Essay by Kevin Ji

English has never been my best subject. As a child, I only had the patience to read through picture books. On a whim I signed up for the Whitefish Bay Public Library's summer reading program. As I was introduced to my first fantastical worlds of Percy Jackson and the Warriors series, my stance on reading changed for the rest of my life. I came back to the library over and over again, determined to find out what happened next in the latest story I was reading. My imagination ran wild with theories and what-if scenarios of the characters I had grown attached to. The joy of immersing myself in a futuristic world was unmatched. I came back as many times as I could, so much so that my parents forfeited their library card to me. I mainly read as a way to relax, but the upgrade from picture books to fantasy and science fiction novels improved my grasp on the English language as well. Essays at school were no longer a slog. Synonyms and different sentence structures became easier to come up with. The novels that libraries provided not only gave me a new hobby, but also helped improve my academic performance as well.

Through reading, I was even able to make new friends in groups like Battle of the Books and literature-focused summer camps. The public library even gave me my first community service experience. During middle school, I started to volunteer for the same program that got me into reading. I logged numerous hours at the desk handing out prizes and leveling up other kids.

My life has gotten busy throughout my junior and senior years of high school. I now use both the public library and the high school library as quiet study spaces where I can gather my thoughts and focus. The time spent in study rooms has gotten me through multiple tests and projects throughout my academic career. Now as I get closer to graduating high school, I will always be thankful for the magical space that libraries provided for the majority of my life. Libraries and their vast selection of books and stories offered me a place to relax, imagine, and study. I could not imagine what my life would be like if I hadn't signed up for that summer program all those years ago.