***7. What have you done to make your school or your community a better place? (350 words)***

During Junior year, I visited my neighborhood’s community garden for the first time. I was shocked to be greeted by an unsightly mess of withering stems and shriveled leaves sprawled across the land. Hoping for a space for community through gardening, I decided to restore this space. So, I gathered my childhood friends from the neighborhood to help me.

Starting small, we removed the dead plants and re-tilled the soil. Our weekend trips to the garden inspired donations of seeds and fertilizers from delighted neighbors. We worked tirelessly planting new seeds and took turns carrying heavy buckets of water from the nearest water source about 100 meters away. After several weeks, the garden took an unprecedented form. Promisingly tall sprouts shot up left and right with their leaves unfurling, beckoning the daylight.

However, the responsibilities of junior year of high school soon caught up to us. Examinations and competitions were underway, and we guiltily skipped designated gardening days. When I returned again after a month, the garden’s once vibrant greenery had dulled, the plants showing signs of wilting.

I knew the problem was our lack of time and energy. The inconvenient location of the nearest water source meant several round trips hauling buckets of water - an instant motivation crusher. Thus, I designed and implemented a rainwater harvesting system within the garden. Though infrequent, Jakarta’s rainfall is notoriously heavy. A few days of rain filled up the tank, storing up to 2 months’ worth of water. Eliminating the physical exhaustion from fetching water strengthened our resolve to complete our mission.

Months later, the once dilapidated land was bustling with excitement as community members flocked to the garden to tend to and harvest the fruits of our collective labor. I return to the community garden every few weeks, volunteering and fostering connections.

The success of the rainwater harvesting system inspired me to conduct research on the feasibility of implementing them to households. The benefits are significant - reduced water wastage and bills. I know this is an ambitious goal, requiring considerable time and resources, but my desire to further improve my community sustains my motivation.

Hi Brian,

Thank you for your essay! Reviving a garden to bring the community together is a great cause. I would just elaborate on your goal – fostering connections and creating community. Show how the garden has brough the community together and not just have them harvest the fruits of your labor. Did they talk to each other? help each other? What about you and your friends? Did you get to feel like you were part of the community? Did others start to take care of the garden and maintain it? Include how the community has come together to help each other and the garden, bringing it back to your original longing for community.

C.G.