

# The Joy of Going to School

Serina Sugiyama

Shimizu Dai-nana Middle School

What do you imagine when you hear the word “Mexico”? Do you imagine colorful festivals? Women with flowers in their hair? When you hear “Mexico”, do you think of “tacos”? Or do you think of the cartels and violence? Do you think of extreme wealth or crushing poverty? I think of all of these things.

My father is from Mexico, and my mother is Japanese. I was born in Japan, but because of my father’s work in trade, we lived in Torreon city in Coahuila, Mexico. I lived there for five years, from age six until I was 11 years old.

Although the middle class has grown recently, Mexico is still a country with a huge gap between the rich and the poor. The difference is painfully obvious. You can see massive houses, with yards and gardens that look like parks. At the same time, there are areas where the houses are made out of cardboard and scrap wood. The people who live in them are without electricity, and clean running water.

Usually, the children from wealthy families attend expensive private schools. Poor children attend government-run public schools. School is mandatory, and these schools are tuition-free. However, many children cannot afford to go to school. This is because their parents cannot afford uniforms, books, school bags, or anything else that their children might need.

It’s sad to see these children. Instead of going to school, they have to work. They roam the streets, selling candy, washing cars, or cleaning up yards. These children really want to go to school to learn how to read and write, but they have to earn money for their families to survive. That is why there are many illiterate people in Mexico, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The truth is that this is the tragic case of countless children around the world. Meanwhile, most children in Japan go to school. Normally in Japan, we have uniforms to wear, textbooks, school bags, and writing materials. Everyone can read, write, and use basic calculations. Every weekday, children in Japan are in class and learning new things.

Now, I live in Japan. It’s a place where my Mexican friends long to go, because it’s a place of wealth and opportunity. I feel that my experiences in both countries are my treasures. I realize now that going to school every day is not ordinary, but something special.

I would like everyone to think about what I have said. Being able to go to school is such a wonderful thing. Appreciate what we have in life! Children in Japan are lucky. In Mexico, I was able to learn the joy of going to school. As a child of the middle class, I was lucky, and I had the opportunity to learn and make friends. The children I saw on the streets weren’t so lucky.

In closing, I would like to ask all the students in this room to; 1) Go to school every day. 2) Learn from your teachers and 3) Have fun with your friends.

We’ve been given a big gift in life, and we shouldn’t waste it.

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