

Massachusetts Letters About Literature 2016

Massachusetts Center for the Book

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Level II Honors Award

Dear Jason Fong,

I've lost the words belonging and home months ago. Just like that, they vanished from my vocabulary ... poof! Abracadabra! I've been searching for them ever since. I've searched for them constantly, suddenly having questions popping in my head – What does belonging feel like? What is the meaning of home? I've searched and searched until your voice, Jason, arises from the pages of a magazine one day, reading a poem, "Go Back to Asia", a poem containing so many answers to my questions.

You see, I was not born in the United States where I now live. I was born in Asia, China to be more specific. I've been told I spent some time in China becoming slightly accustomed with the language and food. At age two, I left. I was picked out of the masses of other infants and babies at the nursing center and was set up with a new home and new family. When my adoptive mother and I united, we boarded a plane and flew halfway around the world to meet the rest of my family. I don't remember anything at all about these events – not the nannies that took care of me, the color crib I may have been placed in, the leather airplane seats, or the view from 35,000 feet above the ground. All I remember is growing up in the U.S.

As I grow older, I've become more aware about what is happening around me. I have begun to notice the cultural differences between others and myself. I notice I have a wider, flatter nose and dark, almond-shaped eyes with one double eyelid. Not only that, but I've begun to notice people staring at me a second too long, maybe because of this appearance. This has all led me to confusion. Confusion about belonging. Confusion as to where my home is. Because I look Asian in an American society, do I not belong here?

I do. I belong here. You told me in "Go Back to Asia", a poem on a flat piece of paper in Times New Roman font with a sharp emotional edge to it. It was nothing like John Milton's long, epic poems or Emily Dickinson's precise rhyming stanzas. When I read those classic poems, they are merely good reads. Yours, well, yours was refreshing. It was filled with answers to my relentless questions, clarifying the meaning of my lost words, home and belonging. Your poem reasons with yourself why you belong. It mimics first the malice in the voices of the people who call your appearance out. *"Go back to Asia! He says and sneers and snarls"*. You were oh so angry when you wrote this, weren't you? I too have felt this bitter anger, Jason. I have felt the confusion and unsureness you felt after these words and accompanying stares were hurled at me. It made me wonder like you did. It made me question and think, if I went back like they say, then where would I go? Where would I go if I left the United States? And you shouted, nowhere. You said that you were born and raised here. I wasn't born here as you were but none the less, I was raised here. I realize now, here is all I know. Here is all I remember. Here is where most of my past lies. Here is where everybody I know lives. I can't very well hop on a plane and abandon everything I know – the styles of clothing I've grown up wearing, the foods I've acquired a taste for, and English, the language that helps me learn and express who I am. If I leave all this behind, then I will have nothing. I would have *no* home.

You close by saying, *"I'm staying right here with you"*. And I am too. I, Jason, am staying here. I realize I truly belong right here.

So, thank you so much, Jason, for this poem. Thank you for reasoning with me where my home was and where I belonged. Woven within the five stanzas of your poem, you gave me an understanding. I now can answer my questions. Belonging is a feeling of comfort. It is a word that is used to describe somebody who is comfortable as who they are and comfortable in their own skin. Home to me is the place that I've been raised all my life, the place that is familiar, and the place where I have the most memories. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Leah

Leah
Hull
Grade 7