



Celebrate America



2018 Winning Entries



2018 Winners

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About the Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest

The American Immigration Council works to strengthen America by honoring our immigrant history and shaping how America thinks about and acts towards immigrants and immigration.

As part of this mission, the Council partners with American Immigration Lawyers Association Chapters to host the Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest, which challenges fifth graders across the country to reflect on and write about the theme “Why I Am Glad America Is a Nation of Immigrants.”

About the 2018 Winners

We are proud to announce that the first place winner of the American Immigration Council’s 2018 Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest is Imyra Guerrero, whose poem was submitted by AILA’s New England Chapter. In an interview, Imyra shared her family’s immigration history, saying, “My inspiration for the poem was my dad’s story, and how he was so brave to make such a big choice to come America.”

The second place winner is Hamna Shahzad, whose poem was submitted by the Connecticut Chapter. Honorable mentions were awarded to Madeline Goodwin from New York, Chloe Luong from California, and Elliot Swart from Washington State.

First Place Winner: “The Blessing of Immigration”

By Imyra Guerrero
New England Chapter

It’s Gone

Everything

Gone

My home

My mom

My family

My childhood

Thinking

No me gusta!

But there’s nothing I can do

I didn’t want this to happen

But it did

I could not change anything

If I had one wish

I would stay

Left

I left everything

My mom

My friends

My home

Todas

My New Home

America

Boston

English

I was so confused

Overwhelmed

“What do I do now?”

Adiós Honduras

Adiós

I said Adiós

But I want to say it again

So,

Adiós, mamá,

Adiós, amigos,

Adiós, mi vida

Fit In

I didn't know what they were saying

Mi papá told me that we were in Boston

That they spoke English

I went to school

People didn't say “Hola.”

Instead they said “Hi.”

But I didn't

English

“How do I speak it?”

¿Cómo se dice?

“Yo no sé,” Papá says,

“We will learn soon.”

I didn't fit in

Maple Street

I saw this female

She taught me

She taught me how to speak English!

Estaba tan feliz

Nikki

Is from Boston

She's different

Smart

Sassy

Funny

Mi novia, mi amor

My New Family

Friends

Family all happy

Because of my new hija,

Imyra

I will never forget

The best day of my life,

Moving to America

I didn't know it yet,

But soon I did

Now

Ahora, este país es mi casa,

I live here,

I have family and friends here,

America!

Author's Note:

This is my papa's story. His life changed as soon as he left Honduras. He was only 14, but knew what was happening. He left because it wasn't safe. There were gangs, and people being kidnapped. He had to leave his mom which was really hard. But when he met my mom he had help instantly. Now, even though my papa got deported, he is still a blessed immigrant.

Second Place Winner: “Goodbye, Hello”

By Hamna Shahzad
Connecticut Chapter

Elahfiz (Goodbye)

Staring

Eyes fixated

Mother crying, father hugging

Grandma face swollen with tears

Uncle, Aunt, Cousin, wrapped in

Each other's arms, in each other's

Sadness

Tears

Rolling down so many sad faces

I cannot keep track of the

Many, many things going in and out

My head six years old,

Not knowing what to do

Some are crying tears of joy

Some just have no hope

Leaving home,

Leaving grandma, friends,

Family

And

The most important: my world,

My country

My six-year-old mind

Wondering

What is going on

Why is it going on
Why is everyone so sad
So many questions floating around in my head

We arrive at the Pakistani airport women with shalwar
Kammez, or a *duppata* on their head
But people with bags, jeans, shorts,
Shirts, ponytails, and
No *dupatta*

America

I walk through the sliding door
Step Outside and
What I see is blue
Sky with bright yellow ball Everywhere cars, big and small
No vans
No horse with carriers
No rickshas

We get into a car filled with
So many strange buttons
When we arrive at our destination
A lady emerges
From a house
She looks familiar
Putto,
She calls to my dad
And then it hits me
My dad's cousin,
What is she doing here?

Aslam u alakum (Hello)

My mom wakes me up

A little earlier than usual

She puts me in a

Strange brown dress

(Where is my *shalwar kameez*?)

And

Black shoes

(No *duppata*?)

She gives me a green bag

To wear on my back

A tall brown building

Inside are different rooms

Filled with kids and their parents

My mom leads me to a room with a door

Covered in strange symbols and

207 at the top

We enter

“Hamna”

How does this woman know my name?

She speaks to me and smiles

I try to smile back

Then I notice

A girl who lives in my neighborhood

Isabella

I smile and she waves

My mom tells me she needs to leave

I cry

Will she come back?

I am alone

After a long time of sad emotions

I sit down next to Isabella and I look

At Mrs. Najat, we learn how to make

Flowers

We have lunch but it's not Pakistani

Food it's this blue box with white stuff in it

I take a sip and I know what it is dood (milk)

A round brown thing sitting on

A plate I take a bite it's very sweet so I take

Another bite and then I eat it all

Isabella and I giggle,

Crumbs dotting our desks.

"Hello," she says, and smiles.

"Hello," I reply, and smile back.

Hello.

Honorable Mention: “Land of Opportunity”

By Madeline Goodwin
New York Chapter

Across my land of shriveled crops
Beyond the wildering trees Following the dreary sun
A land of opportunity is upon me

On my land I am a bird who cannot fly
My arms and legs tied to the ground
My feet bricks, weighed down from the sky
Only deep in my heart can I picture
The hope and happiness in my future

In this country, I cannot make my own decisions
Unable to learn or speak freely
My mouth forced shut,
My mind trapped in a cage
Only my dreams can capture a country free with opportunities

Day after day, dawn arrives and dusk follows
The flowers I once planted have crumbled and flown away
The sky is now dark, in sorrow
While time slowly drifts from my hand
But as time drips through my fingertips,
My feet become lighter
And my head is now held high
In my future shall lay a land of opportunity
The morning sun is now bright and joyous
Peeking out from the tall mountaintops ahead
Beams of sunlight illuminate my face

Warmth in my heart now exists
A spark of hope travels within me
Reaching the tips of my toes and the top of my head
My eyes begin to sparkle
My mouth forms a grin
With this feeling, I know, I must travel to the land of opportunity

Selecting the few items to place in my bag,
A blade slices through my heart
Leaving behind the old rocking chair beside my bed
And even the small sculpture I used to dread
Although my feet hesitate to move
My mind knows it is what I must do

Before the sun rises the next morning
I tip-toe to Papa's bedroom and stroke his thin hair
Beside his sleeping head, I place a note explaining that I will not be returning
A tear rolls down my face as I stare
And look around at this house that has raised me
Breathing in the warm air
My hands shaking and head pounding,
I close the door to a house I will see no more

Days have flown by since I embarked on this ride
My home faded long ago
I look ahead at miles of endless land and sigh
Why did I leave?
Where am I?
Where am I going?
The lonely source propelling my mind forward
Is the thought of freedom
And this thought solely

But at this time I did not know
That the next day after I awaken,
I will arrive at the land of my dreams
I finally will see the land of opportunity

Honorable Mention: Why I'm Glad that America is a Nation of Immigrants

By Chloe Luong
Southern California Chapter

She, her two sisters, and her parents,
At the witching hour, late at night
Sneakily, walk like ninjas
One foot at a time,
Come to a sight of a small boat
They board and she thinks,
Will I ever be able to see Saigon again?

He and his brother are fleeing Vietnam too
They board the ship to Australia, confidently
Leaving their parents and sisters by themselves,
"Tàu đã sẵn sàng để đi!"
"The ship is ready to go!" cries the captain
In his head he thinks,
Will I ever see my family again?

It has been a long journey,
Little food, little space,
She was in America!
She saw a large green statue,
For they called her Lady Liberty
Or, Mother of Exiles
And she thinks,
I am in America, the land of opportunities

He is in Australia now,
For him and his brother
it has been a long journey,
But he was with his Uncle now,
Living on a farm,
He goes off to high school and learns basketball, but doesn't go to college
Instead, his parents are waiting for him in America,
When he arrived he though,
I can see America and my parents!

She grows up, learns her lessons, and goes to high school and college
She thinks,
I have succeeded.

He goes off to college in America and graduates
He thinks,
I have succeeded!

I'm glad that America is a nation of immigrants because,
She, is my mom
And he, is my dad.
They are my family.

Honorable Mention: “Absence”

By Elliot Swart
Washington State Chapter

There is an absence in my heart,
I can't tell if good or bad.
Full of depression or full of gratefulness.
There is an absence in my heart, For my mother's voice.
So calming,
But if I were to hear it now,
It would be full of fear.
There is an absence in my heart, For my father's strength.
Ready to strike,
But now he would hide like a coward.
There is an absence in my heart, for where I used to live,
For where I used to be
In Central African Republic.
There is an absence in my heart, For my friends and family.
Kind and playful.
There is an absence in my heart, For everything I gave up
To have a shot at a better life.
To have a shot at equality.
There are holes in my heart,
that have been filled
With
gratefulness,
acceptance,
education,
freedom,
hope,

gladness,

and unity.

I gave up everything to be in a better place than where I was.

I hope it will treat me well.

I gave up everything to be in a nation, built on people like me.

Built on diversity.

Built on gratefulness.

Built on the American dream.