

Introduction

Everyone has different experiences when they come to the U.S. In my experience, this country has given me freedom, equality, and respect.

Freedom

I am a Buddhist. When the U.S. president is sworn in, he puts his hand on the Christian Bible. But I am free to join any religious organization I want.

Furthermore, my kids have more free time to play because there is less homework. In this country, your kids can play almost any sport.

Warm reminder: Try going to the YMCA to find out what sports they have. Do not worry about your English. You will find patient and friendly staff who will help your child find an activity!

Equality

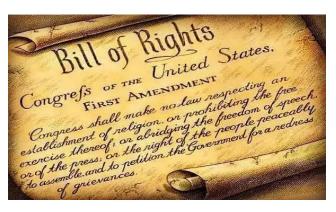
Wow, it is amazing that you can hear someone criticizing the president in public! You can write to a senator and get a response! You can comment freely on politics! Whether you are a dignitary or just plain folk, you are protected by the First Amendment. This idea that everyone has freedom of speech made me start to like this country.

The Declaration of Independence says, "All men are created equal." I know that racism still exists, but this country is still growing.

Warm reminder: Use your voice. Speak up for what you believe. Vote if you can. This country invites your participation.









Respect

As a new immigrant, I need to deal with all kinds of complicated things. And my English is very poor. But wherever I go—the bank, the store, and the doctor—the staff are always patient with me! I feel respected.

At my free English lessons, I receive the selfless help of the church people. When I first attended church services here, the people gave me friendly suggestions. They gave me ideas that helped me with my sons, and they helped me find the Chinese restaurants and shops to buy what I needed.

Warm reminder: If you have a problem in life, try visiting your local church. There are many caring people who can help you. When you receive care and respect, pass it on to others.

Conclusion

Freedom, equality, and respect make this a country close to heaven. As immigrants, we can enjoy those qualities of our new nation, and we can do our part to make them stronger.

Grace Wang is a student at Bossier Parish Community College in Bossier City, LA. Grace came to America in 2015 with her sons. In China she had a retail company, and she hopes to open a new company here in the U.S. Grace's sincerest dream is that her move to America will give her sons a better and more prosperous life. She simply wants to be a good mother.







Photo by Shawn Read, BCNC.

AFTER YOU READ:

- **1.** In the title, the author refers to "a country close to heaven." What does the metaphor "close to heaven" mean?
- **2.** What evidence does the author provide to back up her claim that the U.S. is close to heaven?
- **3.** In the "Coexist" image on p. 6, which symbols do you recognize? What do they represent?
- **4.** The author mentions freedom of religion and speech, which are rights guaranteed in the First Amendment to the Constitution. Do some research to find out what other rights are guaranteed in the First Amendment.
- **5.** The author offers "warm reminders" or advice to readers. What is your advice? Collect your class's advice on a Google doc and share it on a slideshow or on a poster to display in your program.

