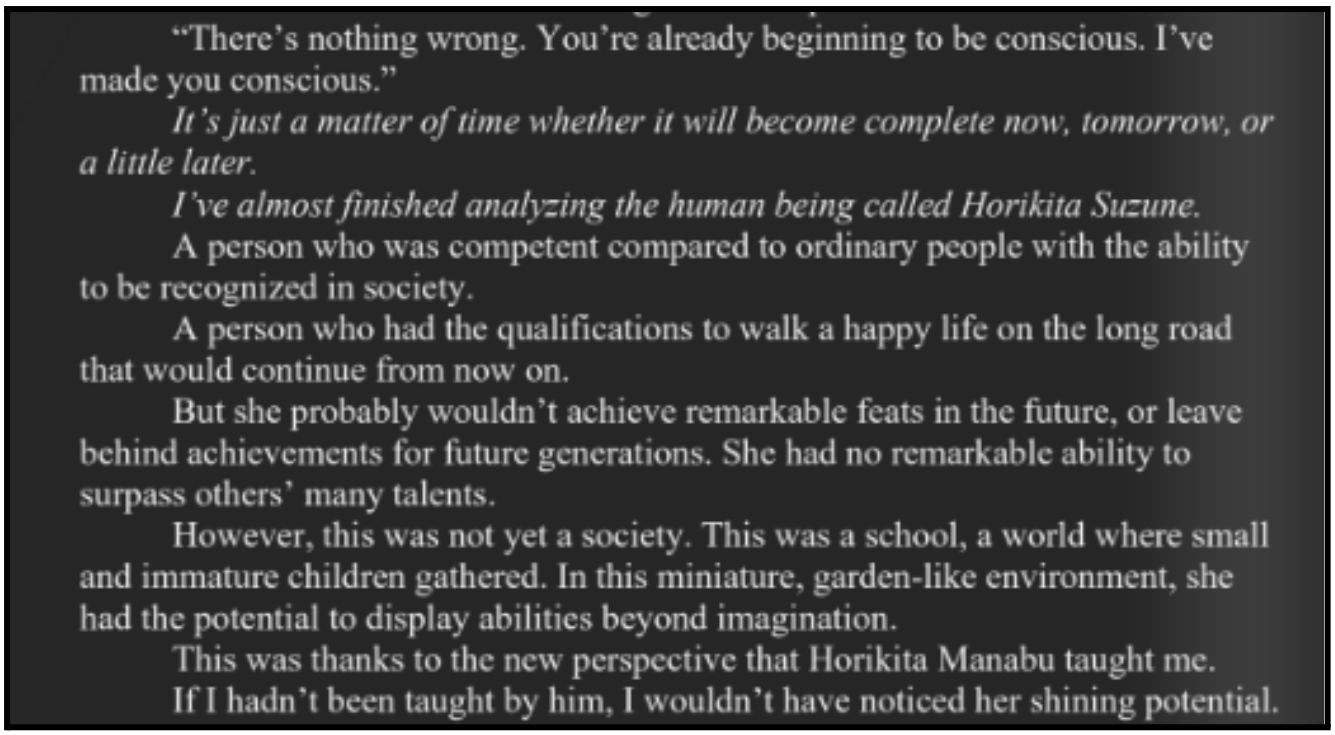
“Horikita's Potential” by Ganve

Horikita Suzune is without a doubt the most controversial character in COTE. There's a lot that can be said about her, both good and bad, but in this extra I'm going to talk about her potential.

Where does “Horikita's Potential” come from?

It all starts with a key conversation in Volume 11 of the first year of Classroom of the Elite between Ayanokoji and Horikita Manabu, where the latter states that his sister, Suzune Horikita, has the potential to surpass him. This is reinforced by Kiyotaka's monologue in Y2V10, where he talks about her potential as “beyond imagination.”

> "If Suzune could stop chasing after my shadow, break away from her dependency, and become honest with herself..."
>
> A Spring breeze blew through the air.
>
> "She would surpass me altogether, and probably become someone you wouldn't be able to ignore." 10
>
> He wasn't saying this just because he was doting on her as an older brother. He truly meant it.
>
> In a lot of ways, I also admired Horikita's high potential.
>
> Why was that, though? Was it because of what he just said?
>
> Suddenly, a thought crossed my mind. What was I supposed to be doing here, at this school?
>
> No, what did I want to be doing? I felt like I had suddenly found the answer to that question. 3


"There's nothing wrong. You're already beginning to be conscious. I've made you conscious."

It's just a matter of time whether it will become complete now, tomorrow, or a little later.

I've almost finished analyzing the human being called Horikita Suzune.

A person who was competent compared to ordinary people with the ability to be recognized in society.

A person who had the qualifications to walk a happy life on the long road that would continue from now on.

But she probably wouldn't achieve remarkable feats in the future, or leave behind achievements for future generations. She had no remarkable ability to surpass others' many talents.

However, this was not yet a society. This was a school, a world where small and immature children gathered. In this miniature, garden-like environment, she had the potential to display abilities beyond imagination.

This was thanks to the new perspective that Horikita Manabu taught me.

If I hadn't been taught by him, I wouldn't have noticed her shining potential.

This made her very controversial. The most common criticism is that, despite being two years into the story, most of her class's successes are due to Ayanokoji pulling the strings from the shadows. Many readers feel she gets credit as leader without having done the heavy lifting (literally, you're watching a doc where I show you that this isn't true, at least when it comes to second year.)

At the start of the story, Suzune was a character with "high stats" for a normal teenager, but "without practical level," who blindly tried to imitate her brother Manabu. This imitation was her biggest obstacle, because being a copy meant she would always be inferior to him. It's her character arc (you can't measure her by the same metrics as everyone else, because making mistakes is the whole point of the character)

It's also somewhat unfair to her, because her past mistakes were never repeated again in the future. This is where your own definition of Anti-Feat comes into play, so I won't dwell too much on this topic.

The turning point where she breaks out of her shell happens when she decides to cut her hair, symbolizing her abandoning her brother's image in order to find her own path as a leader (something that happens at the end of first year). So it's normal for her to have that image in first year, but it's not the same in second year, where Kiyotaka saved Suzune in 3 out of 8 exams.

Also, although the narrative (Ayanokoji and Manabu) constantly insists that she has an incredible hidden potential, in practice she racks up painful defeats. One breaking point was her crushing loss (0-7) against Ichinose at the end of second year, which led many to ironically label her “Potential Girl,” a mocking nickname similar to ones used in other anime (JJK) for characters who promise a lot but never show anything.

However, that's being unfair to her given the type of exam they were in. (Check the Y2V12 section) where any of the other leaders would have been defeated. Even Kiyotaka himself said he would have struggled. So I don't think that criticism holds up.

If a soccer player, say Messi, beats a basketball player, say Michael Jordan, in a penalty shootout — does that mean Jordan is a fraud for not beating Messi at his own specialty?

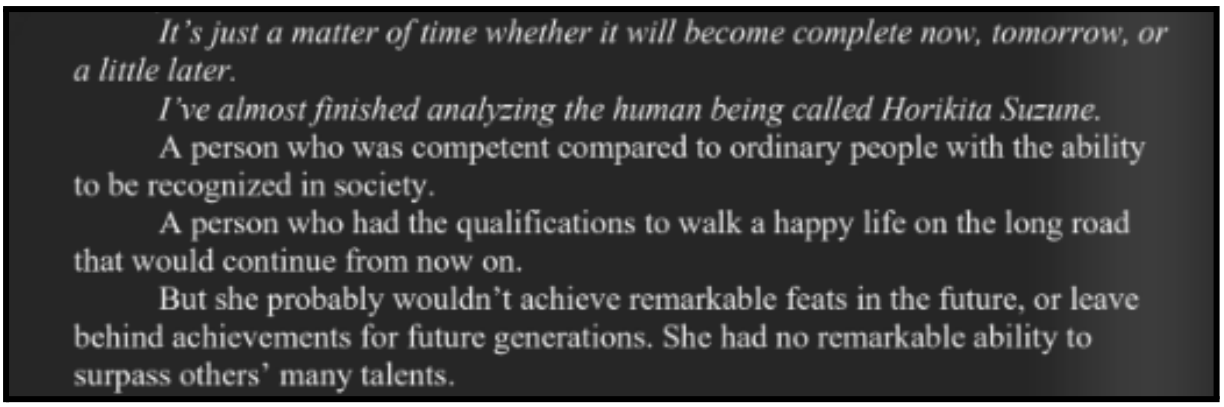
Do you get the difference? Ok, Ok, I'll stop with the fanboy excuses, lol

There's also her apparent lack of level compared to other leaders. Compared to Sakayanagi, Ryuen, or Ichinose herself, Suzune is seen by many as the weakest class leader in terms of strategy, manipulation, and tactical reading. On top of that, there's the narrative point: Ayanokoji is looking to prepare someone who can beat him, and the narrative points to that “someone” being Suzune.

For a lot of people, it seems unbelievable, or like plot armor, that a student who needs constant help to reach her goals could defeat a superhuman genius trained in the White Room. After all, Volume 0 exists.

However, this isn't what's actually meant, or it's being misunderstood.

Suzune will NEVER reach Kiyotaka's level, at least not narratively speaking. That's because Suzune isn't a genius capable of changing generations like he is — she's an “ordinary” girl. This is something we're told right before the potential monologue



This is something I have to point out — I understand a lot of people are joking, but this has gone so far that there are LARPers in the fandom who claim to be "fans" and believe that the narrative about Suzune's potential points to her individual abilities which made them deeply disappointed when she didn't show the development of those super abilities.

And I'm saying it now: That's not what Suzune's potential is about.

Suzune's potential isn't about becoming a strategic genius or gaining superhuman physical or intellectual abilities, it's about her ability to build real connections with people.

At the beginning of the story, Suzune was an antisocial person who pushed others away because she was trying to imitate her brother.

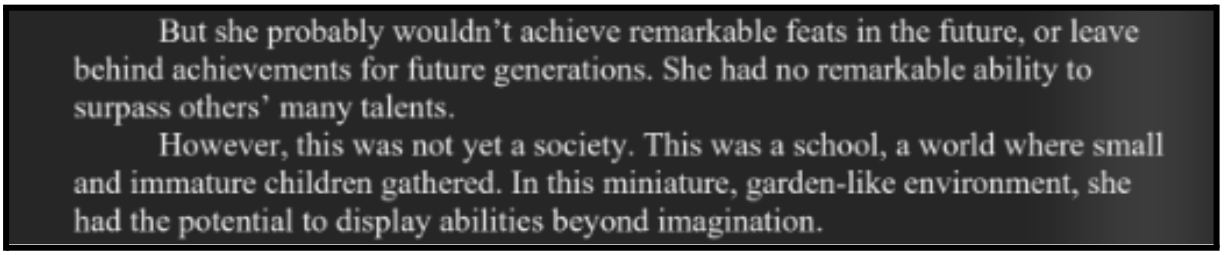
Manabu made the mistake of never forming real bonds of trust during his time at school. Although he was an exemplary leader, he kept a distance that kept him from seeing the true intentions of those around him (like in Tachibana's case, or Kiriyama's indirect betrayal in front of Nagumo).

Therefore, the path where Manabu failed is exactly where Suzune can surpass him: by opening up to others and getting others to open up to her.

A key evolution of her potential is her ability to turn people who hated her or rivaled her into close allies:

Characters like Sudo, Ibuki, and Kushida started their relationship with Suzune out of conflict or dislike, but gradually developed a close bond with her.

Unlike other leaders such as Sakayanagi (who lost Katsuragi) or Ryuen (who rules through fear and respect for his usefulness), Suzune naturally attracts people of all kinds of different backgrounds — which, within ANHS, is a terrifying and devastating ability.



Let me get you on the same page as me. What is ANHS about? What's its goal as an institution? What does it use to achieve that?

ANHS brings together teenagers full of insecurities, traumas, egos, and social flaws. In such a small, controlled ecosystem, conflicts aren't resolved through intellect and pure manipulation alone, but by managing the emotions and human imperfections of every member of the class.

Unlike real-world society, where people can go their separate ways, at ANHS classes are forced to live together, cooperate, and clash directly with each other under threat of expulsion or loss of their own monetary capital. This makes the ability to unite flawed or hostile pieces infinitely more valuable than being a lone genius. This is mainly because the school evaluates teamwork and collective performance through the Class Points system.

A leader who's perfect on paper (like Sakayanagi) or a tyrant (like Ryuen) both hit the ceiling of their own methods. Horikita's growing empathy, perseverance, and ability to connect let her build a cohesive group that grows stronger after every defeat — something that, in such a small school environment, has a compounding impact over time.

Also, in the outside world, changing the mindset or personality of a resentful adult is nearly impossible. At ANHS, since these are students still developing, Horikita's potential to attract, integrate, and reform hostile people (like Sudo, Ibuki, or Kushida) blooms fully. She can shape and polish her classmates and enemies alike into key assets for her own goals, as has been shown throughout the series — something brutal when you consider that the institution itself works to keep them apart (literally, the class competition and its divisions were

created for that reason). This means Suzune has the exact potential needed to master the unwritten rules of that particular ecosystem.

As I mentioned, a lot of people think Suzune's potential was about reaching an individual skill level that would leave everyone stunned and make her a worthy rival to Kiyotaka in a battle of intellect, but that's not true. Just think about it for a moment.

It's practically impossible to beat Ayanokoji in intelligence, manipulation, or physical combat. Because of that, the only logical way to beat him is through unity and mutual support among her classmates:

Ayanokoji is a product of the White Room, a deeply solitary character who doesn't hesitate to discard anyone once they stop being useful.

If Suzune manages to unite not just her class, but key allies from other years or class (like Koenji, Ishigami, Ryuuen, Ichinose, Amasawa, Nanase, etc.), she would create a total support network against an Ayanokoji who fights completely alone.

Suzune's biggest challenge in solidifying this ability will be getting genuine cooperation from Koenji, someone Ayanokoji himself admitted he couldn't manipulate or predict. If Suzune manages to get Koenji to work as a team to save or integrate him, she will have surpassed the limits that both her brother and Ayanokoji faced.

This is reflected in her greatest ability, which is her determination and perseverance. Ever since her first major defeat against Ibuki and Ryuuen in the first deserted island exam, she understood her limits and began collaborating more with her classmates. Unlike other class leaders who stall or collapse after suffering a significant defeat, Suzune learns from her mistakes and never falls into the same trap twice. For example:

After being defeated by Ayanokoji, Ryuen wanted to withdraw and remained inactive for almost three months, or 4 volumes. Meanwhile, when Kiyotaka, her emotional pillar, betrayed her and switched classes, she recovered within a few weeks, despite it being the hardest emotional blow she'd ever received in her life.

When Ichinose lost to Ryuen, she didn't change her approach and kept making the same mistakes — something Suzune corrected after being outmatched in the first Sports Festival.

When Sakayanagi faced betrayals or losses within her group, she didn't act to fix her class's dynamics. Suzune, on the other hand, dealt with this scenario many times. With her defective class sabotaging itself, she fixed it. With Yamauchi's betrayal, she had him expelled, and with Kushida, the biggest traitor in the class, she turned her into her best ally and one of the strongest assets in her class.

However, she overcame those limitations to gradually become a threat recognized by other classes....

Ichinose:

"When I was assigned to Class B and met my classmates, I was confident in victory. People say I might have been too conceited, but I was blessed with excellent companions. That feeling hasn't changed."

As if she were confirming it again, Ichinose said this.

"Yet, the only miscalculation was me as the leader. If I took better action, Class B would definitely have more points than now."

"I don't think so. I always considered you as an extraordinary person."

Shaking her head, she refused my praise.

"After speaking with Horikita-san today, I really felt that she has grown a lot as a person this year. The same is true for Sakayanagi-san and Ryuuen-kun. No matter which class it is, their leader is getting stronger."

Ryuuen:

"If you're all right with that, there's no problem on my end," I replied.

"Well, all right, then," said Horikita, moving to put her notebook away.

Ryuuen didn't respond, and simply watched her. Meanwhile, Katsuragi made a move.

"Ryuuen, it seems that Horikita has changed even more than we had imagined." After calmly analyzing the situation, he turned his gaze toward Horikita once more. "If we don't bring our best to the negotiating table, we'll be the ones who get left behind."

Sakayanagi:

"That's right, that might be a good idea. Horikita's credibility and morale would be damaged."

Hashimoto thought the enemy class was in disarray because Horikita chose not to use the protection slot.

On the other hand, Sakayanagi came to a different conclusion.

"I was thinking they might protect him unconditionally, or better yet, we could just eliminate him... but it seems Horikita-san has a different plan. If we keep targeting Kōenji-kun, it would just be pleasurable for her."

With a slight laugh, Sakayanagi turned on her phone.

"Anyway, I'm impressed that she's carefully thought about how to fight me."

Sakayanagi wondered whether Ayanokōji was lurking behind Horikita or not.

Who had been the driving force behind these tactics?

"He's definitely not involved."

If Ayanokōji had been pulling all the strings, she would have felt it beyond the classrooms.

The unusual and bizarre feeling would pierce Sakayanagi. She didn't feel that.

However, there was a faint hint of Ayanokōji in Horikita's way of thinking.

"It's only natural that she grows. She sees his back closer than anyone else."

She could see the trend. Sakayanagi wouldn't be lagging behind Horikita in this tactical battle.

"The problem is—"

And, probably, in the future, by Kiyotaka himself, because he was the final obstacle to her growth.

He's the one who has been preparing the ideal environment for her to develop, but by the end of second year, Suzune still relied on him too much because of her own insecurities — which is why her class transfer is so narratively important.

Some people will argue that resolving a realistic psychological thriller through "uniting everyone to defeat the lone genius" turns Classroom of the Elite into a generic shonen in disguise. If Suzune beats a genius trained in the White Room by gathering allies from other classes, it will be seen as the tired "power of friendship" formula driven by author benevolence (plot armor), betraying the novel's cynical, pragmatic tone.

To me, this confuses "cooperation" with "blind idealism." COTE is a resource game where trust lowers management costs and eliminates betrayal — this is reflected in Ichinose's class.

Kiyotaka represents absolute individual efficiency — he only sees people as disposable pieces. Suzune's "connection" would be a logistical and tactical advantage. Having genuine allies who won't betray you at the first opportunity lets her carry out complex strategies without the constant fear of internal sabotage — something Ryuen or Ichinose will never achieve because of the climate of distrust they themselves sowed in their own classes.

You could also say that having the theoretical potential to connect people is one thing, and the ability to lead in real time is another. Although Suzune has achieved individual alliances, connecting with personalities as extreme as Koenji, Ishigami, or rival classes requires an extremely high level of emotional intelligence and social manipulation. This might make it seem like the story is "handing" certain characters' redemption to her for narrative convenience, rather than through organic political work.

However, to me that's a poor reading of Suzune's growth and character arc. It literally ignores or downplays a two-year process full of falls, humiliations, and constant work (the very reason people mock her).

For example, integrating Kushida or Sudo wasn't a "gift from the author," but the result of work that took years. With Sudo, Suzune spent months tutoring him and putting up with his outbursts. With Kushida, she took on the brutal cost of Sakura's expulsion and her class's initial distrust — a blow that made her spend

weeks earning Kushida's cooperation, paying the price of her mistakes head-on. Suzune has never had luck; she pays the cost of every alliance out of her own pocket. These experiences are what can lay the groundwork for her future.

However, that's not enough — earning the loyalty of the Class of Defects is very different from uniting capable, proud people like Ryuen, Koenji, or Ichinose. Each of them has their own irreconcilable or selfish goals. The idea that Suzune could get other classes to unite to beat Ayanokoji ignores the very structure of ANHS. Only one class wins. Why would Ryuen or Ichinose sacrifice their own class or hand Suzune the victory just to beat Kiyotaka?

Although the final goal is Class A, ANHS is full of special exams where classes have to form temporary coalitions in order to survive or maximize gains against a common enemy. If Kiyotaka becomes a threat blocking every other class's path, joining forces to neutralize the biggest threat doesn't remove the competition — it's pure survival. This is already happening, with Ryuuen being defeated over and over and Ichinose's alliance getting closer and closer to its end. Also, friendships like the one between Ibuki and Suzune show that personal bonds can form that go beyond the class points competition.

Another thing that gets brought up is that Kiyotaka was only “preparing the ground” this whole time. If all of Suzune's development (including saving Kushida, cutting her hair, and building her support network) was implicitly or explicitly triggered by Ayanokoji's direct interventions from the shadows, then Suzune is still just a piece on his board. If she wins in the end because Kiyotaka shaped her to win, the victory still belongs to Kiyotaka's design, not to Suzune's own merit.

However, I don't think that's correct either.

The entire premise of Kiyotaka's character is to prove that the White Room environment is flawed. Kiyotaka prepared the ground and planted the seeds, but the way Suzune blossomed exceeded even Kiyotaka's own expectations. For example, the fact that she chose to save Kushida — something Ayanokoji wouldn't have done — shows that Suzune has long since stopped operating under her mentor's logic, and instead follows her own independent vision, something that is under her own control.

And finally, one argument that personally bothers me a bit is that her emotional stability remains her Achilles' heel. Against an opponent with no attachments, like all her rivals are, any leader who relies on empathy and connections is vulnerable to being psychologically destroyed, especially given her current mental state. However, to me, this greatly underestimates her emotional intelligence.

Over two years of story and more than 10 years' worth of volumes, the story has shown exactly the opposite — her capacity to feel is the source of Suzune's resilience. She's been emotionally broken multiple times and has always come back stronger. The various betrayals, her mistakes, her defeats, and Kiyotaka's class transfer were her trial by fire, and the fact that she didn't collapse and instead got back on her feet again and again, no matter the context or the opponent, shows that her emotional vulnerability, far from being a weakness, is the engine of her unbreakable perseverance — which makes her an opponent very hard to defeat completely. She will always come back and try again.

In the end, the discourse around "Horikita's Potential" reveals a fundamental divide in how COTE is read. Those who reduce her character to a collection of individual stats, victory ratios, or immediate exam results are reading a different story than the one being written.

Suzune was never meant to be a female Koji, nor was she meant to become a tactical monster through a sudden power-up. Her journey is not about reaching perfection; it is about the raw, grueling process of human growth.

In an institution designed to isolate students through cutthroat competition, Suzune's true potential is her ability to build an indestructible collective out of broken, hostile, and flawed individuals.

This creates the ultimate thematic clash for the third year: The Absolute Individual vs. The Unbreakable Network.

Kiyotaka is the pinnacle of human efficiency, but he is fundamentally alone, trapped in the cold logic of the White Room where people are merely disposable tools. Suzune, on the other hand, represents everything the 4th gen tried to erase: Genuine human connection.

If Suzune eventually defeats Kiyotaka, it won't be because she outsmarted him in a vacuum of intellect. It will be because she built something Ayanokoji's WR cold philosophy cannot calculate nor comprehend.

This brings the story full circle back to the very first question asked in Volume 1: "Are people equal or not?"

Chapter 1:
The Structure of
Japanese Society

I know this is kind of sudden, but, please, it will only take a moment. I want your honest opinion.

Are people equal or not?

A proper society will constantly strive for equality. There are those who clamor for men and women to always be considered equal. As a result, we raised the employment rate for women, we made specialized subway cars only for women. Sometimes, women will even argue over the order of names in a family register. The public opinion of people with disabilities has also changed. We're now told that we should not use the term "disabled people" when referring to them, so as not to discriminate. Nowadays, children are taught that all people are created equal.

But is that true? I have my doubts. If men and women have different abilities, then their roles should also differ. People with disabilities are still disabled, no matter what polite euphemisms you use. No matter how you try to avert your eyes, the meaning of the word does not change.

So, my answer would be, "No, we are not equal." To be human is to be unequal. Equality does not exist.

Long ago, in a bygone era, a great man said that heaven does not set one man above or below any other. However, he did not necessarily adhere to the idea that everyone is equal. Did you know that there is more to that famous passage? The rest goes like this: *Everyone is equal when they are born, so I ask, why do we see differences in position and status?* And it continues: *Do you or do you not encourage learning to create a difference?* So then, education creates an imbalance. The point's spelled out there, in the incredibly famous work *Gakumon no Sume*. Even though this is the year 2015, the modern era, nothing about these teachings has changed. The situation has only grown more complex and fraught.

In any case, we are human beings. We are living, thinking creatures.

I don't think it right to simply say that we are unequal and then live our lives based on pure instinct. In other words, though "equality" is a complete lie, we cannot accept inequality, either. Right now, I'm trying to come up with a new answer for humanity's eternal question.

Hey, you there. You, the one reading this book right now. Have you ever given serious thought to the future?

Have you ever considered the purpose of going to high school or to college? Though the future may seem hazy right now, do you think you'll find a job someday? That's what I used to think. Back when I finished my compulsory education and became a high school student, I hadn't really considered the future. I'd only felt joy at being nearly free of obligation. I didn't consider the incredible influence that school would continue to have in my life, on my future. I didn't even understand the purpose behind studying language or numbers.

Ayanokoji's opening monologue asserts that while absolute equality is a LIE, human society cannot simply accept raw inequality based on pure talent or born superiority. He noted that he was searching for a "new answer for humanity's eternal question."

Suzune is that answer.

While the White Room attempts to prove that human worth is defined by artificially manufactured superiority, Suzune proves that ordinary individuals, when brought together through genuine connection and mutual growth, can bridge any gap in talent. She is not fighting Kiyotaka merely to win a class battle;

she is unconsciously providing the alternative answer to the philosophy that created him.

Kiyotaka gave her the tools and set the stage, but the path she walks is entirely her own. Whether she succeeds or fails, Suzune has already proven that her potential is the very heart of the story of COTE.