

NSF Youth Ambassador: Thrusha Puttaraju

Sometimes the most unexpected things bring us the greatest happiness of all. That's why I can boldly claim that this summer, I was truly the happiest person on the planet.

It was month of April, and I naturally grew more eager for my upcoming visit to Karnataka, India; where my family is from. I longingly awaited meeting family, procuring new clothes, devouring traditional foods, explore historical places and most of all: fulfilling a new dream from long time to ***motivate someone in my life***. Soon after the annual NSF competitions in March, I came across an opportunity that NSF offered, where high school/college students from America can become a Youth Ambassador. A Youth ambassador would share their experience and knowledge by conducting workshops on interesting subjects that are useful for students. I immediately signed up by writing an essay explaining why I will be a good candidate. In the weeks following, after a month of waiting, I was at-last given the splendid dream-like opportunity to become an NSF Youth Ambassador! I was so enraptured for this window of opportunity.

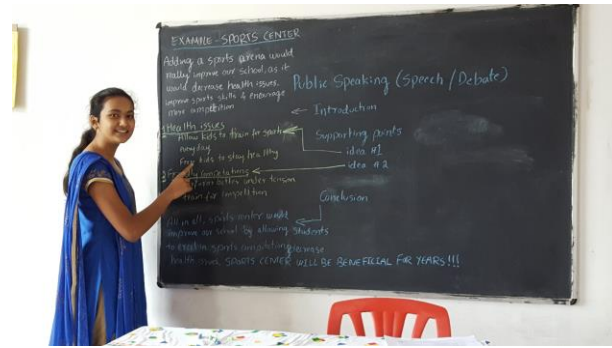
Being so excited for this new experience, I spent my next few weeks to prepare for workshop material for essay writing, public speaking and spelling bee, which are three extremely vital educational topics that every student should attain in order to reach future success. Meanwhile, in my school, I started a fundraiser to raise money and awareness to motivate my fellow schoolmates. I was not only supported by my school principal and teachers for taking up such a tough but Nobel role, my schoolmates supported me by raising around \$150 to cover any expenses for workshop materials. My parents also pitched in and sponsored additional materials such as dictionaries, school supply and prizes.

After months of preparation and a flight to India, I presented my workshop plans at a government aided school called SJM Middle School. One of the good school which educates students from rural villages surrounding Chitradurga, a mid-size town in the state of Karnataka, India. With the alliance of an amazingly flexible headmistress of the SJM School, I went over my self-prepared workshops. Impressed as she was, I received the astounding chance to conduct workshop for 150 students from 6th, 7th and 8th grades combined, for a week.

The first day of my workshop, I barely could find the courage to introduce myself. Even after all of this preparation, nothing could compose me for my initial fear as I was constantly thinking about how I am going to establish that connection and get their attention. After all, I just completed my 8th grade and almost same as their age. However, once I started with my introduction and why I am chosen as NSF Youth Ambassador, I could already see curiosity in every student's eyes, and I never wanted to stop!



I started my workshop with essay writing; went over what an essay is and talked up different types of essays. Together we dissected and examined a variety of introductions, body paragraphs, conclusions like a detective; to allow for stronger essays and less common errors. To spruce up the lesson, I gave them colorful highlighters to highlight important notes from my pocket. By the end of class, upon their request, they eagerly challenged themselves to a persuasive essay competition with the topic, "How can I improve my school?" We brainstormed few ideas together, until each student choose their own topic and eagerly started constructing their essays. Some common topics were recycling, adding a sport center and big support for "Swachha Bharath - Keep India Clean". Each student was determined to outdo and outwit their companions in this unique competition. The resulting essays were top notch!



Another important educational skill every student should attain is public speaking, which was exactly what my second lesson was all about. It was a new and exciting topic each student was willingly eager to endeavor. To effectively show everybody how to write and present a speech, I went over some simple but most effective steps that I follow to prepare for my competitions. After some analyzation, and sharing my top tips to success, I confronted them with the challenge of writing and performing their own speeches through a public speaking for later that week. Students from all three grades bravely accepted this challenge!!! I was so proud of all the students, who were able to conquer their stage fear and present an amazing speech in front of me, their teachers, and their Headmistresses.



Another vital skill all students should perfect is spelling, which was covered on my third lesson. To add some fun, I reinforced all of the rules through a spelling scramble game, a word search, and a crossword to finish that day off. All of the students loved playing games, trying to prove their new excelling spelling skills to me:

"Teacher! Teacher! I finished first!" or "Teacher I got them all right!" Seeing their enthusiasm made me think I might have influenced someone in my life.

Every minute I spent at SJM, each student respected me for coming all the way from USA and sharing my experience. I was touched by their welcoming attitude, and happiness for learning. Daily when I left, students would come out of their classrooms to exclaim goodbye, as I passed by in the

halls. Students and Teachers thanked me for choosing their school, but really I should be the one thanking them for giving me an opportunity. As it is with their amazing cooperation at SJM, that has allowed me to make at least a small impact on the lives of 150 incredible students and motivate many more students to participate in similar program.

Many of the students I taught barely had aspirations or time for learning resourceful skills outside of school. None of the children were informed about the key topics, that I had covered, that could help them towards their future. But that didn't stop them from trying. Every time a student shouted out an answer or smiled at their success, I felt so unbelievably happy, and proud of their learning capabilities. Their determination to study hard, active participation, and their eagerness to outsmart their companions made them all the smartest of their school. The student's such spontaneous responses to my teaching from day one, not only encouraged me to continue teaching to make a difference, but also excited me that they wanted to learn.

I hope with my role as NSF Youth Ambassador, I was able to inspire the students to work on their core skills along with the classroom subjects, and motivated them to participate in similar activities to spread the knowledge. And every other student, starting from back at my middle school to everyone in my friends circle, I hope I have influenced them to step up to these challenges, and spend their time to share knowledge for those who could use it the most.



Though it takes a lot of hard work and commitment, it was truly rewarding and fun experience. Seeing their work ethic to their outstanding common sense, or their ability to capture things so quickly to their curiosity to connect with other parts of the world, I can honestly say, that the SJM students have also influenced me.

Thank you so much NSF for this unimaginable opportunity, and my parents for pitching in to help supporting me and attending to all of my needs. I cannot wait to do it all again!!!