

Clean-Up 2022

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THE CHANGE AGENT

**Adult Education for Social Justice:
News, Issues, and Ideas**

CREATING NEW COMMUNITY

The Change Agent is a publication of The New England Literacy Resource Center/World Education, 44 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210 (617) 482-9485. Coming out three times per year, each issue focuses on a different topic that is relevant to learners' lives. This online magazine is designed for ESOL, ABE, GED, and adult diploma classes. In New England, online access to *The Change Agent* is available free of charge through NELRC's affiliated state literacy resource centers. Contact us at <https://changeagent.nelrc.org/contact-us/> to learn how to access the site.

No information in this magazine is intended to reflect an endorsement for, or opposition to, any candidate or political party.

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Our New Series on Immigrants and Immigration:

Our new school-year publishing schedule is designed to make each issue available enough ahead of the upcoming semester to help you integrate the content into your planning:

Issue #56, August 15, 2022: "Our Immigration Stories"

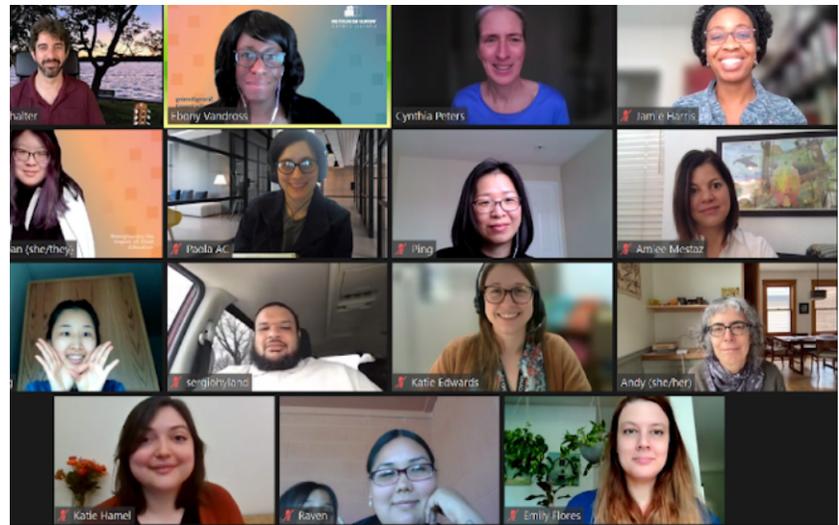
Issue #57, November 15, 2022: "Creating New Community"

Issue #58, February 15, 2023: "Finding Our Voices"

We want to thank an anonymous funder for their generous support of the Immigrants and Immigration series of *The Change Agent* and the [Transforming Immigrant Digital Equity \(TIDE\)](#) project. The TIDE project proposes an ESOL ecosystem that interweaves digital equity, immigrant and refugee inclusion, and language justice. *The Change Agent* is a partner in this effort by bringing the voices of immigrant and refugee English language learners to the center of the conversation.

Please Subscribe! We Need you!

The cost is just \$30 per teacher per year. Teachers can share their online access with all their students. Have 25 or more teachers? The price goes down to \$20 per teacher per year.



Big Thanks to the Editorial Board for Issue #57:

From left to right, starting at top: David Buchalter, teacher at Genesis Center, RI; Ebony Vandross, World Education; Cynthia Peters, *Change Agent* editor; Jamie Harris, World Education; Shirley Doan, World Education; Helen Paola Almanzar Comas, student at Genesis Center, RI; Zuanping Zeng, student at Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC); Amiee Mestaz, teacher at Gila Crossing Community School, Laveen, AZ; Hwiyoung Gwon, student at BCNC; Sergio Hyland, *Change Agent* contributor, Philadelphia, PA; Katie Edwards, Howard Community College, Columbia, MD; Andy Nash, adult education advocate, Cambridge, MA; Katie Hamel, teacher at BCNC; Raven Lewis, student at Gila Crossing Community School, Laveen, AZ; Emily Flores, San Antonio Public Library, San Antonio, TX.



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My Neighbor

Xuiping He

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. How do you connect with neighbors?
2. Consider this vocabulary: **introvert**, **extrovert**, **organic**, **ignore**, **hardly**. Look up the words you don't know, or see if you can figure out the meaning from the context.

My neighbor is an older man. His name is Bill. He has lived in the neighborhood for a long time. When I first moved to Everett, every time I met him, he always had a serious face. He never said hello to me. I tried to say hello to him, but

I wrote a note: "This is from your Chinese neighbor. These are organic vegetables. I hope you are happy every day."

he ignored me. I thought he must be an **introvert**. Maybe he doesn't like Chinese people. I am an **extrovert**, and I thought I should make good relationships with my neighbors.

In the summer, I like to plant some vegetables in my small garden. One year, the vegetables grew very well because there was a lot of rain. I looked at the vegetables, and I had an idea. I picked some fresh vegetables and put them in a bag. I wrote a note: "This is from your Chinese neighbor. These are **organic** vegetables. I hope you are happy every day." I put the note inside the bag and left it on the neighbor's doorstep. A few days later, when I met my neighbor outside, I said hello to him. This time, he answered me politely. He did not **ignore** me.

Since then, my neighbor smiles when he sees me. In the winter of 2021, a heavy snow fell. People couldn't go outside. Everyone was busy shoveling snow. After I finished shoveling the snow in front of my house, I found Bill's door was blocked by snow. I thought, "He's old. Shoveling



must be hard for him." So I shoveled snow to help him. Bill thanked me very much.

Bill told me he lives alone. He is 80 years old. His children work out of state, far away from Boston, so he **hardly** sees his children. Since then, I have often given him good food and chatted with him. Now, my neighbor gets along well with me and my family. When you treat people with love, they will be friendly with you. Most of the time.

AFTER YOU READ:

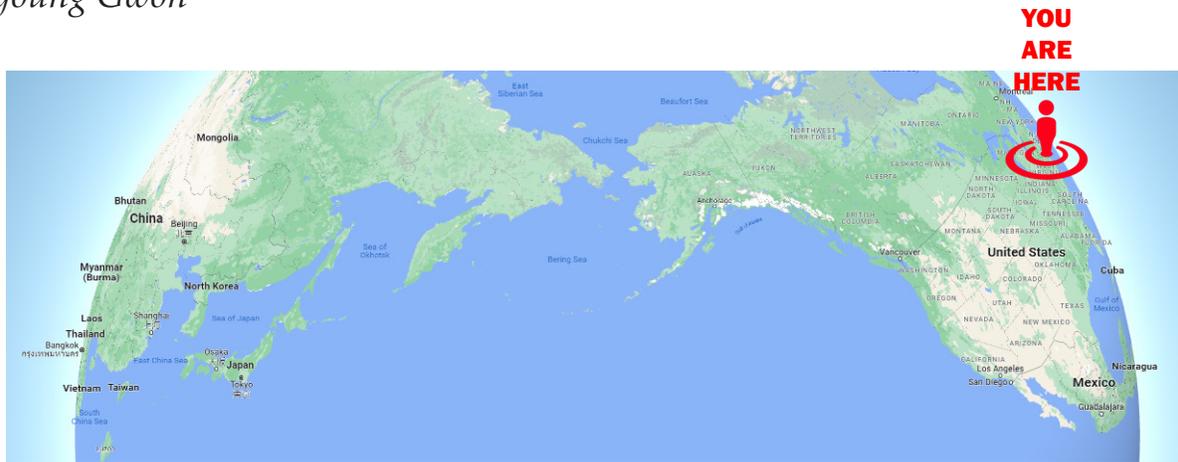
1. What did the writer do to connect with her neighbor?
2. Whether you are an **introvert** or an **extrovert**, what do you do to connect with people?

Xuiping He is a student at Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center in Boston, MA. She is from China. She loves Boston. She is curious about different foods and different cultures. She loves peace and wants people to be friendly.



How Can I Settle into this Here?

Hwiyoung Gwon



BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Study the title. What does it mean to “settle into” something? Describe a time you have settled into a new home, school, or job. What made it go well? What was challenging?
2. Think about the phrase “break the isolation.” What does the word “break” mean in this sense? Describe a time you helped yourself or your family feel less isolated.

Community Equals Survival

My goal is to settle in this country. I want to make friends and live a normal American life. Trying to

make a community in this country is equal to survival to me. Many people make friends with co-workers. But I don't have a job, and my husband works at home. We don't know

anyone. Nobody helps us. I need to learn how moms can get information in this country.

I Felt Like an Island in the Ocean

When I first arrived in the U.S., I felt afraid to talk to other people. Every day, I came to the

playground with my son. I looked for someone who spoke the same language as me. There were many people, but no one spoke my language! I felt isolated, like an island in the ocean. I asked myself, “What if my whole life is like this? How can I make a friend?”

How can I improve my English?”

After a few weeks,

I made a plan. My

first step was to try to act like a normal mom and make some friends. My second step was to look for some ESL classes to improve my English.

**After a few weeks,
I made a plan.**

Trying to make a community in this country is equal to survival to me.

What is “Small Talk”?

Small talk is light, informal conversation. Here are some examples:

- I heard there is a storm coming.
- Aren't the flowers here beautiful?
- Did you hear about the parade next weekend?
- This line isn't usually so long. I wonder what's going on.
- I have two children, too. How old are yours?



Hwiyoung's first step was to talk to other moms at the playground. She started out by making small talk. Photo from www.pexels.com.



Hwiyoung's second step was to look for an ESL class. She says, "Being a student made me feel like I was in a community." Photo: Shawn Read, Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center.

What Did I Do to Break the Isolation?

Step 1:

At the playground, I decided to ask questions to the other moms. For example, I said, "Your kid is so cute. How old is she?" I asked parents, "Where do you live? Where do your kids go to school?" I made small talk with people. Sometimes people just said, "Goodbye." But I didn't give up. Finally, some other immigrants asked for my phone number, and I made some friends.

Step 2:

I searched for English classes, and I found one at the Boston Chinese Neighborhood Center. Being a student made me feel like I was in a community.

Being part of a community makes me feel safe. Now I have more friends than my husband, even though his English is better than mine.

Soon, I will work on Step 3 of my plan – look for a job!

Hwiyoung Gwon came to the United States in 2021 because of her husband's work. She is a student at Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center in Boston, MA. (She also participated on the editorial board for this issue, and this photo is from a screenshot of our Zoom meeting.)



Hwiyoung's Three-Step Process

In your own words, describe Hwiyoung's three-step process. Try writing your own multi-step process for breaking isolation.

Step 1: _____

Step 2: _____

Step 3: _____

A Better Life Despite Discrimination

Miriam Salinas

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. “Despite” is a preposition. It means that something is true even though there are things that might stop it from being true. For example, “She went to class regularly despite being very busy with three children and a full-time job.”
2. Study the title of this essay. Say what it means in your own words. Try using “despite” in several sentences that describe something in your life.

Having Brown Skin in the U.S.

When a person moves to another state or country, they are probably looking for a better life. Sometimes moving to another country is not easy, especially if immigrants do not have permits to move and work. Many face racism, especially if they come from Latin America or are people who have brown skin. Some get exploited for cheap labor because of the language barrier.



Anti-Latino bias is on the rise according to <https://salud-america.org/the-shocking-rise-in-anti-latino-hate-crimes/>
Photo by Brian Jiz: <https://www.pexels.com>.



Years ago, “Juan Crow” laws (like Jim Crow laws), enforced racial discrimination against Mexican Americans. (Photo from the Russell Lee Photography Collection, courtesy of The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History.) Read more about segregation of Latinos at <https://www.latinousa.org/2016/03/11/no-mexicans-allowed-school-segregation-in-the-southwest/>.

While European immigrants who are Caucasian often have a smooth welcome into dominant society, foreigners with brown skin have a more difficult path to acceptance. My family and I have witnessed and been victims of discrimination from white people. They use insults like, “Go back to Mexico,” or “You do not belong here.” Also, they think anyone with brown skin is from Mexico.

“You Kids Are Criminals”

My son was born in the United States. He goes to high school. One day on his lunch break, he went to the store with his friend. When they entered the store, the cashier told them, “Please put your backpacks behind the counter.” My son first thought it was some type of rule that the store had for everyone. My son and his friend did what the

cashier told them to do. While my son was looking for something to buy, he noticed a group of white kids carrying their backpacks in the store, so he asked his friend, "Did you notice that white kids have their backpacks and we do not?"

My son's friend responded, "Yes, and this is not something new. It happens every time we come to the store." My son was confused, so he asked his friend, "Why?"

He said, "Because they think we are criminals."

My son asked, "How do you know this?"

His friend answered, "Because she told me. I asked her one day, 'Why do we have to leave our backpacks behind the counter?' And she replied, 'Because you kids are criminals.'"

You'll Get Fired if You Complain

Undocumented immigrants are easily exploited by their employers. Unauthorized immigrant workers are often afraid to complain about unpaid wages and working conditions because they can get fired from work or even get deported. Therefore, they feel frightened to join unions and get help from worker organizations.

Before I got my DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) status, I worked illegally in a canning factory. I worked hard 12 hours a day for



A cannery work processes fish. Photo credit Grant Callegari/Hakai Magazine.

7 days a week. One day, a supervisor put me with a crew that was doing very hard labor. The crew was all men. For three months, I did this work, which was at a higher pay grade, but I did not get higher pay. Since I was working as a subcontractor, I complained to the company that contracted me. They told me if they had to file a complaint about this, I would get fired. This is just one example of how employers get power to exploit and underpay undocumented workers.

Discrimination against Immigrant Workers Is Illegal



According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination against workers. According to the ACLU, "the National Labor Relations Act, OSHA, and Fair Labor Standards Act require employers not to discriminate on the basis of race, to comply with certain health, safety, and minimum wage requirements, and to allow employees to unionize."

Sources: <https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/discrimination/immdisc>; <https://www.aclu.org/other/how-do-labor-laws-apply-immigrants>



According to American Progress, 29% of construction laborers and 19% of carpenters are undocumented. Each year, undocumented workers in the construction industry and their households pay \$12.9 billion in federal tax contributions and \$7.7 billion in state and local taxes. For more information, read the [fact sheet](#). Source for photo: www.ilr.cornell.edu/.

Also, immigrants often work many hours, so they don't have time to attend English classes, which means it's hard to get support or protection at work. My husband is undocumented. He works in construction. He is limited in his English which means his opportunities are also limited. He does not get paid as much as others who have work permits, and he does not get paid vacations or bonuses.

Paying Our Taxes

Some white people think that undocumented immigrants don't pay taxes, but it is not true. We do, and we pay more because sometimes we do not get our refunds. Before I got DACA status, I had an ITIN (Individual Taxpayer Identification Number). I filed taxes with that number, and the tax preparer told us if I had a Social Security number, I would get a full refund since my children are U.S. citizens.

Discrimination but also Opportunities

Being an undocumented immigrant in the United States is not easy. We face racism and discrimination. We can work for long hours with low pay, and we have few protections on the job. But sadly,

even with all of these difficulties, people live better here than in their native country. If I were in Mexico, I would not have the life that I have now. There are more opportunities here such as having a house, education, and a good quality of life. My kids are growing up bilingual and bicultural and have the chance to have two identities: Mexican and American. It's a better life.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What evidence does the author provide that her family has experienced discrimination?
2. In what ways does she still have a better life here, despite the discrimination?
3. Read the caption under the photo on the upper left. Look up the fact sheet and read about undocumented construction workers.

Miriam Salinas, originally from Mexico, is an ESOL student at Chemeketa Community College in Salem, OR. She currently works as a receptionist at a child abuse assessment center. She wants to continue to grow in her career to help abused kids. She is married with two children.



Undocumented and Determined

Djamilah Lambert

BEFORE YOU READ: Read the box below about TPS. Look up the list of countries. What do you know about what is happening in these countries?

As an undocumented immigrant, I face many challenges every day that documented people don't understand. The hardest thing is waiting. I feel like my life is on hold while I try to get the documents I need to be here legally. It has been

The hardest thing is waiting.

almost one year, and it seems like they keep adding more months to process my case. I tried to get a student visa so that I can go to college, but I did not get it. After that, my family opted for the Temporary Protected Status (TPS).

My parents decided that I should come to the U.S. for the security that unfortunately my country cannot provide me. In Haiti, there is a lot of violence and kidnappings. People are living in fear. Our leaders do not focus on the real problems of

Temporary Protected Status (TPS)

According to the American Immigration Council, TPS is a “temporary immigration status provided to nationals of specifically designated countries that are confronting an ongoing armed conflict, environmental disaster, or extraordinary and temporary conditions. Immigrants from which countries might receive TPS? Find a list here: <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/temporary-protected-status>

Source: <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/temporary-protected-status-overview>

the country: education insecurity, hunger, and unemployment, which is only increasing. The sacrifice that our ancestors made to give us freedom is tarnished.

The path to getting documents seems so long! And while I am waiting, I can't fully participate in the opportunities that this country offers. I can't get a job or go to college. I can't even get my driver's license.

It's a terrible feeling—like I'm not really improving anything in my life. It is tiring. But somehow I find a way to make every day a better day by doing things that help me get closer to my goals. For example, I pray, I read, and I educate myself.

I don't want to see only the bad side of waiting. Waiting teaches me patience. It gives me courage, strength, and determination. I have a great thirst to reach my goal to be a better version of myself. I can do that by learning every day, so one day I can help my family, my country, and other people. This is how I stay motivated.

AFTER YOU READ: What does the author mean when she says, “The sacrifice that our ancestors made to give us freedom is tarnished.” Share what you know about Haitian history to make sense of that quote. If you're not sure, look it up online.



Djamilah Lambert is a student at The Welcome Project in Somerville, MA. She is 20 years old and comes from Haiti. She is learning English and starting to take violin classes.

The Change that Gave Me Life

It Was an Expensive and Challenging Process, but I Finally Got My Papers

Brenda Castañeda

BEFORE YOU READ: What is something you saved money for? What sacrifices did you make to save the money you needed?

No Papers and No Money for a Lawyer

I arrived in the U.S. without papers in 2018. My husband is a U.S. citizen. He had work in El Paso, and that is why we moved here.

When we arrived, we had to fix my papers so I could live here legally. However, we did not have the necessary money. We had to raise \$4,500 to pay the lawyers. We started saving, but we had problems. We had to rent an apartment, and rents in the U.S. are very expensive. My husband's

truck broke down. He had to buy a new one and make monthly payments. It took us a long time to save. We had to make

We bought only things that were absolutely necessary to live.

many sacrifices. We didn't go out or eat in restaurants. We bought only things that were absolutely necessary to live.

More Fees and More Obstacles

In addition, there were more expenses besides the lawyer's fees. We had to collect many papers, such as birth certificates, marriage certificates, certificates of naturalization, and photographs. It seemed like there were always more appointments and more costs.

Money was not the only obstacle. It was very difficult for me to be here without my family and to adapt to this new culture. Above all, I did not speak English.

Another challenge was finding a good law-



yer. There was a pandemic going on, and no one wanted to take my case.

And Finally a Chance at a Better Life

Finally, in October 2020, we filed the papers. On April 1, 2021, I had an appointment at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. On April 12, my residency arrived. Now I have a Social Security number, so I can work. I can go visit my family in Ciudad Juarez and return safely to the U.S. Also, I can study English so that I can have a better job and a better life.

AFTER YOU READ: What obstacles did the author face as she tried to get her documents?

Brenda Castañeda is a student at Ysleta Community Adult Learning Center in El Paso, Texas. She works in the cafeteria of a high school, and she hopes to be able to pursue her career as an industrial engineer (which she studied in Mexico).

This Country Showed Me Justice

I Got Support as a Survivor of Domestic Violence

Maria Loera

BEFORE YOU READ: What is domestic violence? What are some special challenges that immigrants who are experiencing domestic violence might face?

The Violence Started after I Moved Here

When I came to the U.S., I never imagined that this would be the country that I would adopt as if it were mine. This country is where I became a survivor of domestic violence. And in this country, I also found justice.

After I moved here, the violence started. My life was completely destroyed. I lost everything – my family, my friends, my self-esteem, and even myself. I lived with so much pain and injustice in my new home in my new country.

I Got Help

I feared I would also lose my son. But hope returned to my life. Someone rescued me and my son. I call her “My Angel.” She took me and my son to a shelter for women who suffered the same agony. In that place, I was able to find the support and love that my son and I needed.

Non-profit agencies helped me get custody of my son, stay legally in this country, and find a home that my son and I rebuilt with love and hope. The Center for Hope and Safety gave us shelter, food, and clothing. They helped me get a lawyer through Legal Aid Services of Oregon. The lawyer helped me get a divorce and custody of my son. Catholic Charities helped me get work, and they are still working with me to get my residency. I had only been in this country for a couple of months when I received this support, which changed my life completely.



Now I Feel at Home Here

This country gave me back everything I lost. I am very grateful for all the care that my son and I received. I never thought to say this, but I feel at home here. I am surrounded by my people. I am happy that this country has shown me that justice and good people still exist.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. Some centers for people experiencing domestic violence accept donations of clothing, toys, and other supplies as families often arrive with nothing. Do you know of any centers in your community? Consider ways you might join with others to support the center.
2. Read “Many Kinds of Violence Against Women” in <https://changeagent.nelrc.org/issues/issue-56-august-2022-our-immigration-stories/> (pp. 24-25).

Maria Loera is a student at Chemeketa Community College in Salem, OR. She is studying English and plans to get a degree in Social Work. She wants to help people like her to know their rights. By the time this is published, she will have become a U.S. citizen.

A Good Experience

Seeking Asylum in the United States

Nsingani Mukinayi

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Read the box about asylum on the next page. Share your own story (or the story of someone you know) of coming to the U.S. seeking asylum. If you have no experience with asylum, what do you think might make the process go well? What might make it difficult?
2. What does the word *persecution* mean? Try using it in several sentences.

We Didn't Know How to Start

I came to the U.S. with my mother and five sisters from Kinshasa, Congo. We did not have documents, and we faced a lot of challenges. I discovered that the laws and procedures for immigrants are different in different states. As an undocu-

mented immigrant, I had a difficult experience in Atlanta, Georgia, but then I went to Portland, Maine, and I had a better experience.

We were seeking asylum, but we didn't know how to

start. My mother's friend referred us to the Portland Family Shelter because she stayed there too. But we are a large family of seven, and they didn't have space for us.



Family Promise in Portland, Maine, has a vision that "every family has a home, a livelihood, and the chance to build a better future." Photo from Pexels.com.

Family Promise Helped with Food and Shelter

After three days in the shelter, they sent us to their partner, Family Promise. Family Promise is a private non-profit. They took care of our housing and food needs for two months. After that time, they found a permanent house in Portland for us to live in.

General Assistance Helped with the Asylum Application

They also referred us to the General Assistance Program in Portland, which is a government program. When we went to General Assistance, they explained to us how to apply for asylum. They also gave us vouchers for food and paid the rent for a year and a half because we couldn't work yet. Without immigration documents, I couldn't

They took care of our housing and food needs for two months. [Then] they found a permanent house for us to live in.

What is Asylum?

Asylum is a form of protection granted to individuals who can demonstrate that they are unable or unwilling to return to their country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of:

- race,
- religion,
- nationality
- membership in a particular social group,
- or political opinion.

Source: www.rescue.org/article/it-legal-cross-us-border-seek-asylum

have a legal job, drive legally, or open a bank account. I was limited.

Applying for asylum was our best option to become documented. The asylum process begins when you submit the initial paperwork. Then the local immigration office will contact you to take your picture and get your fingerprints. After that, you will wait for 150 days. Then you can apply for work authorization and a Social Security number. After a few months, you will be all set to receive your documents. This is how the standard process works and how I experienced it with my family.

Waiting for My Life to Begin

While I was waiting for my documents, I was hopeful and excited at the same time. I had food and everything I needed, but I didn't have enough money to buy clothes or shoes that I liked. I knew that sooner or later, I would have all my documents, and my life in the U.S. could really begin.

Now I Can Help Myself

Today, now that I have my documents, I can work and drive legally, and I opened a bank account. My life is easier than in the past because I can live anywhere I like in the country. Also with legal work, I not only help myself, I also contribute to

society by paying federal and state taxes. I can pay my bills without contacting General Assistance, and I feel free to live my life.

Arriving in the United States without documents was very challenging, but I found that once I had guidance on how to apply for asylum, it was a straightforward process. Now I am able to have the opportunities that I didn't have in my home country, and I am on the right path to fulfill all my dreams.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. The author says he had a good experience seeking asylum in Portland, Maine. What evidence does he share to back up his claim?
2. He mentions briefly that his experience in another city was "difficult." What do you infer might have happened there?
3. What are the two sources of aid he uses in Portland? (Note: one is a private non-profit, and the other is a government program. How do you think these different organizations are funded?)
4. What sources of aid are available in your community? Work with others and make a list of resources in your community that support families and provide assistance during times of transition. Share this list with others. Create and share a slideshow presentation describing what resources are available and how to access them.

Nsingani Mukinayi is a student at Portland Adult Education in Portland, Maine. Nsingani is from Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. He is single and lives in Westbrook, Maine. His mother and five sisters also live in Maine.



Family of Angels

Sadat Golestaneh

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. What does it mean to refer to someone as your angel?
2. Is there someone (or some group of people) who has been an angel in your life? Share the story.

How Would I Deal with the Loneliness?

I remember the day I immigrated to the United States. It was a beautiful day, and I was excited, but I also felt a lot of stress. I was entering a completely new world. As the plane approached the Boston airport, I loved seeing the dark blue ocean and dense green trees. The colors were stunning.

As we drove to our new home from the airport, I felt tired and confused. I had decided to say goodbye to my parents and emigrate forever. I was thinking about how much I would miss them. I was wondering how I would deal with the loneliness that lay ahead. I was still deep in thought when we arrived at our house. When the car turned into the driveway, I saw sunlight shining down on our new home. I saw tall trees and a garden with beautiful flowers. I was so happy to be home after our very long journey from Iran.



When I opened the door of the breezeway, the floor was covered in flowers and candles all the way to the front door. Beautiful pink flowers with large green leaves filled the entryway, and colorful candles next to the flowers multiplied their beauty. I was so inspired to see this scene that all my fatigue and stress were instantly gone! I asked my husband, “Who did this?”

A New Friend Shows Me Kindness

He answered, “Hoda and Mahmoud must have done it.” Mahmoud is my husband’s friend from Iran. Hoda is his wife. Later, when I saw Hoda, I hugged her and thanked her for the incredible welcome she had made for me. My friendship with Hoda started from that moment. She is like an angel, my helper who is always with me. Hoda



has shown me that kindness can change the way people experience the world.

This friendship has lasted for six years, and we are getting closer every day. Hoda, Mahmoud, and their child, Hiram, have been strong supporters of our family ever since we came to

the U.S. Since our son Benyamin was born, this family has helped us take care of him.

They treat my son with so much love and affection.

Whenever my son

counts his family members, he includes Hoda, Mahmoud, and Hiram.

They make us laugh louder, smile brighter, and live better. They are our family of angels.

They Are Our Family of Angels

Last year, I had to be hospitalized for about a week due to illness. Without the help of Hoda and her family, I would not have been able to focus on healing. When I had to be hospitalized, my son just stayed with Hoda, who took care of him with compassion, kindness, and patience. I appreciate all their goodness and generosity, and I hope we will always be happy together.

Good friends show their love in times of trouble, not just in times of happiness. Hoda, Mahmoud, and Hiram are the people in our life that make us laugh louder, smile brighter, and live better. They are our family of angels.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. How did Hoda, Mahmoud, and Hiram act like angels toward Sadat and her family? Be specific.
2. Look at the pull quote on this page. *Laugh, smile, and live* are verbs. They are actions. *Louder, brighter, and better* are adverbs. They describe the verbs. Write several sentences using adverbs. (Note: many adverbs end in *ly*.)

Sadat Golestaneh is a student at the Ludlow Area Adult Learning Center, part of the Holyoke Community College ESOL Program in Holyoke, MA. She is from Iran.

Angels in Religion

Angels show up in Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Another thing these religions have in common is that they are all monotheistic. That means they all believe in one God. Research these and other world religions to find out what they have in common and how they differ.



Statue of a Christian angel by Michelangelo (1494–95), Bologna, Italy.



An Islamic angel depicted in an Arabic manuscript.



The Archangel Metatron is mentioned in the Jewish text, the Talmud.



A Stranger in a Distant Land

Feeling Grateful but also Missing Family

Elshaimaa Karima

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. What does “extended family” mean? Where does your extended family live, and what is that like for you?
2. In the title, “stranger” is a noun. It means someone who is not well known. For example, *Don’t talk to strangers*. “Stranger” can also be an adjective. For example, *In the U.S., the breakfast food seemed strange to me, but the dinner food was even stranger*. Try using both the noun and the adjective in several sentences.

My Mother Is My Role Model

Life is unpredictable. We need to be strong and resilient. But how can we achieve this? Fortunately, I have a role model in my life who embodies both strength and resilience – my mother. She is my hero, my inspiration, and my advisor.

My mother married my father in her early twenties. My father was a good and kind man. She loved him so much that she agreed to move away from her parents’ town to a distant place where she was a stranger to everyone. They were married for almost 12 years. She still remembers these 12 years as the happiest years of her life.

Unfortunately, my father suddenly passed away. All the love and support she relied on disappeared overnight. She was a widow in her early thirties with five children between the ages of six months and eleven years. How could she carry on? To make things worse, my father’s relatives were not kind to her in any way. They attempted to kick us out of our home, the home that my father built for our family. They stole our inheritance by forging my grandma’s signature.

She Supported Me to Make a Change

As a result, my mother struggled emotionally, physically, and financially. And yet she has given us so much. We have been lucky to have her guidance, as well as support from her side of the family. That support was one of the main reasons she was able to endure such hardships. This is why it was a surprise to me when my mom supported my decision to move away from my family. “Family is important,” she said, “but you will need to have your own home, and with the right person, you won’t feel so far away from family.”

So, why did I decide to move away from the life I was used to and everyone I knew? Well, it’s a long story that I can summarize in three little words: Ahmed, my husband. He is a kind and tender gentleman who I knew would make me happy. Traveling so far away wasn’t easy. It was a challenge to live in a foreign country with different traditions and customs.

Luckily, here in the U.S., I have my Aunt Leila. She is a caring lady who treats me like her daughter. She was by my side when I had to go through surgery two weeks after I delivered my son. She took care of my newborn when I was under anesthesia and recovering.

Hanging out with Aunt Leila and my husband’s small social circle helped me a lot, but it wasn’t enough. I was still lonely and isolated. My husband encouraged me to venture out to socialize with other people, but I wasn’t familiar with U.S. social norms, and I couldn’t communicate well in English. My husband persisted. He supported me to take my citizenship exam, and he showed me how to go to the library. He encouraged me to learn to drive (something I had never done before I came to the U.S.).

My Son Misses His Extended Family

My son always wonders about our family in Egypt. He asks, “Why aren’t they here with us? Why don’t I have grandparents nearby like my friends do?” Once he asked me, “If you and Dad die, will I be left alone?” This is why I’m looking

forward to the day my family joins us in the U.S. This will be the day that my son will no longer fear being left alone after my husband and I are gone.

I am grateful for everything I have: friendships, family, and opportunities. But the truth is, living away from your family in a foreign land is still painful, especially when you lose those you love and depend on. Two months ago, I lost Aunt Leila, and six weeks later, I lost my grandma. It hurts so much to be away when you need to be close to receive a comforting embrace. But by the grace of God, I will prevail and be resilient in the face of being a stranger in a distant land. After all, I had a strong and resilient hero in my life.

**My sons asks,
“Why don’t I have
grandparents nearby
like my friends do?”**

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What ways does the author show her strength and resilience in this story?
2. Study the chart of adjectives, comparative adjectives, and superlative adjectives. Can you identify any patterns or rules? Make your own list with more examples of these types of adjectives.

Adjective	Comparative Adjective	Superlative Adjective
kind	kinder	kindest
strong	stronger	strongest
strange	stranger	strangest
happy	happier	happiest
funny	funnier	funniest
different	more different	most different
delicious	more delicious	most delicious
good	better	best
bad	worse	worst

Elshaimaa Karima is a student at Pawtucket Adult Education in Pawtucket, RI. She immigrated to the United States from Egypt a couple of years ago. She has a Bachelor’s degree in science from Egypt.

Opportunities

Araceli Bonilla

BEFORE YOU READ: What opportunities do you have in the U.S. that you didn't have in your country?

At First, I Was Afraid

Opportunities! Every time I think of the United States, the word that comes to my mind is opportunities.

When my son was three years old, my husband and I decided to move to the United States. We wanted my son to start school in the U.S. My husband and my son are U.S. citizens, and I had a tourist visa. When the time arrived to move, to be honest, I had mixed emotions. I was happy, but at the same time I was afraid. I wasn't familiar with this country and its culture. I didn't know the language, and, to make matters worse, I didn't know how to drive! Yes, you might think that I was *making a mountain out of a molehill*, but I was afraid.

At that time, my husband had found a good job in El Paso, Texas. We bought a nice house at a good price close to a Native American reservation. Things couldn't be better. The only problem was that the only people I knew were my three-year-old son and my husband.

Then I Felt Welcomed

Fortunately, my friendly neighbor introduced herself to me, and soon we started a friendship. She was so kind to me. She talked to me about different schools for my son. As soon as I could, I went to register him. After that, I began the process to become a U.S. resident. Within three months, I got my green card. That was a great opportunity for me because it allowed me to get an ID and then a job.

I signed myself up as a volunteer in my son's pre-K classroom. The experience was amazing. I met some wonderful ladies there. They were very



kind to me, and I felt very welcomed. They taught me different types of crafts and how to decorate classrooms. Most of all, I loved working with kids. One of the advantages of living in El Paso is that the majority of the people are bilingual. That made communication easier. I spent three wonderful years as a volunteer, but it was important to me to move forward with my career.

Enrolling in English and GED Classes

I was told that I could take GED classes, as well as English classes at a community learning center near my house. I was amazed when I found out that I could take classes for free. In my country, Mexico, we do not have the same kind of oppor-



The author with her husband and son at the ceremony where she received her GED.

tunities. Even though education is free, parents and students are always charged fees. That is why many people immigrate to other countries. They lack opportunities in their own country, their governments are corrupt, and the society has too much violence.

In my GED classes, I learned about U.S. history. The thing that amazed me the most was finding out that this country is made up of immigrants. Even before the white colonists came in the 1400s, other people migrated here from Eurasia thousands of years ago. These early immigrants were the first people* to live on this land. Now we call them Native Americans.

Finally, I graduated and got my GED. My family was there, and they were very happy. When they called out my name, my son yelled, “We are the best.” Happiness!

Proud to Be an Immigrant and U.S. Citizen

As time passed, and with a mortgage to pay, I wanted to help my husband, so I looked for a part-time job. Fortunately, I found one near my house. I took care of an 86-year-old lady. It was an

easy job that allowed me to take care of my family and complete my housekeeping chores. My son finally graduated from high school, and that allowed me to pursue my dreams. It was time for me to go back to school. And here I am, improving my English even more.

Opportunities indeed! Since I moved here I have faced several challenges, but I have had many opportunities. Today, I have the opportunity to vote on issues affecting my city and my community. I have met wonderful and kind people – teachers, students, and strangers – who smiled at me. I feel welcome. My fears are gone. I have been in this country for almost 20 years, and I am thankful for the opportunities I have had. I’m proud to say I’m an immigrant and a U.S. citizen.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What does the metaphor “make a mountain out of a molehill” mean? Share a time you made a mountain out of a molehill.
2. Find examples of short sentences in this essay. What impact does a short sentence have on you, the reader? (There is at least one example each of one-, two-, three-, and four-word sentences.)

Araceli Bonilla was born in a small town in Durango, Mexico, but raised in Juarez, Mexico, a border city across from El Paso, Texas, where she now resides. She is currently enrolled in Ysleta Community Learning Center, and she is taking a Microsoft Office certification course. Next semester, she will be starting to pursue her degree in Business Administration at El Paso Community College.

***First People Are Indigenous People**

To learn more, see <https://changeagent.nelrc.org/issues/issue-48-march-2019-indigenous-peoples/>.

Also, read “The Border Wall Runs through Our Home” on pp. 36-39 of <https://changeagent.nelrc.org/issues/issue-56-august-2022-our-immigration-stories/>.

Take Notes While You Read

Use this grid to take notes about what you read in the articles on pp. 21-25. Use this page or make your own notetaking grid in a Google doc and work with a partner to fill it out. Compare your notes with the notes other people in your class took. Write an essay about school. Include your own experience and use evidence from these articles. Cite your sources.

p. 21	School in Mexico	School in the U.S.
		
p. 22	School in China	School in the U.S.
		
p. 23	School in Colombia	School in the U.S.
		
p. 24	School in Myanmar	School in the U.S.
		

My Kids' School Was So Exasperating!

Gabriela Ibanez

BEFORE YOU READ: Is there anything about your kids' school that you find exasperating?

In Mexico, Too Much Contact

Since I moved to the U.S., I noticed a big difference between schools in Mexico and schools in the U.S. The biggest difference is that in the U.S., parents are only required to visit the school for conferences or special events. I take my son to the bus stop every morning. The bus takes him to school. At school, he gets breakfast and lunch. In the afternoon, I go back to the bus stop to pick him up. And that is only because he is a young child. My older son comes and goes by himself.

Can you believe that?

In the U.S., I Enjoy the Peace of Not Knowing

In my country, I have to face the traffic every morning and every afternoon to bring my sons to school and then bring them home. Every day, my phone is full of notifications regarding my sons' school. Mothers ask about homework, festivals, and meetings. They give their opinions about the teachers' skills and the behavior of the other children. The teachers frequently ask for help from parents to organize things in the classroom or to fix something. So much school contact made me feel exasperated. Having news from the school all the time was tiring.

Here, everything is very different. When I first came here, I was shocked and confused. How would I be informed about things at school? I used to know what was happening at every moment, but now, I enjoy the peace of not knowing. Here in the U.S., people's time is respected, and each person does what they have to do.

Except It Is a Little Lonely

On the other hand, this situation makes it almost impossible for a new mother in the school to make

friends with other mothers. I never see them. This is something I miss about the schools in my country.

My sons, however, are fine. They are enthusiastic about their new school.

They made new friends, and they don't care about their mother's social troubles.



We Are Less Exasperated

My sons say that school in the U.S. is easier than in Mexico. They say that in the U.S., they don't need to learn many things that they will probably never need. In Mexico, educational programs are full of information that students must learn. This information is often repeated year after year, but it only increases in difficulty. Students feel very tired of it in the end.

I am aware that I speak from my privilege. We have been lucky to be in very good schools both in Mexico and in the U.S. My sons are good students. I understand that other immigrants have different experiences. This is just my experience. I can say that here in the U.S., I no longer feel so exasperated by my children's school.

AFTER YOU READ: The author says she enjoys the "peace of not knowing everything" about her kids' school. On the other hand, it's hard for her to meet other mothers. Write about something that has two sides to it. Use "on the one hand" and "on the other hand" in your sentences.

Gabriela Ibanez is studying English at Santa Cruz County Continuing Education in Nogales, Arizona. She is the mother of two sons, and she recently moved to the U.S. from Mexico to look for better opportunities for her and her children.

School Is So Different for My Kids

Yan Lei

BEFORE YOU READ: What is school like for kids in the U.S. compared to the school you went to when you were a child?

Here, the School Day Is Short and My Kids Are Happy

My kids were born in the United States and now study in an elementary school. Their school hours are from 8:00 am to 2:10 pm. On my clock, it is a short time they spend in school.

I always love to see the happiness that shows on their faces when they come home from school. They always have something to show me that they have done in school. Sometimes, they show me a drawing or some other hand-made artwork. Sometimes, they even have candy or some little toy they got from school. You can imagine how much fun they have in school.

They Don't Have Homework

I always ask them, "Did you have fun at school?" The answer is always yes. And then I ask them, "Do you have any homework to do?" My second grade child always answers no. My kindergarten child sometimes has one page of homework. She doesn't need my help with her homework. It takes her maybe five minutes, and then she is done.

I feel surprised and filled with doubt. Kids go to school to learn, and they don't have any homework to do? It's always no homework! No homework on the weekend. No homework on holidays and vacation.

School Was Different for Me

I remember my own childhood in China. I worked hard at school. School started at 8:00 am, and it was not over until 5:00 pm. I had homework every day. My Chinese and English teachers gave me words to practice. I had to write them down



over and over again. They explained the grammar rules and gave me grammar practice. In math, my teachers taught me how to solve a math problem, and then they gave me homework to keep practicing until I could solve the math problem quickly. Teachers always gave a lot of homework: week night homework, weekend homework, holiday homework, and vacation homework.

If I Could Go Back in Time...

What a different school life my kids are having! If I could go back in time and immigrate to the United States when I was in elementary school, I could have escaped all that homework. I could have had a happy elementary school life, too!

AFTER YOU READ:

1. How does the author's school experience contrast with her children's experience? Be specific.
2. Do you think kids should get homework? Why or why not?

Yan Lei is from China. She is a student in RIFLI Transitions to College Class in Providence, RI. She is the mother of two kids, and she loves to learn. Her motto is: "There is no end to learning. Find a good way to apply what you learn."

Colombian vs. U.S. Schools

Juliana Duque

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. In the title, “vs.” is an abbreviation for “versus.” It means as opposed to or against. We also use it when we talk about sports teams, for example, the Celtics vs. the Lakers. In legal cases, “versus” is abbreviated as “v.” – for example, *Brown v. Board of Education*. Why do you think the author uses “versus” in the title? What do you infer the article will be about?
2. Use “versus” in several sentences.

Colombian Schools

In Colombia, the classrooms are small, but they have a lot of children. There are 40 to 45 kids per room with just one teacher! It is very complicated to maintain calm and quiet in all the classrooms; in fact, it is virtually impossible. There is a lot of pressure and stress on the teachers. In Colombia, students take more than eight subjects per year, but the schools don't have much technology, so the students can't learn them all well.

Not all of it is bad, though. Colombian schools encourage students to practice sports, and the coaches are very demanding. They push the students to have self-control and discipline. Sports help students focus on good things, not bad activities.

Unfortunately, the government doesn't do enough to support students in their studies.

U.S. Schools

American schools are very big yet often have no more than 15 kids in a classroom, which seems crazy coming from Colombia! In my town in Connecticut, each class has one teacher and one paraprofessional teacher or helper. There are also

other professionals for special needs children. The teachers are very kind with the students and they encourage social skills and being helpful to each other.

On the other hand, schools here can be crazy with drugs and bullying. To my surprise, though, each school has a police resource officer! Wow! Other staff in the school also encourage students to continue with their studies and sports.

The government supports schools with a lot of funding, so it is easier here to continue your studies.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. How does the author contrast school in Colombia with school in the U.S.? Be specific.
2. Read the article on p. 22 contrasting school in China and in the U.S. Write your own article comparing and contrasting school in two countries.

Juliana Duque, originally from Cali, Colombia, is a student at Shoreline Adult Education in Branford, CT. She is 39 years old, has two daughters, and has been living in the U.S. for ten years.



In My Country, Most People Can't Afford to Go to School

Sang I



School children in Myanmar. Photo by Kehitys Lehti from [Flickr](https://www.flickr.com/photos/kehitys/) CC by NC 2.0.

BEFORE YOU READ:

- 1.** Were you able to go to school as a child? What was it like? What challenges did you have to overcome to be able to participate?
- 2.** *Afford* (verb) means to have enough money to pay for something. *Affordable* (adjective) means something is not too expensive; it has a reasonable price. Use both words in sentences.

In Myanmar

In Myanmar, I lived in a small village. There was one elementary school in my village. We went

to that school from kindergarten through fourth grade. After we finished fourth grade, we had to go to the city for middle school. We had to leave our families in the village.

When I went to school in the city, I had to rent a small house with my friends. In this house, I felt lonely because I didn't have any family with me. At the end of the school day in the city, I would have a lot of work to do. I would have to fetch wood for cooking and walk a long way to get the water to shower or wash clothes. By the time I got home, it would be dark. When I could not afford a candle, I would not be able to study.

Every two weeks, we would go back to the village to get food and things to sell to pay for rent. We would sell foods like rice, eggs, and chicken. We would also use the money to buy notebooks, pencils, and anything we needed for school. I felt embarrassed because I often didn't have the things I needed for school. At school, there was no breakfast or lunch. Without money to buy lunch, I was often hungry at school. Also, we didn't have a school bus. Not having a bus made it difficult to get to school every day.

In the U.S.

In my country, most people can't afford to go to school. Here in the U.S., they give students everything they need. They provide a healthy breakfast and lunch. There are school buses so the children don't need to walk a long way. Children can stay with their parents or family until high school.

I have two children in school in the United States. One is in fourth grade and one is in sixth grade. The teachers are very helpful to my kids and me. Unlike in my country, they are able to call me if something happens at school and let me

know what happened. I am happy because I know my children will have what they need to study at school.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What does the author say is different about school in Myanmar and school in the U.S.? Use the grid below to organize the information.
2. Do you believe education should be free? If so, up to what level should it be free? Explain your reasoning.

Sang I is from Myanmar. She has two kids and moved to the U.S. in 2009. She is an ESOL student at Reading Connections in High Point, NC. She thanks Reading Connections for teaching her to read and write in English.



Organize the Information

Use this grid to organize the information that Sang I shares about school in the U.S. and school in Myanmar. Make your own grid in a Google doc and work with a partner to fill it out.

School in Myanmar	School in the U.S.

My First Job in America

Luiara Anderton

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. What was your first job in the U.S. (or anywhere)? Do you have a story about not understanding others or being misunderstood on the job?
2. What does a *barista* do?
3. What is your favorite coffee drink? How do you make it? Or how do you order it?

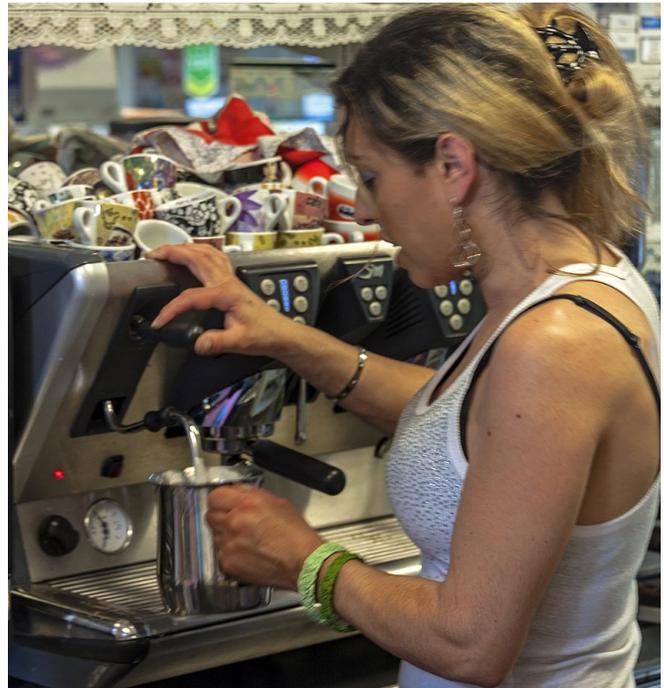
Barista at the Drive-Thru Window

My biggest challenge as an immigrant was being able to use my qualifications and experience to find work. In Brazil, I was a bilingual executive assistant with close to 20 years' experience in corporate administration. Before starting work, I got a bachelor's degree and master's degree in Education. Upon arriving in the U.S., I struggled constantly with the language barrier and people's assumption that immigrants are uneducated. With limited English, I couldn't communicate my professional experience or get recognition for my degree, so I had to settle for any job I could find. This was really hard emotionally and prevented me from making much money.

Eventually, a Brazilian friend of mine who owned a coffee shop offered me a job as a *barista*. I said my English was not too good, but he thought it was good enough. He said all I needed to do was take orders from customers at the drive-thru window. I was so happy to get a job at last; but my dream soon became a nightmare!

Wrong Orders, Dissatisfied Customers

First, it was so hard to hear and understand the orders that came through the speaker. Usually, I had to repeat the order two or three times to make sure I understood, and I often had to ask the customers to repeat themselves or speak more slowly. Most of the customers had little patience



A barista froths milk to make cappuccino. Photo by Daniel Case from <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.

with me and didn't want to take time to help me understand. I delivered a lot of wrong orders and had a lot of dissatisfied customers.

One customer got really angry and was very rude to me and told me to go back to my own country. (That was a painful experience.) Some customers tried to speak Spanish with me, but that was no help because I speak Portuguese, not Spanish. (They didn't ask me what language I actually spoke!)

Too Many Kinds of Coffee Drinks

Second, I had no idea that there are a thousand different ways to order coffee in the United States. (In Brazil, a coffee is a coffee – an espresso – and that's it.) *Americans are nuts about their coffee*, and they order it in so many different ways: "Can I have a large frozen *half caf* with double ice and

three Splendas, half coconut milk, half cream, and caramel on the side please?” What?? Too many words, too much information: what were they talking about? There were so many kinds of shots, sweeteners, milks, creams, flavors, chocolates, caramels, *OMG!* And then there was the food: plain bagels, everything bagels, many flavors of muffins and croissants, and all types of sandwiches. This was just too much for someone like me who doesn’t even drink coffee.

The first time a customer ordered “cream on the side,” I tried to figure out literally how to pour the cream down the inside of the cup. How could I keep it on the side of the cup, so it didn’t mix in? What was this nonsense way to serve coffee? I didn’t realize that “on the side” meant separated, in a different container.

Co-Workers Ready to Kill Me!

My manager *hung in there with me* for a while. He kept trying to help me and kept me on the job even when all the other staff were ready to kill me because of the number of customers who were getting upset and complaining that their coffee was wrong. There I was struggling to keep up with a bunch of teenagers to serve coffee and sandwiches. In Brazil, I was able to deal with high-level business problems and solve them in five minutes, but here in the U.S., I couldn’t handle serving a coffee! My self-esteem sank so low, and I questioned myself all the time. In the second month, I got fired.

Immigrants Do the Jobs No One Else Wants to Do

Now I look back, and I see that I learned a few things from this experience, even though it was very hard. I learned that usually only young or retired people and immigrants work at this kind of job, because most Americans want to do something that pays better. It’s supposed to be basic, easy work, but it wasn’t that easy for me because of the language. It was *definitely not my cup of... coffee!* I wish people in this country would appreciate and understand that most immigrants are

here to work hard and build a better life for themselves and their family. They often do work that other people don’t want to do.

Even if you don’t like the idea of immigration, you should realize that America was built by immigrants. We share similar values and want to contribute to the American dream. We are looking for opportunities, and we want to live in a free country. At least now I know how to make a hundred different kinds of coffee, my first lesson in American culture!

AFTER YOU READ:

1. Think about the following phrases that the author uses. If you’re not sure what they mean, can you figure it out from the context?

“Americans are nuts about their coffee...”

“half caf”

“OMG!”

“hung in there with me”

“definitely not my cup of...coffee!”

2. Where in this essay do you notice the author’s sense of humor? What parts seemed funny to you? Why? How does her style of storytelling make it funny?

3. Write about a humorous experience you have had at work or elsewhere. Make sure to include enough details so the reader can feel what it was like and experience the humor in the situation.

Luiara Anderton is an advanced ESOL student at Exeter Adult Education in Exeter, NH. She works as an Executive Assistant. She and her husband have five kids between the two of them, and their kids are their reason for living.



Taking Care of My Grandchildren

Robabeh Nazemi

BEFORE YOU READ: Did your grandmother help raise you or your children? If you are a grandparent, do you help raise your grandchildren?

I Packed My Bags

I came to the United States because my son and my daughter-in-law needed help with their baby. Both my son and daughter-in-law were working full time. It was hard for them to manage a family and go to work at the same time. They knew they didn't want to put their baby into daycare, so they asked if I could come and help. So I packed my bags and said goodbye to my family in Iran and jumped onto an airplane for a new life.

In the U.S., Everything Was Different

Once I arrived in the U.S., there were a lot of changes for me. Everything was different. I had to adjust to the culture, the food, and the language. It felt like I lost a little bit of my independence. I could not drive or go anywhere by myself because I could not speak the language and did not have a driver's license.

I started to take English classes and then studied for my driver's license. I started to become more comfortable in my new home country.

And the best part of it all, I got to take care of my grandson all day.

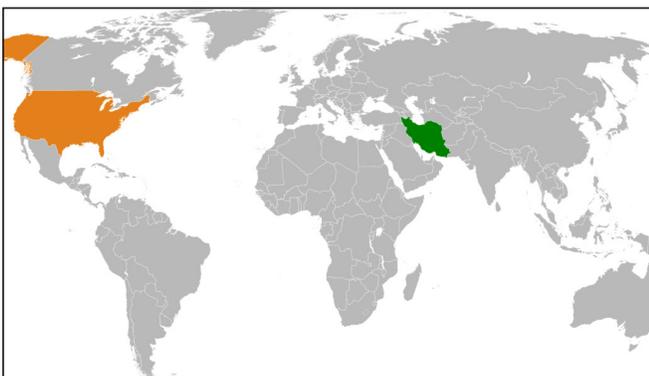
Settling In

Now I have been living in the U.S. for almost 10 years. My grandson is almost 11 now, and he has a sister, who I took care of as well. She is almost 9! My husband joined me here in the U.S. We now live in our own apartment in Seattle. We have our own car, and we can drive wherever we need to. I'm still taking English classes to improve myself and not forget what I have learned.

Overall, the United States is a very good place to live. They take good care of their elderly people. I have no stress here. The medical system is very good compared to my home country. I'm very satisfied with my life. The only problem is that it's hard for me to stay away from my other two children. I do miss my culture and home country sometimes.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. How did the author lose her feeling of independence? And what did she do about it?
2. What does the word "overall" mean in the beginning of the last paragraph?



Share what you see in this map. It is more than 7000 miles from Iran to the U.S.

Robabeh Nazemi is a student at Literacy Source in Seattle, WA. She is from Mashhad, Iran, and she is 68 years young. She has three adult children and three grandchildren.



Starting at \$6.50 an Hour

Yenenesh Tesfaye

BEFORE YOU READ: Describe your work trajectory. What was your first job? And what was your next job? How much did you get paid? Were you able to get more training while you worked?

First Worked in the Kitchen

When I came to the United States in 1998, my first job was working in the kitchen at a hotel. I had two shifts per week. After two weeks of working, the manager asked me to work three days a week, and I said yes! I needed more days and hours. I got paid \$6.50 per hour.

Then Cleaning Rooms

Then I got another job in the hotel. This job was cleaning rooms. It was hard because they gave us 16 rooms to clean in one shift. It was so hard, but I did it because I didn't have a choice.

Got Trained to be a PCA

While I was working at the hotel, I took caregiver classes. I learned to be a Personal Care Assistant (PCA). When I finished my classes, I gave two weeks' notice to my supervisor at the hotel. I got a new job working at an assisted living center. I like working as a caregiver because I love helping elderly people, talking with them, hearing their stories, and learning from them.

And Then a CNA

My next plan was to work at a nursing home. I had to be a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA). I started working at the nursing home 16 hours a day for six days a week. I got paid \$10 per hour. I was happy.

Now, after years of working, I am getting paid \$22 or more an hour.



Read more about students who work in the healthcare field and explore nursing career pathways at <https://changeagent.nelrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/extras-explore-nursing-career.pdf>. You need to have a subscription and be logged in to access that link. Photo from rawpixel.com.

Achieving My Goals

My plan was to save money to buy a house, and I did! I got married, and I have three kids. I am very happy. Now I want to focus on my education. I'm also starting my own business.

Yenenesh Tesfaye is a student at Literacy Source in Seattle, WA. She is from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and she now lives in Lynnwood, Washington, with her husband, three kids, and one dog that her kids love.

In the U.S., You Have to Rely on Yourself

Zula Sabatino



"In Mongolia, I always had help from my extended family. We all helped each other."

BEFORE YOU READ: In your home country, did you rely on your community? What about here in the U.S.? Whom do you rely on?

Surprise! I Won the Lottery

I was born and raised in Ulaanbaatar, the capital city of Mongolia. I had a great life in Mongolia. I had three sisters and a brother, and our family was very close. I was very sociable. I had a lot of friends from high school, university, and work. Before starting my career, I got my bachelor's degree in business. Then I got a job at the National Office of Statistics. I never thought about leaving my country to live abroad.

One day, my sister told me about the U.S. Green Card Lottery. She offered to help me apply. We didn't really know what to expect, but it sounded like too good an opportunity to miss. I didn't have any concrete plans. And guess what? I won the lottery and got a Green Card on my first



"But when I came to the United States, my old life didn't come with me."

try. So in 2007, when I was 27 years old, I moved to the United States, and I have been here ever since.

Starting Over in the U.S.

When I came to the U.S., I never thought about what it would be like to start everything over again all by myself. I imagined that my life would be just like what I had seen in American movies: a big house; a nice car; a beautiful, rich life. But it wasn't such *a bed of roses!* To begin with, I spent 60 hours in transit to get here, and I arrived with \$700 in my pocket, thinking it would be enough for everything.

The first two years in this country were especially hard. When I arrived, I came straight to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and I got a job as a housekeeper at a hotel. In Mongolia, I would never have dreamed of earning my living by cleaning, but this was the only job I could find. The job was

hard and paid very little. At first, I was very happy to have it, but then I began to face a lot of new problems. My coworkers, American teens and young adults, treated me in a very disrespectful and patronizing way. They gave me orders all the time. They took advantage of me and pressured me to do work they didn't want to do. They made *feel like a loser*, and I didn't have the courage or the language to defend myself. Now I see that this was racist harassment.

I also made very little money, working extremely long hours for just enough to *scrape by*. Room service tips were one of my most important sources of income. I needed those tips for basic expenses like food and gas. With little English, I struggled to communicate with everyone at work, at home, and anywhere else I went.

My managers were great, though, and helped me to understand how to do many things. They gave me a lot of hope and inspiration. I had a dream, and I thought if I just try a little harder, I can make it come true.

The Job Became a Nightmare

But soon the hotel was sold to another company, and the new management was terrible. They cut our base salary and a lot of benefits from our compensation package. My old income wasn't enough to provide for me, and now I was even worse off! I had to work harder for even less money. I



Zula Sabatino is an ESL student in the ESL 3 class at Exeter Adult Education in Exeter, NH. She is from Mongolia.



Go to <https://www.google.com/maps> and search for Mongolia. Move the cursor around to rotate the globe and explore where Mongolia is in relation to other countries.

also had the feeling that the new housekeeping manager was stealing our tips from the rooms. I complained, but nothing changed. The job became a nightmare, but I was too afraid of losing my job and income to say anything else. I thought I might be fired and become homeless. I stayed much too long in that situation.

Now, I realize how naive and frightened I was. I had to learn the hard way not to let myself be *treated like dirt*. Eventually, I quit housekeeping and became a waitress.

Now I Am Stronger

Looking back, I see now that I learned something important about the United States from this experience. In this country, you have to rely on yourself all the time. In Mongolia, I always had help from my extended family. We all helped each other. But when I came to the United States, my old life didn't come with me. Now I know, after all my hard work, that I am much stronger than I ever thought, and I have a lot of opportunities ahead of me. I have more confidence in myself.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. Look at the phrases in bold italics and discuss their meaning.
2. How is it different for workers who have a union at work? Share what you know about unions. Read about hotel workers in Boston on p. 49 of [Issue #36](#) of *The Change Agent*.

Diary of a Farm Worker

Elda M. Siqueiros

NOTE: This is a work of fiction where the author uses some elements from her own experience, especially her English class.



Spring



I am here, I made it: just me and my hopes and dreams. Hunger, gangs, and suffering—I left them behind.

From day one, I find a job as a farm worker. I am a strong young man, able to do the hard work. I have always had an inquiring mind. My father always says I have sparkling eyes and determination, and I was born ready.

Farm work is hard work, poorly paid and physically exhausting. But they offer food and a place to sleep, so I don't think twice. The farm reminds me of my town. Children work with their parents in the field. It's a big community. I meet a family. They help me when I cut my hand. They clean my wounds and feed me too. They have a son my age, Luis, and a young daughter, who asks a lot of questions.

My "roomies" drink and smoke all night, talking of better days. The reason they drink is to forget. Memories are painful. I join them, but alcohol is a vice I don't want in my life. I can't afford to spend money on it, or worse, get fired for not being productive enough in the fields. Many workers have been fired for that reason. They are now living in the streets, with no work to do and an addiction to maintain.

I hear about someone committing a felony. I

pray that he isn't a farm worker. If he only knew the consequences of his actions for him and for all of us. People judge us for our appearance, accent, and broken English. They think we are bad people. But most of us come here to escape the gangs and the drug cartels. We come here to work very hard and to send money to our families.

There's a lemon tree that I like to lie under. I rest and think of better days. I imagine my family, sitting together and eating a modest but warm meal. They are in Mexico. They don't have much, but at least they have each other.



Summer

I come back home! All my family and friends are reunited. Even Cheeto, my old dog, is here. My mother kisses my eyes and blesses me. She is so happy to see me in one piece. Everyone looks much older than the last time I saw them. They say the same of me. They receive me with a warm meal. I feel happy for the first time in years. But the happiness is short. It doesn't feel like home anymore. Have they changed? Or am I the one who changed? How ironic it is: I don't belong here, and I don't belong there.

I think of that lemon tree, the one that listens to my misfortunes without judging, lets me lie down in its roots, and sees me crying and comforts me until I fall asleep. The lemon tree is the

one who sees my tiredness and hard work. I left the lemon tree behind to come home to Mexico. The scent of other blossoms reminds me of it. Why am I thinking of that tree? Is it being taken care of? Is someone watering it? Do the lemons still taste extremely sour?

It is like that lemon tree is calling me back.

Autumn



There is a new *capataz* (foreman) at the farm. They say he is a good person. He installed a little school in the field, and he brought a teacher. He wants everyone to learn English. I saw Luis there and

his sister Maria. She is so grown up now, but she still asks a lot of questions.

Classes are a relief; we have the time to talk about ourselves. Our stories are similar. I didn't see that the person next to me also was in need of compassion and not judgment. Now I can understand why they drink. I understand their anger and frustration. I wish I knew this earlier, so I could help those who got fired. If I had listened a little more, perhaps they wouldn't have lost their jobs and fallen into addiction.

Things are getting better now. The hard work is still hard. I finished my English courses, and the *capataz* encouraged me to study an administrative career. He has faith in me. He promoted me to be a supervisor, and I am studying at a community college after work. I also have been spending time with Maria. We sit under my lemon tree to practice English. Time flies when I am with her. She is beautiful, smart, and sings like an angel. She sees me with tenderness and compassion.

Winter



Seasons come and seasons go. I now own a piece of land in this generous country. The hard work has paid off. I still come every day after work to see how my lemon tree is growing. It was my witness

and companion in those difficult times.

At the end, I could taste the perfect balance of sweetness and sour in my lemons. Now I know that to grow a healthy tree, you need more than sun and rain. You also need the sweat from hard work and many tears of pain and joy.

My beloved Maria is joining me in the garden. We have had 25 years of this adventure together. I am grateful for our life. Our children come to dinner. They have grown up and become honest, kind adults and professionals. We are so proud of them. They look at me with love and respect.

When I was about to say the blessing before dinner, a young girl grabbed my arm, calling me "Grandpa!" I looked down to see who it was. Oh, my beautiful little Flower! I saw her eyes, the same eyes that I saw long ago in the mirror, sparkling and full of curiosity, compassion, and tenderness. She is so smart; she insists on knowing the name of my first dog.

I was an unknown immigrant who decided to leave everything behind to accomplish his dream of living with dignity in the land of the free. I have learned "for everything there is a season" and a time for everything. My dream has come true.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What is the role of the lemon tree in this story?
2. Explain how the author uses the metaphor of seasons to describe the farm worker's life.
3. The quote at the end of the article is from the Bible. Look it up and read the complete verse. Discuss.

Elda M. Siqueiros was born and raised in Mexico. She is married, is the proud mother of two daughters, has a career in marketing, and is an active volunteer in her community. She just finished a semester in English Language Acquisition for Adults (ELAA) in Nogales, Arizona, where she learned to write and speak without fear of judgement. This is a work of fiction.



Finding Welcome in My New Country*

Kamka Kostadinova

BEFORE YOU READ: Share what makes you feel welcome.

Three Ways to Feel Welcome

When I moved here from my country, everything was new for me. I realized it was very important to find ways to feel welcome. After I had been here a couple of months, the Covid pandemic started, and it was even harder to feel connected. However, I found three ways to feel welcome in my new country: explore the natural beauty of New Hampshire, meet friends from my native country, and find an adult education program.

Visit Public Parks

New Hampshire has beautiful mountains, state parks, and beaches. Hampton Beach is a big beach where we spend a lot of time during the summer. My son adores playing with sand, building castles, and running on the beach. My husband and I enjoy relaxing and having a view of the ocean. Mine Falls Park is great for hiking. It has a lot of beautiful trees and lakes. You can enjoy the sounds of birds. Another park, Greeley Park, has a playground and an auditorium where they hold events. Finding these places to visit helped us feel at home in our new country.

Find Others from Your Home Country

Another important way I felt welcome here was meeting friends from my native country. I met my husband's friend Gjorge. Then I met Ivana online. After our first meeting, we became friends. We all spend time together during the holidays and special days for our families. My friendship with Ivana is so important for me because she gives me a connection to my native country. With Ivana, I can speak in my native language and express my feelings. We spend a lot of hours talking to each

other about different topics. She gives me information about daycare, food, and the healthcare system for my son. Our friendship means a lot to me, and every day it gets stronger.

English Class

The Adult Learning Center, where I went to learn English, also made me feel welcome. The classes are free, and they give me a lot of information about organizations and resources where I can meet people and get support. More importantly, I made a lot of friends. There are two friends who have been very special: Alma and Beatriz. Our friendship began when we decided to practice English together. In the beginning, we spent a lot of hours talking on Zoom. Now, we meet in person and have small parties. Even though I can't express my feelings the same way that I can with Ivana, I want to build these friendships. Alma and Beatriz mean a lot to me.

I Hope My Ideas Help You

In conclusion, now I know what to do if I have to move to another state. I know more about how to find welcome. I would explore the state parks, find friends who speak my language, and sign up for English classes, where I could meet more people. If you are a newcomer to this country, I hope my ideas help you.

AFTER YOU READ: Notice the structure of this essay. What role does each paragraph play? Are some paragraphs stronger? If so, why? Write your own five-paragraph essay about what makes you feel welcome in a new place.

Kamka Kostadinova was born and raised in Macedonia. She attends Advanced English classes at the Adult Learning Center in Nashua, NH.



* Two versions of this article are available: [intermediate \(p. 34\)](#) and [low intermediate \(p. 35\)](#).

Finding Welcome in My New Country*

Kamka Kostadinova

Three Ways to Feel Welcome

When I moved here from my country, everything was new for me. I wanted to feel welcome. I found three ways to feel welcome in my new country: visit parks, meet friends from my country, and take English classes.

Visit Public Parks

My state has beautiful parks. My son loves playing with sand at the ocean. My husband and I love to sit by the ocean. We also walk in the woods. The trees and lakes are beautiful. Some parks have playgrounds. When we visit these places, we feel at home in our new country.

Find Others from Your Home Country

It also helped me to find friends from my country. One friend from my country is Ivana. I am so glad I can speak my language with Ivana. I can express my feelings. Also, she gives me information about daycare, food, and the healthcare system for my son. She means a lot to me.

English Class

My English class also makes me feel welcome. The classes are free. I can meet people and get support. I have two new friends: Alma and Beatriz. We practice English together. Even though I can't express my feelings well in English, I love spending time with Alma and Beatriz.

I Hope My Ideas Help You

Now I know what to do if I have to move to another state. I would visit the parks, find friends who speak my language, and sign up for English classes. If you are new to this country, I hope my ideas help you.

AFTER YOU READ: Notice the structure of this essay. What role does each paragraph play? Write your own five-paragraph essay about what makes you feel welcome in a new place. Read the higher level version of this essay on p. 34.



Kamka Kostadinova was born and raised in Macedonia. She attends Advanced English classes at the Adult Learning Center in Nashua, NH.

* Two versions of this article are available: intermediate (p. 34) and low intermediate (p. 35).

Supporting Immigrants to Succeed

Carmen Contreras

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. What programs or benefits are available to immigrants in your community?
2. What does “get on our feet” mean? What supports have you needed to get on your feet? Find an online video of “Get on Your Feet” by Gloria Estefan and watch it with your class.

We Want to Succeed, We Have a Lot to Offer

Most immigrants to the United States want to succeed. We work long hours and make many sacrifices. We come to the United States because we want better opportunities. There are state and federal programs that support us to get on our feet. Thanks to these programs and our hard work, we can contribute a lot to U.S. society.

In Mexico, my husband did not have a good job. He struggled a lot. His friend invited him to come to Arizona, to work. My husband was afraid because he didn't have papers. He took the risk

We work and learn and provide for our families. We start from zero, and we do our best.

to come here because there were no opportunities in Mexico.

He started as a landscaper. Then he found a job at McDonalds. He experienced discrimination.

His co-workers called him “wetback.” They said he didn't belong here. They made him feel bad. Sometimes, he didn't have money for lunch, so he sat and watched others eat.

My husband worked hard. He never had time to go to school, but he learned English on his own. At one time, he had three jobs. He came to the U.S. illegally, but my husband is an honest and responsible person. He has integrity. He got his residency through an amnesty program. Now, he is a warehouse supervisor.

Government Programs that Help Us

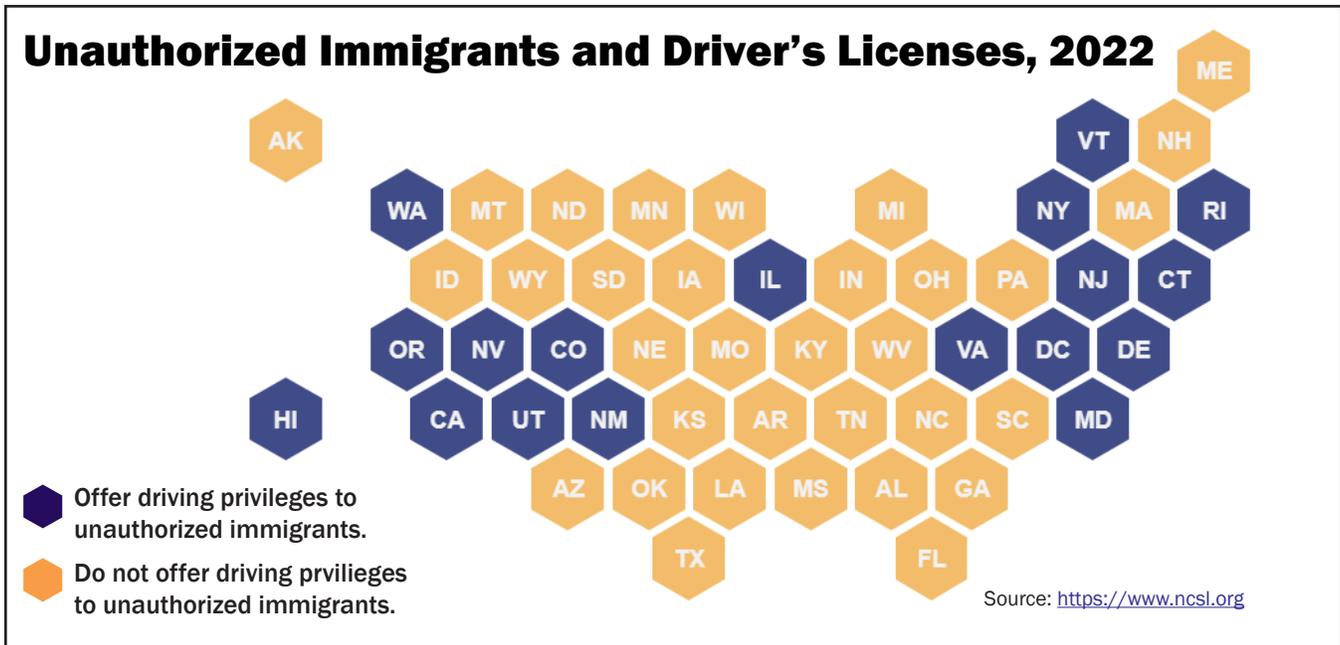
After we married, he helped me get my residency papers. Now, I am in the Arizona Work Program. This program gave me the confidence that I needed to find a job and feel empowered as a woman. I have acquired many skills, and I can contribute something to this country.

The truth is, however, that there are times when I want to drop out of English class. I work long hours, and I have to drive two hours every day to go to work. It is very tiring to arrive home at 10:30 pm, and I still have to do reports for my job plus homework for English. There are not many hours left for sleeping.

The Arizona Work Program is a free program provided by the state. There are other federal and state programs that provide assistance to people who need it. For instance, my family and I have been lucky enough to take advantage of programs such as FAFSA to help my kids get through college. On rare occasions, my husband would take food from local food banks. For a short time, we got help from state-subsidized health insurance.

There are other programs to help people with various needs. For example, there is a federal program called the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). The ACP will give you a discount on internet access. This is a very important program for all people of this country, not just immigrants. If you are not connected to the internet, it is hard to go to school, track your children in school, apply for jobs, and do so many other things.

Benefits help people when they are having a hard time. For example, I know a family where the dad and his children are citizens, but the mom is undocumented. It is very difficult for them because they are always afraid. The mom can't work, and she doesn't speak English. When they have an emergency, she can't drive. Even though



the dad works more than 12 hours per day, it isn't enough for a family of five. Nevertheless, thanks to the aid that the government provides them, they have been getting ahead.

And We Contribute to the Economy

Do some immigrants abuse these benefits? Yes, some do. They do not want to work full time because if they make too much money, they won't get to keep their benefits. These immigrants make other immigrants look bad. Some U.S.-born people think that immigrants come here to take their jobs and benefits. But this is mostly not true.

I know many more immigrants who work hard and are willing to do any type of work. Most immigrants don't come here for the government aid. We come here to work. By working here, we contribute to economic growth: we do all kinds of jobs – even the unpopular ones, and we pay taxes.

In conclusion, many of us come to this country, and it is very hard for us. We leave behind our whole lives. Nevertheless, we fight to succeed. We work and learn and provide for our families. We start from zero, and we do our best. When there are government programs to help us, we can use those to support ourselves, so we can contribute even more to U.S. society.

Source: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/immigrants-contribute-greatly-to-us-economy-despite-administrations>

AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to the author, why are government programs and benefits important?
2. Study the map above. Research the law in your state. Write to your state congressperson and let him or her know what you think about the law that is in place in your state on this topic.
3. Find out more about the Affordable Connectivity Program. Read "The Present is Digital" in <https://changeagent.nelrc.org/issues/issue-55-february-2022-re-training-ourselves-re-making-our-work/>. Available at intermediate and advanced levels.

Carmen Contreras was an elementary school teacher in Mexico. Now, she is a student at Santa Cruz County Continuing Education in Nogales, AZ, which helped her get a job working with autistic children. Her goal is to get her teacher's license and teach Spanish in middle school.



The Impossible Is Possible!

Carmen Chu

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Read the title and the headings in the essay. What do you think this essay will be about?
2. What does “ecstatic” mean? Share a time you felt ecstatic.

I Took a Chance and Became a Volunteer

We moved to this country because we wanted our three children to have a better education. While my children studied at school every morning, I went to an adult school to learn to speak English. I hoped to improve my English so I could communicate with my children’s teachers and assist them with their homework.

My school was near the library. One day after school, I took a chance and became a volunteer at the library. I needed to practice my English with a confident attitude in a friendly environment. I was responsible for sorting the books. I was pleased to have this incredible chance.

And Then I Got Hired!

After ten months, my supervisor advised me that the library had a job opening for a part-time library aide. He encouraged me to apply. I was eager to have a job, so I could help out with our family’s finances. Luckily, I got the job and became a part-time library aide at the Alameda Free Library in October 2009. My supervisor gave me on-the-job training and a manual for how to sort and shelve books.



Many Challenges and Many Strategies for Dealing with Them

I had a lot of challenges. First, I didn’t have any related experience. I had not even had a job for twelve years! I had a strong desire to prove myself useful, so I arrived on time every day, worked very hard, and seldom took sick days.

Second, the language barrier made it hard for me to communicate with my supervisor and coworkers. I tried to speak in simple and specific sentences. Sometimes, I wrote my question down on paper and showed it to them. They were very

patient and willing to help me out. They made small talk with me and made me feel at ease.

Third, I had some difficulties with patrons' questions. They asked where they could find books or what books were good for their reading levels. I could give them some information, but sometimes my mind was frozen. I had to politely suggest that they ask the librarians. I felt embarrassed and unhappy at that moment. I made a vow to myself that learning English was my lifelong goal.

Feeling Ecstatic

I am ecstatic about this chapter in my life. I have a fantastic job in the library. I am surrounded by well-written books and kind people. Also, I have the perfect opportunity to study English at Alameda Reads. Their adult literacy programs provide reading, writing, and conversation

classes. My favorite is their book club. I attend all of their classes. I have built up more confidence in my English-speaking skills. I am more relaxed about connecting with others at work. I am enjoying my ability to do my job well. This is a real *milestone* in my life.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. Describe the sequence of events that led to Carmen feeling ecstatic about her life. Use phrases like: first, then, subsequently, etc.
2. Think about the word *milestone*. What are the two words in this compound word? Can you tell from the context what it means? If not, look it up and learn about the word's origins.

Carmen Chu is a student at Alameda Reads in Alameda, CA. She is from Hong Kong. She likes working at the Alameda Free Library. She is married and has grown children. She would like to thank Alameda Reads and her teacher, Cecile, who encouraged her.

Organize the Information

In her essay, Carmen mentions three challenges and what strategies she used to respond to those challenges. Use the grid below to list her challenges and strategies. Write down your own challenges and strategies as well. Write an essay based on your notes in this grid.

Carmen's Challenge	Carmen's Strategy
Your Challenge	Your Strategy

Grief Brought Change

J.L.



The LA County Arboretum and Botanic Garden. Photo by Daderot, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/>

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. What does epiphany mean? Try using it in a sentence. Share a time that you had an epiphany.
2. Study the title. How might grief bring change?

I Lived to Work

This year is my 20th work anniversary. There have been ups and downs. I appreciate that my company values diversity and multiculturalism, and employs immigrants like me. The office culture is friendly and warm. With time, the trust between me and my co-workers has grown. However, working in this new country has not always been easy.

In the early years, working to sustain my employment-based immigration visa was es-

sential. In that situation, I was not confident in myself. I often felt tense and defensive because I was afraid of losing my job and work visa. When I sensed competition from a peer, I got tunnel vision. I worked diligently, so I could make up for the disadvantages of being an immigrant. I was always agreeable and conformed with others. I kept my head down and focused on work. I avoided internal politics and confrontations. I kept working harder and harder. I was living to work. I did not raise my head and look around to see where I was.

Then My Work Clock Stopped

In 2014, my father had a heart attack. He was in the ICU. My mother called me from Taiwan and

told me that his condition was fatal. At that point, my work clock stopped running. I left everything behind for home.

A few days later, my father passed away. Growing up in a Taoist and Buddhist family, we had to chant a series of sutras and practice various rituals for the death. Our religious customs lasted about 20 days before the funeral. It gave our family time to grieve. Indeed, during that time, I did not work. I had time to be with my family and myself. While coping with the loss of my dad, I started to look inward and examine my own life.

I had an epiphany: Was I working to live or living to work?

Work had been important to support my immigration status in the U.S. By working hard, I achieved my career goals. However, I wondered if that should be the only purpose in my life. There were so many things I had not yet explored, learned, and contributed to this country, my new home.

An Epiphany Brings Change

Perhaps it was my epiphany. Shortly after my trip, I felt an urgency to make a change.

I started by doing something new. I visited places I had never been, places right in my backyard. Every month or two, I challenged myself to explore a new place. I went to the LA County Museum of Art (LACMA), the Getty Museum, the Broad, the Griffith Observatory, the Natural History Museum, the Huntington Library, and the Arboretum and Botanic Gardens. I could stay a whole day. I felt inspired by all the talented artists, scientists, and landscapers. It was educational and filled me with eye-opening experiences.

Contributing time to help others was the second thing I chose to do to open up my life outside of work. I signed up to be a volunteer at LACMA. The tasks were not difficult but they gave me an opportunity to connect with people from various backgrounds, to see the exhibitions, as well as to visit other community-based organizations in Los Angeles. Unfortunately, due to Covid, the museum had to put all volunteer activities on hold.

During Covid, I pursued a third way to open up my life. The pandemic forced people to connect with the world digitally. This opened various options for me to engage with people and groups from anywhere. For example, I signed up for Long Beach Library's online article reading session and its one-on-one tutoring program. I also joined my sister's weekly reading group with people from cities in New Jersey, Wisconsin, Illinois, and California. And I attended online talks and seminars without physically being in the locations. All these opportunities have opened my mind and connected me to many interesting people.

Trying to Live Fully

Working hard is important. Through work, we can fulfill our needs and ambitions. But to fully live, we also need time to explore new things, be kind and compassionate to ourselves and others, and keep an open mind so that we can keep learning. For immigrants, this can be more challenging. We have to figure out how to succeed at work and navigate resources in our adopted community. What is the best way to transform your work life in a new country? Asking for help and reaching out could make a difference. Life is impermanent, so everything is possible.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. Why does work consume the author's life? What makes her rethink the role of work in her life?
2. What changes does she introduce into her life in order to "open it up"?
3. Make a class or group project of gathering information about parks and museums and volunteer opportunities in your community. Put the information in a slideshow and share it with others.

J.L. receives tutoring through the Long Beach Public Library in Long Beach, CA. She would like to thank Hugh Menton who has been helping her on both reading and writing skills, and Ana Villalpando, Literacy Coordinator at the Long Beach Public Library, who encouraged her to submit her essay to The Change Agent. They are both unsung heroes who should be recognized!

Enslaved and Still Not Welcomed

Brenda McGriff

*“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”*

— “New Colossus,” by Emma Lazarus



BEFORE YOU READ:

1. The above verse is from a poem inscribed in the base of the Statue of Liberty. Read the verse carefully several times. Look up words you don't know. What is the message of the verse and why is it connected to the Statue of Liberty?
2. Study the title. What tension or conflict do you think the essay will explore?

Brought Here by Force

This poem, inscribed on the Statue of Liberty, welcomes all immigrants to America. This statue is

the most recognizable symbol for freedom, peace, and prosperity in the world. All of us who are not indigenous could be classified as immigrants. But our Black ancestors are not conventional immigrants. Our ancestors were brought here by force, as slaves. Does this poem apply to them and to their descendants? No, not really!

Still Yearning to Breathe Free

Both Blacks and immigrants arrive here “tired and poor.” A good portion of Blacks and immigrants suffer poverty, and we are tired of it. Both groups



This *Puck* magazine cover from 1908 has the word “lawlessness” in the smoke, and “The Unwritten Law” is the title of the book in her hand (with the gun). The image makes a caricature of “Lady Liberty,” calling attention to “the widespread lynchings, disenfranchisement, segregation, and poverty that African Americans experienced after the Civil War.”

—<https://www.nps.gov>

What does caricature mean? Discuss this particular caricature. Is it effective in making a point? Why or why not?

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

qualify as the “huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” Everyone deserves to be free from oppression. But this is where the message of the poem separates the immigrants from the Blacks. When the poem says, “Send me the homeless tempest-tost to me,” who does that refer to? Clearly, that welcome is meant for the immigrants who enter the country conventionally.

In my experience, Blacks, even though we have been here for generations, are not welcomed in most communities in the U.S. We have been segregated by laws and traditions. When I look at what has happened to me and my friends and family members, I notice that Blacks are not allowed to participate in the workforce in a positive way. Housing is hard to come by, and good education is not accessible to many Black people.

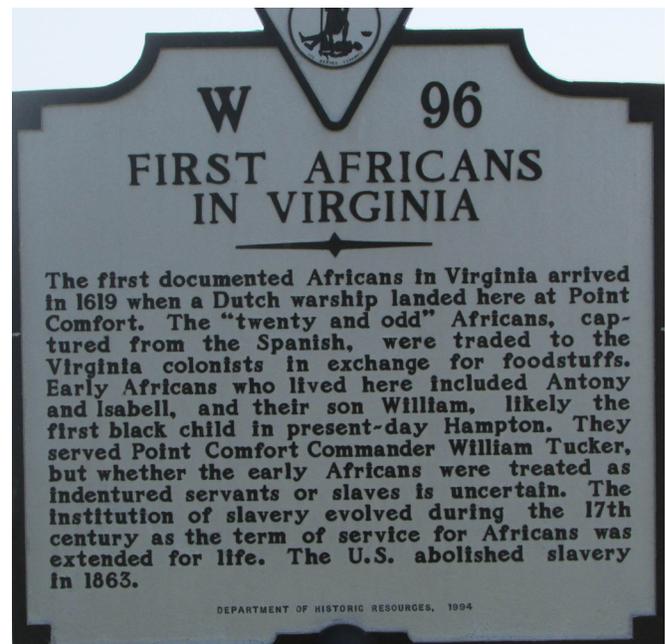
The Lamp Is Not Lifted for Us

The last line of the poem says, “I lift my lamp beside the golden door.” That lamp is lifted bright and high for many immigrants. There are programs to help them integrate into the country. While becoming citizens, immigrants are taught the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and other important laws of this country. They are also taught about different agencies that can help them with their personal needs to establish themselves. Food, shelter, and work are easier for immigrants to find in this country. It is my experience that a large portion of Blacks have no access to that information.

This doesn’t mean that some Blacks don’t achieve the “American Dream.” They do. They have money and education. It looks like the “golden door” is open to them. But in some ways, they are still stuck behind that “door.” If you are Black and prosperous, people think you are a criminal. They think that in order to acquire your good fortune, you have been dealing drugs and breaking laws.

When Will There Be Liberty for All of Us?

It seems to me that since the civil rights era, each time the plight of Black Americans is brought



This historical marker talks about the first enslaved Africans brought to the U.S. in 1619 and sold in exchange for food. Their story inspired The 1619 Project by Hannah-Jones, Nikole. Read further at this interactive website: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html>

up, we are lost in a sea of other downtrodden people. So we are marginalized even further. Hopefully one day, the inscription on Lady Liberty will be relevant to immigrants, descendants of slaves, as well as indigenous people. This country can only be better if everyone can be treated as one.

AFTER YOU READ: What is the main idea of this essay? What arguments does the author use to make her case?

A native New Yorker, Brenda McGriff is a playwright and a freelance writer, who now resides in Manhattan. She was trained in her craft at HB Studio and Frank Silvera’s Writers Workshop. Her interests include writing, cooking, and being a concerned citizen of the world. She is currently in a Writing Workshop at East Village Access, a part of Community Access, in New York City.



Asian Immigrants and Black Americans

Fighting for the Same Piece of the American Pie

Sterlin Reaves

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. What does the metaphor in the subtitle above mean? What do you infer will happen between the two groups that are fighting for the same piece of that pie?
2. Where you grew up, were there people of different national origins who ran certain businesses in the neighborhood? What was that like?

We Didn't Know Them Well

Growing up in West Philadelphia in the 1990s, my neighborhood was inhabited mostly by African Americans. There was also a small but noticeable Asian community. Back then, we referred to all of them as "Chinese," but now I know they were

They lived in our community and owned businesses.

from different Asian countries. They lived in our community and owned businesses, but nobody really knew them very well. Sometimes, we got in arguments with Asian store owners, and they would yell at us in their language, and we didn't understand what they were saying.



A convenience store in Toronto was redesigned to create the exterior shots for the show, "Kim's Convenience," which is about the life of a Korean family that owns a corner store. License: [CC by 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/).

We thought that they weren't from here and that was why they didn't fit in. What I never considered back then, but what I'm thinking about now is: Isn't everyone except (indigenous people) an immigrant? Didn't we all migrate by choice or by force to this land?

Tension Between Us

My ancestors were brought here against their will, as enslaved people. But a lot of immigrants come here because they are forced to for a different reason. Maybe they are escaping war or some other problem. Despite our similar circumstances and apparent reasons to relate to each other, there was always this unspoken feeling that we were *fighting for the same piece of the American pie*.

That feeling, real or imagined, created a tension between both groups, and it was always *simmering right below the surface*. I sympathize with

those who *desperately seek salvation* in America. Black Americans have been here for centuries, and there has been no salvation.

The U.S. is a blend of so many cultures. But when white people brought Africans here as slaves, they didn't make an effort to preserve African culture. In fact, the opposite happened. Enslaved people were punished for speaking their own language and practicing their own religion, sometimes by death. Most Black people in America can't even trace their ancestors because of how we were bought and sold and separated from our families and our roots. For many of us, our names come from the slave masters of our ancestors, not from our families.

Thinking about it now, I realize that we are all facing similar struggles, but we haven't always figured out how to *make common cause* together. Immigrants and Black Americans both want the same thing, which is to make a better life for ourselves and our families.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What does the author learn by reflecting on his childhood neighborhood and the dynamics between his community and the Asian storekeepers?
2. Revisit the phrases in *bold italics* in the text. What do they mean?
3. According to the author, why was it hard for Black Americans and Asian immigrants to make common cause?
4. Write an essay or create a slideshow describing a racial or ethnic tension that you grew up with or currently experience. What pits the two groups against each other? What could be done about it?

Sterlin Reaves has written numerous articles for The Change Agent. He is a 45-year-old inmate in Pennsylvania. He's using his experiences to educate himself and be a "change agent." You can write to him at SC-Sterlin Reaves-dx5999, PO Box 33028, St. Petersburg FL 33733.



Photo by Kathy Kojimoto

Research these moments in U.S. history to find out more about the connections and tensions between Asian and African American communities:

Late 1800s. Chinese grocers in the Mississippi Delta: Read this story, "Dismantling the Barrier between Asians and African Americans": <https://www.inquirer.com/philly/opinion/stop-and-go-asian-african-americans-20180608.html>

1992. Riots in Los Angeles following the police beating of Rodney King and killing of a Black teen by a Korean grocer. Read <https://www.npr.org/2022/04/29/1095676460/the-l-a-riots-30-years-later>

2020. Unity between Blacks and Asians in response to anti-Asian violence and anti-Black violence. Read <https://time.com/5949926/black-asian-solidarity-white-supremacy/>

Write for The Change Agent

CALL FOR ARTICLES

THE NEXT CALL FOR ARTICLES will be published on our website in February 2023. Please look for it then. The deadline for that “Call” will be in early May 2023, and the articles we select from that set of submissions will be published during the following school year. Learn more at: <https://changeagent.nelrc.org/write-for-us/>.

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A small selection of the themes we have covered:

