

For as long as I can remember, I have aspired to become an artist. I often dream about it, late at night, when the person I am now communicates with the person I hope to be. In my dream I am painting a canvas with the most vibrant hues, so lively they seem to sing and dance. I visualize the picture perfectly; I swear I can duplicate it when I awake. However, when the morning comes, I pull out a canvas and paintbrush, then discover that I am missing the paint, the most vital part of the entire piece. Sure, I have watercolor, oil, and acrylic—but these are not the paints in my dream. Instead, fiery red is the sunset on the desert, yellow is curry on chicken, and blue is the water of the Mediterranean. Swirling around these are the green of a rainforest, purple silks in a Chinese market, and the orange glow of Parisian lights. I aspire to become an artist, a traveler, who uses the feelings, sights, tastes, smells, and sounds of the world to paint a picture of the human race and this earth. However, I currently lack the paints themselves—the ability to witness human kind in its splendor, to see the world in its most beautiful array of colors. My palette, which should hold the experiences of many world travels, is empty.

The opportunity to travel to China through this program will give me the first paint colors. The trip will be the beginning of my world exploration—the start of my journey across the earth. I am a student who enjoys a wide range of interests, including art, music, language, religion, culture, architecture, history, and literature. I am fascinated with people: how they look, sound, and act; how they impact their world; and how the world, in turn, impacts them. I also hold an interest in the natural sciences, of botany, zoology, and earth science. The earth's brilliant landscapes have held me in complete wonder since childhood. This is something I was meant to do. I possess a strong thirst for knowledge, for experiences, and for a chance to make something of my life. This painting, my “painting of the world,” is the dream that has fueled my thoughts and decisions. It is also the only thing that has remained consistent throughout my changing visions of the future. The chance to begin my life as a world traveler is a thought that thrills me. This trip to China would begin my great dream.

Like an artist, I would have to improve upon my skills. The EF Tour will provide me with a chance to do just that—to develop skills essential to a world traveler. For a person crossing geographical and cultural lines, communication is key, and it starts with celebrating and understanding diversity. Diversity includes the many differences that make each person, and each culture, unique. Understand-



ing means learning and respecting these differences. But a study of diversity will also reveal how similar people are in this world. Being woven of the same human thread, we all possess the same emotions. Sadness and happiness, victory and defeat, hate and love are felt from the North to the South Pole, from America to Afghanistan. Humans everywhere express the same desires: the need for family, fellowship, and self-expression. A trip to China will allow me to experience this diversity first hand. I would witness the change in mannerisms, learn when to speak, and judge when to remain silent. I would also use my knowledge of human similarities to get my point across, and express my art, despite language barriers. This trip to China will allow me to study the delicate balance between differences and similarities, and thus become a better communicator as a result. My comparison of American and Chinese culture would make me an artist, and a traveler who is able to work around the challenges in multicultural interaction, while continuing to treat each situation with a high level of respect. The communication skills I learn will apply to the rest of my life, as each new day brings me into contact with a myriad of beliefs from others.

I have lived in the United States all my life. I know American customs and etiquette. I speak the language of America. I am aware of American politics. It is what I am used to, the society in which I am most comfortable. A trip to China will quickly draw me out of my comfort zone and place me into a completely foreign atmosphere. I would have to build the confidence to learn about and adapt to my surroundings. I would have to gain the courage to toss out my own beliefs, thoughts, and feelings—the ones I have known all my life—and become tolerant of the things surrounding me. The experience would both humble and enlighten me. In the process, the program would help me to develop another vital skill: leadership. A good leader is one who has a clear understanding of herself. This understanding comes after her limits are tested, and as a result, of the confidence that comes from overcoming a challenge. This EF Tour could help me become a better leader. I could gain confidence in an unfamiliar land and discover the best way to handle ideas unlike my own. The experience could help me become an open-minded leader—the best type of leader there is.

The third vital skill that could be developed as a result of the trip would be critical thinking. Direct immersion into a new culture will surround me with new information. New traditions, new stories, new experiences, and new opinions would become my topics of exploration. My ability to adapt to



the unfamiliar setting would depend on my development of critical thinking skills. Critical thinking is the ability to apply previous knowledge to new situations. China is an entirely different country, and I imagine that I will often be faced with things I have never experienced before, but my capability of applying what I have learned from similar situations will allow me to work to a point of understanding. This process of applying previous knowledge will become such a frequent occurrence that it will almost become second nature.

Being given the opportunity to go to China, to immerse myself in a culture, and to become a better person because of it, would be one of the greatest gifts I could receive. Not only would the experience allow me to build useful skills, but it would also pave the way for other future successes. I would come back from China with new paints on my palette, and the trip would surely reinforce my passion to continue acquiring these paints, these experiences, in order to complete my portrait of the world. For me, the future is always changing. However, two things have remained consistent: my desire to travel and my desire to help others. Perhaps that means joining the Peace Corps or teaching abroad. Maybe I will work for Red Cross or write for the education of others. In any event, this trip to China could become the start of my future career. The opportunity would provide me with experiences that I will be able to keep and apply to any future job. I might even decide on that job while I am on the trip, discovering myself in a foreign country.

I am a hard-working student. I work hard so I can prepare myself for the future, for opportunities like this. For most of my life, finances have been a barrier—I have had to turn down numerous opportunities for world travel. I strive in education so that, one day, I can travel in absolute freedom, without being restricted by a lack of funds. And always, I strive in education to fulfill my dream of painting a picture of the world. My dream is to become filled with all the experiences this earth has to offer—to fall in love with multiple cultures and landscapes. I want to live and breathe in new atmospheres, and soak up the available knowledge. Right now, as I write this essay, I can feel my dream drawing closer to reality. I can visualize all the details of the painting—a splash of red here, a peppering of blue there, a splatter of green in the corner. The colors call to me, each speaking in a singsong voice. All I need to do is claim them.