

2022 International Essay Contest for Young People

【Children's Category – 1<sup>st</sup> Prize】

## Being Who You Are

(Original in Japanese)

*Waka Sato*

*(Age 12, Japan)*

*Tokyo Metropolitan Oizumi Junior High School*

The things I like and dislike are often different from what other people like and dislike, so people often say I'm strange.

A long time ago, something I liked was rejected, and I was told that I was strange. I realized that I was different from others around me, and I felt very hurt. After that, I was afraid to be called strange again, and I rarely showed my true self.

Some time later, I was talking with my close friends during our break time. At first, we were talking about TV, music, and other pleasant topics, but when the bell rang, everyone started saying "Oh, no!" I felt confused because I didn't know why they were saying that, and then I happened to see the day's schedule. I checked what class we had next period, and saw that it was math. I was getting ready, wondering if everyone hated math, when my best friend came up to me and said, "I hate math, don't you?" and wanted me to agree. I didn't know what to say, because I really like math. But since all my friends were saying that they didn't like it, I answered, "Yes."

Another day, I was talking with the same friend about music, and she told me she liked a popular song that was relaxing and calming. To be honest, I didn't care for that song, because I prefer fast songs. But my friend said, "It's such a great song. There's nobody who doesn't like that song," so I felt I had to agree, and I told her I liked it.



In this way, I told a lot of lies, thinking that they were good lies because if I agreed with my friends, we would maintain a good relationship. I thought I was satisfied, since people came to talk to me thinking that we could get along.

But as day after day went on like that, I began to feel badly about not being able to tell the truth. I started to question why I was the only one unable to say what I like and dislike, when other people could state it clearly. Was it really okay not to tell them? All this time, was it okay not to let them see my real self? As I thought about these things, I decided that, from now on, I would clearly say what I really thought.

The next day, we had math again, and as usual my friends were complaining about it, but I said, "I like math, so I'm looking forward to it." At first, my friends were surprised and said, "I've never seen anyone who likes math!" I was a little hurt, but at the same time, I felt so much joy for being able to tell the truth, that I didn't really mind.

After that, I continued saying what I really liked, and just as before, people called me strange. But somehow, I wasn't hurt by it. Instead, I felt happy, and I even became proud of being "strange." Then, naturally, other people started to accept me.

Thinking about it now, I think I was able to accept who I am, and that feeling was passed on to other people. *Be honest with yourself, accept yourself, and others will accept you, too.* These are the values I hold now. Each person has their own values, but I believe that this is the most important thing for me, and essential for me to be happy in my life. If you are not afraid of others, and act based on your own will, then I believe people will eventually come to accept you. For that reason, I would like to continue cherishing these values of mine.