

#4 Applicant

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ - 2022 TYAF Award Essay

As a youth in our growing Taiwanese American community, I'm both honored and proud. When someone asks me where I'm from, I usually say Maryland, even though I know what they're really asking is "what Asian I am". When I say I'm from Taiwan, most of the time people are supportive and think it's cool while some people are confused. I hope that more people can get to know Taiwan and our culture.

Since high school started, I have been a teaching assistant for both first and second grade mandarin classes at the Washington DC Taiwanese School. My favorite part in assisting younger children to explore the mandarin language and Taiwanese culture is that it reminds me of my younger self. I recall how their wide-eyed, curious, and excited looks were reflections of my own as I learned about our culture as a young boy. I chose to be a teaching assistant because I want to help them learn about our culture like how my parents and relatives did for me. Furthermore, I also participate in many FASCA events because I believe that advocating for Taiwan and allowing others to learn about my culture is necessary. Taiwan deserves more recognition and we can start promoting at a local level, though the most important objective should be passing the same mentality down to younger generations.

When serving as a teaching assistant, I usually help students that are having trouble understanding the material. When teaching kids how to write a character, I would first go through the stroke order and proportions of that character. After that I would explain the meaning of the character and how to pronounce it. One time a student asked me how to write the character "想" and I went through the process with him and after a couple of minutes he was able to write the word from memory. I was surprised by how quickly he learned and he seemed very proud of himself, watching him become more confident and having that sparkle in his eyes was a really special moment for me. Almost every class we sing mandarin songs, read stories from the textbook, and learn new vocab. On special Taiwanese holidays, we would tell them the folklore and teach them what activities we do on those days and what food we eat. Seeing children actively learning about their cultural background brings me a lot of joy and satisfaction because it makes me feel like I'm contributing to the cultural transmission in our community.

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During quarantine, I felt especially disconnected from my Taiwanese roots due to the lack of celebrations and gatherings. After mandates were lifted, I jumped on the opportunity to volunteer for numerous FASCA events in order to connect with others and experience our culture together. One of the best things about FASCA is that I get to be around other Taiwanese kids my age. I find our effortless connection stems from our shared experiences and similar cultural backgrounds. It is with them where I feel like I most belong. The most popular event, and my personal favorite, is the Bubble Tea Festival. We set up booths there with various activities such as Night Market Style Fishing (撈金魚), Baseball (九宮格), Ball Bounce Toss (地上彈跳珍珠), and more. All of these activities remind me of Taiwan's night markets, other than getting some delicious food we would also play games that are similar to these. People would come to our booths and we would explain what our station is doing and let them play or do whatever activity our booth offers. Sharing our traditions to those that might not have a Taiwanese background helps promote Taiwan and helps them become more knowledgeable.

I'm currently a tenth grader at Montgomery Blair High School and part of the STEM Magnet Program. Even though there are many Asian Americans in the program, there are only a few Taiwanese students. Many of my peers are well informed, but there are still some that are clueless about Taiwan. It is not a rare case that people just lump us with the Chinese and at first it was frustrating to explain to them how we're not the same. However, after many "aren't you Chinese"s and "isn't Taiwan part of China"s I've found it rather fun to discuss these problems with people and do my best to convince and educate them.