

# B-22

## Not Barriers, But Doors

Imagine waking up every morning and wondering which version of yourself you need to be today. Whether it's meeting the expectations of your parents, keeping up at school, or fitting in with your friends, just like everyone else in this hall, balancing different expectations can feel chaotic. For me, balancing three languages, Nepalese, Japanese, and English, is my version of that struggle. My days are a constant game of code-switching.

Back in April, during my first week of 3rd grade, I was trying hard to fit in and chat with my new classmates. We all know that feeling of desperately wanting to make a good first impression. However, as I tried to call out to our teacher in Japanese, my brain switched wires. My Nepalese slipped out, and I loudly called her "mamu." In Nepalese, "mamu" means "mom." My classmates side-eyed me, and I wanted to disappear. Later, my friends heard me speaking Nepalese on the phone with my mother. They teased me. They called me "Kiyoubinbou", the Japanese phrase for a "jack of all trades, master of none." They said, "You speak three languages, but you still struggle to get a perfect grade in Japanese class."

For a long time, I used to ask myself, "Who am I actually supposed to be?" I sometimes mixed up my languages and also felt like I didn't belong anywhere. It used to feel like I was repeatedly changing masks just to fit in. But as I grew older, I realized something life-changing. I looked up that old phrase and discovered that it was incomplete and the full idiom is actually "A jack of all trades is a master of none, but oftentimes better than a master of one." That changed everything for me. I realized that languages are not just academic subjects that I need to "master" to get a perfect grade. They are tools. A subject is something you study just to pass a class. A tool is something you use to build a bridge. I use Japanese for cultural empathy and community, English to connect across borders, and Nepalese to anchor myself to my family. Because I speak these languages, I don't just see words on a page I see human beings.

People think multicultural kids don't fully belong, but they are wrong. Our diverse backgrounds are our superpowers. I am not half of one culture and half of another. I am double. The truth is, we all have different layers within us. Whether you speak one language or three, we all have multiple sides to who we are, and none of us should ever have to live behind these barriers we call "differences".

My fellow junior high school students, we all have differences that we worry about. Maybe it is the food you bring for lunch, the hobbies you love that others find unusual, or even just the unique way your mind works. We often try to hide or smooth over these parts of ourselves just to make other people comfortable. Our differences are not weaknesses. They are our greatest strengths. Think about it. A sports team is strongest when players have different roles. A band sounds beautiful because the instruments play different notes. In the same way, navigating our unique differences doesn't divide our potential, rather, it multiplies it.

I am proud of my Nepalese roots, my Japanese heart, and my global English voice. However, I do not want to use these tools just for myself. I want us to use all of our unique voices to bring people together. Together, we are not living in fractions. We are doubled. Now, let's stop looking at our differences as barriers. Let's use them as doors to open, share our unique stories, and build a world where everyone truly belongs.