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Honors English 9

High School Hierarchy

I cried yesterday. I was sobbing: red, wet, puffy, and gross because of the academic competition I face in school every day. I don't mean to do it, compare myself to other students, but it's inevitable when we're all "graded" and forced onto a scale of intelligence. Though the hierarchy is meant to be kept secret, the reality is that as a student it is actually quite clear, and no one wants to be at the bottom. That's a dilemma within itself, but the other issue is the fact that I attend a Quaker school.

Being in a Quaker environment—although I do not necessarily identify as a Quaker—has caused me to adopt some of the Quaker values. One of those is the Quaker testimony of equality. According to this testimony, "We believe there is that of God in every person, and thus we believe in human equality before God." Following those guidelines, what my grades are compared to the grades of other students doesn't matter because we are all different and therefore have different strengths and weaknesses. What someone else is skilled at may not be what I'm skilled at, but both are equal and valid. Therefore any competition in just one particular area does not define who we are as people.

It is very easy to lose sight of that when engaging in competition. Although I'm aware my grades do not define me, it is very easy to start believing they do. I am a dedicated student and really care about my academic performance, almost more than I should. Even when I get a B

I'm disappointed in myself, although I know that is not necessarily a bad grade. In a Quaker school the system is designed to make grades seem as insignificant as possible. We are constantly told that the grades on our report card do not define us as people or even as students. Not only that, but we are encouraged to support our peers and help them instead of dragging them down, with things like peer tutoring programs and study groups. The environment is much different than that of a public school, which is more competitive in all aspects.

I feel as though comparing myself academically to other students can be unhealthy competition, but it also drives me to be better and to work harder. Attending a Quaker school has made me question the belief that people who have higher grades are "better" than those with lower grades. Your report card is not everything. There are plenty of successful artists, musicians, athletes, and influencers who did not have the best grades in high school or even did not attend college. We all have something unique and special inside of us, and what makes me an individual is not what makes someone else an individual, hence the word "individual." There is a specifically Quaker way of looking at competition. Quakers are less concerned about who is better and who is worse, but instead engage in competition to see where their skills currently fall in a specific field. One area does not define who you are. If you have not found your strength, keep searching and keep working. Eventually you will discover that passion and run with it.

So yes, I cried yesterday. I cried for a good hour or so and spoke with some amazing teachers who gave me calming advice and helped the tears dry. And only after they dried was I able to think, process, and look inside myself to discover exactly who I am in this great game of life. The answer I came to was simple: I am not sure yet, and that's okay. I made peace with that because I still have time to figure it out and try new things until I finally find what really sticks

with me. For now I will continue to work, improve, and keep positive for both myself and the people around me. As long as I have my family, friends, and everyone else who cares for me and helps me during this journey, things can never be too bad.