

Fresh Off the Boat

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When I came to the United States in 7th grade, it wasn't easy. Everything was so different, not just the language but also the culture, it was hard for me to fit in.

The first day of school was the worst. I found my homeroom teacher five minutes after the bell rang. I blurred through the first two classes, the only conversations I made was saying my name, where I am from, and my favorite color, blue, because I didn't know how to say turquoise. Then it was lunchtime. Back in China, we would line up in the classroom and have lunch boxes provided by the school, and the cafeterias were for teachers; so I walked back to the classroom where my teacher asked me to leave, but I didn't know where to go. I didn't know we were supposed to go to the cafeterias. so, I sat down in a hallway with my lunchbox, and just waited until the bell rang.

Things got better as time went on. I made my first friend here during PE class. She saw me standing alone and asked me if I wanted to join their group. At that time all I needed was just a hand, and she gave it to me. I started to know some people and knew how things work here, but I still felt out of place. I was surprised to see kids sitting on tables during classes and they didn't get yelled at, because in China this counts as disrupting the class order. And girls dying their hair and piercing on their nose, that would have also been a no.

I learned and changed so much after 7th grade, I had passed my ELD (English Language Development) class, updated my wardrobe, became more outgoing. But sometimes when I try to share something that was in Chinese, I found it extremely difficult to translate my meanings correctly. And when I tried to share my stories with friends back in China, they thought I was just showing off. I felt out of place, on both sides.

During my second semester of Freshman year, we had a Chinese history unit, where our teacher played a movie called *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. The fictional story was set in the Qing Dynasty (19th century) China, where the main characters knew wushu, they all practice *qi* which allows them to have better control of their bodies. There was a fight scene where they were chasing on rooftops, it looked as if they were flying, and immediately some students found it funny. I knew that they did not mean to be offensive, but I felt uncomfortable. I understand what the movie was trying to portrait because I have my background knowledge, but they didn't. That was when I realized how difficult it was to introduce a new culture, and I understood how easy it was to create conflicts and biases because of not knowing. My values and beliefs are influenced by both sides. I think I do fit in, just parts of me fit here and parts fit there, and that is what makes me special.