



chance of a lifetime

Anika Sinha

Senior



Anika Sinha is currently a sophomore in high school. She attended GEMS Camp for the first time in the summer before 8th grade. Her family had recently moved to Texas from Florida. She was making the transition to a new community at the same time many girls feel out of place and lonely. As an admitted introvert, Anika found a welcoming place at GEMS Camp and has learned to put herself out there in ways she wouldn't have dared before.

Anika has always liked science and math in school. Her father is an engineer so she knows something about that field but she didn't know any women engineers before meeting them at GEMS Camp. It is easier for her to see herself as a future engineer now. She was thinking about becoming a pharmacologist and felt herself lucky to meet a practicing pharmacologist, particularly a woman of color, at the camp. After learning more about the vast opportunities open to her, Anika is now leaning toward a career that combines medicine and engineering, perhaps biomedical engineering.

Two service learning projects that Anika participated in were the STEM Fair at the local library and helping Bon Ton Farms. The STEM Fair was fun because she got to see other girls, other people of color in the community, be interested in STEM. Many attendees asked if they would be doing this again. Bon Ton Farms is an urban farm that seeks to redress the problem of food deserts. Anika found it fulfilling to participate in coming up with recommendations for Bon Ton Farms to better serve its community. Fortunately, Anika and her family have not experienced a lack of fresh food personally. She appreciated the opportunity to help solve such an important social problem using her STEM skills.

Anika has learned about herself and about leadership at the GEMS Camp. Previously she thought of leadership as something you did by being above others. She learned that leadership is more about being part of a team and recognizing the skills that each person brings to the problem at hand. Through a personality exercise at GEMS, she learned that she is a data-oriented person but that others are more people oriented. She recognized that everyone has different talents and that we all need to respect each other's importance.



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One woman who made a strong impression on Anika is Ms. Alexis Clark, president of the GEMS Camp Board of Directors, and a product manager for HILTI North America, a supplier to the construction and energy industries. Anika noted that Ms. Clark carries herself in a very confident manner, conveying to the world and especially her male co-workers, that her opinion matters. Ms. Clark's example and encouragement helps Anika and all the GEMS campers see that they should speak up and that they can make a difference.

The Founder and Director of the GEMS Camp, Ms. Saki Milton, receives high praise from Anika. On a practical level, Anika learned a memorization technique from Ms. Saki that she uses to quickly learn the names of all the campers. Anika finds the technique useful in learning terms in Chemistry class. This example is emblematic of the GEMS Camp way – the girls learn something practical while absorbing the intent behind it. Ms. Saki wants to emphasize the individuality and importance of each camper by making sure she knows them by name. Anika appreciates that Ms. Saki cares enough to identify each girl's learning style and to recognize what each one needs to develop to be their best. Anika was shy and hesitated to speak up before Ms. Saki and other GEMS staff encouraged her by assuring her that her opinion matters. The positive feedback Anika received at GEMS convinced her she was good enough. The GEMS Camp provides a safety net for the girls. They are pushed to be their best, not by embarrassing them or focusing on what they lack, but by celebrating their strengths. GEMS girls are inspired by guest speakers, staff, and each other to work hard, which leads to success and a well-deserved level of confidence.

Anika encourages all girls to attend GEMS Camp even if they don't know if they are particularly interested in STEM subjects. GEMS is about making connections and it provides a great opportunity to learn. Meeting successful career women is valuable for girls who are able to see their potential future selves represented by the diversity of the speakers. Anika was able to see a successful Indian woman in a STEM role leading her to think, "this can be me."



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In 7th grade, Anika was in a gifted class with 20 boys and 6 girls. She noted that she and the other girls didn't speak much in that class. In 9th grade, after going to GEMS Camp for two summers, Anika was confident about pursuing an advanced science class even though some other girls were dropping out of the upper level classes. She also participated in a science fair that was dominated by male participants. Armed with a greater confidence in her speaking skills because of GEMS, Anika was able to successfully present her project at the fair and was proud to have achieved an honorable mention. Anika has already seen changes in herself and is enthusiastic about what she can accomplish in a future STEM career. She credits the GEMS Camp for her new healthy sense of confidence. GEMS has already affected her school year performance, and she expects it will have a lifelong influence on her.

I always had this idea that leadership was about being above someone, or being the top dog, instead of being with the people you are working over. When you are leading a group, it is better to be part of the group and talking with them and getting to know them personally. It is not only about using your skills as a leader to help bring them together but using the skills of the other people in your group to come together and form a better group.

One of the activities we did, we analyzed ourselves in a splash pattern. I tend to be more on the blue/green side while some of the girls were more on the red/yellow side. It was interesting. I knew some of the girls and worked with them before and they were characteristics that I had picked up on from them. It was seeing that and seeing how we could use our own skills. Some are more people oriented and I am more data oriented. Seeing how those could come together in a way that we can all respect each other and create a product that is overall helpful was interesting. You don't get to see a lot of leadership experiences and to develop them in regular school. GEMS Camp is very student oriented and we are able to take charge of what we are doing.



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When I first went to GEMS Camp, I had lived in Texas for less than a year. I felt on the outside of everything and I didn't feel like I fit in. It was hard because, in 6th and 7th grade is when you make friends that will take you through middle school. But my first time at GEMS Camp, I met someone who had been a complete stranger to me and who had very different life experiences than me. We became best friends and we still talk. Since there were only a few other girls in my grade at camp, I knew I had made these friends who would be friends for a long time. That was really important because I had just moved.

Ms. Saki has a really good eye, finding those who are more introverted and who is more extroverted. She pushed me to start talking more. She, along with the mentors, try to push us together and nudge us to each other so we don't just depend on them. We would more depend on our group and that would become our safety net.

Before going to GEMS, I like math and science as school subjects and I had a little experience with STEM because my dad is an engineer along with many of the men in my family. But none of the women are engineers. I thought "I like these subjects but I don't think this is the right path for me because they are all men. What am I going to do?" Seeing a program dedicated to girls, and girls who are a minority, it is like seeing yourself in their shoes. It is super rare to see that.

I learned more about STEM. It was more math and science as school subjects to me. At GEMS, I saw how those concepts could be applied to building catapults and how catapults can be used in the real world. I saw how geometry can be used in building dams. We usually have school learning and outside of school learning, but now I can actually apply the knowledge from my school into real world problems.

There were a lot of engineers who were brought in as well as other people who were doctors who used their STEM degrees to apply engineering in medicine. I decided that I would rather pursue an engineering degree as an undergraduate and then go into medicine. That was something I never considered before. It was opening up new pathways, new types of engineers. Seeing that to build an oil platform, you need multiple types of engineers was not something I had an understanding of, because it is not something that was readily available.



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Knowing that I am more visual and auditory and that I need to connect those two things has helped me. I don't like being told to just do something, I like seeing an example. The way Ms. Saki caters to everyone's learning styles has helped me better talk to others when working on group projects in school. Saying it out loud and showing them how to do it and enabling them to ask questions so they have an engaging dialogue with me, helps me with group projects.

I was super introverted. If you asked me to do an interview in 7th grade, I would have said no. I would have let my mom deal with it. I never felt that my opinion mattered or that it was special. Being told that you can speak, you can talk, your opinion matters is not always something you hear in a classroom in school because there are more kids in the class. Because GEMS is fairly small, you get that one on one attention and you also have a mentor who gives you that attention.

I hold myself to high expectations naturally, but sometimes I feel like I never accomplish things. For me, at GEMS, I was getting feedback that I was good enough which was important to me because I don't usually accept that of myself. But Ms. Saki tells me, "you're doing well." Whenever she sees someone struggling she doesn't embarrass them. Instead of pointing out what is wrong, Ms. Saki will ask "does everyone agree," and spreads it out across the whole group, reinforcing that this is your safety net. If you feel you are doing something wrong, you can go back to them. She doesn't focus on our bad parts, she wants us to strengthen them but she lets us know what our good parts are. While we have them, we need to work on our bad things but she doesn't reference them as bad things, those are our weaknesses and we need to work on them, but she focuses on our strengths.

GEMS is not a one and done experience. You go there for a week or two, but it affects you for the school year and for the rest of your life. A lot of girls have returned to the GEMS Camp and I will too. I know that it is something I will do regardless of where I am. It's a lifelong thing and I am glad that I can carry it with me for the rest of my life.