

Participant P6

School Experience: Public high school with a large Chinese student community

1. Can you briefly introduce yourself and tell me when you came to the United States?

Response:

My name is Mandy O, and I am currently an eleventh-grade student at an American high school. I will begin my senior year next year. I moved to the United States in ninth grade and currently live with my grandmother, uncle, and cousin. Before moving to the United States, I grew up in China and completed elementary school and part of middle school there.

2. What was the biggest challenge when you first arrived in the United States?

Response:

The biggest challenge was adapting quickly to a completely new school environment and learning to communicate in English. Compared with classmates who had grown up in the United States, I felt that my English ability, classroom participation, and social skills were much weaker. At first, I often could not understand what was happening in class, and I did not feel confident talking with American classmates, which made it difficult to fit in.

3. Can you describe your experience learning English?

Response:

When I first arrived, I was placed in an ESL program based on my placement test. The class consisted entirely of students whose first language was not English, and the pace of instruction matched our language level. Outside of school, I often watched videos on TikTok and other social media platforms to learn authentic English. I also encouraged myself to participate more in class and communicate with classmates after school. Because I came to the United States during high school, I knew I had to adapt to an English-speaking environment quickly. Otherwise, both my academic performance and my confidence would suffer. Eventually, I left the ESL program and was able to keep up with regular classes.

4. Do you remember a moment when language made you feel excluded, embarrassed, or misunderstood?

Response:

Yes. During a group activity shortly after I transferred to my new school, I wanted to introduce Chinese food and daily life to my classmates. However, I did not know the appropriate English expressions to explain many cultural concepts clearly. My classmates looked confused, and I felt embarrassed because I could not communicate what I really wanted to say. After that experience, I started organizing my thoughts carefully before speaking English.

5. Do you feel like the same person when speaking Chinese and English? Why or why not?

Response:

No. When I speak Chinese with my family or Chinese friends, I feel relaxed and comfortable because it is my native language. However, when I speak English at school, I become much more cautious. I think carefully before speaking and rarely joke or speak casually. The way I interact with Chinese friends and American classmates is so different that people might think they are seeing two completely different versions of me.

6. Has moving to the United States changed the way you think about being Chinese?

Response:

Yes, very much. When I lived in China, I rarely thought about my Chinese identity because it felt completely ordinary. After moving to the United States and living in a multicultural environment, I began to appreciate my Chinese cultural background much more. I became more interested in celebrating traditional festivals. For example, during the Dragon Boat Festival, I make zongzi at home because it is difficult to buy them in the United States. I feel proud of my cultural background and enjoy introducing Chinese culture to my American friends.

7. When do you feel most Chinese? Can you give an example?

Response:

I feel most Chinese during Lunar New Year. My family wears red clothes, gives red envelopes, makes dumplings together, and plays the Spring Festival Gala in the background. Even if we are not watching it closely, the atmosphere reminds me of my cultural roots and strengthens my sense of being Chinese.

8. When do you feel most American? Can you give an example?

Response:

I feel most American when I play on my school's tennis team. My teammates care much more about ability than about race or cultural background, and everyone is respected based on their performance. After matches, we often eat hamburgers together, which makes me feel that I am experiencing a very American style of school life.

9. Have you ever felt caught between two cultures? Can you tell me about that experience?

Response:

Yes. My family still holds traditional Chinese values, placing great importance on academic achievement, self-discipline, and family rules. In contrast, many of my American classmates' families value freedom, social activities, and personal experiences much more. Sometimes these different expectations create conflicts, and I feel caught between the two cultures.

10. If you could describe your identity in one sentence, what would that sentence be?

Response:

I am Mandy, a Chinese high school student who moved to the United States in ninth grade and has grown up between Chinese and American cultures, continuously learning to balance my "华人底色" (Chinese roots/foundation) with my American experiences.

Participant P6

学校经历：公立高中(中国学生较多)

1. 请简单介绍一下自己, 以及你是什么时候来到美国的?

回答:

我叫欧星萌 (Mandy O), 目前是一名美国高中十一年级学生, 明年将升入十二年级。我在九年级来到美国, 和外婆、舅舅以及表姐一起生活。来美国之前, 我一直在中国长大, 完成了小学和初中的学习。

2. 刚来到美国时, 你遇到的最大挑战是什么?

回答:

刚来到美国时, 我遇到的最大挑战是快速适应全新的美国校园和语言环境。由于我是九年级才转学来到美国, 与从小在美国长大的同学相比, 我的英语能力、课堂表达方式以及校园社交习惯都存在较大差距。刚开始时, 我经常听不懂课堂内容, 也不太敢主动和美国同学交流, 因此很难融入集体。

3. 你能描述一下自己学习英语的经历吗?

回答:

刚入学时, 学校根据我的英语测试成绩安排我进入ESL课程。班里的学生都是以英语作为第二语言的学习者, 课程内容和学习进度也更适合我们的英语水平。课余时间, 我会通过刷TikTok等海外社交媒体学习地道的英语表达, 同时也努力在课堂上主动发言, 课后多与同学交流。因为我是高中阶段才来到美国, 所以必须尽快适应全英文的学习环境, 否则不仅会影响成绩, 也会影响自己的心态。后来, 我逐渐脱离了ESL课程, 能够跟上普通课程的学习节奏。

4. 你是否记得某个因为语言而感到被排斥、尴尬或被误解的时刻?

回答:

有。九年级刚转学时, 在一次小组讨论中, 我想向外国同学介绍中国的饮食文化和生活方式, 但由于不会使用很多地道的英语表达, 始终无法准确地描述自己的意思。同学们听得一头雾水, 我当时觉得特别尴尬。本来是一次向别人介绍中国文化的机会, 却因为语言能力不足没有表达清楚。从那以后, 我每次开口前都会先整理自己的思路, 想好要说什么再表达。

5. 当你说中文和说英文时, 你觉得自己是同一个人吗? 为什么?

回答:

我觉得完全不一样。和家人或华人朋友说中文时, 我会更加放松自在, 因为中文是我的母语, 我能够自由表达自己的想法。但在学校说英文时, 我会更加拘谨, 也会反复思考措辞, 很少开玩笑或者轻松地聊天。无论是和华人朋友相处, 还是和美国同学交流, 我表现出来的状态差别都很大, 别人甚至会觉得我是两个不同的人。

6. 来到美国以后, 你对于“中国人身份”的理解有发生变化吗?

回答:

变化很大。在中国生活的时候, 我一直觉得自己的中国人身份很普通, 也没有特别深刻的感受。来到美国之后, 由于生活在一个多元文化环境中, 我反而更加珍惜自己的中国文化背景。我会更加主动地关注中国传统节日, 例如端午节时会自己在家包粽子, 而不是像以前在国内一样直接购买。我为自己拥有中国文化背景感到自豪, 也愿意主动向外国朋友介绍中国文化。

7. 在什么情况下你最能感受到自己是中国人? 能举个例子吗?

回答:

每到农历春节的时候, 我最能感受到自己的中国人身份。春节期间, 我们一家人会穿红色衣服、收红包、包饺子, 也会播放春晚作为节日背景。虽然不一定会认真观看节目, 但这种节日氛围会让我深刻感受到自己与中国文化之间的联系, 也让我更加认同自己的中国人身份。

8. 在什么情况下你最能感受到自己像美国人? 能举个例子吗?

回答:

我加入学校网球队之后, 和队友一起训练、比赛时, 我会觉得自己很像美国人。球队里的同学更关注每个人的实力, 而不会特别在意种族或文化背景。比赛结束后, 大家还会一起去吃汉堡, 这种校园生活让我感受到浓厚的美式文化氛围。

9. 你有没有感到自己夹在两种文化之间? 可以分享一个相关经历吗?

回答:

有。我家人仍然保持着比较传统的中国教育观念,非常重视学习成绩、自律和家庭规则;而很多美国同学的家里更加重视自由、社交以及个人体验。这两种不同的价值观有时会产生冲突,也让我偶尔觉得自己夹在两种文化之间,需要不断寻找平衡。

10. 如果让你用一句话描述自己的身份认同,你会怎么说?

回答:

我是欧星萌(Mandy),一名九年级来到美国、成长于中西双文化环境中的华裔高中生。我一直在努力平衡和融合自己的中国文化背景与美国成长经历。