

Duy Dinh
First Prize Winner Grade 9-12 Category

Essay:

Feeling represented, validated, and respected is a phenomenal feeling.

During times of physical isolation, media has become a source of laughter and hope for many Canadians. For the Asian-Canadian community, Sandra Oh has been a light that has guided us through the highs and lows of the pandemic. More than just a renowned actress, Oh is an inspiration to diasporic Asian youth like myself, who empowers us to dream big and speak up.

Despite being ignored by the acting industry for years, Sandra Oh persevered. With determination and passion, she became the first Korean-Canadian woman to win two Golden Globe Awards. Seeing Oh on-screen gives Asian-Canadian youth like myself hope—hope that one day we can shine in a white-dominated industry.

However, Sandra's impact radiates far beyond the screen. In early 2021, amid a frightening social climate that targeted the Asian diaspora, the actress did not silence herself to maintain face. Following countless racially-motivated attacks in Canada and the United States, she stood tall and led uniting rallies for the Stop Asian Hate movement. She created an "opportunity [for Asian people and allies] to stand together, feel each other," and chant, "I am proud to be Asian." Unafraid to speak her truth, Sandra used her platform to empower a scarred community to heal and remain strong.

On-screen and off-screen, Sandra Oh is an inspiration to all Canadians. Asian-Canadian girls and boys can now look at the screen and finally see someone with their skin tone, their eyes, and their dreams. Asian-Canadian girls and boys can finally say, "that looks like me, that can be me." Asian-Canadian girls and boys can finally feel comfortable making their voices heard. With the help of Sandra Oh, my community and I are proud to be Asian-Canadian.