

Is world peace even possible? Many people don't think so. According to a survey by the Goi Peace Foundation, 72% of Japanese youth aged 10-25 don't believe they will see world peace being achieved in their lifetime. Only 9% remain optimistic. For a long time, I was part of the 72%. I saw peace as something only politicians or diplomats could influence, something far beyond the reach of ordinary people like me.

However, something changed this perspective I had. It was something I've been fortunate to experience throughout my life; cultural exchange.

My family used to host exchange students nearly every year, allowing me to witness cultural exchange firsthand. As a child, I didn't fully grasp its significance. To me, it was simply an exciting opportunity to meet new people. But as I got older, I realized that these interactions meant much more — they were small yet powerful steps toward peace. Let me share a personal story to illustrate this.

This summer, I had the honor of participating in a project called Over the Wall. Founded by the artist Kensuke Miyazaki, this global initiative brings together people from different nations through the universal language of art. Every year in a different country, the project members work with the local people to paint a mural symbolizing unity and hope. When I first learned about the project, I was so inspired that I reached out and asked to join.

This year, the mural was created in Palau to commemorate the 30th anniversary of Japan and Palau's diplomatic relations. The two countries shares history dating back to 1920, when Palau was under Japanese rule during World War II. They renewed diplomatic ties in 1994.

In the project I helped local children paint on the mural. At first, there was a natural distance between us — different ages, cultures, and the complicated history that separated us. But as we painted together something magical happened.

One child asked me, "Is Japan where Totoro is from?" With a smile, I replied, "Yes!" At that moment the walls between us crumbled.

Some people might say: how can such a naive conversation lead to world peace? Well, thanks to that "naive" conversation, I was able to connect with the Palawan children despite our different backgrounds and history. Throughout the project painting together, no one was judged; everyone's contribution was celebrated. In that small world, I saw peace happen through cultural exchange. I realized peace isn't a goal accomplished by great leaders but an accumulation of small connections between people just like us. To simply be and bond with each other not as different sides but as humans. Cultural exchange teaches us the importance of personal connections.

What would happen if all of us were to experience this?

Cultural exchange doesn't always have to involve people from different countries. As for me, I took my first small step toward peace: I started a project called "THINK" with my school friends, where we create magazines and host workshops to exchange cultures within my local community.

Remember the statistics I gave you in the beginning? Now, are you ready to join me in the optimistic 9%? World peace may seem like an impossible goal, but if we remind ourselves that we're simply just human, no strings attached, connected with each other right here right now, peace is achieved.

4番 樋口 恵奈

弘学館中学校

Achieving Peace