

特別賞

脇 碧彩さん 大妻中野高等学校 2年

東京都

私は 5 年間のタイでの生活で偶然出会ったマレーシア人の子もたちとの交流経験で感じた、身近な社会問題について書きました。彼らとの異文化交流は、国際的な問題を考える大きなきっかけになりました。

### Open Your Eyes

Japan is a developed country that I thought was free from most of the world's problems. The posters I see on the train asking for donations always talk about hunger in Africa or some other country that is 1000 miles away. So even if I knew these problems existed, they did not feel real because of how distant they seemed. But it is all around us. People just do not realize it because they do not look closely. I used to be one of those people until I met my Malaysian friends.

I lived in Thailand, and during that time, I would go to cram school. Whenever I arrived, there was always a group of students who looked out of place. They had snacks and sat by the lounge while I waited. They had no books, pencils, or even a bag. On top of that, they wore ragged clothes instead of uniforms.

I kept asking about them, so one day the cram school staff introduced them. It turns out the kids who were always eating snacks were not students at the school. They were undocumented Malaysian immigrants.

Because they were "illegal", they could not enrol in local schools or receive government support. The cram school owner let them rest in the lounge and gave snacks out of goodwill. Just like me, they were children, and just like me they were foreigners. For the longest time, we shared the same space, but it felt like we were worlds apart.

When we were first introduced to each other, they were very cautious. Their eyes looked at me like I was a threat. They only interacted with themselves and the cram school staff. I think they felt unsafe, so they showed no emotion, even when the cram school staff gave them treats. I never imagined I would meet people whose problems often only existed in the TV to me. Suddenly the unreal world issues proved they existed in the world where I lived in. The big gap between how we lived overwhelmed me. Everything I took for granted: food, education, housing, complete family, even clean clothes, they were out of reach for them.

I wanted to help them in my own way. At first, I thought about giving them clothes because their clothes looked worn down. But they told me in English: "cannot wear clean shirt". I learned that wearing imported Japanese clothes makes them look suspicious to border control police in Thailand. This could lead to their deportation. I then noticed how they struggled to communicate, so I started teaching them English. In Bangkok, most people can understand English, so this was a useful skill. I taught them simple phrases and nouns they can use to communicate verbally.

Each lesson, they learned new words and phrases. And with each lesson, I could see them change. They were not fluent, but I could see their confidence and sense of accomplishment increase as they used the words they learned. They started laughing more and showing a wider range of emotions to outsiders like me. Most importantly, I could also see that they felt safer around the outside world and showed curiosity about it. They started asking me more questions. That was a big change because they now want to know about the outside world and how others lived their lives.

My Malaysian friends with their struggles lived a few hundred meters from my house, but I didn't realize until I met them that there are social problems that are closer to me than I thought. I just had to ask questions, look closely, and pay attention to small things around me.

When I came back to Japan, I made sure to remember that. Social problems are not in a foreign continent as most posters would have me believe. For example, close to my school is a children's cafeteria where they serve meals to food insecure children. Because I actively looked for it, I was able to volunteer in that cafeteria. This is one example, but I am sure there is more I can do around me, and if I keep my eyes open, I can recognize the people struggling right next to me. [699 Words]