed. Especially, my perspective on cross-cultural communication has changed because of what I learned from the following three experiences.

First of all, it turned out that English is not a universal language. English is the most familiar foreign language for Japanese people who are learning English as a foreign language at school. As a result, when we go abroad, most Japanese think that using English is the minimum requirement needed to communicate with local people. This is what I had thought. However, in Cambodia, even when I greeted people in English, they understood nothing! I realized that I had expected that foreigners could speak English naturally. I reflected on the fact that I had created a selfish image because of my way of thinking.

Secondly, giving donations is not always helpful. When we visited an elementary school, we donated the pencils we had brought from Japan. However, they had already received a large number of pencils from groups that they had visited from Japan before us. When I heard this, I wondered if what we were doing was probably done mainly for our own self-satisfaction. I realized that we must be careful to prepare what the other party really needs when we make a donation. Also, we should think about the local situation after the donation when we donate things and give technology for free. If we create a cycle of dependency based on accepting donations, the local economy of production and consumption will be broken. Therefore, I believe it is necessary to go to meet the children of developing countries and to find out what the children really need now.

Thirdly, material satisfaction is not proportional to human well-being. We cannot say that Cambodian people are well blessed with modern consumer goods. However, they are making what is necessary out of what they have around them and they were living very happily. On the other hand, Japanese people usually just complain about what they don't have, and don't try to fill the gap for themselves. The people in Cambodia smiled happily and were content with what they had. I could feel a warmth in the people that we cannot see in Japan. I had a good experience to spend time working on solutions to problems with them, and laughing together. I felt that the secret of the richness of the heart is a degree of self-sufficiency.

We tend to think that life in Cambodia is troubled by poverty. However, Cambodians enjoy their life. They appreciate what they have and make the most of it. People help each other and share things. In addition, they are trying to improve their situation by themselves. I met a lot of people trying to restore historical sites and building schools and educational institutes. These people have even encouraged me to act more for the world. Helping people in need in other countries is wonderful, but first we should consider carefully what they really need.

By experiencing the differences between Japanese and Cambodian culture, I have learned that we need to reexamine our customs and stereotypes that we have as Japanese people. We need to be more open and flexible in dealing with the outside world. In addition, spending time in a different culture has shifted my perspective on the world in general. I also realized that there are many hidden problems behind people's happy smiles. I have come to know the importance of understanding the other side of things. By actually going abroad, we can experience many things that we cannot understand just by studying from books. From now on, I would like to not only go abroad for sightseeing, but also to be more aware of the differences between other countries, and my own culture. [695 words]

<特別賞>

に かい り い ず き ち じ ゃ う じ ゃ し
楡井 理泉 さん 吉祥女子高等学校 1年

エッセイ内容:国際化が進む団地でのボランティア活動を通じて、多文化共生への道は、ルールをつくって人々を分けるのではなく、文化の違う人々が関わり合う場を作ることから始まると学んだ。新たな交流を今後も提案していきたい。

From Coexistence to Better Communication

When people from various backgrounds live together, it is necessary to make common rules. That was what I had thought before this summer when I started volunteering in a big housing complex with 5,000 residents called “Shibazono Danchi.” However, after experiencing volunteering activities, I am now aware that the rules could be a discrimination or distinction if it just reflects one side opinion, to separate other people from different culture and came in later. I therefore started to think how the rules could be developed and shared by both sides.

The Shibazono Danchi is located in Kawaguchi city, Saitama prefecture, about 20 minutes train ride from Shinjuku. It has been rented by Japanese families for almost 40 years but gradually international residents mainly from China arrived. In 2019, more than half of the residents are Chinese people. Recently, the difference of culture between the Chinese and the Japanese residents has made it difficult for them to live together without troubles. To give an example, Japanese residents complained about the scribbling which insults Japan on some benches, garbage thrown away without being sorted and even filth found on landing of the stairs which everyone uses.

To be honest, when I heard these stories, I was disappointed with the people who did them. I almost thought that the residents from China and Japan had no choice to live peacefully together but to live separately because the common sense in daily life between two countries are too different to be shared.

One day, the leader of our volunteer group said to me, “Of course the easiest way to give peace back to this Danchi is to separate the people into different buildings, but why don't we stop for a moment and think? The only thing that we need to solve this problem is, I think, to make a new platform of better communication between the residents who have different value. We can do that.”

I was impressed with his word. Fix the bad behaviors complained by other residents or live separately. I found that this extreme idea would make the result to the bad way. What I learned from his word was that the issue we have to discuss in this housing complex was how to go beyond the stage of coexistence of Japanese and Chinese residents, to the neighbors to have good communication between them.

So how we could make a platform for the better communication between Chinese and Japanese residents? Our volunteer group, the Shibazono Kakehashi Project, hold monthly communication events in which residents and student volunteers jointly plan and operate such as calligraphy or science workshop. The idea here is to share the same process makes people understand the culture and way of thinking with each other. It has apparently become a new communication arena in this housing complex. I am pleased to see more and more people join these events and would like to be of help to them.

I have another idea to pursue the possibility to make a better surrounding for communication among international residents. In addition to face-to-face communication, I think that online communication could strengthen the tie between Chinese and Japanese residents. Online communication could offer a new opportunity for the residents to join the Kakehashi Project and extend the number of people to join the monthly events. Also, online application is the best way to collect local information such as restaurants, events, or tips of living here. I would like to open the online bulletin board on which residents could share such information as well as their feeling and opinions about Shibazono. I am currently working on the prototype and show it to my colleagues soon.

My hope is the Chinese and Japanese residents would develop a new living rule in Shibazono housing complex together through good communication, be the mix of online and face-to-face.

We are in the global community where coexistence of different culture is being discussed everywhere. Thinking about the better communication and develop various platform should be our common goal. (660 words.)

<特別賞>

かみなが みみ
神長 美海 さん クラーク記念国際高等学校 梅田キャンパス 2年

エッセイ内容:最近、登下校の風景の中に、外国人の子供が増えたように思う。日本社会に適応できず、困っている子供がいることを知り、私は幼い頃の経験から、少しでも彼らの力になってあげたく、将来教師を目指すことを決意した。

More than just a problem child

When I was in elementary school, a boy who couldn't speak Japanese came to our school. He often punched and kicked me and any classmates, and gave us a pinch. Our teacher scolded him, but he didn't listen what the teacher said, so everyone always thought he was "just a problem child". He moved when he was second grade, but I sometimes thought about him when I met other foreign children. Years passed and I realized that he might just have wanted to get along with us. I have a brother who is 8 years younger than me, and sometimes my mother explained that children who are slow to develop language, and cannot communicate well through words tend, to punch or kick. I wonder now if maybe that child did not understand Japanese well and acted violently. Why couldn't I ask him to play together at that time? I deeply regret it now, and since realizing it, I have become interested in the issues surrounding foreign children living in Japan.

I've heard that foreign children who are not familiar with Japanese schools are increasing in Japan. In spite of living in Japan and going to Japanese school, there are many children who don't easily adapt to Japanese customs or don't understand the Japanese language well. But Why? The reason is easy. The number of foreign workers are increasing, but sadly there is just not enough support for their children. At the end of October last year, the number of foreign workers was about 1.46 million, the highest ever. In addition, the Japanese government has launched a new policy. To encourage Japan's growth in its chronic labor shortage, the government decided to accept foreign workers in areas such as construction, agriculture, and nursing care. And the workers in industries especially in need of advanced technology are allowed to be accompanied by their families. The Japanese government has a plan to increase the number of foreign workers by 345000 by 2025, meaning one out of 70 people in Japan will be a foreign national. Naturally, the number of foreign children coming to Japan with their parents will also increase.

But what about their social adaptations to Japanese society and their learning of Japanese? How would I feel if my parents suddenly told me to leave Japan and go to foreign school from tomorrow? Is there anything I can do for foreign children?

I've been thinking about it for a long time, and I concluded that language is very important for children to communicate each other. If the children can communicate with each other, they can play, be included and make friends.

On the other hand, the inability to communicate can cause stress in children, and in some cases they can be dismissed as simply "problem children," like the boy in my school was.

But from my experience, I felt most strongly that there was sense of prejudice and discrimination among us that "all foreigners are like this". We are unconscious of the assumption that "foreign people do bad things", so we might have decided that the child who punched us was a problem child. I felt ashamed of myself, and I decided to change my mind.

Since then, I made it my mission to be friendly and say hello and thank you to foreign staff at convenience stores. After all, their children may be crying at school because they don't understand the pages of textbook. In the future, I want to be a teacher. I hope to be able to take care of many foreign children at that time. As an educator, I want to raise them to be "treasures of Japan", and I want to tell my students that we are all equal. When I enter university, I plan to set up a volunteer circle to help foreign children get used to Japanese language and culture.

I have changed from my experience with a single foreign child. This experience has made me decide to become an educator who will lead foreign children to a better direction and future, and I want to continue to study and work towards my dream from now on. (699 words)

<特別賞>

おおむら りさ はままつにつたい
大村 梨紗 さん 浜松日体高等学校 1年

エッセイ内容:4歳の時にアメリカに引っ越し、そこで初めて直面した異文化にどのように対応していったのか、また、日本に帰国後は日本特有の価値観を理解するのに苦労した経験をふまえて、自分が今後どう成長していくべきかについて考えました。

Outsider

*“So, here you are too foreign for home too foreign for here. Never enough for both.” This was written by the poet Ijeoma Umebinyuo. Recently, I came across these words, and they lanced my heart. I had spent five years in Boston and currently, I am spending my eleventh year in Japan. I can say with confidence that being an outsider was the intercultural experience that changed me the most.

Firstly, it taught me the importance of patience and not giving up. My family moved to Boston the Spring I was four years old. When Summer came, my parents sent me to summer camp despite me not being able to understand English. I vividly remember refusing to get on the yellow school bus, filled with unfamiliar faces. I screamed and cried to get out of the camp, and I felt lonely because it seemed no one could understand me. I wanted to escape this strange new life where I thought I didn't belong. After summer ended, I started going to preschool. That was when I started adjusting myself to the new world. There, I copied the other kids, because I didn't understand the teacher's instructions. I tried hard to have fun like them and never gave up. As a result, I made friends and had a blast at the preschool. By the time I was in elementary school, I was learning to look at the world from a different perspective, which I didn't realize was special until I came back to Japan. I really have to thank my 4-year-old self for having the patience to persevere, even though I didn't have the faintest idea where it was going to take me. I learned that not running away and overcoming my difficulties can lead to some of the best moments of my life.

Secondly, I learned that to grow as a person, wherever I am, I need to take chances. At the age of nine, my family moved back to Japan. I had no idea what to expect. There were numerous things I wasn't used to, such as walking to school, writing kanji, bowing to people and so on. Yet the thing I struggled with most was 'blending in' and trying to be the same as everyone else. Especially at school, people expected me not to stick out, and to 'be normal'. The teachers liked the idea of the class or grade working together toward one goal. I thought that having my own ideas, and expressing them was important. Sometimes I felt like I was suffocating by holding back my true self. I desperately wanted to return to my classroom in Boston, where it was normal for everyone to be different and we could say things without worrying about being thought insensitive or selfish. Things started changing when I realized that I didn't have to fit into just one culture. So rather than whining and waiting for things to change, I started thinking about what I could do to improve things myself. For instance, I took on the role of leader in several groups at elementary school. Moreover, in junior high school, I joined the student council and became council president. These experiences helped me build my confidence and I learned that no matter where I am, I can become a better person if I am just willing to take chances.

In conclusion, being an outsider in two cultures helped me learn how to overcome intercultural barriers. It wasn't necessary for me to be enough for both, but rather I should get the best of both and use them to help me become the sort of person I myself wanted to become. Moreover, it taught me how to grow as a person living in an increasingly globalized and intercultural world. I would very much like to meet new people, work abroad, gain a wider perspective on the world and help contribute to it. As for the rest of society, I hope that more people will have the chance to be in a new environment and see more of the world outside; because I believe that these are the moments we truly challenge ourselves and have the greatest opportunity to grow. [699 words]

*Umebinyuo, Ijeoma. “Disapora blues.” *Questions For Ada*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015

<特別賞>

かわもと りんこ
河本 凛子 さん ユナイテッド・ワールド・カレッジ ISAK ジャパン 3年

エッセイ内容: インスタントラーメンを通じた人と人との繋がりを実体験を基に書いた。食べ物は、文化や場所に関係なく、人同士をつなげることができるコミュニケーションツールだと考えている。

Instant Ramen

Pour 500ml of water into a saucepan, and bring to a boil.

When I first set foot into a boarding school of around 200 students from over 100 countries, I was overwhelmed. All of us had lived a different reality. One girl had never stepped outside their country, let alone their village. Across the room, sat a girl who had travelled more number of countries than the years she has lived for.

I had realized- even in English, we weren't speaking the same language.

So when a housemate had sat down, Indonesian instant noodles in hand, a wave of unfounded nostalgia washed upon an anxiety-filled me. As my strangers-turned-family and I feasted on this tiny culinary delight, I remember feeling so welcomed. Something no combination of words or number of offhand hugs could offer.

Add noodles, soup base, and vegetable mix.

Perhaps it was October when my room had our first fight. Academic stress, coupled with eleven extracurriculars, was starting to get to me, and I could tell, it was getting to them too. We were exhausted. Our roommate offered a smile, as she brought a bowl of spicy instant Korean ramen, poached egg and scallions garnished on top. We ate the bowl in silence, but through her slight nods of understanding, it was like she had said everything.

A few months later, she had slumped down, in the same way I had previously. I carefully mixed the dry noodles into a boiling Japanese pork broth, before I had carefully brought it down to our room to eat. It didn't solve her problems, of course, but I'd like to think that was the reason for her grin the following day.

Cook for 4 - 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.

We approached May the following year, and my roommates and I are sullenly sitting in the center of the room. Denying that I wasn't crying and it was *just my dust allergies*, my emotions started to well up. We sat surrounding an assortment of Thai instant cup noodles with added Nepalese spice and stared down at them. How an affordable package of artificially flavored, greasy, and -unfortunately- very unhealthy noodles, were able to bring us together so well had perplexed me. I think above that though, food was our universal language. When we ate, we didn't need an excuse to have small talk. Cooking and eating together is a tool of communication that had transcended all barriers of cultural, socio-political, and economic difference. It had unified us together.

Two years later, we are in senior year.

Remove from heat and serve.

Nail-biting, wide-eyed, shy girls fill our common room, as if they were a reflection of our past selves. One girl is just barely grasping the English language, and the other has never spoken anything but.

We try to crack a laugh but alas, nothing.

That is until, the same scent of fried garlic and soy sauce travels through the kitchen once again. It's such a mundane snack, and something we take so much for granted. Yet, now we know of its ability to bring us together.

As the girls dig into this MSG-filled concoction, a giggle escapes their lips.

I have a feeling that these girls are going to be okay.

[539 words]

<特別賞>

わかばやし か な こ
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エッセイ内容:私がこのコンテスト知ったのは授業の一環としてエッセイを書くことになったからです。異文化交流と聞いて私が思い浮かべたのは環境保全を学んだイギリスでの体験でした。文化の違いから起こる自然保護の違いの気づきをエッセイにしました。

Is Nature a Museum?

Is nature a museum? This is the first thing that comes to mind when it comes to cross-cultural exchange for me. In the summer of my second year of high school, I visited the UK to learn about the differences in nature conservation activities between Japan and foreign countries.

England is well known as the birthplace of the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest and Natural Beauty. The National Trust, as it is commonly known, is a charity that organizes citizen activities, and negotiates the purchase of properties and land with local governments in order to protect them and their natural environment from unreasonable development for economic reasons.

I actually spent seven days in the Lake District where the Trust was actively working. On the last day, I attended a lecture from John, one of the employees of an organization that works closely with the National Trust. At the beginning of his presentation, he posed the question, 'Is nature a museum?'. It occurred to me that the ideas of nature conservation in Japan and those of the British National Trust are a little different.

It seems that the aim of nature conservation activities in Japan is to preserve nature as it was. Emphasis is placed on sustaining the nature of an era when people and technology did not change much.

On the other hand, the British National Trust tended to view conservation as a more dynamic process. For example, in Japan observers such as myself would be discouraged from making any change at all to the natural landscape, while in England, I planted trees on National Trust property that could adapt to the area with consideration to future environmental challenges. These adjustments would be made by future visitors again depending on the environmental challenges of the day.

In a sense, one can consider the conservation activities of the National Trust as a kind of innovation. If conservation, as it is thought of in Japan, requires us as citizens to do nothing, to not come into contact with the environment at all, then we cannot innovate. So, we have two conflicting approaches to conservation. However, both are necessary for our physical and mental health. I realized that the National Trust thinks that these two things are not mutually exclusive, but can coexist. My trip to England has also allowed me to conclude that the approach of the National Trust was important to achieve the realization of a sustainable world. Nature and technology change with the times. And for a sustainable society, nature and technology may have to change. Just as nature and humans change and evolve over time, so should our approaches to conservation and preservation of natural and man-made treasures. At the end of my trip, I reflected on the question, 'Is nature a museum?' If nature cannot be touched, only observed then yes, it is. However, as I experienced, we can have a positive impact on nature by interacting with it. As a result of my trip, I have changed my approach on the impact that we as humans can have on nature.

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