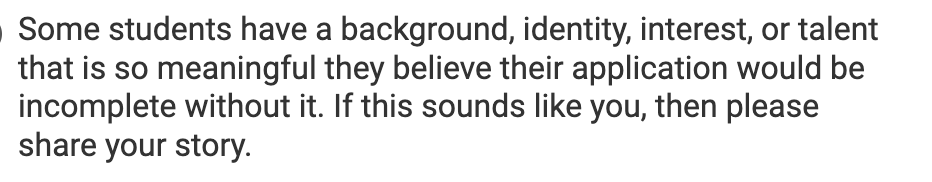
PROMPT:



“Two lines guys, one for boys, one for girls.” Ms.Inno said, guiding my second grade class to Church which was conveniently adjacent to the Catholic school I attended. I remember looking around and seeing what was

“Who here has a small mouth?”, Li Laoshi asked our second grade class in Mandarin as a few of my friends raised their hands. We were learning about body parts and facial features, but as much as she tried to convince me that we were all different, I looked around and strongly disagreed; as according to my 7 year-old knowledge, everyone I knew spent their Sundays at church, ate bakmi and dimsum after, and attended Kumon. We were Chinese-Indonesians. Being Chinese-Indonesian, and on top of that, Catholic, is not a duality. In fact, ironically it makes you neither Chinese, nor Indonesian. Most of us don’t speak Mandarin on a daily basis, but when Chinese New Year Eve comes along, we always leave one side of the fish untouched. Being of both cultures ironically did not make us feel accepted by one or another, the only people we could confide in was our own. That was what my parents felt in the Indonesian riots of 1998, when most of our people were massacred. And that was also what my grandparents felt when they had to change our Chinese surname, “Zhou” to a more stealthy, less Chinese name, “Tjokroardi” in the hopes of avoiding any conflict. They taught me that diversity is a source of fear.

So, I do not blame them for placing me and my siblings in the super homogenous community we live in. A suburban town, a Catholic school, where everyone, young or old looked the same, prayed the same way, lived in similar houses. For 15 years of my life, I lived thinking that everyone in Indonesia lived the way I did. To say that I did not know better would be a lie. I did, but what can a naive 15-year-old do when someone says one thing, but she herself has never seen or experienced much else?

Then the COVID-19 virus came to Indonesia, and guess who they had to blame. It indeed did not help with feeling accepted, but in ways I could never have imagined at the time, it changed my life. When we first started online learning, I began to explore the internet, and like everyone else at the time, our lives began to thrive with it (after all it was our only source of socialising). I started to explore more issues around the world, either socio-economic, environmental, or human rights issues. These were things the people in my neighbourhood had no clue about. That was when I began my journey with We The Genesis. Although I have to admit, the passion and goal we had at the time was shallow at best; to us, a start was better than nothing.

As We The Genesis grew, so did I. I had never known that there were children living by mountains of landfills in Bantargebang (a city only 2 hours away from mine), until I went there. I had only found out that there were students my age in public schools being bullied for money by their seniors, or physically beat up– when I spoke to a member of my organisation who experienced it. These were not things I could have experienced at my school or my city. In fact, I would have never believed that these were happening in my country, because the Indonesia I know had turned out to be very different from the one they knew.

So, when people ask me why I started fighting for social justice, my answer will never be because I read books or because I read the news. I did not start advocating for climate action after reading news of floods in Jakarta; I started advocating for it after meeting people who lost families and homes. It was not because of the news that I started advocating for the sexual violence bill in Indonesia, but because of the girls I met that were being told by society and the law that it is their fault. Now, diversity to me is a close friend, and great teacher. Every person different from me has taught me something new about the world, about their lives. Now, I am no longer afraid of diversity; because they taught me that diversity is a source of change.

Hi Danya,

I like that you are honest in your essay, and I believe you have a unique writing voice. It is clear that you want to make We the Genesis as your focal point in the essay, and how you now have a positive view about diversity.

Thus, I want to suggest several parts that you can do to highlight your story:

1. Intro: You began with a hook, which is a great start. However, I feel that if the question you want to highlight is about looks, it is better to follow up with how you felt that everyone looked the same. You can talk about how your class is filled with Chinese Indonesians, and how you grew up in the same neighborhood. You can further continue your story about how you did not realize that there were other ethnicities living in Indo (sort of a Chinese bubble, which you need to clarify to the admissions committee).
2. Main: You can explain to your readers why there was a clear segregation in Indonesia, how natives and Chinese Indo usually attend different school, church, live in different communities, neighborhood, or even dress differently. After, you can touch upon why this is so: The May ’98 incidents and how your family was affected. This is a good chance to make it more personal so that the committee can see why you viewed diversity as a negative thing at the beginning (preferring to live in a bubble of homogenous Chinese neighborhood for safety reasons).
3. Climax: We the Genesis should be the highlight here. There needs to be a smoother transition of why you joined We the Genesis during COVID. I left specific side comments that you can include to help make it coherent. It is imperative that you include how you were able to grow as a person.

Several ideas to be answered:

Who is Danya in 3 to 5 words?

What makes you different from other Chinese Indonesians?

Were you able to break common prejudice about Chinese Indo by joining this WTG?

What makes your WTG experience so special? (highlight just one or two contributions but delve deeper).

You can talk about how these one or two specific instances of helping others made you realize that everyone in Indonesia has struggles, not just the Chinese Indo. Alternatively, talk about how helping other Indonesians made you feel like you belong here.

1. Ending: You can close it with a resounding ending to reflect your journey. Now, you view diversity as a valuable resource to help Indonesia become better. Here is an excellent ending as an example:

“*Forging a special, personal bond with young refugees proved a cathartic outlet for my insecurities as it taught me to value my past. My transculturalism allowed me to help young refugees integrate into American life, and, in doing so, I was able to adjust myself. Now, I have an appreciation of myself that I never felt before. Home isn’t the digits in a passport or ZIP code but a sense of contentedness. By helping a young refugee find comfort, happiness, and home in America, I was finally able to find those same things for myself*.”

The most important thing to note is this, Danya: the topic of cultural identity and race can be commonplace if you cover a common experience such as feeling divided between cultures.

Since this experience is integral to who you are, you can still write about them, but make sure to highlight your introspection and reflection, and how you are different from other Chinese Indonesians who have similar upbringing ☺

Best wishes,

Melinda