

2016 International Essay Contest for Young People

【Youth Category – 3rd Prize】

Unity in Diversity (Original in Japanese)

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In my school, we have a class called Unity in Diversity. It's not the kind of class where we sit in chairs and take notes while listening to the teacher talk. Rather, it's a class where we get out of our seats and form teams and play games to think about and discuss world issues and other topics.

I enjoy this class very much. The reason why is that we have fun learning about issues that we normally would not think about because they are so difficult. We have the chance to think deeply about how to solve these problems, and how to make things better than they are at present.

The other day, we had a brainstorming class. In groups, each of us wrote down on sticky labels ten phrases that came to mind about a certain topic, and we stuck our labels onto a large sheet of paper for the whole group. The topic that day was "what I would do if an earthquake strikes." I put forth a lot of ideas about things to do immediately after a disaster occurs, such as securing water and taking refuge in a safe location. However, my friend who was in the same group offered ideas from the viewpoint of living in an evacuation shelter after the earthquake, such as "I will play with the little children." In our groups, we shared and collected ideas that we wouldn't have thought of on our own. I felt that being able to look at the same topic from various perspectives was worthwhile, and that it was a fun lesson.

Because I am usually very shy, it's hard for me to assert my opinions and ideas. But in this class, we have a rule that we don't put down other people's ideas, so it's much easier for me to communicate my ideas, and I'm able to talk a lot about what I'm thinking and feeling. Through this class, I've learned the importance of articulating my ideas to others, and of listening to other people's ideas.

I have a friend from junior high school who now goes to a different high school, and I told her about our Unity in Diversity class. She said, "We don't have a class like that in my school. It sounds fun—you're lucky." I had thought that this class was being taught in other schools, too, so I was surprised, and I also felt a bit sorry that my friend couldn't take a class like this.

Recently, I saw on the news that many young people are becoming uninterested in politics. Voter turnout in national and local elections is low enough that if things continue this way, the existence of Japan's democracy is at risk. I think this kind of problem, too, can be solved in the Unity in Diversity class. If we all discussed questions like why we need to participate in elections and how we can get people interested in participating in politics, I think we would better understand our current political situation, we would think about the future of Japan, and more people would participate in elections.

However, based on what I heard from my friend, it seems that the Unity in Diversity class is not becoming common in schools. I think that by conducting this kind of class in many more schools, we could solve not only domestic issues but also international issues that require a broader view and many different perspectives.

There are many issues and problems facing the world today. Within Japan alone, there are countless issues, like our aging population, decreasing birth rates, the situation in Okinawa, American military bases, pensions, and so on. But right now, I know most of these issues only by name, and don't know anything more about them. On the contrary, I'm not even making an effort to know more about them. I think that if the Unity in Diversity class could spread to more schools, everyone would take an interest in these issues and think deeply about them, and we would try to come up with solutions. In this way, many more people would be thinking about and envisioning the future of our world, and we would endeavor to make things better. Together, I think, we can create a safe and peaceful future.