5. Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?

*Things to consider:* A challenge could be personal, or something you have faced in your community or school. Why was the challenge significant to you? This is a good opportunity to talk about any obstacles you’ve faced and what you’ve learned from the experience. Did you have support from someone else or did you handle it alone?

If you’re currently working your way through a challenge, what are you doing now, and does that affect different aspects of your life? For example, ask yourself, “How has my life changed at home, at my school, with my friends or with my family?”

The first time I saw a snake, I was four. That was the first time I realized that snakes were not as scary as people made them out to be. My grandma, in particular, was terrified of snakes. She'd warn me that snakes were demons in disguise. Grandma would refer her story from Nagagini, a daughter of a snake god who is half-human, half-snake. She's a popular evil icon in Indonesia.

I felt discouraged when I heard this story, but I kept feeding my curiosity through books, including reading all of Richard Dawkin's books on evolution. In between the pages of reptile books and YouTube animal videos, I realized how misunderstood snakes are. The Nagagini myth must’ve been derived from a human and snake conflict that was poorly managed over time.

Interning in the zoo, being a part of an animal rescue team in Singapore, and doing herpetology research has given me an edge in both experience and knowledge. I studied the snakes up-close-and-personal there. I wanted to understand the role snakes play in our ecosystem and how I could help in preventing human-animal conflict and mitigating the problem. Whenever Grandma was afraid that I'd get killed in my line of work, I was never tired to correct all of her misconceptions about snakes.

However, that's not all. Through a combination of these internship opportunities and my eagerness to soap up more knowledge, I was able to land myself a spot in the 'Biology and Biomedical Sciences' program in YYGS, a competitive program that was held at Yale. Through my experiences there from the seminars and lectures, I was able to come back to Jakarta, with more knowledge to share to my grandma.

In the end, I was able to win her over. She gave me a snake keychain shortly after my return from America, which was her way of blessing my pursue in herpetology. I told her that I would make her proud, offering to speak Parseltongue to any snake she encountered , to tell them not to harm her.