

## Instant Ramen

**Pour 500ml of water into a saucepan, and bring to a boil.**

When I first set foot into a boarding school of around 200 students from over 100 countries, I was overwhelmed. All of us had lived a different reality. One girl had never stepped outside their country, let alone their village. Across the room, sat a girl who had travelled more number of countries than the years she has lived for.

I had realized- even in English, we weren't speaking the same language.

So when a housemate had sat down, Indonesian instant noodles in hand, a wave of unfounded nostalgia washed upon an anxiety-filled me. As my strangers-turned-family and I feasted on this tiny culinary delight, I remember feeling so welcomed. Something no combination of words or number of offhand hugs could offer.

**Add noodles, soup base, and vegetable mix.**

Perhaps it was October when my room had our first fight. Academic stress, coupled with eleven extracurriculars, was starting to get to me, and I could tell, it was getting to them too. We were exhausted. Our roommate offered a smile, as she brought a bowl of spicy instant Korean ramen, poached egg and scallions garnished on top. We ate the bowl in silence, but through her slight nods of understanding, it was like she had said everything.

A few months later, she had slumped down, in the same way I had previously. I carefully mixed the dry noodles into a boiling Japanese pork broth, before I had carefully brought it down to our room to eat. It didn't solve her problems, of course, but I'd like to think that was the reason for her grin the following day.

**Cook for 4 - 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.**

We approached May the following year, and my roommates and I are sullenly sitting in the center of the room. Denying that I wasn't crying and it was *just my dust allergies*, my emotions started to well up. We sat surrounding an assortment of Thai instant cup noodles with added Nepalese spice and stared down at them. How an affordable package of artificially flavored, greasy, and -unfortunately- very unhealthy noodles, were able to bring us together so well had perplexed me. I think above that though, food was our universal language. When we ate, we didn't need an excuse to have small talk. Cooking and eating together is a tool of communication that had transcended all barriers of cultural, socio-political, and economic difference. It had unified us together.

Two years later, we are in senior year.

**Remove from heat and serve.**

Nail-biting, wide-eyed, shy girls fill our common room, as if they were a reflection of our past selves. One girl is just barely grasping the English language, and the other has never spoken anything but.

We try to crack a laugh but alas, nothing.

That is until, the same scent of fried garlic and soy sauce travels through the kitchen once again. It's such a mundane snack, and something we take so much for granted. Yet, now we know of its ability to bring us together.

As the girls dig into this MSG-filled concoction, a giggle escapes their lips.

I have a feeling that these girls are going to be okay.

[539 words]