

## Move the Air 空気を動かす

IMOTO Mei 井本 萌愛

Kobe Municipal Fukiai High School 神戸市立葺合高等学校

2nd Year 2学年

The air in the art room was heavy. I could hear students whispering behind us. We rolled up our sleeves to start mixing the oil paint and that's when I saw the countless wrist cuts on Audrie's arm. I was speechless. I always knew she was getting bullied, but naive me thought that it wasn't such a big deal until that moment. As the bullies continued to whisper I wanted to speak up, to say that something wasn't right ... but I couldn't. I didn't want to go against the crowd. The next day Audrie didn't come to school. We were told that she was at the hospital.

Have you heard the phrase 『空気を読む』? It means to read the air, to feel the atmosphere and to not do anything that is against the majority. It's common sense, like in class when the teacher asks us if we have any questions. Even if students have one, we tend to stay quiet, read the air and not ask. I'm sure most of you have experienced this. The social psychologist Solomon Asch conducted an experiment to see if social pressure could affect a person's actions. He asked the test subject to point at the longest line, which was obviously line A. However, when all other people around him start pointing at line B, the subject changed his answer to match them. When under social pressure, people tend to ignore their own judgment and follow the crowd.

You might be thinking, "What does this have to do with Audrie? What happened to her is the bullies' fault". According to the Japan Times, about 114,000 students suffered from bullying in 2018. We always search for someone to blame. But the main cause of bullying is not the school, not the teacher, nor even the bully. It's something far more terrifying. It's the air. Circling around each person in the room, yet invisible. When a bunch of people move, you unconsciously find yourself following them, no matter what they believe is inhumane or cruel. Ignoring bullying by going with the flow, enables it to continue, until it goes too far. My friend nearly died.

So ask yourself, do you want to be the kind of person who does nothing and sits on the sidelines? In my case, I didn't do what I felt was right, because of fear and social pressure. Anytime you feel some type of fear that's preventing you from doing what you think is right, imagine yourself 10 years later, and think about if you would regret it or not. I want you to tell yourself: "I fear regret more than I fear failure." John F Kennedy once said that "evil happens when good people do nothing". Even if you aren't the bully, doing nothing is the same as accepting it. I am not saying that reading the air is always bad, but don't let yourself be swept away by the current of social pressure. Trust your own judgment. Stand up for others. Do something.

If I had refused to just read the air and instead did what I thought was right. Audrie wouldn't have had to be in the hospital. Air is all around us, we can't just avoid it, but we can control it. What I want every person in this room to know is that before it's too late, we have to take action and make decisions on our own to stop bullying, and not always say "yes" to the crowd. By showing courage and trusting our own judgment, we can put a stop to bullying, and yes, even save lives. Don't just read the air, move the air.