My first encounter with robotics was in eighth grade, when I begrudgingly attended a VEX class. The new experience opened my eyes. I was introduced to advanced programming in C and C++. Moreover, I began to understand the functions of certain mechanisms. Constructing robots requires knowledge of specific things, like two-bar versus six-bar lifts, holonomic versus U-shaped chassis, etc. In addition, I discovered the uses of gear ratios and how they influence speed and strength. Though some of this knowledge is specific to robotics, the valuable experiences and the conceptual grasp of mechanical design are also applicable to engineering and science. Vice versa--real-world inventions can serve as inspirations for VEX. One of my initial Sack Attack designs occurred to me when I saw a bulldozer; its shovel and lift mechanisms were so appropriate for this year’s game that I almost couldn’t believe it.

I also met wonderful people with similar interests and created everlasting friendships through VEX. At the World Championship, I got to see the diversity of all the creations around the world. Competing against teams from different countries introduced me to many different designs and concepts. It was an enlightening experience.

My dream to become an engineer was inspired by my experiences with VEX. I love the design process because it can start from a simple idea and develop into an incredible creation. From the brainstorming to the building and finally, to the finished product—it feels special to be part of the creation of something new.