



10 days, 6715 miles from home, millions of minute interactions. All of the interactions that take place in our lives are unique, and each one shapes us in a different way. Some of these interactions can be life changing. A car crash, a marriage proposal, joining the army, these are only a few examples of extremely powerful experiences. The more common, day to day experiences are equally, if not more important in the process of human development. The child that plays soccer amidst the hustle and bustle of the city streets will naturally develop different skills than the child who spends every day in preschool. The understanding of human interaction I have developed over the course of my life has been shaped only by my prior experiences. The current level of interconnection in the world today is unprecedented, people that do not share the same culture or language can now easily communicate across borders. When this communication is based off of prior experiences, first time interactions between two culturally different people are difficult. When another culture is explored, the explorer naturally gains understanding, they are now familiar with the nuances of that culture. They can create stronger cross-culture relationships, and avoid offensive topics or actions, because they have that experience. Touring China would give me this experience, and allow me to expand my view of human interactions. Expanding my comprehension of this vastly different culture would help me become an experienced explorer, someone who I have always wanted to be. Taking this trip to China would improve my communication abilities through new experiences, strengthen my leadership skills through the ability to understand others, and help me develop my own critical thinking skills by forcing me to think in new directions.

Communication is defined as a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behaviors. Without the knowledge of these symbols, signs and behaviors both parties involved in an exchange cannot correctly interpret information. These characteristics of information exchange differ greatly from culture to culture. What is considered acceptable in one part of the world might not be acceptable somewhere else. This inherently makes cross culture communication extremely difficult. I want to take this tour of China to become accustomed to Chinese culture in a low risk, high reward setting. By being a part of a school group, I would naturally be in safe situations where my mistakes would be corrected rather than ridiculed. Any serious misunderstandings could be resolved easily in comparison to those I might make as a tourist. As mistakes are corrected, through trial and error, my mental library of human interactions would



grow in a brand new direction. I would gain a basic understanding of the symbols, signs and behaviors of a different country and language, something most people at my age can not claim. I would return home to my own community and take the lessons I learned in China home with me. I believe that after visiting Venezuela with my school this coming spring, and China through this scholarship, I would return to my community with the ability to interact with a broader range of people. This ability to interact with people outside of my community would be thanks to my experiences and past mistakes. Having this experience in communication would distinguish me from my peers, I would stand out. I would be able to make a real difference in the world as a direct result of this experience.

I believe that the leader who can accurately represent members of different cultures is a true leader. I want to lead in the future, and by taking this trip to China I can learn how different human perspective can be. My representation of others will never be perfect, but the leader who has learned as much as possible about human interaction is the one who will solve the most problems. Taking this tour of China would grant me a view from another perspective, and allow me to understand my own assumptions and beliefs for the first time. By understanding my own assumptions and beliefs, Chinese beliefs will not seem so strange, they may be different than my own, but they are not wrong. Without acknowledging this different perspective as equally important as my own, sending a respectful and correct message will be impossible. Leadership is all about the relationships the leader has with the people who are listening to him or her. The key concept is that the people must be able to listen, to understand the message, the information the leader is trying to send. By developing a culturally diverse view of human interaction, I would be able to represent people of different cultures. I would be able to constructively deal with differences and complete end goals quickly and efficiently. China is quickly becoming the new world superpower and the United States needs people who have prior experience communicating with the Chinese. In the near future, interactions in between the United States and China will be crucial for both the countries. By having a prior basic understanding of Chinese culture, I will be able to complete tasks with Chinese co-workers for the benefit of both countries, and for the rest of the world.

Taking a 10 day trip to China will improve my critical thinking skills by immersing me temporarily into another culture. To immerse oneself into another culture is by no means an easy task. Assump-



tions that could be made at home during conversations or interactions will most likely not apply in China. Ten days is not enough time to simply let myself learn about the culture gradually, to learn I will have to try to jump into the culture, make mistakes, and attempt to learn from these mistakes. To learn from my mistakes I will have to figure out what I had done incorrectly, and use critical thinking skills to understand why people do the things they do. Analyzing the interactions happening around me and to me will develop my understanding of a different culture. My current set of critical thinking skills are entirely geared towards the American way of thinking, getting things done now, and how to do it. This type of critical thinking is entirely material based, with only the end result in sight, the final product. By experiencing China, I hope to be exposed to a different perspective. Chinese culture at first glance seems directed inwards, towards the people. Personal offense seems to be avoided at all costs, and the end product appears not as important as how it is made and who that affects. These are my assumptions about Chinese culture, and regardless of whether or not my assumptions are correct I will still be partaking in interactions I will not have been prepared for. Every experience I have in China will be new, and as I try to understand what is going on around me, my critical thinking skills will improve. Critical thinking is the act observing actions taking place with the intention of determining the meaning of those actions. When I was younger, I attempted to learn how to snowboard at the local mountain. No matter how hard I tried, I could just not understand what the instructor was trying to teach me. I lacked the critical thinking skills to comprehend the directions he gave me. Several years later, I thought that I understood how it worked, and so I tried it once again. All of a sudden, it felt as if something had clicked, I could now control the board. I love snowboarding now, I currently work at Berkshire East as a snowboarding Instructor. The “click” that I felt when retrying the sport was my critical thinking skills being at just the right level for learning to snowboard. I believe that right now I have reached the point where experiencing another culture will “click” for me. By experiencing China, and all the interactions that would come with that I will become confident in my ability to understand interactions in more than just my own country and culture.

Throughout history, great leaders have stepped forward and created better lives for everyone around them. Their locations have been different over the years, but the great leaders of our past and present all share several of the same attributes. All great leaders share the ability to communicate with others; they all can send clear messages to their people. They all have great experiences, grand adventures



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where they learned just how important understanding others is. Someone who I respect as a leader and a difference maker is my father. He actively makes a difference in the community, whether it is helping our elderly neighbors or volunteering at his church. When my father was in his early twenties, he traveled to Swaziland and taught in Africa through the Peace Corps. This experience might not have been the sole reason for the way he makes an effort to improve the lives of others, but it was definitely an eye opening experience for him. My father is not a politician or a general, but I consider him to be a great leader. All of those who are written into the history books for leading a country to a more prosperous life are intelligent; they can analyze situations and uncover the meaning of things that have occurred. In short, all great leaders have impressive communication, leadership, and critical thinking skills. They have gained these skills thanks to their experiences, their understanding of human interaction and others forcing them to think in new directions. Taking a 10 day trip to China would be my grand adventure, the experience of a lifetime. This experience would give me the skills to be an example to others, the ability to represent those from different cultures, and the self confidence to make a difference.