

C. Discuss the life experience that has most dramatically affected your attitudes.

I subtly sink further into my chair as the substitute teacher nears the end of the alphabet; I have grown used to what is about to happen. When she finally

stammers out my name, it is followed quickly by an apology, but all I can hear are the other student's giggles, drowning out her voice. Over the years, I have grown

acutely aware of my status as the rare foreign person at my school, an experience that has influenced my life and view of the world. Feeling that I was the odd one, I

became meticulous at hiding parent teacher conference forms, deftly avoiding the Christmas Concerts, and speaking Amharic only in the comfort of my family car, to

sever any ties between my home and school lives. However, these measures would come to a head when even I began to see the faults in my actions, ignited by my

parents growing disappointment in my shame and dubious actions, and the strain that it put on our relationship.

At first, when I began to ponder my identity, I would ask myself large,

insatiable questions. When does the only nation you have ever known, become the one that you identify with, or does it ever? Where is this location, this point, where Ethiopia ends and America begins, in my body? Where will I belong, if I am accepted in neither society? Last year, I would embark on a slow enlightenment, stemming

from my childhood dream to travel the world. I came to realize that, the last sixteen years, I was seeing and experiencing the very things of which I have felt robbed, and rejecting them as inferior. How could I sit and discuss the foreign places I wished to see, whilst simultaneously rejecting my own rich background? Every Ethiopian

Christmas, every word I have spoken to my mother and father in Amharic, every meal, prayer, and dance I have joined in, have all been the yearnings I have dreamt of having, and suffocating them was no longer an option, if I was to truly begin to accept myself.

Although I still get embarrassed, as my school is a place not easily accepting of anything different, I know who I am, better than I ever did, and choose to be true to myself no matter my environment. I know my strengths and will never waiver in my steadfast commitment to my aspirations, background, and culture. As I look back now, I know that my difficulties were only obstacles I needed, in order to fully recognize and respect my personal authenticity. And although my challenges are still present, I combat it by evoking pride in the heritage that has blessed me with such a unique upbringing, and provided me with the foundation to push myself socially and intellectually. To live a life without labels or molds, but simply my thoughts, dreams, and hopes brimming to the top, enhanced by the experiences I have been fortunate to have. Experiences as fulfilling as the quiet elation my parents and I shared when I first spoke Amharic to them in front of my friends.