

Ten Years A Student

It's too hot to think. School started ten years ago. Ten years ago, I was a six year old immigrant from a land 8000 miles away. I had big eyes, bad vision, and fat hands. My memories of school are marked by grades. Each grade is a chapter; each chapter a story. But for the sake of memory, I've had to keep things short, which is why grades are great. I can just describe a year as good or bad. No nuance. No foam. Just good or bad. 1st grade. Great. 2nd grade. Bad. My messiness drove her mad. "Refaht! Why your desk look like garbage half the time?". 3rd grade was great. 4th grade (Ironically, it was taught by the same teacher) was the polar opposite. 5th grade. Good. 6th. Meh. 7th and 8th grade were pretty good. And then 9th. 9th grade. Wow. Well, one thing's for sure: It can't be defined in a word. Or two. Or even a thousand. 9th grade was a mixture of the highest highs and the lowest lows; It was the long overdue happiness at my first 100, and the premature sadness that came after my last contest. But most of all, it was the start of a new chapter; a new era of life: High School.

Grades. They've been the greatest stress inducer of my life. But 9th grade was different. I had a responsibility of showing to my parents that I could sustain myself in a Specialized High School. It's funny. Years of "Refath, you have to be well-rounded!", "Refaaaah, you can't just focus on grades!" came through one ear, only to fall out through the other. The grand feeling of first entering Brooklyn Tech, and it's massive chandelier-lit auditoriums was soon struck by the realization that getting accepted into such a historic school was much more a blessing and much less a curse. Grades became a second thought, and I was overjoyed at the opportunity to join every team, club, competition, and contest. But the miniscule details were not lost on me. The blue, metal lockers, obnoxious bell tongs every 45 minutes, and even the rush hour of frantic

freshman rushing through the halls reminded me of one thing: I was somewhere special.

Everytime I passed under Gauss' magnificent head in the dream-like lobby, I was reminded of who I wanted to be. Every class excited me, and the whole frenzy, excitement and happiness of my situation motivated me to pursue even greater heights. I joined the math team, the chess club, and even joined the Survey--Brooklyn Tech's student newspaper--as a STEM editor. However, I'd become distraught in all my joy; I'd overdone myself, and put my feet places it didn't belong. 90s became 80s, and my brain became mush from all the overload.

It took until April for me to finally realize I should let some things go. My grades were falling, I was emotionally drained and worn out. I came home everyday looking like a sack of sweat; my palms were sweaty, my knees were shaking, my eyes lost their focus, and my mind was a 24/7 siren signaling for help, albeit in vain. I stopped going to the chess club and the survey took a hiatus for the AP season. I cut down on procrastination at home, and prioritized what Regents I needed to pass and how I would study for them. It's hard to grind, but a 75 in Spanish struck me with the PTSD I need to sack up, and start working like there's no end. I took a practice Physics regents every weekend, and made review sheets for all my finals. After two months of intense dedication, I earned a 90 on my Spanish final and Physics regents, and a 99 on my Geometry regents. My math competition season ended fondly, as I received a 5% on the NYCIML contest, the second highest score in Tech.

Even with only one year under my belt as a Brooklyn Tech student, I'm proud to say I've learned many things during my tenure here. I wish I could say it's deeper than the grades, but if I could, then I would. But I can't, so I won't. My grades are essential to the outline of my life; they reflect my highest highs and lowest lows in life, with one exception: 9th grade. Grades were a

second thought to my learning and enjoyment, and I can only thank Tech for that. Brooklyn Tech has equipped me with the agility and knowledge I need to conquer the world. All I need to do now is conquer it.