

**Second Place**  
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## **The Lotus Flower**

My grandmother watched from her rocking chair as I mused admiringly over the belongings placed on her dark, teak wood desk. Old photos, antique talismans, jade pendants, and elephant statuettes decorated the polished surface. As I explored more, I began to notice a recurring emblem among her possessions.

“What are all these flowers?” I asked curiously.

“Bua Lotus flowers,” she responded. “Represent hope and purity in Thai culture.” She smiled thoughtfully.

I soon learned the full significance of the flower from my grandmother. She described the lotus flower as prolific and historically revered by natives in Thailand because of its inspiring life cycle.

The lotus begins as a seed, growing from beneath the murky water. This bud often faces the worst of conditions, and it must make its way through the mud, muck, and insect-filled water in order to unveil its fragile beauty to the world above the surface. My motivation stems from this stage of the flower. In order to blossom through wisdom, we must endure hardships. Even when negative circumstances are swamped over us, we must look up towards our goals. Not all buds will bloom; not all individuals will succeed. It is those who stay focused on their paths that will be fruitful. I exemplify this philosophy by avoiding the stigma of negative influences and keeping my priorities in order.

Because I learned the metaphor of the lotus flower early in my childhood, I have been able to branch off from these foundations to develop my own applied ideologies so I may flourish in a way that keeps me connected to my cultural roots.

Through the lotus flower, the Thai people find familiar ideals that are integrated into their identities. They are united under the common, yet powerful symbol of the lotus, promoting peace within their community. Each family, community, even nation has its own symbols familiar to all members. Even as Americans, as culturally diverse as we are, we maintain the historically significant bald eagle, uniting us under our freedom. Applying this philosophy, although idealistic in nature, to the global level, finding a common link between us, we could move one step closer to world peace. Many would argue that there will always remain differing feelings so strongly rooted in each of us that they cannot be altered. Is it not then possible for each of us to have a common symbol so strongly rooted into our identities that it could one day unite us?