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### Why I am Thankful for Gifted Education

I had never seen *The Stepford Wives*, but in my eighth-grade gifted class, I quickly fell into what my other gifted classmates dubbed “The Stepford Group.” We were the highlighted recipients of teachers’ adulation, perfectionists and grade-grubbers – not unlike the ostensibly flawless characters from the iconic film. As a sheltered homeschooler whose family had relocated eight times, I was accustomed to relying on my own independence. But my paradigm was challenged as I became frustrated with the characteristics of my “Stepford Group”: pride, obstinacy, and close-mindedness – the qualities for which my mother frequently admonished me. So, I escaped this competitive atmosphere and discovered an alternative learning environment.

I found myself accepted by those who had mocked me as a “Stepford.” In this new world, the world of true cooperative learning, the assignment itself was unimportant; we were all confident in our abilities to memorize and regurgitate textbook chapters. The real lessons came from each other and brought the textbook to life. Each of us approached the assignment with a unique insight, and the collection of our perspectives yielded an exquisite array of thoughts and ideas, unparalleled by our individual input. I was humbled.

Now, four years later, our mutual admiration society is closer than ever. We take all the same classes, eat lunch at our “nerd table,” explain the inner workings of calculus, compare grades, and argue whose letterman is geekier. We are similar in our academic focus, but drastically different in our approaches. Our teachers, aware of our fierce opinions and ardor, love to provoke us and observe the fireworks as we animatedly discuss the day’s political buzzword. Several weeks ago, we began discussing Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience” only to find that when the hour was up, we had sparred our way through the threat of federal control and the War on Terror, and soared on to the religious state of our nation, abortion, the ideal woman of the Cult of Domesticity, and the oppression of Poland throughout history. Now I truly understand the advantage I gain from respecting and evaluating the views of others. By sharing my opinion, I receive tenfold more to consider.

Last spring, I watched *The Stepford Wives* for the first time and contemplated the lessons I’ve learned from at my “nerd table.” My journey to appreciate humility, respect, and diversity has not only defined my high school experience, but also will prove invaluable in future interactions with my collegiate peers. This journey would not have been possible without gifted education. If I had never been tested for gifted, I would never have met my mutual admiration society. Though my gifted group will be scattered across the country next fall, I know we will always stay in close contact. We share a bond much stronger than the traditional high school friendship. The gifted program has helped us to become intelligent leaders who are not only confident in ourselves, but also in the strength of cooperation and humility. We could not be more thankful.

