

WHAT IS THE ALISSA JOHNSON STORY?

Alissa Johnson has been at SCIS Hongqiao for the past 4 years. She is currently in 10th grade and is trying to find a way to take as many Higher Level IB courses as humanly possible, while balancing her time with the World Scholars Cup Team, Basketball team, and drama club. Recently, I was able to get Alissa to sit down with me and talk about HQ life in Shanghai.

What is Alissa Johnson story? I heard you're American but really French...or is it the other way around? How did you end up at SCIS?

Well... that's a tough question. I was born in Paris and grew up speaking French in school, Russian with my nanny, and English with my parents. When I was nine, my parents decided that they'd had enough of being stationary, and told me that we were moving to Shanghai. I was horrified – I mean, who wants to move to a country renowned for overpopulation and air pollution? In my time here in Shanghai, however, I have come to realize that even though Shanghai is certainly *different* from Paris, it isn't by any means *worse*. I've had so many opportunities here thanks to the cultural diversity of the city... and I've learned a few things about the unreliability of international stereotypes!

Thinking back to when you first got here four years ago—would the Alissa then recognize you now?

I'm a lot more outgoing in Shanghai than I ever was in Paris (though I still don't consider social interaction to be a strong suit of mine). I've found friends here that I know I will keep for life. Also, me-from-the-past would never even have *considered* joining a basketball team. I never really participated in any sort of sports-oriented activities before coming to Shanghai. This school and city offer a diverse selection of extracurriculars, which I didn't have easy access to in Paris.

You seem very academically focused. What is the source of this motivation?

In a nutshell: curiosity. I love learning about *stuff* in general, and academics are a perfect opportunity to do so. However, calling me "focused" might be stretching it a little... My academic pursuits generally stem from fascinating distractions.

So, congratulations on your team's recent World Scholars Cup regional round. Next up is the global round in Singapore. Last year's team made it this far but wasn't able to advance to the championships. But with the whole team back, do you expect to advance to the next round this time?

I hope so! What with competition from schools around the world, the global round is certainly going to be a challenge. Last year, my teammate Alex Cox couldn't make it to the global round. Sophie and I still participated, but we didn't really stand much of a chance without her. Whether we win or not, the global round this year is certainly going to be an extremely memorable experience.

As to my expectations... It's going to take quite a bit of rigorous studying, but I think that this year, with the full team, we really do

have a chance of making it to the final round (the Tournament of Champions, hosted at Yale).

Quick Debate time. Four sentences. Convince me why you should be able to take 7 IB Courses next year. 3...2...1...Go:

I've only got two years left of high school... I figure I should cram as much information into those years as I can! The IB curriculum provides students with a structured, rigorous academic curriculum – so why not explore as much of that curriculum while I can? The seventh course wouldn't count towards my IB diploma, but it would still provide me with information that I might not otherwise have learned.

Okay: World Scholar's Cup star. Violin virtuoso. Avid Reader. Drama Club set builder. I felt like I was beginning to be able to categorize you...and then basketball player? It seems like you are free to be whoever you want to be. Why is that?

It's the goal of every adolescent to find the "right" vocation, something that they have a genuine passion for.

My parents have always engaged in a variety of different occupations and hobbies; basing myself off of their example, I did the same. This "toe-dipping" approach to trying new things has allowed me to find the activities that I enjoy—and to pursue them.

Just between us (and everyone that will read this of course), what are your future plans after SCIS?

I'm not entirely sure. Just like the majority of my classmates, I'm a little hazy on what I want to accomplish after high school... I intend to go to college in the USA, possibly pursuing a degree in neuroscience. Most likely, I will attend a liberal arts college, and thereby postpone specialization until the last possible moment. As for post grad education, I have been looking at the benefits (and drawbacks) of law or business degrees.

Last question: what does a typical Friday or Saturday night look like for Alissa Johnson?

For the past couple of weeks, I've been having play rehearsals for the production *The Boy from the Sky* (for which I was working backstage). Starting next week, my Fridays will be occupied by dance rehearsals for "Just a Dream."

Most weekend nights, I go to sleep relatively early, as I have basketball practice on Saturdays and Sundays. Essentially, my weekend nights are remarkably similar to those during the week – I work on homework, practice piano and violin, read, and in general pursue my various hobbies.

