



An Interview with Evelyn Leung

- The AAPI Youth Art & Writing Program Founder

Interview conducted by Jeannie Salomon (Founder & Executive Director).

Interviewer: What inspired you to start the AAPI Youth Art & Writing Program? Was there a specific moment that made you think, “We need this”?

Evelyn: I realized that in school, we learn very little about AAPI history, and when we do, it’s usually very brief and not touched upon. As I became more involved in an AAPI youth leadership group, I learned that many AAPI students in other schools don’t feel seen or heard. Hearing their experiences made me realize there needed to be a space where people could share their stories, feel represented, and know they are not alone.

Interviewer: Why did you choose art and writing as the way to tell AAPI stories?

Evelyn: Art and writing let people express things that are hard to say out loud, since not everyone is comfortable speaking up in class or in public, but through drawing, painting, or writing, people can share emotions, memories, and identity in a powerful and personal way.

Interviewer: What does “youth leadership” mean to you?

Evelyn: Youth leadership is a way for students to take initiative, speak up, and create change instead of just letting adults take on that responsibility.



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My questions on her fundraising strategy.

Interviewer: What made you decide to use GoFundMe—and how did you set your goal?

Evelynn: GoFundMe was easy to use and accessible to people I knew. I set a \$2,000 goal because it felt realistic enough to launch the first program. I also did a quick calculation to make sure it could cover basic awards. It's not perfect, but it's a meaningful first step for starting the first program of its kind on a national level.

Interviewer: How did you get people to donate (texting friends, posting on Instagram, asking adults, etc.)?

Evelynn: I texted friends and family, posted on AAPI Instagram pages, and talked to adults who support AAPI causes. I explained why the program mattered to me personally.

Interviewer: What was the most surprising part of fundraising? How many people were willing to help?

Evelynn: The most surprising part was receiving donations from people I didn't even know, didn't expect, or hadn't talked to in a long time. It reminded me that many people care deeply about supporting youth and community-based work.



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My questions on the program's impact and meaning.

Interviewer: What do you hope a young person feels when they see the program or participate?

Evelyn: I hope they feel proud of their identity and confident that their voice matters. I also hope they feel encouraged to share their story and realize that their experiences are important and worth being heard.

Interviewer: Why do you think programs like this matter right now?

Evelyn: Programs like this matter because AAPI communities still face misunderstanding and invisibility. And giving people a platform to change that matters a lot right now.

Interviewer: What's one AAPI story (your own or someone else's) that you think more people should hear?

Evelyn: I think more people should hear the everyday stories of AAPI families, such as immigrant parents working long hours, students translating for their families, and young people balancing multiple cultures. These experiences are common, but they are rarely talked about in classrooms or media, even though they shape who we are. There's also a stereotype that all Asians are good at math or come from wealthy families, which ignores the many AAPI students who struggle and don't fit that image.



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My Questions on the Program's vision and challenges for Evelyn.

Interviewer: Why did you want a writing and art competition as the first program?

Evelyn: It's a simple way to invite many voices and make participation open and accessible.

Interviewer: After the competition, what programs would you like to see happen in this program?

Evelyn: After the competition, I'd like to expand the program to include workshops, exhibitions, and mentorship opportunities for AAPI youth. The most immediate next step would be student-led speaker events or interviews, in which students invite community members, artists, or activists to share their experiences. I'd also like to develop a mentorship program that connects AAPI students with older students or professionals who can offer guidance, encouragement, and support.

Interviewer: What was hard about doing this on your own—and how did you push through?

Evelyn: Not knowing where to start and feeling unsure at times was hard but I pushed through by reminding myself why this mattered and by asking for guidance and support when I needed it.



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Interviewer: What did you learn about leadership from this experience?

Evelynn: I learned that leadership isn't about having all the answers and instead is about caring, trying, and asking for help when needed. I also don't really see this as "being a leader" but rather like something that needed to happen for our community, and I just stepped in to do it.

Interviewer: What advice would you give another teen who wants to start something meaningful but doesn't know where to begin?

Evelynn: I would tell them to start small, ask questions, and don't be afraid to take the first step. You don't need everything figured out from the beginning. What matters is caring enough to try and believing that your idea can make a difference.

Closing Questions for Evelynn.

Interviewer: What are three words your friends would use to describe you?

Evelynn: Wise, kind, and creative.

More on the next page.



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Interviewer: What's next for the program—and how can the community support you?

Evelynn: I hope to grow the program and reach more students. The community can support by sharing the program, mentoring, and encouraging youth participation.

Interviewer: What would you like to say to everyone who donated?

Evelynn: Thank you for believing in young people and supporting our voices. This wouldn't exist without you!

Let's keep Evelynn's vision alive by [sharing this competition](#) with eligible candidates you know who are students in grades 7 to 12.

Or [volunteer](#) to be an evaluator if you are a teacher, professor, or educator.

Or [donate](#) to our cause by using our [donate page](#).

You can respond to Evelynn by filling out the Google Form [here](#). What advice or comments do you want to share with her?