



## MY FIRST CLASS AT SNOWDEN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

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After I bid my family a heartbroken good-bye, I set my feet on the land of my dreams: the United States. Before that point, I had imagined the romantic scenes, which I had seen many times in movies, where I say a happy good-bye to my husband, who drops me off at the airport. To my disappointment, the movie-romance just isn't for me. When I finally got to the airport, I couldn't control my tears. As a result, I didn't end up bidding my husband the picture-perfect good-bye that had been in my mind for such a long time.

Then came my first class... another great disappointment.

As most people know, the first class of each school year is very important for a teacher. There is no doubt that I had been preparing for it for a very long time. I had prepared for it, in some way or another, since I was informed in March that I would go to the United States as an exchange teacher. The long time to prepare as well as the experience of working as a teacher for more than twenty years made me feel extremely qualified for the job. What's more, I was recently honored with second prize in the National Teaching Competition. So, it was reasonable for me to believe that I would receive a lot of applause at the end of my first class in America.

Early in the morning on the first day of class, I dressed myself in traditional Chinese clothing, wearing a Chinese qipao, and even using a little make-up. When I arrived outside my classroom I could hear sounds of talk, laughter and movement. I went in and walked directly to my desk with an air of superiority, feeling strong, confident, and determined to lead a good class. I pretended to cough in order to attract the students' attention so that they would stop talking and become quiet. They heard my entrance and noticed my appearance, but to my surprise, seeing me made little difference, for as I arranged my teaching materials, they kept on talking, laughing and even using bad language. Having prepared my materials, I greeted the students, "Good morning" with a smiling face. To my surprise, there was no response. In China, all of the students would stand up and respond, "Good morning, Miss." I repeated my greetings with an embarrassing smiling face a few times, but there was only a lazy and unwilling response, "Hi, Miss." Confidence began to ooze out of me. After taking my first careful look at my class, I found I was in quite a different situation than what I had expected.

Compared with my class in China, my class in America is a small one made up of 25 students, the majority being African-American students. There are two Caucasian students in the class and I am the only one who is Asian. Later, I was told that five of the 25 students have special needs and can't behave themselves, and two of them are regarded as real troublemakers by most of their teachers.

After taking the attendance I hung up a map of China and was about to make a brief introduction when a girl with a very sharp voice shouted, "Miss, can I use the bathroom?"

I gave her permission unwillingly. For one thing, she had been busy talking with her friends just a few moments earlier, when she should have been getting ready for class. Also, in China students raise their hand and sign to me shyly and secretly to use the restroom. They don't shout across the room.

Finally, I moved on to the next step. But, after two or three sentences, another loud voice (which could probably have been heard about two miles away) interrupted me once again. It was a boy named Devon. When I turned to



him, he looked at me strangely and said “ Miss, look at Jamal. He is funny!” He was right. Jamal was making faces at me. What made me angry was that Jamal continued doing it, ignoring me completely! The whole class laughed. Nobody thought it was wrong.

In spite of that, I tried to keep the class moving. Next was the most interesting part: Chinese martial arts. I mistakenly thought the students would show great interest in it, but no. Most of them were sleeping or sitting there with their heads on their folded arms and with their eyes half open. Even worse, one of the students just walked out of the classroom without asking permission or even telling me where he was going. Before I had time to run out the door after him, another student danced his way to the trash while singing. Such was my first period at Snowden International School. It’s obvious that my first class ended up a failure.