

The Compass
By Adelyn Wu

“Read *that!* I bet you can’t!” It was a bright morning: sunlight streamed in through the windows, lighting up the classroom. It was a wonderful way to begin the day-- except for the fact that some boys were teasing me. They giggled, smirked, and whispered to each other, then demanded of me again, “Hey, read this thing! On the map there’s a Chinese character!” The “thing” turned out to be a compass. I corrected them, and they doubled up in laughter. I felt bad. I felt that my language and I weren’t respected.

“What’s going on here?” asked our teacher, eyeing the fuss. “They think this is in Chinese-- they want me to read it,” I explained. Walking over to the map, she studied it carefully, then told the boys to leave me alone and that the thing *was* a compass.

Now that I think back on this, I realize the boys probably weren’t taught many Chinese characters (if at all). I am Taiwanese-American, but back then I only knew a little bit of Mandarin-- even so, I could tell they had no clue. I was surprised because one of the boys was Chinese, too-- he even had the same last name as me-- and he couldn’t even recognize his own language! My grandmother was a Chinese major who knew where every character came from, but she went to college in Taiwan. I started to think about what I could do to solve this problem.

If I contributed something to America now, I would share my experience with others and why Asians and others should know their culture and language. Anytime when I have an opinion writing, sharing time, or a speech in school, I can share my ideas and educate my peers and teachers. I might talk about how Mandarin is a “picture language” and the word “tree” shows a tree trunk. “Love” has a picture of a heart inside. I think it is fascinating and cool. Maybe if children learned what simple words from each Asian language or even other ones like Hebrew and Arabic looked like, then people might show more respect and appreciation for all languages and cultures.

I’ve known for a while that I want to become an author. When I’m older, I will write books to inspire Asians and others to know Asian culture. If my books get published, I will send some copies to churches, stores, libraries, and schools so more people can read and think about my ideas.

Thinking back on the incident, something used for direction was mistaken for a Chinese character. Back then I thought that the situation would always bother me, but now I think of it in another way. I realized that a compass relates to your goal because it points you in the right direction. In a way, this “compass” is pointing me in the right direction by helping me choose my contribution to America so Asian culture is accepted and appreciated.