Common App:

*Prompt 5: Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others. (622/650 words)*

Whether it was Kahoots, badminton matches, or chess tournaments, I could not handle losses well. My mind only resorted to envy when I was shadowed under a winner. One morning, I saw someone from my cohort being cheered on by his peers for solving a Rubik’s cube. But as I approached them, I noticed he was taking over a minute to solve it, while I was able to do it four times faster. So I borrowed his cube while his peers were still around, and quickly solved it. I didn’t want to win - I just wanted to be the winner. It was how I coped with envy.

“Can you teach me how to solve this?” said my classmate with his half-solved cube, “I couldn’t understand the last few parts of a youtube tutorial”.

Walking through the first step didn’t take long, but it quickly became the test of my patience. I remembered why it was hard to learn - all scrambles are different. During the first two days, I walked him through a couple of solves, but he was still unable to grasp the things I said. I gave up countless times, telling him to go back to youtube tutorials, but he insisted that I continue. Feeling moved by his eagerness, so once again I attempted to teach him. But that time, I taught with 6 Rubik’s cubes so he could comprehend the techniques which tackle all of the countless possible scrambles. Being able to solve it on his own, his expression went from a puzzled face to a smile of gratification.

“I got a 1 minute solve!” he said as he approached me the next day. As time went by, I noticed his increased enthusiasm as he continued telling me his new records. I felt threatened that they were approaching mine, but the delight I had knowing I introduced a source of enthusiasm led me to invite him to a competition. I performed poorly in that competition, but somehow I felt happy. I was celebrating his times, which exceeded both of our expectations.

The following month, my table tennis match during a lunch break was disrupted by sudden sounds of cheers. “Eight seconds? How is that even possible?” shouted someone from a distance. I dropped my paddle and turned around to see that the person I taught a few months prior solved the cube faster than I could.

I was surprised about his speed, but even more surprised that I wasn’t envious that someone else surpassed me as the fastest in my school. In the following hours, I pondered relentlessly upon my strange behavior. Was it because he was my friend? Did I stop caring about the Rubik’s cube? I was relentlessly jumping into forged conclusions until a memory of his eagernessreminded me why I agreed to teach him in the first place. I was able to appreciate the process and efforts he went through.

I learned that being a winner was not to continue relieving envy but to help the ones behind. The system of winning and losing isn’t success and failure, but instead a scheme of guiding one another towards greater heights. That way, I wouldn’t need to sulk as a losersince I can gain motivation and even advicefrom the winner.

This inspired me to teach in the competition mathematics club in my school. As a high schooler who developed knowledge and techniques from a number of various mathematics competitions, this was an opportunity for me to guide middle schoolers towards their victories. Whether they surpassed my performance in competitions wasn’t an issue anymore. Feeling contentment from seeing smiles of students after they solved new challenging problems made me notice that my urge to envy faded away.