

優秀賞

水島 凜さん 慶應義塾湘南藤沢高等部 3年

神奈川県

1 年前にモロッコ人の交換留学生を受け入れたことを機に、異文化に対する疑問を相手に聞くことと、柔軟な視野を持つことの大切さを知りました。一生に一度の出会いへの感謝を込めてこのエッセイを書きました。

### The Power of “Why?”

Dark clouds hung over us and raindrops pattered on our umbrellas as we approached Enoshima Beach. It was an unusually cold day in June and I shivered as the wind chilled my damp clothes. The next moment, my friend gave me a mischievous smile.

“Let’s swim in the ocean!”

I gaped at her. She would surely catch a cold. However, she ignored my pleas and sprinted into the water before I knew it. I was left stranded on the beach yelling at her to come back, helpless and exasperated. It was only after twenty minutes that she finally came back to shore with her clothes dripping wet. *She’s crazy*, I thought to myself.

“Why? Why did you go in?”

She met my incredulous eyes with a smile and replied, “Because, fear is temporary but regret is forever.”

She explained that she would have regretted not going in despite the weather, and told me she would remember this moment forever, even when her hair turns gray. While I was hesitant in accepting that reasoning, I conceded that I too would likely remember this moment for the rest of my life.

This is the absolute whirlwind that is my Moroccan friend Noha, who my family hosted as part of an exchange program last summer. Lively and unpredictable yet one of the most considerate people I have ever encountered, Noha left a profound impact on me during her two-week stay in Japan.

“Let me take you to a Moroccan restaurant,” she said to me and my friends one day. I was perplexed by her sudden proposal.

“Why? You’re in Japan, wouldn’t you rather eat Japanese food?”

She eagerly explained that she wanted to introduce us to Moroccan food. At the restaurant she taught us Arabic words like ‘*shukran*’ which means ‘thank you’ and I tried Moroccan dishes like *Briwats* (a

triangle-shaped savory pastry) and *Tagine* (a slow-cooked stew). Over the course of that dinner, I gained insight and understanding about Moroccan cuisine and culture. I recognized that Noha was not only eager to immerse herself in the Japanese experience, but also excited to share her own cultural heritage with us. Furthermore, I was struck with the realization that all the times I had been abroad, I had always been solely intent on absorbing foreign culture. Noha inspired me to devote more effort to sharing my own culture on future occasions.

“I want to get flowers for everyone in our class,” Noha said to me the evening before her departure.

“Why? Is that even possible?” I was in disbelief at her grand and ambitious idea.

“I just really want to thank everyone,” she said.

While I still had doubts, we went to a flower shop and picked out over 50 flowers of different kinds. We brought home an enormous bouquet which stunned both my parents. I then opened my eyes the next day to see that Noha had spent the entire night neatly wrapping the flowers one by one. I was in absolute awe.

Noha was one of the most unique people I had ever encountered, and I followed nearly everything she did with one question: “Why?” To my conventional ways of thinking, her actions often left me baffled. However, uncovering her underlying rationale helped me understand and accept her actions completely. It is common for people to judge others when they are acting in a way that is not normal to them, especially if they are of different backgrounds. However, asking a simple “Why?” can alter conventional thinking and offer fresh perspectives. Noha was wild but always very sure of her actions. She had pride in her cultural heritage and didn’t fail to show it. She had great kindness in her heart and would always find a way of expressing it. She always took action in what she believed to be important, and spending time with her completely transformed the norms I previously held. I feel very lucky to have met someone like her, and I hope to be equally inspiring to others in my own unique way in the future. [682 words]