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**First Prize Winner Grades 9-12**

ESSAY:

To call the COVID-19 pandemic a crisis of unprecedented proportion is an understatement. Yet navigating this silent killer as it threatens those we love in light of a deplorable increase of anti-Asian racism is none other than Dr. Theresa Tam: a strong leader that never faltered in displaying courage and benevolence to a crippled nation, despite failure, hatred, and loss. For this reason, her tenacity and personal sacrifice inspired Canadians from coast to coast and led us in the fight against the virus and not each other.

As chief public health officer of Canada, Dr. Tam is no amateur in dealing with public health emergencies. However, the coronavirus and the corresponding spike in anti-Asian racism was no ordinary issue. Even while facing death threats, she refused to show weakness and persevered “to [conquer] this epidemic,” for the good of all Canadians.

But even more commendably, Dr. Tam holds the safety and wellbeing of Canadians above her own image and pride. At the start of the pandemic, without the gift of hindsight, Dr. Tam understood the paralyzing potential of alarmism and chose to reassure Canadians when it was all too easy to fall victim to fear and anxiety. That said, when the harsher realities of the virus were exposed, Dr. Tam never hesitated to publicly correct her mistakes, despite the potential to shift blame—a common trend in contemporary politics.

As an Asian-Canadian but also an individual, I am grateful, reassured and inspired by Dr. Tam’s unwavering efforts to protect both Canadian lives and livelihoods. In weakness, she modelled strength. In fear, she modelled valour. In hate, she modelled compassion. And when faced with the biggest crisis Canada has faced in decades, she stood her ground: not to be recognized but to make a difference for you and me.