

Cafeteria of Change

Laughing lunch ladies, playful pranksters, chatty chit-chatters, and a sole singer belting out an off-key song fill the air in my school cafeteria. Tuning out a debate on the merits of dark chocolate, my eyes are drawn towards a lone figure at the other end of the table. The shy face belongs to a new student, her fearful eyes saying it all: What do I do? A chill runs down my spine as I am transported to the unnerving scene I witnessed yesterday when this student was teased for her home lunch. Her cheeks had turned a strawberry red as she shut the lid on her tin box and quietly lowered her head to the table. Having received comments on my packed lunch before, I knew that even the most light-hearted of remarks could cut deeply and should be avoided. But what could I do to bring lasting change here at school— after all, I was just one kid. As Dr. King once said, “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter,” and I knew I must do something, no matter how small the action. A Ziploc bag of sunflower seeds in hand, I turn back to my friends with a mission in mind. We start talking and thus, a seed of change sprouts in our little corner of the cafeteria.

As our idea grew, we found ourselves approaching our teacher’s desk with a proposal for a class show and share day. With the value of celebrating different cultures and food traditions, our innovative idea was appreciated and even shared with other teachers in the grade. With great excitement, our “Show and Share Day” arrived and we all presented on a traditional or festive food we enjoyed. Best of all, many kids even brought a sample dish to try! Participating in this event, we gained an understanding of various cultures and traditions and even tasted many new foods. The new student who had become a new friend got a lot of applause for her delicious dessert. Although our class was the first one to organize the event this year, we saw the impact we had even with each student who stopped at our bulletin board.

As Dr. King once said, “The time is always right to do what is right.” By believing in ourselves and working together as a team from that day, we were able to inspire change and gain a new appreciation for different cultures along the way. While our presentation day was only a small step for us, it became a giant leap as a potential new school tradition and learning opportunity for students in years to come. Just as the roots of a small sapling can spread to encompass the entire forest, our ideas, and contributions as kids today can bring lasting change for a better world tomorrow. Always be open to inspiration, after all, you never know when your cafeteria will find you.