

Mrs. Gefei Zhang

I would like to nominate Mrs. Gefei Zhang for Mensa's Distinguished Educator Award.

I'd committed to learning Mandarin when I was very young and had had a few teachers; they were all the sit-down-and-take-notes type, which at age 4 would have been a tall ask for me.

After some looking around for a new teacher, my mom found *the one*. She saw a website called funstudy.org and thought that maybe that was what she was looking for. When I met Ms. Gefei, I thought she was the absolute best... and that's probably why she *still* teaches me to this day.

The Mandarin classes themselves, which are still by far the most interesting courses I take, are only a small part of what makes her the teacher that has the most impact on my life. First, she taught me one-on-one, which helped me progress at my own speed for the first time in my life. When she formed a group, she never exceeded around five kids, which made understanding the materials much easier. She also helped me pass HSK 1, the first level of an official Chinese government proficiency test.

Second, she has also helped me embrace all my other passions. She encouraged my artistic side by getting me to draw something to get printed and sold as an official Christmas card. She tried to start my ill-fated singing career when I was seven. She helped me overcome stage fright when she let me MC her organization's annual showcase... In Mandarin. Those showcases were, in retrospect, some of the best days of my life.

Mrs. Gefei also made me fall back in love with writing during the quarantine when she suggested that I write for this competition on journal entries during the pandemic. At first, I had to be... coerced. Eventually, though, I started looking forward to those entries more than anything else, since they helped break up the monotony.

When I won, I was shocked. I was even more so when she got my story illustrated, and ultimately published in a book along with other winning entries. As someone who loves writing, it was a beautiful experience to see the words that I wrote printed in a shiny hardcover.

Mrs. Gefei is a huge part of who I am, and has helped me learn so much about who I want to be. She is one of the best people I have ever met, she goes above and beyond for her students. She could have just taught me in the allotted time, but instead she teaches me every day, motivating me to do things I would never have thought of and never had the courage to do without guidance.

She is the single greatest teacher I have had, because she is the only one who realized I needed enrichment, and provided in full, not only in her classes, but in the many other ways she helped me grow as a person over the years.

Anya Figlarz-Grassino