



# Teen Perspectives on Immigration 2025

from Everett, Malden and Medford High Schools Students



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# Teen Perspectives on Immigration Contest

The annual Teen Perspectives Contest from The Immigrant Learning Center highlights the voices of the latest generation of American high school students. Immigration is a topic that very much affects their lives, and we think these students have something to teach us if we give them a chance.

Thank you for taking an interest in the perspectives of these talented young people. You can see submissions from previous years on our website at:

[www.ilctr.org/for-teachers/teen-perspectives/](http://www.ilctr.org/for-teachers/teen-perspectives/)



**The Immigrant  
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# Alex

## Malden High School

First  
Place

### The Red Banner that hung high

The first Lunar New Year I spent in Miami didn't feel like a celebration at all. Back when I was in Hong Kong, the streets would glow with the saturated red of lanterns and Festive banners. The air would carry the smell of festive foods, and the city would pulse with excitement. Family gatherings, exchanging red pockets filled with money that symbolize wealth and luck, snapping firecrackers—the celebration was too prominent for anyone to ignore, as the entire city moved concertedly to welcome the new year.

“Año nuevo lunar, ¿qué es eso?”

Lunar New Year did not exist in my neighborhood. That was the response when I tried to tell someone that it was the Lunar New Year. On the day of, the sky was dull and gray, as if even it had forgotten what the day carried. In school, the hallways were filled with the usual noise of students hurrying to class, oblivious to the weight the day carried for me. There were no red banners, no well-wishes—just another ordinary day.

I was lonely at school. My classmates spoke Spanish, and their rapid conversations formed a wall I could not break through. At times when I attempt to talk, whether it is about school or the festival, their confused expressions made me want to retreat further into myself. What does it mean to celebrate something when no one around you recognized it? I found myself questioning whether my traditions still mattered if they existed only in my memories.

My mother, having sensed my unusuality, decided to introduce our culture into the new home. Despite her limited English, not to say Spanish, she knocked on our neighbor's door with the red banner in hand. She smiled warmly. “Lunar New Year,” she said. She gestured towards the decorations and pressed on. “Good Luck. Happy New Year,” she attempted. Seeing that there was confusion, she mimed hanging the banner and pointed at the sky. “Lucky,” she repeated. “Ah, suerte! Lucky! For new year?” Mrs. Cruz replied with Spanish-infused English that she had moved from Mexico not long ago. My mother beamed, nodding vigorously.

The following morning, I woke up to see Mrs. Cruz's front porch getting fluttered with the red banners. A victory! Soon, word spread, and more and more people approached us with curiosity regarding the decorations. We spent time explaining the tradition: the symbolism of red for prosperity, the giving of red envelopes, and the importance of family gatherings, all of which highlighted the significance of the tradition. Many neighbors joined in, dying their houses red with the banners. They also shared their own traditions with us—how their families celebrated Día de los Muertos or Three Kings' Day—and we recognized many commonities within our shared reverence for ancestors, family, and prosperity.

It was the beginning of something greater. By the following year, Red banners were hung on more homes. Some neighbors even learned to say “Gong Hei Fat Choy” or “Xin Nian Kuai Le.” Mrs. Cruz made tamales and brought them over while my mother prepared dumplings. We blended our traditions and enjoyed the fusion. I no longer felt so isolated. My traditions had found a home in America, not by replacing others, but by existing alongside them.

This experience is the epitome of American society. Immigrants carry rich traditions that shape and enhance the cultural landscape in America. According to statistics from the Pew Research Center, immigrants and their descendants will account for 88% of the U.S. population growth through 2065. This demographic shift will lead to more fusion of customs, languages, and celebrations. Examples include festivals like Diwali, Eid, and the Lunar New Year; these once-niche observances are now celebrated in cities across the country. This mosaic of culture strengthened America and turned it into a place where different backgrounds coexist and enrich one another.

Sharing traditions is not just about preserving cultural identity; it also promotes understanding and unity. A study by the National Immigration Forum found that communities with strong immigrant integration programs tend to experience lower crime rates, higher economic growth, and greater civic engagement. When people share their customs, they break down barriers of misunderstanding and prejudice. Food, music, and celebrations become bridges between cultures, turning strangers into close-knit friends and fostering a sense of belonging.

My experience in Miami taught me that cultural exchange is not just about holding onto the past; it's about shaping the future. Lunar New Year in my old neighborhood transformed from an unknown tradition into a shared celebration, demonstrating how immigrants do not just assimilate into America—they redefine what it means to be American. This openness to cultural exchange is what makes the country unique. It is why you can find sushi restaurants next to taco stands, hear different languages spoken on a single street, and see people from all backgrounds celebrating holidays that are not their own.

Years later, when I look back on that first Lunar New Year in America, I no longer feel the sting of isolation. Instead, I remember the red banners that stick to the wall with written blessings, a testament to the power of cultural sharing. I remember my mother's determined smile as she bridged a gap with nothing but kindness and broken English. And I remember how, through something as simple as a holiday, I found my place in a new area—not by abandoning my roots, but by planting them in new soil and watching them grow alongside others.

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## Kelly Malden High School

### Second Place

#### Dance with the Lion Unafraid

Dudududu. The distant vibrations of the tanggu drum sent a familiar thrill coursing through my veins, evoking the same child-like awe I've always held. Clang, clang, clang! The loud clashing cymbals and equally thundering gongs echoed after it. Every head inside Malden's Sun Kong restaurant, a community staple for Chinese dim sum, swiveled toward the door in anticipation. It was one of the main traditions to look forward to during the Lunar New Year celebrations—the lion dance.

The lion dance is an essential tradition in Chinese culture that immigrants keep alive. Every year, it is customary for lion dances to visit Asian businesses within their community. These dances are commonly believed to bestow good luck and prosperity for the upcoming year while also chasing away any lingering evil spirits. Onlookers are encouraged to give red envelopes of money to the big-headed Choy Sun, the god of Wealth, in the hopes of gaining financial success, too.

Pushing the restaurant door open, the Choy Sun pranced in, guiding a fierce red lion that arrogantly glared down at its onlookers with its large, beady, blinking eyes. A second yellow lion followed, bowing its sparkling golden fur to greet the business owners. As the lions patrolled around the restaurant, rearing up to dance to the rhythm of the drums, I came to a curious realization—most of the lion dance procession, adorning their red jackets, did not bear Asian features. Instead, I saw flashes of blond hair, tan brown skin, blue eyes, and many other markers that signified diverse ethnicities and backgrounds. The group was from Malden's local Wah Lum Kung Fu & Tai Chi Academy. Many kids in Malden, including some of my friends, have taken classes there. The academy is just one of the many ways people in Malden can unite and learn from different cultures.

Pushing a hóng bǎo adorned with gold etchings into my hands, my mother instructed me to bow as the Choy Sun came by. "It will bring lots of money and good luck," she promised. Other tables were doing the same, offering their red envelopes with both hands to the god. It was slightly bewildering but heartwarming to see people from various backgrounds open-mindedly participating in my culture's traditions—this genuine interest and engagement in different cultures makes Malden so unique.

According to the City of Malden's demographics page, minorities make up about 51% of the population; this is not just a statistic but a fact evident in our way of living. Malden is as united as it is diverse. Built on a population of immigrants, Malden serves as a welcoming transition into American life for people of all backgrounds. One of the most challenging barriers for immigrants to overcome is the reconciliation of their own cultural identities after confronting America's hostile society. By facing alienation from familiar sights, people, and language, immigrants are often forced to adapt to the American lifestyle abruptly;

this might mean stripping away crucial aspects of their ethnic identities and leaving them more isolated than ever before. My mother would tell me, "I was too scared to even go grocery shopping because I was afraid that the cashier would talk and I wouldn't be able to understand."

Luckily, Malden's networks of ethnic communities and support towards immigrants have made it a city that anyone could call home. And at the center of it? Malden High School.

Each student at Malden High possesses their own story, woven between complex layers that hold their identities, backgrounds, and values. Therefore, you might never know what insight or perspective you can gain just from talking to someone in the hallways. What makes its community even more inclusive is its club culture, where students embrace their differences and encourage others to learn about each other. Walking into the Asian Culture Club might expose you to passionate discussions on Asian cuisine and media, while the Afro-Caribbean Dance team may help guide you through the swaying beats of the rumba. The K-pop club might offer you a multitude of different music to listen to, and the Hispanic Heritage Club might invite you to try some of their cuisine in their potlucks. A student at Malden High is never completely alone, as there is always a community that they can belong to.

The Multicultural Club ties the community together, a club that reminds me how unique our differences as individuals can be. Last year's Multicultural Night, for me, felt like a representative of Malden's values of unity—a place where the sights, sounds, and smells of different cultures wafted together to create one whole living entity. I remember walking in and being hit with mouth-watering aromas from the buffet, which included cuisines from China, India, Spain, Brazil, Vietnam, and many other countries. Further down in the courtyard, the line for henna art stretched far across, and people flashed their gorgeous cultural attire as they tangled together on the dance floor. "I love your robe! What culture is it from?" I remember asking a girl in a long, flowy blue dress decorated with delicate jeweled designs. For me, the most exciting part of the night was what I learned about different backgrounds and perspectives. Similar to the awe I felt watching the lion dance, it was at this point where I never felt more proud to call Malden my community. So, the next time you hear the beating of the tanggu drums begin, remember that you can join the dance, too.

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### The Cultural Impact of Immigrants on American Society

Today, I speak from the heart, sharing experiences I have lived through and witnessed since birth. I understand that every person has their own journey, with their own struggles and triumphs. My journey began in Afghanistan, a country with a deep history, a rich culture, and people known for their resilience and hospitality. Despite the challenges we face, Afghani people are among the most hardworking and hopeful. When given an opportunity, they can turn dreams into reality, even in the most difficult situations.

But Afghanistan is also a country that has faced countless hardships. War, violence, and fear have shaped the lives of its people. I was born in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, where I experienced the beauty of Afghan traditions and the love of a strong family. My family is supportive and encouraging, always teaching me the importance of hard work and perseverance. However, our lives were not always peaceful. I still carry memories of the day when explosions shook our city and I witnessed the destruction of my homeland. Despite this constant threat of violence, we managed to keep our traditions alive.

In Afghanistan, education was viewed as a serious privilege. I was taught to study hard because we knew that education was a rare opportunity that could change the course of our lives. However, as I grew older, I realized that Afghan and American society differ in many ways. In Afghanistan, the focus is on studying and gaining knowledge, but in America, talent and skills are highly valued. This taught me that each culture has its unique way of shaping a person's future.

I grew up in a large family that had many customs and traditions. For example, Nowruz, the Afghan New Year, was always a time of celebration. We wore new clothes, shared delicious food, and spent time with family. These traditions gave me a sense of belonging and pride.

But despite the beauty of these traditions, our lives in Afghanistan became more dangerous each day. I will never forget the day when explosions hit Kabul, one of which occurred near my home. That day, I stood by the window, full of wounded and dead people. It was a moment of fear and pain that I will carry with me forever. This was the reality for many families—living in constant danger with no guarantee of safety or peace. Finally, my family made the difficult decision to leave.

Our journey took us to Turkey, where we faced many challenges. The language was difficult for me, but my father's knowledge of Turkish helped us adapt. Despite the difficulties, we made the best of our situation, and I worked hard in school. But even in Turkey, I faced prejudice. It was hard to feel comfortable in a place where people didn't understand our background or appreciate our culture. Yet, I remained proud of where I came from. I continued to study hard because I wanted to make a difference.

After three years in Turkey, we moved to France, where we experienced more challenges. As immigrants, we were strangers in a new land. We didn't know anyone, and the language barrier was just as strong. We worked hard and tried to adapt, but once again, we faced bigotry and discrimination. It was difficult to fit in, but we remained determined.

Finally, we moved to the United States, and this is where I truly began to understand the meaning of freedom and opportunity. America is a place full of possibilities, where hard work is respected, and people have the chance to create a better life for themselves. Though there are challenges, I now see how important it is to embrace diversity and respect different cultures.

As an immigrant, I can say that the culture and traditions I bring from Afghanistan and the experiences I've had in different countries shape the way I view America. I have witnessed firsthand how immigrants like myself help the U.S. We bring with us the traditions of our homeland, the languages we speak, the foods we eat, and the art we create. These things make America more vibrant and diverse.

In my school, Malden High School, there are students from all over the world. Each of us carries a piece of our culture, and together, we create an environment of learning and respect. We share our stories, languages, and dreams. This is what makes America special—a place where different cultures can come together, learn from each other, and build something greater than themselves.

Afghan immigrants contribute to American society through their strong values of hospitality, resilience, and hard work. Afghan culture emphasizes community, generosity, and respect for elders, which can strengthen social bonds in the U.S. Many Afghans are entrepreneurs, bringing businesses that enrich local economies, especially in food, textiles, and trade. Afghan cuisine, poetry (like Rumi's influence), and traditional arts add to America's cultural diversity. Additionally, the value of education in Afghan families encourages academic success, and Afghan immigrants often pursue careers in medicine, engineering, and business, contributing to America's workforce and innovation.

As an Afghan girl, I am determined to use my voice for change. I want to be the voice of the Afghan girls who have been silenced, who have been denied an education, and who are denied their basic rights. These girls deserve to be heard and to be given a chance at a better life. I will fight for their freedom, and I will fight for a future where every girl, regardless of where she is born, has the right to dream and to achieve her goals.

America is a country made by immigrants, and it is through their perspectives, cultures, and hard work that the country continues to grow and evolve. I am proud to be an immigrant, and I am proud to be Afghan. My culture, my story, and my struggles will contribute to making this country stronger, just as immigrants have always done throughout.

#### About the author:

My name is Safa, and I am a sophomore at Malden High School. My favorite activities are reading books, researching, and watching documentaries about different subjects. I am very interested in advocating for human rights because they are valuable and important to me.



# Amelia

## Malden High School

### The Cultural Impact on American Society: What Cultures and Traditions do Immigrants Bring to Your School, Communities, and/or the U.S?

#### How do These Cultures and Traditions Make America a Better Place?

Immigrants are a crucial part of American culture and identity as a nation and have played an important role in shaping America. Immigration is nothing new, yet we treat the concept as if it is. Misconceptions drive nativism, and white supremacy fuels uneducated rationales. However, I think it's time we look at the facts and open our minds to the truth of immigration, and what immigrants bring to our communities and the nation itself.

Malden, Massachusetts is a great example of a society impacted by cultural influence. According to the World Population Review, Malden's population is 40% made of first and second-generation immigrants. Malden's 5 largest ethnic groups consist of the White (Non-Hispanic) population (44%), followed by Asians (27.5%), Black or African Americans (13.3%), and White Hispanics (about 4%), according to Data USA. In 2024, Niche ranked Malden as one of the most diverse cities, a consistent result across Niche's evaluations over the years. The rising generation in the school system in Malden is even more diverse than the City itself as the student body has a "76% chance that two randomly selected students will be of different races," as said by the Boston Indicators. The diverse influences of the Malden school system allow for cultural expansion, where students learn about foreign national identities and cultures, thus creating an inclusive multicultural community. Students at Malden High School have created many clubs to support and preserve their culture, religion, beliefs, and much more. Some of these clubs include the Asian Culture Club, Black Student Union Club (BSU), Feminism Club, Hispanic Heritage Club, Multi-Cultural Club, Pride Club, Rainbow Lions and many other clubs to support and provide academics, sports, minorities, volunteer work, and many extracurricular activities.

As a nation, however, Immigrants have even greater benefits to both the prosperity of society and the economic welfare of the nation. Forty-eight million immigrants single-handedly accounted for an extra 1.6 trillion dollars made in the U.S. during 2022. But that's not all, immigrants have not only contributed to economic welfare through labor, but they have also contributed by paying taxes. The American Immigration Council documented that in 2022 immigrants paid 75.6 billion dollars in taxes. Through these contributions, towns and cities have been able to improve their area by using these funds, which maximizes national prosperity.

As a student at Malden High, the current 2024 immigration crisis has affected my life and the people around me, so I would like to speak a little more about this topic and what it means to me. As of right now, the Trump Administration is performing mass deportations as their administration did back in 2018. According to the research collected and presented above I would like to explain the detrimental impact and logistics of what deporting immigrants will have on our societies, communities, schools, and nation.

For starters, the government doesn't have enough money to afford these mass deportations, as that would require roughly 88 billion dollars a year to sustain, reduce domestic produce by 1.6 trillion, and lose 75.6 billion dollars in immigrant taxes every year. So, that leads us to the question of what will the government do with all these arrested people that they cannot afford to deport. Well, ICE has already started building "prison camps" to hold the arrested immigrants. Furthermore, the revoking of birthright citizenship was recently proposed, but soon was rejected, however, if this proposition was passed, that would allow the government to deprive these birthright citizens of life liberty and due process. By doing this, those individuals would then be considered illegal immigrants, which would allow them to be deported and/or put into prison camps where the 13th amendment would allow this form of "slavery" but only when someone has been convicted of a crime, hence the birthright citizen being an illegal immigrant therefore illegible to be placed in these prisons. If this reminds you of a certain event that happened in the 1941's with Germany then you would be following on perfectly. Deportation of our fellow immigrants would cause a national depression to the U.S. economy and much worse consequences if deportations continue.

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#### About the author:

Amelia is a sophomore attending Malden Public High School in Massachusetts. At Malden High School she is the Captain of the Girls Varsity Soccer Team, Vice President of her class, Media coordinator of the Malden High Rock Climbing Club, Girls Soccer Team, and Boys Soccer Team. As a part of the varsity soccer team she volunteers at T.O.P.P. Soccer, and organization that allows disabled kids to learn and play soccer due to their inability to play on standard soccer teams. Amelia is thirteenth in her class with a weighted 4.0 GPA and 4.67 unweighted GPA. She plays club soccer year round, as she intends to play soccer in college where to will take up a business major.

# Anne-Christie

## Malden High School

### US

At home it was the hot sun during the day, an enchanted light blue sky, the smell of coffee when I woke up, the radio that broadcasts street news, a plate of spaghetti in the schoolchildren's lunch box and a corn with avocado leaves for breakfast. It was enough for a day of one night that everything is turned upside down in our little paradise to a field of war, crying, and mourning. I was not too interested in the countries that surround me, even if it was not luxury. But living in my country pleased me, it was the laughter of my classmates, a small neighborhood crowded with people, where everyone knew each other, I did not think about the day aftermath of what my life would be, until the sun lost its shine, the sky became gray, the misery that ate us, the news more and more Heavy that brought sadness, fear and desolation.

I proudly wore the title of a nation but when I arrived on a foreign land I was called "Immigrant" this title defined me in their eyes not that it bothered me but we saw that of me. But what is an immigrant? This title did not simply mean coming from outside, this title means humiliation, judgment, hatred. We all carry a burden by having this title while we are all looking for a better life. I was not impressed when I arrived. I was used to its giant building, its skyscrapers, the sounds of sirens, the large streets, sometimes crowded or deserted. I was used to it thanks to the TV, it was not new to me but I had to face greater than that "solitude". No one talks about it enough how it is hard to change to have gotten used to a new repatriation, to live in a place where everyone lives in his bubble while before you lived sharing, to live without even knowing the neighbor next door, find yourself without hiding yourself and only God knows and we ask ourselves "Where are mine?" "Where are those who share my blood?"

The Haitian community is very widespread in the United States. It was not difficult for me to find mine, those who are always ready to work whether it is hot or cold, those who aim to see the best for tomorrow, those who have families behind them helped, or those who are ready to hate for no good reason. This title that I wear makes some villains towards us, but do you know? Do they know that our own brother and sister humiliate us for coming? So what are we there for the same cause as them? A better future because hope makes you live? Do you know that they are throwing us out when we are unknown to everything and that we have to do it as always to survive? You probably say to yourself but what are we doing here if we already know the verdict? Then I will answer you with this "IF" if I knew when I was going to finish my classical studies I will have a good university studied you will not have seen me here if I knew that my big brother was not going to sit with a piece of paper proving that he spent 13 years of his life on a bench to learn and that in the end there is nothing to offer him you would not have seen me here, if my mother had not lost her job you would not You won't find it here, and if you say what the leaders of

the country do, well I'll teach you a little life lesson \* as long as you profit you become blind". But do they know that we would never have left our little paradise if we saw the opportunity to move forward, if we saw a better future.

Being an immigrant is not only working hard for tomorrow, it's also means making a unique contribution for my part my basic culture is voodoo but it's a long story how colonization made us completely forget where we come from, being an immigrant is also its touch of Kompa, the carnival of the Antilles, it's the Bachata, it's the Navroz, it's the Dio de la muertos, the Festival of Lanterns (Yuánxiāo Jié), the Tenjin Matsuri, or las Fiestas Juninas , it's also our dishes the pumpkin soup, it's the Ackee and saltfish, it's the Bandeja paisa, Biryani and haleem, we are not those who said they eating dogs and cats, not those who we stretch our eyes to describe or that we look at the skin color, those who dress says that it will explode everything, it's not us "immigrant".

Blind are they if they don't see what we bring them, idiot they are. We who could have been doctors at home, we who could have been engineers, diplomats, lawyers, teachers, farmers, secretaries, workers, technicians, policemen, soldiers, chefs, service agents, drivers, caregivers, at home, they are blind to see us only as wild animals that sow the mess. My mother had put me in one of the prestigious schools in the country despite the fact that we did not have the means because she counted on me, because it is her children like me who are the day after their country, and that's where we managed to offer open arms our souls fiercely behind the best, to run after opportunities, fill an economy and that after we are forced to return to where we came from, here we are children immigrated to be the future of a country that is not ours. Why not stay to rebuild your home? Say you, you as we know the answer, so let's be silent.

My simple little words will not be up to the task of defining what it is to be an immigrant. what it is to live as an immigrant, what it is to beg for respect, to face the trials of life and the hatred of a similar. But I want to pass that I am a 'HUMAN' just like you.



# Ashily

## Everett High School

### The Immigrants

Immigrants are very important in the United States. Why? Well, Immigrants have a significant and special place in this country because they have brought happiness and peace, especially with their hands. After all, thanks to immigrants you have the opportunity to try fresh and healthy fruits and vegetables that you find in every store you go to. Immigrants have also been a great help to this country because thanks to their powerful hands we have had delicious dishes from different countries with different flavors and textures that we as immigrants and you as citizens have been able to enjoy and try. Immigrants have also brought different types of music and rhythms to this country that have inspired most young people and adults in their lives or simply made them create hobbies. There are so many students in the United States who are immigrants, and each of them has the ability and strength necessary to quickly adapt to a new environment. The majority of the students who are immigrants come to this country with the desire to succeed and to give all of their effort, dedication, and intelligence to achieve a better life for themselves and their families. American schools have the benefit of having books in their libraries with multiple languages or topics that might be interesting for teachers, students, or any other person. They also can have more languages that could help any students to speak, learn more about us as immigrants, and succeed in their careers. America is becoming a better place every day because thousands of immigrants come here and go to school and learn and after graduating, go to college, get the diplomas that you need for your career, and after all that you start working for this country.

I'm an immigrant. I came here in 2019 thinking I was gonna have a better future for not just myself but for my family. When I came from El Salvador to the United States I didn't speak proper English because English was not my first language and I started having a dream that now is my priority to better my English for my future, my skills, and my intelligence. Spanish was my first language and learning English is of great importance in my life because I want to become a big part of serving the United States and I would like to be one of the few Latinas that become a Police Officer.

We as immigrants go through too many obstacles in our schools, jobs, or even in public places because we experience a lot of bullying, discrimination, or racism. Many parents or families who are immigrants go through this type of thing daily, most of the time at work they are treated differently for being immigrants. They make them do things that are not their responsibility and all of this happens because of those people who discriminate against them without really knowing how hard they work, without knowing them. They judge them by the clothes they wear, the jewelry they wear but never sit down and think about how hard they work, and that without them the United States would not be the United States because thanks to immigrants they have more workers who do a great job. They spend day and

night working hard without stopping so that companies and places progress and have popularity and make money.

Now, I'm here to speak up for all those immigrants who are afraid to speak at loud. I'm here to defend every one of them using my voice and I wanted to let Donald Trump know that we are fighting for our lives as an immigrant. Many immigrants are working for this country to make it even better and they are people who are poorly fighting for their lives, they may not be citizens or have property of documentation but they pay taxes, these days we as young people and adults have been seeing many kids scared by getting their parents taking away, independence from families who fear for our lives that the majority of them are not criminals and they have put their trust in you and faith to save us. All the immigrants have come here for different reasons or maybe not, but half of them have come here to serve this country and have a better future for their families.

Since I started adapting to this country, like Martin Luther King Jr I have dream for those who have passed through all unfair situations but now I am here to talk about a dream that each one of us as immigrants wants to talk about but are afraid to do so and now I tell you that I have a dream that one day this nation will stop judging immigrants and accept them as they truly are. I have a dream that one day immigrants will speak out without being afraid and be heard in any country they live. Why do people judge and bully others without any reason or evidence? Why do they do all that? I Have a dream that one day U.S citizens and immigrants can work, be heard and fight for their rights as a community in our government. I have a dream that in every school that citizens and immigrants go to, they don't judge each other for their skin color, region, personality...etc, and can be compassionate and respect each other. I have a dream today that we can work as a team to stop the bullying of immigrants and we will show them the kindness of this land. I have a dream that one day we all start noticing how many immigrants we hurt with our words and actions and stop bullying people. Although it is gonna take time to make people understand how being oppressive to others affects our country and us as human beings, I still have a dream today. I have a dream that one day we will have more hard workers without being judged, and we will have more students at every school learning and becoming triumphant without getting bullied. This is my hope and faith. With this faith, we will be able to become a better country with hardworking immigrants, where citizens of the United States and immigrants are all in one because people think it isn't important but is very significant to the majority. This will be the day when every single one of us will be able to live in this country with charity and kindness, where everyone will speak out and fight for their rights without being afraid, feel judged, or be compared to other people or objects.

# Betelihem

## Malden High School

### I Left My Heart Back Home

I invite you to follow me on my journey about my immigrant trip with me, my name is Betelihem, I am 15 years old and come from a small country that is found in East Africa, Eritrea. My journey started in East Africa. I was born in the beautiful city of Asmera, Eritrea. It is a small country that is located on the Red Sea surrounded by many different types of trees, and has lots of farms around.

At first, it was very difficult moving to a new country because the movement, weather, food, and environment were nothing like Eritrea. However, I behaved enough to carry myself together and was ready to learn new things about a new country even though it was difficult. My family came to the US to build a better future career for me. Back when I first came here I never came to realize that my family moved all the way leaving everything behind just to make my future better. I never understood how I felt back then because my heart was divided into two pieces one was in Eritrea and the other one was here in the US. Just because I am here with everyone with a smile on my face and laughter in my voice, doesn't mean I know that my heart and soul are still back home. But now that I have come to realize that my family sacrificed this all for me, the only way to pay them back is by making them proud by doing well in school and showing them that I am on my way to success.

Many traditions from my home country are very important to me, such as my religion and culture because they are the reason why my characteristics and personality are the way they are. My family and I moved to the US 5 years ago and we knew nothing about this country, and it was very difficult for us but still, we stuck together and stayed strong while trying to not forget about our traditions while learning about the US traditions. So some things that helped me to not forget my tradition are going to church more often and seeing people from my hometown and we all share things and we remember and talk more about our hometown. We didn't forget about our culture. We started doing them in the United States as well.

Ever since I came to the United States I have learned about Thanksgiving and Halloween, which is an American tradition. In the beginning, I never knew what they were at all, then the more I lived here the more I got to know more and learned more about them and got to know more about this American tradition. They are very interesting topics to learn about. At first, I was a little confused but I actually have come to like Thanksgiving, Halloween was not something that I liked from the beginning, and it's not something common that we are allowed to do in my religion but I liked it because I got to know more about it and know if it's bad things or good things for me to celebrate.

In my country, there are 9 ethnic groups. I love all of them because we each have our own cultural clothes and they all have their unique way of life and traditions. It's very interesting because we learn more about each other even though we live in the same country. I have been told many times how my culture is very interesting and when I meet people and they want to learn more about my country I feel proud and not ashamed because my country is small, that no one has ever heard of it and so it feels really good to be able to share my country's story with others.

However, when I came here and started to learn more about this country I came to realize that people here don't actually care about guests that come to your house. In my country back home when guests come to your house we have to make "BUN" which is a fresh coffee beans made at home and when the beans are dark enough offer the guests smell it, it smells like fresh coffee that is sweet and it makes you feel like your back at home gathering with our family laughing. While the coffee is getting roasted because it is a sign of respect, welcoming and blessing, and if that person doesn't drink coffee we make them a "SHAHI" which is tea. Whenever a guest is coming over we have to make something to show them respect, but here in the US when people come to other people's houses they leave without eating or drinking anything or they just order stuff from outside which is not a good sign in my country.

I think my culture helps make America special because Americans get a chance to learn and experience more about our country and get to know more about our culture which is a good thing. Our culture is one of Mesmerizing, rich heritage, and unique cuisine. Two parts of my culture that I always want to keep are my religion and behavior because my country is well known for its kindness and welcoming people and how much we respect our religion. Eritreans will continue to leave a lasting impact on American culture and I'm proud to be called one of them.

#### About the author:

My name is Betelihem I am 15 years old and currently in 9th grade I live in the City Of Malden. I am originally from Eritrea. One of my hobbies is painting or drawing.

# Chelmie

## Malden High School

Honorable  
Mention

### Immigrants Cultural Impact on American Society

The cultural contributions of immigrants have profoundly shaped the American society we have today. Throughout American history, we can see the impact of those who have immigrated in many ways. Undoubtedly, moving to a new place can be extremely scary. Despite this, those who have immigrated to America have showcased their determination and pride in their culture. Without their pride, the contributions they have made today wouldn't be as visible. One of the major contributions has been towards cuisine. Immigrant communities have transformed American cuisine by introducing their cultural dishes such as sushi from Japan or countless Mexican dishes. These dishes can be found in numerous restaurants and even grocery stores. Immigrant cultures have also introduced new languages to America. Spanish is the second most spoken language in the U.S. and is now available for students to learn in many high schools. Another prime example of immigrants shaping American society is through music. Immigrants have not only taken over the music world through their distinct styles such as Kompa from Haiti or Reggaeton from Latin countries, but they've also enchanted the dance world by introducing immeasurable styles of dance from their home countries.

These traditions and cultures make America such a unique place. America's diversity is truly a key point to why we are such an amazing country. Countless people from around the globe immigrate to America, bringing their culture with them. Immigrants introducing their culture and traditions lead to more learning opportunities within America. It allows for America to be educated on many other countries around the world and their way of life. In fact, I believe that immigrants are essential to the American way of life. However, coming from my personal experience it is extremely difficult for immigrants to share and keep their traditions while learning American ways of life.

Being an immigrant in America, you can't help but feel different while learning about American culture and their way of life. This is why I believe immigrants carry onto their traditions and culture so hard, as it reminds them of home. Immigrants keep and share their traditions through food, cuisine, and language as I mentioned before, but they also rely on family, festivals, and art to maintain their traditions. Family is essential to carrying on traditions in many places. Immigrants can rely on family to teach younger generations about their culture and traditions while also embracing the American way of life. Public festivals and parties make it easy to introduce a certain tradition or culture to others. For example, Chinese New Year parades are open to the public. These parades being open to the public act as a learning opportunity for those who aren't familiar with the tradition. Lastly, through art immigrants can provide visuals to a certain tradition, experiences they've had, or their culture as a whole.

All in all, immigrants play a special role in educating America and shaping American society. At a time like this, we need to recognize this key point. Without immigrants, I truly believe America wouldn't be as developed in a majority of fields but significantly in cuisine, music, and diversity.

#### About the author:

Hello, my name is Chelmie and I'm a sophomore at Malden High School. Some of my key courses at Malden High School include Honors US History II, Math 3 Honors, Honors Chemistry, and AP Seminar. I am also a lead reporter for The Blue and Gold, Malden High's Newspaper, the 2nd oldest-running high school newspaper. I am the third child of 1st generation Haitian immigrants. Being a child of immigrants has shaped my life in a way nothing could compare to. Despite going through many internal struggles where I didn't feel proud of where I came from, I can now say that I am truly proud to be a child of immigrants. Notably, one of the articles that I have written for The Blue and Gold was about the gang violence crisis in Haiti and how it's affecting MHS students. English has been my favorite subject for ages, I truly love writing about topics that interest me, and as a child of first-gen immigrants, I was ecstatic to write about this topic. Outside of school, I spend my free time cooking, reading, shopping, and going to church. I aspire to be a News Anchor in the future.



## Anonymous Medford High School

### Untitled

When I arrived in the United States, I saw a lot of different things. The culture is totally different. Although I was born in the United States, I lived all my life in Brazil, so Portuguese is my first language. I can see that people in this country are more serious than in Brazil, they are funnier, sweeter, and I think our friendships are better than in the United States. In Brazil, It's common to see people outside their house playing soccer and talking with each other but here, I don't often see people doing that. Immigrants can bring valuable from their countries and share them with Americans, helping the United States become better. I believe everyone should have a passport to live in this country, but people who are harmful should be sent back to their home country. If immigrants follow these rules, I think it's good for immigrants to live in this country.

## Guilherme Malden High School

### My Experience

It's difficult but worthwhile to balance my Brazilian culture with American customs.

One important tradition from my home is Catholicism because half of the people in my country are Catholic. My family and I continue this tradition by going to church, but we actually do not go so much because we are not so religious. This tradition is important to me because it is so good and amazing to have this and put the faith in God and be devoting by the saint. I share this tradition by telling the people that I don't know and be more curious about.

I have learned too,that there is not just Christianity or Catholicism; the American people have been practicing other religions like Buddhism and Islam that were not so famous as the Christianity and Catholicism, I have been exploring and describing which religion I fit more. Right now I can consider myself as a spiritualist. I believe in God, but not as much Christianity and the other; we also can communicate with spirit and guide for a good place.

There are things about America that have surprised me. Since I came to the U.S.,I have learned that people eat a lot of industrial food and less natural food,which is an American custom/tradition. I learned about this custom when I arrived in the USA.At first,I felt very shocked that they eat food in an easy way,but now I am more accustomed.

I balance my culture and American life by celebrating some holidays like Easter.It is important to keep my traditions because is very respectful for some traditions,but it is also important to learn new things like Veterans Day.I think bringing my culture to America helps make America special because it will happen people know new things and not isolate their own culture.

I am hoping to expand my cultural repertoire. In Brazil I played in a basketball team, but I was horrible and when I arrived in the USA I now have more motivation to go and run into this willingness to play basketball somewhere. I'm also looking to make some more friends because I kind of don't have so many friends here then in Brazil, so I hope to make more friends from around the U.S.

In my opinion, Brazilian immigrants to the US help make America special by introducing natural food that we are accustomed to making. To us, food is not just about taste or flavor - we want to influence people to be healthier and stronger.

#### About the author:

Guilherme is an 18-year-old student from Malden. He enjoys watching YouTube streamers and is passionate about playing games. In his free time, he likes to take a train and travel. This is his first time participating in an essay competition.

# Estandelie

## Malden High School

**Honorable  
Mention**

### From Haiti to America

My name is Estandelie, a student of Malden High . Today I take this opportunity that ILC offering to me, to share my story and what impact my community and I made on America.

To start, my dad came to America when I was 5 years old. He left all his family behind him not to escape his responsibility; but because he wanted to give us a better life, to give us what he never had in his life, that was his American dream. I had never known my father during my childhood, we used to only talk on the phone.

When I first met my father, it was when he came to take us (my brother and I) with him to the US. He stood up in front of me and I had this strange feeling that a stranger was in front of me. Even though I had seen and heard him a thousand times through the phone I could not believe that he was here in flesh and blood. I was happy to know him now but the most tough day for me was April 24, 2022; that day I left my mom, siblings, homeland, and friends that I have known all my childhood to come with my dad to a country that I never lived in, a country that I never knew its value or history.

People always felt impressed when they first came to the US but I wasn't at all. I was like Lot's wife ( Bible story ) who looked back to see what she was about to lose in Sodom and Gomorrah even though she knew that God told her not to look back.

It took me almost one year to reveal who I am and what I brought to the USA. To this country, I bring myself, I bring my Haitian culture, belief and values. There are two important events in Haitian history that are very significant to my family and all the Haitian community here in the US that we keep doing and do not want to forget, and these are "1st January( independence day) and 18 May ( Flag day)".

On each 1st January, I prepare "Soup Joumou" and share it with all Haitian people that my family know and our neighbor; and my mom and my big sister's birthday made this day more special for me . The Soup has an aromatic smell as the earth after the rain because 95 % of the ingredients come from the earth and it has a savory taste and flavourly.

18 May is an event that my people bring to the USA. On that day I share my homeland's history, the most popular dance and song of my country "rara" with everyone at my school. Rara is what my people do to express their joy, and also in hard times my people do to bring joy to our heart; all my life I have heard my people said:" when the rara's drum sounds there is no longer a question of race or skin color" , now I can say that it is true because I have already observed this fact in Boston . Those traditions make me feel like I'm at home.

My family and I have incorporated July 4th and Thanksgiving into our customs because they are similar to January 1st. Americans feel the same pride that we feel on the 1st and Thanksgiving is similar to the "Soup Joumou" that we share with our people and our neighbor on January 1st as well.

Being in America gives me the opportunity to eradicate all the propaganda about my country by showing them the real Haiti that no one else bothers to know about. Sharing my perspective and gaining new perspectives is important to me.I look forward to learning more about this new country that I'm part of.

#### About the author:

Estandelie  
12th grade  
City: Gonaives  
Haiti  
I have multiple hobby: dance , sing, crochet, practicing piano  
Passionate about medical field  
In my free time I do crochet  
First time participating in an essay competition.

# Harry

## Malden High School

### How Immigration Changed My Life

It all started when gang activity in my country forced me to move from my hometown in Haiti, Liancourt, to Malden, Massachusetts, in America. I was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, where my childhood was filled with peace, lots of friends, and delicious food that was rich in flavor. At my school in Haiti, we wore pretty white and pink uniforms.

Everything began to change when I was 12; gang activity started to increase significantly. My family moved about 4,200 miles from my home, and my dad came to America first, landing in Boston. I often think about my life in Haiti and all the friends I had at school and in my neighborhood, which brings me to tears. I was very worried about my family until I heard that they were safe. I thought to myself, What if my family got killed? If something happened to my sister, I didn't know what I would do.

These days my life at Malden High School is very different. I have one or two real friends whom I trust, but my teachers are the best part of the school, especially my English teacher, Charles Redmond. He has been instrumental in helping me learn English and improve my skills.

In Haiti, students do not receive free breakfast or lunch, but at Malden High School, we do get free lunch, which is quite good, although I still prefer the food from my country. If I could change anything about the Malden lunch, I would add Haitian patties with chicken to the menu. The hallways in Malden High can get really crowded at times, and the school has four different houses: Holland, Boyle, Brunelli, and Jenkins. In Haiti, the schools are much smaller, and each teacher has to teach four subjects—math, science, history, and Creole, which I think is tough to manage. In contrast, Malden High School teachers only teach one specific subject, which seems much easier.

Another significant difference is the prevalence of electronics. Ninety-nine percent of students at Malden High have phones, whereas in my country, there are no electronics for teachers, and students don't have phones because many parents cannot afford them. I didn't have a phone in Haiti, but now that I do, I enjoy spending time with friends.

One thing I miss culturally about Haiti is the way people spend their free time. In Haiti, we would make kites and fly them outside, but in Massachusetts, the streets are very busy, and I don't see many people making kites or running around. In my opinion, you might get arrested for that in America unless you fly kites at the park. Additionally, everyone is usually distracted by their cell phones. This is a part of American culture I don't like. I like video games, but I don't like social media because of cyberbullying.

Culturally, the aspects that Haitian people bring to the United States that help make our country special include soup joumou. Soup joumou is a soup we eat that has meat, vegetables, and pumpkin; we eat soup joumou on New Year's Day. We eat soup joumou on January 1st because that was when Haiti got independence. One tradition I want to keep is that on Sundays, we eat lots of fish. The way I share our traditions or culture is by sharing new ideas with other people. Without immigration, Malden High School would be so boring because there would not be so many different languages in our hallways and cuisines at Multicultural Night. Haitian immigrants help make America a better place because of the skills we bring and the art we contribute.

#### About the author:

Harry is a 15-year-old student from Malden (originally from Haiti). He enjoys playing video games like Roblox and is passionate about engineering. This is their first time participating in an essay competition.



# Helen

## Malden High School

**Honorable  
Mention**

### Immigration: The Duality of Cultural Understanding

Immigration has always been a defining characteristic of American society, with the nation's foundations built upon immigration: moving to and establishing oneself in another country, other than the one they are native to.

Immigrants' contributions introduce new ideas, traditions, and knowledge that enrich the country's culture by offering unique customs and perspectives. However, despite these benefits, immigrants have historically faced challenges while adapting to life in the U.S. The struggles they encountered and the obstacles they overcame showcase these individuals' resilience, determination, and adaptability.

It's never easy to leave the familiar streets of your inviting hometown and travel across oceans to a new, unfamiliar place. This is especially true if you are recognized as foreign and deemed unwelcome.

If you ask my father, for instance, he would take you back to 1992, recalling his feelings of apprehension as he boarded the plane as a young teenager. When he eventually settled in the predominantly white town of Milton, New Hampshire, he did not have an easy time. Being a middle school dropout with limited English skills made him an easy target for harassment from locals.

As a child living in the same town where my parents settled, I was always painfully aware of my "differences." Even now, the town remains lacking in diversity, with a staggering 95% of residents being white. I vividly recall walking into my kindergarten classroom for the first time and seeing faces with European American features, which stood in stark contrast to my family's East Asian appearance.

"Do you speak Spanish?" I remember a boy asking me. "No, I'm Chinese. Why would I?"

In second grade, two other students approached me—a girl and a boy. The girl, with her eyes stretched with her hands, proclaimed in a sing-song voice, "Look, Helen! I'm Chinese!" while the boy walked beside her, his pinky finger outstretched in a 'Chinese middle finger.'

These ignorant racial transgressions reached beyond the colorful playgrounds and the innocence of elementary children who had never been taught any better. They took concrete form when my parents' recently evicted clients posted a note brandishing the text, "F\*CK CHINESE" on their front door.

After living in Milton for over a decade, moving to Malden in fifth grade was a culture shock, however refreshing. I noticed faces of all ethnicities and businesses with the same diversity in businesses everywhere I went. A walk down Main Street would lead me to Ethiopian, Vietnamese, Mexican, Chinese, Korean, and Brazilian-owned establishments, among many others.

I also felt welcomed at school, fitting in with other students who shared my culture while not being judged by those who did not. Instead, they were eager to learn and shared their own stories and ideas.

But the difference between Milton and Malden goes far beyond statistics. It reflects how communities that lack Malden's culturally rich atmosphere may foster ignorance, leaving people uninformed and disrespectful. Without exposure to various cultures, individuals form narrow viewpoints and biases stemming from an absence of personal experiences.

On the other hand, diverse areas promote interaction, understanding, and appreciation of different cultural backgrounds, which lead to inclusivity. When people are allowed to engage with those from various cultures, they are more likely to embrace differences, contributing to an accepting community.

Immigrants contribute beyond bringing the measured number of "diversity" that appears on a census; they positively influence the attitudes of local residents, making them more tolerant and less bigoted. This highlights the importance of diverse communities like Malden, where resources such as the Immigrant Learning Center and the Chinese Culture Connection are crucial assets. They help immigrants transition to life in the United States, creating an inclusive society where no one needs to feel inhibited or belittled because of their ethnic background.

Even my mother, who had already lived in the U.S. for over 10 years, benefited from the ILC programs, which helped her gain more confidence in her English and introduced her to new people and experiences. Through the Immigrant Learning Center's resources, she was able to pursue higher education that would have otherwise been out of the question due to her busy schedule.

I am proud of my parents for overcoming the obstacles put in their way, and I am grateful to live in a community that provides such rich cultural connections. In Malden, they met new people and found comfort among those who shared their experiences with discrimination. That is the essence of immigration in Malden: connection and acceptance. As time passes, Malden will continue to embody the diversity that America prides itself on in its "melting pot of culture." I hope that in the future, more communities will embrace this diversity and the resources that help immigrants adapt to life in America while remaining connected to their roots.

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#### About the author:

Helen is a Chinese-American junior at Malden High School. As the daughter of two first-generation immigrants, she has always prided herself on her fluent English and her ability to communicate, giving her parents a voice when they lacked one. She is currently enrolled in AP Literature and Composition.

# Isabella

## Malden High School

### Immigrant Lives Matter

Hello, my name is Isabella, but I prefer to be called Bella. I was born in Portugal, but I am a person who is proud of who I am and I will always have Brazilian blood running through me, through my body because my entire family is Brazilian, so I consider myself Brazilian and I will always be proud to say that I am Brazilian. It is a beautiful country, with many cultures and traditions and I am passionate about my country. My parents are fighters and have always given me everything and never let me want for anything and I admire that a lot because they are people who have always inspired me.

I came to the United States alone when I was only 12 years old with many goals in life. And my story begins with my parents who left me in Brazil when I was 6 years old with my 6-month-old brother and came to the United States for work and left us with my grandmother. I am also grateful to her for everything. After 6 years, I went to the United States to reunite with my parents and with dreams and goals that I want to achieve, which is to be a criminal lawyer. I've always wanted to be the pride of my family, and being a criminal lawyer is one of my biggest dreams. I really want to study so I can get into the college of my dreams. Sometimes people don't open their doors to immigrants, but no one would make money, have their things, and be successful without immigrants here. Everyone knows that coming to the United States is not an easy thing and everyone will have everything in their hands, as shown in the movies. It's everyone's dream to live here, but it's not everyone's dream to suffer for little things.

There are many things they don't tell you about living here and how inferior you can feel compared to other people, and how you're always very alone here because it's a different culture, the way of life is different, and you end up getting lost in the midst of so many cultures. There are many interesting things here, and I always admire this whole country.

With that said, I've never abandoned my culture, I always carry and have carried Brazil with me because, as I said, I'm proud to turn to people and talk about my country.

A tradition that all Brazilians have and an important meal in my country is to eat rice and beans for lunch every day, so it's a common tradition for us. And since Americans don't have a very substantial meal, I always maintain my tradition of eating food from my country and my culture, which I will never leave behind. Since I came to the United States, I learned about their language, which is English, which is a super interesting and important American language to learn. Going to school to learn English in a classroom where you don't have people to translate for you and only people to speak in a language you don't know is a little scary, but many words are similar to Spanish and I speak it too, so it wasn't that

hard, at least not for me! But it's very hard to look around and see that it's not the same; the streets and cultures are not the same and I miss my home because I have many dreams here in the United States.

One of them is to study at Stanford and I hope to achieve it. I will only return to the country that I love when I have achieved my dream. As everyone says "Brazilians never give up". And I will never give up on any of my dreams and goals until I achieve them. When I get a chance, I will accept and pursue all my goals.

I balance my Brazilian culture and American life by always speaking my language with people and always keeping Portuguese alive by speaking my language, eating food from my culture, and going on trips with my church steeped in a Brazilian culture. Brazilian people do not give up on things and I am a person who does not give up easily. Being independent is very important because you learn things from an early age, so you can balance Brazilian and American cultures.

One piece of advice I give to everyone who has a dream is to not give up on it and keep following it and trying hard. One day, everyone who judged you and who did not have faith in what you are doing and did not support you will see you at the top and will admire you. Many people will put you down, many people will tell you that you cannot do it, but with effort and determination, you will go far.

I hope that everyone always has a great opportunity to do what they have always dreamed of and be who they want to be. In the victory of Jesus Christ, everyone will be saved and we will have a chance at life and, as the saying goes, "those who are humbled will be exalted." Believe that you can do it, if you try, you will succeed. Immigrant lives matter and deserve an opportunity to show that they can strive to have a dignified life like everyone else.

#### About the author:

Isabella is a 9th-grader student from Brazil, originally born in Portugal. She now attends Malden High School. They enjoy social media and are passionate about painting. Her dream is to be a criminal lawyer and study law at Stanford.

# Janbi

## Malden High School

### Balancing My Identity

My home country, Nepal, doesn't celebrate Independence Day because it has never been ruled by another country. Nepal has the most unique flag in the world. It's located in South Asia, between China and India. Nepal is known for its ancient culture. Nepal is the birthplace of Lord Buddha. Nepal is known for the highest peak in the world, "Mount Everest". Which attracts climbers and adventurers from all over the world. There are 125 different cultures and 120 languages spoken across the country. The most famous festivals are Dashain and Tihar, celebrated by Hindu people. One of the most important traditions in my culture is celebrating festivals because they have deep meaning for people.

In my opinion, it is important to keep these traditions alive. Festivals like Dashain and Tihar. bring my family and friends together. They allow us to celebrate together as a family, share our culture, and connect. These festivals are more than just rituals, they are about spending quality time with loved ones, even if we live far away. We go home to celebrate with the whole family.

As a Wikipedia article on the topic explains, "Dashain is a 15-day festival dedicated to the goddess Durga and the win of good over evil. It's the longest and most important festival in Nepal, marked by family gatherings and blessings from elders. The main rituals include receiving tikka (a mixture of yogurt, rice, and red color) and jamara (barley grass) from elders. Also receiving money from elders. This symbolizes blessings and good health. Children enjoy flying kites, playing on swings.

Tihar is also held a few weeks after Dashain, usually in October or November, and lasts for five days. Tihar celebrates the bond between humans, animals, and the gods. Each day is dedicated to a different animal, including crows, dogs, cows, and the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi. On Laxmi Puja Homes are decorated with oil lamps (diyas) and colorful rangoli designs to welcome prosperity. People also light fireworks, give gifts, and decorate their homes with flowers. The last day is dedicated to brothers and sisters, symbolizing family bonds. Sister applies tika on brothers' foreheads and offers them gifts, while brothers promise. to protect and support their sisters. People go to other people's homes to dance."

Even though I now live in the United States, my family still celebrates Dashain, and we gather with the whole family together in one house. Prepare traditional Nepalese food, such as sel roti, which is made from soaked rice, sugar, ghrr, and water. It's a ring-shaped bread, Meat, alcohol, dhau, etc. also wering traditional clothes for example female were sari, kurta surwal, gunyo cholo etc. and the man ware daura suruwal, kurta pajama, modern attire etc.

Since coming to the United States, I have also learned about different foods, cultures, traditional clothing, and how people here keep their traditions alive. Even if they are not from that country, people can still learn about cultures and celebrate other cultures. I have also learned about major holidays like Thanksgiving, Halloween, and Independence Day. I have learned about these holidays through school events, friends, trick-or-treating, or Thanksgiving dinner. For example, my friend and I celebrate Halloween, we get so much candy from other people. People will go out to get candy, some people will put candy at the door or knock on the door, and other people will say blessings after taking it. On Independence Day, my family eats Nepalese food and we go to watch fireworks. In the Thanksgiving dinner, they have turkey, gravy, sweet potatoes, etc. I have seen in Malden High School, they have a club for learning about other cultures, for example, there is a Chinese club, etc.

I have been able to balance both cultures and continue to practice Nepalese traditions and festivals with my family while sharing them with friends and helping them learn about my culture. I also make sure to celebrate American traditions, festivals, and customs while respecting my own culture. For example, our school, Malden High, has cultural days, and those who are interested can participate in cultural activities. For example, wearing your cultural dresses, and people will come and take pictures of you, and then you post them online, and people will vote for the best and give prizes to the winners. On special days, Malden High students celebrate cultural day. People bring food from their own culture to sell, and people will buy food from a different culture, like patekode from Haiti, frust, etc. That's how we balance both worlds. This helps me understand and appreciate both worlds.

Also, in my opinion, balancing both worlds is important because one of them is my own traditional culture, and from what I have learned, I love to celebrate my festival because it's so beautiful. Also, I have moved to the USA, so I should know about the USA people celebrate, so I can roam around, also it will help me to adapt and feel more included in society. You can enjoy both worlds. It encourages mutual respect and appreciation, making communities more inclusive. Experiencing different cultures broadens my understanding of the world. It taught me the value of cultural diversity. It allows me to participate in meaningful cultural exchanges, helping me appreciate both my own and others' backgrounds.

#### About the author:

Janbi is a 9th-grader at Malden High School from Nepal. She enjoys playing games and hanging out with friends in her free time.



# Jean

## Malden High School

### My Journey

As a Haitian immigrant and senior student at Malden High School, I recognize that this event is a unique opportunity to represent my culture and illuminate its multifaceted impact on the United States. My name is Jean, and I was raised in Gonaïves, Haiti. My arrival in the United States was an unforgettable experience; despite having seen glimpses of America on television, nothing prepared me for the reality that I had to live in the USA.

Stepping outside of the Airport everything was different: the weather, the atmosphere, the people, the environment.., I felt lost between all of this feeling that was coming one after another in my mind. This experienced put an urge in my mind and body to adapt because I was not comfortable at all, but thanks to where my family rents because the people there, were welcoming, the owner of the house an elderly women was so kind with us and his family too after all it was Elidro— her son a gentlemen— that come to get us to the airport, they were haitian.

Elidro introduced us to the country because my father had 2 jobs and didn't have time to pass with us, but he knew and ask them to help us adapt, Elidro explains us the base and how thing working in the community and also introduced us to the bible and to church every weekend he always come and take us with him to his house— where we meet his family— in order to learn and discuss about the bible. After he helped us get to school which was a long process which is different because in Haiti we don't have to give medical papers.

Once I got to school, I found out there was a Haitian Club and every May 18th, there is a flag day event. Last year I recognized the Mayor of Malden was among us at the event. I was surprised and delighted by how they gave importance to our culture, and my ESL teachers were talking about how good some Haitian foods are in the community around Malden and Boston.

When I'm not able to adapt the food here, some American food surprises me because they treat the meat the same way we do in our culture. I remember this bowl of perfectly cooked rice, each grain tender and flavorful, mingled with hearty, savory beans simmered with aromatic spices. Nestled beside it, succulent jerk chicken wings, glistening with a smoky-sweet glaze, offer a burst of spicy, savory joy. And for a touch of sweetness, golden, caramelized fried plantains complete the plate that was serving to me in La Perle Restaurant & Lounge. It was a simple yet unforgettable Caribbean-inspired meal.

I have seen that in the first semester of the year that the Haitian community and other communities such as latino, white people,etc put together in order to make events( rara dance, flag day, etc) happen. This makes me realize how Haitians are ingrained in American culture and way of life,

#### About the author:

Jean  
12th grade  
City: Gonaïves  
Haiti  
I have multiple hobby: read, cook and watch new  
Passionate about legal law  
In my free time I read  
First time participating in an essay competition.

# Jeud

## Malden High School

### My dreams

My dreams and goals were to travel to the United States and get a good education in a safe place. My family started to talk to a neighbor who told us that there is a program that Biden has put in place, he told us that he is going to go to Mexico through the immigration services to take the roads and my family talked about it with someone who was already in the United States. My first arrival was in New York City. We stayed in Brooklyn for 3 or 4 months. After Brooklyn, we found a place in Connecticut. My mother found an apartment in Malden. Malden was better than the other place. Malden had opportunities for my family to enroll in school and get help with food, jobs, and health care. We were very happy about that and loved Malden.

He said that he was going to put us in the program, I was not so happy because I love my family and my friends too, I like a little the sensations in Haiti, the neighbor told us that he is now in the United States of America, he traveled with many people and there are people who remained on the road, I had not been on the road, it was on a plane that me and my cousin my godmother, now I am here to study to help my family, my friends and other people through my money, the immigration services it was a problem to make our passports thank God we are here that's all I can say to earn money, it would make me very happy.

When I first arrived in Malden I felt good. I didn't know anyone but I was not afraid. My cousin, my mom, my godmother and cousins all shared an apartment. The apartment in Malden was better than Haiti. Malden High teachers and principal Mr. Mastrangelo were much more friendly than my school in Haiti. I love Haiti so much because you can drive a car at a younger age than in the United States. Haitian food is my favorite, American food is OK but Haitian food is the best. My mom can get the supplies here in America to cook Haitian food. We are so happy about that.

#### About the author:

Jeud is a 10th grade student at Malden High. He likes the teachers at Malden High.  
Malden Public Schools  
Age: 16  
Grade: 10  
Native Language: Haitian Creole  
Date of arrival: 2024

# Joaby

## Malden High School

### My Immigrant Story

I traveled to the US w/ my mother and my dad were already here with my brother in Malden. When my plane landed in Boston, I noticed a group of military soldiers getting off the plane in Boston,. I was so excited because my dream of coming to the USA was to join the army. When I arrived in Malden I saw a lot of airplanes, way more than Brasil because I never travelled.

My mother and I took an Uber from the airport to our new apartment in Malden. My Dad was waiting for us, he prepared the best Brazilian BBQ even though it was so cold in February, we had a great time. The party was fun but I definitely missed my friends in Brazil. We also had to share the bedrooms when we first arrived. Malden was very expensive and it was difficult to rent an apartment.

My sister and I had to wait until September to attend high school. I was so nervous because everyone at school spoke English. When I arrived at Malden High School, the students were very friendly, they showed me around the school and we made friendships that I still have today.

In Brasil, my friends and I used to play soccer in the middle of the roads, we all knew each other's families too. Bristol's weather ws so nice and sunny. So many opportunities to walk around outside and play. Unlike the USA. Unfortunately, in February, it is too cold to play soccer outside on the street. There are also a lot of cars, buses and traffic. The environment in Malden was completely different and shocking.

My new friends in Malden showed me how to walk to school and take the MBTA. Everything was in English and the money was even different. High school was mostly fun but some teachers spoke too fast and did not have enough patience for me. I like to learn but it is hard for me to focus. After some time in MALden High, I made even more friends and joined a soccer club over the summer.

It was awesome. Now, I mentor new students and give them a tour of Malden High because I like to help people and I know how hard it is to be a newcomer. MY advice for Americans is to have more patience for newly arrived people. Thank you,

#### About the author:

Joaby is a 17 year old Grade 12 student from Malden High School. He arrived in 2021. Joaby is a mentor for newly arrived students and supports the teachers and administration with guided tours of the school. His ultimate goal is to join the Army.

## Josep Malden High School

### The Colombian Flag

I am Josep, I was born in Cali, Valle del Cauca, Colombia. Throughout my life I was oblivious to the history and culture of my country. I enjoyed celebrations such as Holy Week, the lighting and a very important cultural event, 'La Feria de Cali', a festival that is celebrated once a year in which a route is made for several kilometers filled with dancers, giant puppets, flowers - clearly all of this in the representative colors of our flag (yellow, blue and red).

I also liked family gatherings, playing with some cousins, and being introduced to different relatives so they could appreciate how much I have grown and ask the typical question "Don't you remember me?" This was always accompanied by delicious preparations made by our grandmothers gathered in the kitchen sharing their knowledge and techniques to achieve that wonderful flavor, a flavor that the only way to describe it would be, "Home" flavor.

Our culture places great emphasis on gastronomy, the Colombian seasoning that characterizes great dishes such as "El sancocho, Tamales Vallunos, la bandeja paisa, el arroz paisa also from Medellín, etc." But there is also something that characterizes Colombia, especially Cali, and that is how it openly proclaims itself "The capital of salsa" since its habitants have an extraordinary passion for this type of music that has become part of our culture, that is forming part of their daily life, giving rise to the popular songs that many will recognize like "Las caleñas son como las flores, by The Latin Brothers.

Arriving in the United States of America was not an inconvenience for me, it was not difficult to leave my other relatives, it was not difficult to say goodbye to my few friends, it was not difficult to leave the land, the climate, the environment or the culture with which I grew up; but I cannot say that it was easy either, to be honest. In Colombia I felt empty, without any fixed goal for life.

Back in Colombia, I would think about what would become of me in the future. I would finish high school and so what? What would I study? What would I like to have in the future? It was a constant routine: getting up early, going to school, getting home from school and staying at work with my parents until dusk, coming home, having dinner and sleeping to repeat the next day. It doesn't sound very interesting, or maybe it is, but what demotivated me the most was NOT KNOWING HOW TO SOCIALIZE. I was the odd person out in the classroom, the weirdo who could be asked for homework and I would give it to him without question because he just wanted to have some social contact with someone. There were times when I would think... Why do I feel like they have more fun with others than with me? Maybe because they are more interesting? Or maybe they are just with me out of pity? These were recurring questions that constantly tormented me because I didn't feel like I fit in.

Settling here in Malden, entering MHS and realizing all the people with different cultures, traditions and languages gave me a feeling of calm. I was a little nervous because I didn't know how to communicate properly with them, since I still didn't have enough language skills or confidence to make new friends, but I didn't feel excluded. I felt like it could be the new beginning of my life. I could finally be someone in this great country of opportunities.

When my mother had time, we would go to see new places on the train. We went to downtown Boston and visited the Boston Garden and Park, Harvard University and its surroundings, and Revere Beach. It was a dream for us to have the beach so close to us and we finally got it. When we looked at the streets, the people, the shops, and the transportation, there was one phrase that was never missing: "This is all like in the movies." It was like daydreaming, a wonderful feeling, and it was even more so when we saw snow! It was wonderful.

Walking through the streets I could see that our Colombian culture is not seen at all anywhere, however there is a place where it stands out too much, which is "East Boston" I could see the largest concentration of Latinos in that area, especially Colombians, more specifically "Paisas", in East Boston I could find many typical Colombian foods such as the bandeja paisa and sancocho, " without leaving behind the beloved empanadas.

Although there are many people of Colombian nationality here in the United States, they do not generate a great impact with their culture in American society, unlike that they offer places where you can go and try the Colombian flavor and seasoning while listening to the salsa that so distinguishes our country. I would say that more than us influencing American society, American culture influences us. Many of us who came here without close friends from our own country began to let go of our culture and our traditions that we enjoyed with our families and we began to live influenced by American customs, as if we were part of this country and that is one of the reasons why we are here, because even if we don't realize it, the time we spend in this nation influences us in such a subtle way that we don't notice it. As time goes by we become more and more American and that's not bad, human beings are born to adapt but we will always be part of our land of origin. Even if we no longer have the same customs with which we arrived, even if we begin to forget our language and speak only English, we will always remember with great appreciation the land that saw us born.

#### About the author:

Josep is a 10th-grade student from Colombia. He enjoys playing video games and is passionate about music and guitar. In their free time, he likes to play guitar and learn new songs. This is his first time participating in an essay competition.



# Julieta

## Malden High School

### Live with Passion

If you ask me what cultural impact is, I would like to tell you my story. The unusual celebrations that we Colombians have, such as the day of the candles and the representative celebration of my city Medellin “The flower fair” represent the diversity in our country like race and also fauna and flora, which focus on keeping Colombian culture alive.

My culture makes me feel proud of who I am, knowing that these beautiful customs still do not fade as time passes, even in another country, and different people. In this essay I want to tell you about my experience when I moved from a country as resplendent as Colombia and arrived at one full of dreams and hopes like the United States.

A few years ago my mother came to the United States in search of better opportunities and new adventures; on the other hand, ever since I can remember I loved American culture, I loved high school movies with blonde girls and soccer players, I even learned some of my English skills because I loved listening to Lady Gaga. After two years my mother offered me the opportunity to move in with her, and it was one of the hardest decisions I have ever made in my life. Although I was very excited about living in the United States, I couldn't forget the fact that I might not see my family again and celebrate our traditions, but at the end of the day I have the same adventurous spirit as my mother.

My story may not be what you expected. I had a calm and pleasant 6 hour trip after crying all morning because I was going to miss my father and my family, but the moment I had most waited for was to see my mother, which was incredible. She showed me all the emblematic places of the city of Boston; and if I feel proud to be Colombian now, I also feel proud to live in Boston, a city that in my opinion divides into countries, I even found a place where many people from my community tend to be “Maverik”, I usually go to this place and delight myself with a delicious Bandeja Paisa.

In Boston you can see places with different cultures. Can you believe how shocked I was to see all these cultures in one city together? I truly felt like I was in a dream; now I pinch myself and I realize that is not just a dream. If you think it is strange that I was impressed by seeing places of different cultures, now it will seem strange to you as well that I was surprised that half of the Latin American culture was in this school. At Malden High School I met people from every corner of the world; I cannot find the words to describe how beautiful this adventure has been for me. Here I met Nico and Vale, my best friends. The three of us are from Colombia and come from nearby cities, so it was very easy for me to find friends that I fit in with even though we are different. I also have friends from Brazil who are very fun and effusive; It was a little difficult for me to fit in with them since I tend to be a very calm person, although we always laugh while communicating in different languages.

At Malden High there are many opportunities for people from every culture, and sometimes those cultures are celebrated doing different types of activities, so I really appreciate the support that schools give to their students and also that they feel proud to have so much diversity roaming through their halls.

Cultural impacts reminds me one night, it was approximately 6pm, those of us who live in Boston know that the old trains under the city are not the most efficient, but I grew fond of them because i was able to delight the sight thanks to their slowness; that night the train was very slow and I asked myself “why?”, if recently it had some maintenance repairs; when I hear over the speakers “Fenway Station” a sea of people enter trying to fit in the available spaces of my old companion (The train); “We won!” someone said. You, my dear reader, can guess which team I am talking about just by telling you that it was a spring night?, Of course, I'm talking about the Red Sox, now what I want to get to by sharing this memory with you is that never in my life had I seen people so fond of this type of sport since these sports are not mentioned in my country, it seems strange to me that sports that I call “not flashy”, caught the attention of Americans and it's part of their culture.

The beloved seasons that stand out in this city for me, are part of the Bostonian culture. Starting with the frozen winter where I and my dear Bostonians find ourselves shivering on ice skates at the frog pond, or in the summer where you can enjoy fairs and sand sculptures, or spring and autumn where the flowers appear and go along with the little creatures that migrate in each season. Each one of these things make up part of my culture now, even though I am not American, I adopted the things that Americans enjoy and now I enjoy them too.

My adventure in this country is neither sad nor depressing. I feel that I found a place where I fit in, challenging me every day to learn more. The culture that I call Bostonian culture has been adopted by me, but I will never forget my Colombian customs, I will always remember them with such happiness and I will continue celebrating them, with my mother who is here and my family. Despite the distance, we have always found a way to stay together.

#### About the author:

Hello, I'm Julieta, I am 17 years old and I come from Colombia. I thank you for having read and enjoyed this essay as much as I enjoyed writing it. This essay is my way of seeing the cultural impact both on my life and on immigrant society, from a positive approach highlighting each of the details that impacted my life that made the difference from the cultural part as an immigrant

# Katerin

## Everett High School

### Trabaja Duro

Why do immigrants leave behind their homes? The war that's brewing in their country? The poverty? The failed education system? The hopes the Statue of Liberty brings? My parents left El Salvador to have something more for themselves. On their backs through deserts and rainforests, they carried their catholic religion, their hopes of being successful, and their motivation to live a life without showering in lakes and sleeping cramped in a room with 12 siblings. They had 5 kids—all girls; one in college majoring in dental, another almost 13 in the constant attitude phase, one who loved Spiderman and Stitch, one who prompts mini heart attacks from a love of climbing everything, and one writing this essay on the impact of immigrants to our society.

What does a hammock look like to you? I'm assuming it's something modern and expensive material, sold on Amazon. My hamaca all the colors you could think of, handwoven by the veiny freckled hands of my grandmother. Whenever anyone in my family visits our country, they always bring back a hamaca—it's more than just a place to take the best nap ever. It's a reminder of how far we've come. On every trip to the lake we've ever taken, we always brought a hamaca. The first thing my dad would do was tie the knots he learned to tie from his father. If that was being used, we would lay a towel on the bare ground and let the sun dry us up. Looking around, I'd see American families with a whole crib out on the sand for their babies. We had our hamaca. It may not be as sturdy but it brings us a sense of our home. I believe many Hispanic immigrants find comfort when they go to the lakes. It's a place where they reminisce about their homeland. My parent's migration to America has brought me the best of both worlds. I live in the typical Hispanic household but with typical American traditions. Sometimes they even say I'm whitewashed since over the years I have begun to lose my Spanish and my appetite for frijoles. But I will always choose a hamaca over an American beach chair.

My family embraces many different cultures. At our birthday parties, there is agua fresca de fruta with mango, strawberry, apples, and melon. There is Portuguese chicken that would be left with clean bones. Have you realized how you'll occasionally pass by a small hidden market that sells Hispanic ingredients? It would be named Los Primos or Supermercado Latino. There are thousands of stores in the world that bring their cultural food that becomes a feeling of home to immigrants or it becomes a bridge to the community between other Americans. We are all connected by an invisible string and we don't even realize it. What makes America special is that in every turn you take, you'll see a market selling foods from a different culture. If you love spice and you need some good peppers and spices, go to a Mexican market. The beauty is that you'll find whatever you need. My family doesn't celebrate their Independence Day but we sure do celebrate July 4th by buying fireworks, cooking a barbeque, and hotdogs for the

children all day. All the older cousins get together and secretly go to the corner store without the younger cousins knowing. The dads play cards, except for the one flipping the steak and hot dogs. The moms talk about the latest chisme. We would get together like all the other American families.

My mom and dad built their way up to where we are now. They had dreams and accomplished them. My 17-year-old parents provided for themselves all while learning a new language. They didn't have their parents to rely on, only themselves. So, they worked jobs that Americans wouldn't. Cleaning the scraps of food from the sink as they wash the dishes, cleaning the clinics you go to, working the night shifts everyone didn't, including them, but what could they do? They took every opportunity that landed in their hands. I remember the new burns and cuts my dad would show little 8-year-old me when he'd get home on school nights. I didn't realize that these cuts and burns were the reason I was fed each day. The reason that I slept soundly at night. The reason I got light-up Skechers. The reason is that I didn't live with any fear.

Immigrants are the hard workers of our nation who share the same dream of better lives for their families. Immigrant parents raise diligent children who become successful nurses, entrepreneurs, police officers, teachers—all while patiently waiting years for their legal papers, staying silent when they know they are taken advantage of. They endure the cuts, burns, and blisters for their first-gen children to get into colleges, and their children work just as hard to make them proud. Society today is versatile and diverse due to the great impact of immigrants who've made our nation beautiful and strong. Try to picture America without immigrants—that nation would cease to be America. It would not be a better place.

My name is Katerin and I am glad to have been raised by two dedicated parents who have allowed me to flourish. Who have allowed me to become a person of gratitude, respect, integrity, and most of all a person of hard work. Every day is a day where they give their all. They have taught me to give my all in my academics and sports. At every falling moment of mine, they say, “trabaja duro,” even as the tiredness shows in their eyes and they look so drained when they come home at night. For them, I work hard. Because of them, I will be successful.

Immigrants are the face of this nation through their diversity, hard work, and their undying will to keep going. Thank you, immigrants. You make this country great.

# Khkola

## Malden High School

**Honorable  
Mention**

### Flying to the Country of Opportunities

As I closed my eyes, I heard hhhhhhhhhhhh ( sounds of kids laughing), elder's were happy birds chirping, kids riding bikes and girls were going to school. I opened them back up to see women, men, kids crying sobbing and running away this was the reality of today then it was 5 year ago it wasn't like this, as the Taliban (monsters, terrorists) came to my homeland they made the country as hot as hell, burning people from both the outside and inside, so why did nobody come to rescue them?

The time I was in my country, before the Taliban, life wasn't that bad, but still we had a home to live in, we could go to school, we had a life. Then there came the day no one expected to come, I was in my home when we heard a sound that was not quite familiar. It went like BOOM! The sound a bomb makes. We didn't know it was a bomb at first but we felt that something was wrong. As we sat there worrying and crying we thought what if... what if something had happened to my father? Thirty minutes later we heard sounds of the ambulance. I can't forget that moment. How can I? As the ambulance was passing beside our home, I saw it, I saw heads, bodies, and blood. When I was a kid, only 8 years old, I could do nothing besides crying uncontrollably. While we were waiting, a call from my father came through, as my mom picked up the phone shaking and crying my father said "i'm ok". This was the best words that I had heard that day. But my heart was still beating so fastly, so fastly that I almost thought I had a heart attack but I was young and didn't know what real emotions felt like. I come from Afghanistan, from a country that has an honorable history. Life was great in the time of president Amanullah Khan, he was the greatest and most powerful but no one could be or was as powerful and as smart as he was, if we had a president like him nowadays we wouldn't see these horrible things. As time passed by we moved to two different countries to learn and see new things. As I was leaving my country I felt that a sharp thing scratched my heart! Everyone knows that it is really hard to leave your country and to start a life from zero.

I was thirteen when I came to the United states, or the land of great opportunities. My siblings and I were the reason that my parents left their homeland because they wanted to give us a better life, and a better education. It was my first time in a big, modern country so of course I was excited. In my opinion, the United States was the best country so far in my family's journey. U.S. life was going well, I started school and all the staff and the teachers were so nice and I was really happy and grateful for everything that they did for me.

Now I want to talk about how we immigrants affect this country and its people. My father as an immigrant who had come here to provide us a good life started to work here in a store called Launrys

and Arcaries, this was his first ever physical job and at first it was hard for him to work because he never worked physically but later on he was happy with his job, because he met new people he was a part of a new community. From the example of my father I would say that immigrants are the people that work for the United States of America to make it a better place because they have done a lot for us. And we as immigrants have this feeling that we need to pay them back by making this country more and more better.

Immigrants bring a part of their culture here and it could include; food, beliefs, religion, etc... We want to learn more about the culture of the United States too, and we would and we are trying to combine different cultures to make a culture that everyone will adore and really love. If we come back to my country, there are many products that we import from there. For example, Afghanistan is known for its purest Safran that some citizens say that if you even put two pieces of Afghan Safran in your tea or food that it has a specific smell and a pure red color to it. Afghanistan has people who can work really well, the reason is that my country's people had worked all their lives back in my country so I can say that they are hard working and this can have a great impact on the United States because if there are more people who can work this can make something from zero to ten!

Individuals from my country are smart. I say this because their parents didn't have the opportunity to learn, so they are trying to change this culture by bringing their kids to a different country so that they wouldn't see the difficulties that they had in their times and so that they can learn more and this leads to them being hardworking and they are trying for themselves and their parents too. The last time that I checked the news of Afghanistan girls couldn't go to school but now, my sister and I can go to school and we will repay America for the things they had done for us.

Lastly, I want to thank my parents, teacher's, the staff that work in Malden High School and the people that work in the government. I just want to say that I am very thankful for the things that this country (The country of opportunities) has done for us!

#### About the author:

My name is Khkola, I am a freshman in Malden High School. I am 15 years old. I am from Afghanistan and a lady who wants her country to have its peace back. I like to play soccer and to learn about history of the United states. I want to do whatever i can do for this country to make it a better place because this country has provided us high education, a better life and a great environment!



# Kidus

## Malden High School

### The Coffee Cup Between Us

Sitting around the piping hot, dark chocolate colored jebena, laughter fills the room like the thick aroma of freshly brewed coffee. My father, tall and bold, yet warm in his presence, leads the conversation. His voice deep and steady, carries stories from a homeland I was too young to remember. He speaks of villages I've never walked through, people I've never met, and mountains I've only seen on video. A way of life that feels both familiar and distant.

I listen, soaking in every word, translating between my mother's Amharic and the English I've come to master. I don't drink coffee, but I sit among those who do, watching as their pearly white glistening teeth show as they smile and giggle. Their conversations flow effortlessly. Their laughter erupts and fills the room, setting a tone that leaves you with no choice but to feel comfort in the hands of those around you. It's in these moments that I feel the most connected to my Ethiopian culture but also where I acknowledge the disparity in the recognition of my distinct backgrounds.

Even my name sits in that in-between space. "Key-dus", they call me at school, stretching out the syllables, the hard "K" sounds unnatural to them. The real pronunciation is softer, more fluid, but I've given up correcting people. The Americanized version of my name feels like a compromise, a small sacrifice to make things easier. Just like it's easier to nod when someone stumbles through my last name or to brush off the pause before a teacher attempts to say it.

Inside this room, though, there is no hesitation. My name is spoken as it should be, rolling smoothly off the tongue, effortless. Here, I am Kidus, not the adjusted version that fits into attendance sheets and classroom rosters. Here, I don't have to explain myself.

But even in this space, surrounded by people who share my blood, I feel the pull of the two worlds, two distinct cultures, that I have to fight to find balance for. The one inside these walls, where Amharic flows easily, where the scent of berbere fills the air, and where my identity is unquestioned. And the one outside, where I move through hallways filled with voices that do not sound like mine, where my name is something people squint at before trying to say.

Yet, despite the fact that there is no question of my Ethiopian identity by those around me, I struggle to ignore the fact that I wasn't born in my motherland like everyone else. I don't have that perfect accent, I don't have that perfect pronunciation of every syllable of that Amharic word, I don't have that single overwhelming identity like everyone else. I'm cut in half like the pages of a bilingual book, where one side is English and the other is Amharic.

I wonder if I belong more to the world my father describes or the world that I am forced to endure when I head to school everyday. I then realized, the key to overcoming my identity crisis lies in the words of my father. My father looks at me and smiles. "Enkuan des aleck" he says, a phrase that means so much more than just a congratulatory term. It's a reminder that I don't have to choose. That I can exist in both worlds, not as an outsider but as the middleman between them.

And as the voices continue around me, I hold onto the warmth, not of the coffee but of the stories, the laughter, and the understanding that I am still whole, regardless of when I feel caught between two places.

#### About the author:

I am a young, African-American, student who struggles with an identity crisis between his Ethiopian and American culture. My work presents the life I have experienced and the ways that I overcome my struggle.

# Leonard

## Malden High School

### My Haitian Cultural Journey

Immigration in society started a long time ago, when people moved to cities to look for opportunities, better jobs, higher education levels, and a better salary. We live in a world of experiences, where people like experiencing moving from country to country and cities to cities. The experiences can be wonderful and easy to talk about; however they can also be tough.

Let's take a look at my sorrowful immigrant story from Haiti to Mexico and Mexico to the USA. In July 2024, I had an aunt in the US share an idea about a trip to my parents. She explained that I would be closer to college and Haiti doesn't give students opportunities to go to school based on the high insecurity.

My father said, "Okay, I agree with you." My mom did as well. However, he also added "I'm sending my kids and wife because I need to find a replacement for my job as a pastor before leaving the country."

My parents had somebody explain the trip with them by telling us that we are going to take an airplane, then the rest of the journey will be on buses then two more airplanes to the US (Boston). On August 28th 2024, in the morning we were about to separate from our father and didn't even know how long it's going to take to see him as a whole family again. There was a horrible wretched feeling inside of us and the tears didn't stop falling. How tragic it was to leave our dad while there was an opportunity for him to go, but he chose to stay because of the church. He couldn't even look at us when we were heading off to Port-Au-Prince. To be honest I was at the same time happy, overthinking, and scared about the experience.

On August 30th, 2024 we headed off to Nicaragua, when we left the airplane, oh my gosh it was like a desert! There weren't any houses around; it was an empty place except for the office to buy the ticket and continue the journey. Right after buying the tickets, we found taxis leading to all of Nicaragua. I didn't expect that at all, but once we started going around it was wonderful and glowing, lights were everywhere in different colors, there were stores all along the street. After a long time riding, we took a break and got food from markets, some of them not so delicious but most of them were amazing. We started encountering obstacles in the middle of the route. There was a stop sign, and no cars couldn't go through. The drivers were obligated to leave us in the street at 1 AM in the morning where we had to sleep in the streets. At 5AM we saw a bus coming. The driver asked each person for \$5 then he resumed the journey with us. We were overtired and desperate when the bus left us somewhere. We had to spend 6-8 in the morning in a line just to have permission for the rest of the journey.

During this journey my family and I saw ourselves as survivors. There were many twists and turns, but finally we arrived in Massachusetts.

Once we arrived in Malden, we saw life in different ways; everything has changed since that day. One thing that surprised us in our new country was the bus schedule. Unlike Haiti, if we had to go somewhere then we had to wait for a bus, if you missed one then we had to wait for another one. I thought to myself, "Oh God there is nothing like that in Haiti, anytime you go outside, you find a taxi in the station and all the street."

On March 13th, 2024 we started school in Malden High. It was amazing yet confusing also. The amazing thing was, seeing everyone together as the same community. No matter your nationality, skin color, type of hair, there is no exception; that mixing contributes to how our Haitian traditions can spread.

The traditions I want to share from, include: education, our Independence Day, our ancestry day, our language, and food. Just like in Haiti, education is also seriously valued in America. We believe in going to school; education itself guarantees the future of the generation. Every first day in the year is the day of Haiti's independence. As Haitians, we always celebrate that even though we are in another country. We make "soup Joumou" in the morning and share the delicious soup with our neighbors, who are like family to us. On January 2, we pay tribute to our ancestors who led a historical battle for freedom. In the knowledge of Jean-Jacques Dessaline, Toussaint Louverture, Henry Christophe, we remember their sacrifice for our freedom.

Everywhere in America, Haitian immigrants keep their language - on bus stations, at home, even at Haitian church. We find ways in which to help us keep that "Creole" tradition. At school, I have noticed that our interaction with the language makes a lot of people learn words and sentences from our language.

How sublime it is to see our school principal, Mr. Mastrangelo, speak with us in Creole when school is over. He teases us a little bit when Haitian people students stay inside school instead of going home. "Örevwa! Ale!" he'll tell us with a smile. We feel so seen when the adults in the building try out our language. In this way, we know we make a difference in the building.

#### About the author:

Leonard is an 18-year-old 11th grader at Malden High School. She enjoys watching movies and writing about her thoughts. She is passionate about music. In her free time, she likes to listen to music and write about her feelings. This is Leonard's first time participating in an essay competition.

# Maria Eduarda

## Malden High School

### Across Cultures

My journey to America didn't start exactly with me, but with my parents. But before I tell you readers about my journey, I'm going to introduce myself. I'm Maria Eduarda, I'm 19 years old and I was born here in America but lived almost my whole life in Brazil. My parents are Brazilians and I have one older brother that also was born here in America. Many years ago my father came to the United States with his brother to work and have a better life, and during that time he was dating my mom by distance. Just giving some context: one thing that you're going to hear a lot about Brazilians (I'm going to be specific with Brazil, but this can include all immigrants) is that all of them come here to have a better life with better opportunities for their families. This happened because in Brazil it is not easy to have a good life and good opportunities, just if you had graduated from a good college, which is not a reality for a lot of Brazilians.

After being in a long distance relationship for a large period of time, my dad decided to go back to Brazil and marry my mom. In the same week after they married, my parents decided to live in America and build a good and stable life here, for them and their future family. At that time, they came illegally but it wasn't so hard to come here like it's now. Years later they had my brother and right before that I was born. Unfortunately or fortunately, I didn't live in America for too long, because when I turned three, my parents decided to go back to Brazil. Therefore, I didn't have the opportunity to learn the native English language, go to school or even be a "real American" like society says.

Being honest with you, I had really hard moments in Brazil when I was younger. I don't remember much about my life before I was 5, but I do remember almost everything after. I do remember that society uses labels for you just to be someone if you follow some kind of list. For almost everyone that I grew up with, I wasn't an American to them. I wasn't because I didn't speak English, I didn't look like an American, I was literally everything less than American. I was always trying to prove who I was, because so many people asked me to prove it. I arrived at one point where my mom gave me a copy of my birth certificate, just because I was being called a "fake american" and liar. Even after proving that I was born here, they are still bullying me.

I grew up with this in my head: "I'm not american" but I'm also not a Brazilian by birth. So I convinced myself that I had to do everything that I can to prove that I'm both or unless I am a little american. Maybe I'm just going to be American when I speak good English, or when I start living there, or when I immerse myself in the culture, maybe when these things happen I can be considered american. Because of that I just try to leave behind my Brazilian side. Honestly I love Brazil, I love the place, the culture, the food,

the people, I love everything in Brazil. It was the place that I grew up, a place that helped me be who I am today. How can I just leave behind this culture that also belongs to me?

Even knowing that all the things that people were saying about me are not true, why do I keep believing in this? Or why do I leave this corrode inside of me? I knew it was not true and I just tried to keep saying this to everyone that had different thoughts about it. But in a deep part really inside of my heart was a girl that thought that maybe, just maybe if she lived in America, she would have this american side back, and show to everyone that she's an American.

Years later, when I turned 18 years old I moved to America after being in Brazil for 15 years of my life. I came to America not directly, but desiring to live a little bit of the "american dream." I thought that arriving here, everything was going to change, the comments and the feeling of not being part of something would change, but did not. Honestly everything that I dreamed about living here is not even close to what I'm living now. I really regret believing in all the judgments and bad comments of people that didn't even know anything about me or my story.

During this time that I'm living here, I realize that it is not easy, but it's a great opportunity. I'm really grateful to God for everything that He has done for me here and to my parents for all the efforts that they made years ago for me to have this experience that I'm having now. And also grateful to my parents for going back to Brazil, because I had an amazing creation by my parents around of my family, church and friends, I would not change this for nothing. I have learned so much here. I'm learning English, and I'm not ashamed of that, and I'm going pretty good on that. I am discovering the american culture that is part of me. Besides, I have never been more proud of being Brazilian but being American too. Would be wrong if I just left behind my Brazilian side. I am a Brazilian/American and I love being part of both nations. Saying this doesn't make me more or less American. Just made me proud of who I am.

#### About the author:

I am Maria Eduarda, I'm 19 years old and I'm from Brazil. I am a senior in Malden High School. I love meet my friends for a good coffee in a comfy place and during this winter my favorite hobbies were ice skating and going to the movies.

# Meriam

## Malden High School

### The Cultural Impact of Immigrants on American Society

Immigrants have greatly shaped American society through cultural enrichment and social, political, and economic change. Our diverse traditions have influenced American cuisine, language, and entertainment, creating a multicultural society and identity. Additionally, immigrants have played pivotal roles in civil rights movements and voter engagement, shaping policies and advocating for inclusivity against the challenges of integration. The process of integration presents ongoing challenges for immigrants to navigate the balance between preserving their cultural heritage and adapting to American norms.

Before America gained popularity during the 1920s, there was significant hatred against African Americans, which was adapted to the creation of the Jim Crow laws, which segregated people based on their skin color and provided them with no funding for their segregated places. These places were schools, towns, and workplaces where children grew up believing they were worth less than the white man simply because of how their government treated them. Early 20th-century America largely opposed the idea of mixing people in public places because of racist customs passed down throughout generations. These customs affected American society for generations; even today, we still see some of the effects of the advantages white families had.

After President Franklin Roosevelt was elected president, the Great Depression came to an end after he created New Deal programs, including the Federal Housing Program (FHA). The FHA provided mortgages to help people become homeowners. The banks that provided loans created a system called redlining where they crossed out certain people from getting loans. These people were people of color POC and consisted mainly of African Americans and Hispanics. Banks gave loans to white people and helped them become homeowners which raised property value for their towns and created more businesses and commutes for people. These towns usually had laws that only let white people own homes, which restricted POC from becoming homeowners and living in better neighborhoods. These restrictions resulted in unfortunate towns depleting and becoming so poor that there was almost no way of raising property value.

These advantages later proved beneficial because when these people's kids need to go to college, they can sell their house to afford it, or when they pass away, their kids get the house from their parents' will. Over the years, property value rises as inflation slightly increases, and these houses that were bought for \$10,000 were sold for up to \$1,000,000 in today's economy. The advantages given to white people during our years of legal prejudice proved to be beneficial for their kin, especially when these towns are still white-dominated.

During WWII, President Roosevelt ordered Executive Order 9066, the relocation of Japanese Americans from California to multiple areas around the country due to widespread fear of potential sabotage following the Harbor attack. Although many of these people were American citizens and were proven to pose no threat to America, his decision to forcefully relocate them was solely powered by racial prejudice and wartime hysteria. This was part of the larger context of discrimination faced by Asian Americans when they first immigrated to the West Coast in the 19th century, not knowing they would be faced with exclusion, limitation of immigration by U.S. law, and largely prohibited from neutralization.

Prejudice and hatred have always been a part of American culture and customs. Our earlier generation of immigrants protested and fought for our rights to have equal opportunities and to be protected by law in schools, workplaces, public places, etc. While the law has changed, the cultural customs ingrained in American culture to racially hate people's backgrounds. A lot of people had experienced hate toward their ethnicity and gender, regardless of their citizenship or the law. Changing the law is relatively easy, but altering deep-rooted cultural customs- especially those built on hatred -is a much harder challenge.

Fortunately, after a lot of progressive years, we have all become better as a society because the prejudiced custom has degraded a lot due to the integration of immigrants from all around the world. We have changed a whole society's culture and perspective by standing up for what we believe in and changing the law. Slowly, we have made a lot of progress in social acceptance and changing American norms. Although we have come a long way, there are still people who pose a high threat to our immigrant people's safety, but I truly believe change is progressive, and we can still better our society by making the changes we want to see.

My experience in a diverse town is somewhat rare because I have learned so much about other people's cultures and traditions that I feel lucky to be a part of such a diverse community. I have taught many people about my culture and religious traditions, and we have adapted in applying our culture to our identity in our choice of clothes and sharing foods from various cultures during school events, which furthers our connection as a community despite our differences in culture. I feel privileged to have had this experience; not many people have had the opportunity to meet so many people from different cultural backgrounds, and I'm very grateful for this rare experience.

Nevertheless, I firmly believe that American society can be united despite our differences in culture and traditions. American history has shown us that a multicultural society advances better after making social changes and advancements in society. The deportation of immigrants limits the window for a rare experience that will make a grave change to American culture. We have to set a better example for our future kids by uniting together and sharing our culture to further advance our society, not limiting someone's chances for a better opportunity in a united nation.

#### About the author:

I have written this essay based on the American history that I learned in school and some personal experiences I had in a diverse school. I hope this essay helps you understand my views on this topic and perspective. I hope you enjoy this writing.



# Natalia

## Everett High School

### Honorable Mention

#### Proud to say

American culture impacts immigrants and people from all different heritages. I will specifically be talking about my experience living in America as a Hispanic child, growing up as the daughter of hard working immigrant parents, and how I struggle with my identity as I am navigating my teen years. Growing up, I didn't know how to connect with my peers since I didn't speak English. I grew up in a Spanish speaking household. My culture has different traditions that my family gets judged for from time to time, and sometimes that leads to me being labeled or stereotyped. While I know these stereotypes are harsh and simply not true, it influences how I view myself and sometimes can make me despise my own culture. I am learning how to embrace my heritage and maintain my dignity as a proud Hispanic-American.

Like most five-year-olds, I went to kindergarten. But unlike many other kids in my school, I did not speak English. In turn, this felt like I was an outsider even though I knew I belonged—these other kids looked like me, wanted to play like I did, and were also there to learn. When we would sit on that alphabet-decorated, colorful rug and the teacher would read from some of my all-time favorite books to look at, like the ones from Dr. Seuss, I always wished I understood them. I only read “One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish” for the first time when I was in fourth grade. My peers read these stories as kindergarteners. Once I realized that other kids considered me weird for these types of things, there was only one group of people left that understood what was happening to me: my family. At home, my older brother would try to teach me English. But, being a kid himself, he couldn't expect me to always understand. Being able to speak Spanish at home and say what I wanted, or how I was feeling, after school was an escape from what really was happening half of the day. Coming home I felt like a person again. Looking back, it saddens me to know that those who cannot speak English yet have to struggle with social challenges, identity obstacles, and anxiety, and loneliness at such a young age because of being unable to communicate easily with others.

More recently, I notice more that my family's traditions get judged frequently. Like many Latinx communities during the Christmas time, we go to church regularly, celebrate our religions, eat Tamales and enjoy panes con pollo. Many people I know are unfamiliar with foods like panes con pollo: a sandwich-like food with chicken, tomatoes, radish, cucumber, lettuce, and carrots. In my family, panes con pollo are a must have at all the family gatherings. This past Christmas, I had a friend that I sent a picture of this cuisine to. They made it clear to me that they were not fond of me sharing this part of my culture with them, saying “That's weird, just a small sandwich for Christmas? You should come to my family's Christmas. It is way better”. To me and my family, panes con pollo is more than “just a small sandwich”. My grandma's hands work hard to provide this food. For my family, it is never about how fancy

our traditions are, they are always about the love going into them. My friend's comment may seem silly to others, but it was hurtful and confusing having someone judge my family's ways of celebration. In other words, they assumed, and made me question, if I was not happy with my culture and with the things I have.

Similarly, there are many stereotypes and assumptions about my culture that affect girls like me negatively. In my own family, there will always be the aunts, grandparents, mothers, and fathers pressuring young members like myself about how important it is to live a “traditional” life. In other words, we are supposed to have a perfect relationship with God, live a chaste life, and to live life as passive, obedient women like many of the mothers and women in my culture's community.. Contrary to my culture's traditions, I never want to be a housewife. I don't think many women in my family wanted to be housewives either,, but the expectancy and stereotypes of the Hispanic community has forced many women on my life into that role There is also the stereotype that all our abuelas (grandmothers) and mami's are very strict, religious, Catholics. It makes me feel like I can't be like or do things that a lot of my high school peers do; or the stereotype that others view me as poor or dangerous just because I am Hispanic. These examples have made me resent my culture: we get judged and I get angry and resentful towards, not so much my culture anymore, but the people who show racism or a lack of understanding towards it. I don't completely hate my culture as I have in the past, I think all our Spanish speaking countries are so beautiful and have so much culture to offer. I have made myself focus on the beauty in all of the different accents, customs, music, and arts these Spanish speaking countries have. By doing just that, I have learned so much more about different performing arts our culture has to offer, and all of the different foods that we can share. This has helped me to realize that there are so many more things about my identity that I should be grateful for..

Although my Hispanic roots have caused me both pain and joy, I'm proud to say that I'm the daughter of a hard working father and mother, I'm proud to say I'm the granddaughter to my beautiful grandma, and I'm proud to say I'm a sister to my older brother. I'm proud to be bilingual. By reflecting on my experiences, I have embraced my roots. I am proud to say, “I am Hispanic.”

#### About the author:

My Name is Natalia, I am a student at Everett high School. I am from El Salvador and Honduras.

# Neichka

## Malden High School

### The Cultural Impact of Immigrant on American Society

Initially, my mom was the first to come from Haiti to the United States. It was a tough day for her, for both of us. She came to the United States to start a new life and guarantee me a life without worries, which was emotionally challenging for both of us. Unfortunately, I was left behind, it was like a piece of my chest vanished when a mother left her daughter behind, to travel to another country, it was a trek for her.

After several years I couldn't postpone because of my mother's separation. I restarted the life I had before, over the past years Haiti has deteriorated significantly, when gangs take the country specially the capital (Port-au-Prince) and several towns over control. Although kidnappings and murders have increased, the city where I lived was a little safe. Nevertheless it was tough for me to go to school, when they shoot in the public places, and even by accident students and civilians get shot.

I came to the U.S on December 7, 2023, it was a long journey and I enjoyed many adventures as I enjoyed American food. Since coming to the U.S I have learned about Thanksgiving which is an American custom. I learn about this custom when I first came to America. At first I felt curious by the concept where everyone around expresses their gratitude towards their family, especially God. In contrast, I have to respect others' traditions but now I think Thanksgiving is a beautiful tradition that brings people and family fostering a sense of attachment together and contentment in their life.

In addition, Haiti was once called "Quiskeya" (Mother of the Earth), a name formerly given by the Tainos. One important tradition from my home country is Haitian flag Day because it is the celebration of our Flag during the Haitian revolution. We have been celebrating our Haitian flag since May 18, 1804. When we celebrated our Haitian flag Day we started with "la dessalinienne" and the color "blue et rouge" created by our ancestors Jean Jacques Dessalines. While celebrating our Haitian flag Day in Malden High in the U.S it brings a lot of pride for us. The color bleu et rouge symbolizes "l'union fait la force"; it represents our strength and pride as Haitian.

People in America show regard and value individualism, they specially emphasize with others immigrants. I balance my Haitian culture with patrimony and American culture by bringing our Haitian food and have unique flavors such as: griot, fritay (plantain), tassot. On the other hand, Haitian communities support and collaborate with American society. That connote, Haiti and other immigrants play a great role in American culture and society, besides that it plays an important role and makes American communities more inclined and dynamic.

#### About the author:

Neichka is a 17-year-old student from Malden. Her amusements are dancing, playing and reading books and she has an inherent interest in communication, creativity and self awareness. This is her first time participating in the essay competition.

# Rommel

## Everett High School

### Filipino Culture

Culture and Tradition is an important thing to most immigrant families. Moving to a whole new country is scary. Not knowing what this country has in mind for us, we bring what we already know. We bring new foods, new languages, and new people. Moving to a new country is like moving to a new school. You don't know what's there and who's there. You just come in and do the regular stuff you were taught, and slowly find friends that are just like you. These small interactions with people who are very similar to you can help start communities where people with common interests interact.

I am from the Philippines. Though I was not born in the Philippines, I believe that the cure to being homesick from there is the food. If you cook some nice delicious Filipino food, all your problems will disappear. I believe this because the Philippines has the best foods and the best deserts. Whenever I travel, I get homesick. I start thinking about the food my mom cooks and it makes me start to crave Filipino food. Food is the main thing most cultures can offer, but I think Filipino food is the best.

Although most countries' cultures mainly offer food, The Philippines also offers a great community. We have a protective and funny community. Filipinos are usually very small people. There are very few chances you see a tall Filipino. Since we are small, we are an easy target for other people. Filipinos intentionally have lots of kids. This means that they have people to protect them. The community we build defends each other. They fight for the right things, but they also know how to joke and be funny.

To keep our traditions and cultures going, we spread them through sharing recipes, opening up a restaurant, or teaching others our native language. We share our culture to keep it alive and in hopes of spreading it through others. We also keep traditions alive through festivals. I know that in Boston Filipino Festivals are held. I have yet to go, but I know that it would be extremely fun. I love watching people come to Filipino places and try new things. One thing I like to do, that is not necessarily a culture thing, is to try balut. Balut is an egg that is cooked, but the bird is in there. It is a famous dish in other Asian cultures, but I still love watching people try it.

# Rebeca

## Malden High School

### When Two Cultures Collide, The Magic Happens

I have been living in the United States for four years and I remember the time I had to say goodbye to my family as if it happened yesterday. All the tears, the hugs, the laughs, the many beautiful words I received from them, and the letter from my best friend. But most of all, it was the day I realized how time flies and we can not miss the little details in our lives. We have to enjoy every second of the day and every moment with the people we love. We don't know how tomorrow is going to be. We might have many plans, but only God knows what will truly happen.

The first time I came to the United States was at the end of December 2018. I came with all my family members from my mom's side to go to Orlando and visit Disney and all the other parks. It felt like we were in another universe. Everything was different. It was incredible. Pure magic I'd say and because of this trip, my parents were seriously thinking about moving to the United States. They wanted a better future for me and my sister. Great education, safety, and everything the U.S. could provide for us to achieve our dreams. In Brazil, we say that the United States is the "country of opportunities".

In 2021, my life turned upside down. I tried to show my parents that I was alright but the truth is that I was scared. I was anxious, happy, and feeling a mix of emotions. When I decided to fully support the idea of moving to another country, I knew the consequences. I knew that I would have to start all over again. I knew that I wouldn't go to my grandpa's house every weekend to spend time with my family; I knew that I wouldn't pretend to be a mermaid with my little uncle and explore little things as if everything was a treasure. I knew that I would lose my cousins' childhood who were born in 2020.

After a month in the United States, I went to school for the first time. Keverian School in Everett. It was the most incredible experience I've ever had. In Brazil, American movies that show kids going to school were something that made Brazilians wish to study in the U.S. The yellow school bus, the lockers, students not having to wear uniforms... Everything was so real. Of course, some things were different. I felt like I was in a movie and, let me tell you a secret, I still think that way. I had to go back to 8th grade because I couldn't go to high school at fourteen years old and my birthday was too far away. I was sad about it, but I do not regret it. I received the opportunity to meet the friends I have today and the full experience of a semi-prom. However, the anxious feeling of going to a new school was gone. I made friends even though I was super shy and the teachers were the best. I had an amazing experience in middle school. After finishing middle school, I moved to Malden and started my high school experience at Malden High School.

February 21st, 2025 was the day I have been living in the United States for four years. I am not fourteen anymore. I'm eighteen years old. Studying to get my driver's license. And a Junior year in high school. I have grown from the inside to the outside. I had many experiences until I could finally find the best version of me.

In four years, I experienced great changes in my personal life, my school life, and myself. I met good people, but also bad people. I left ESL (English as a Second Language) after my freshman year and achieved fluency in English. I've been studying French in high school for three years and I met a lot of great teachers. I improved my relationship with my parents and my sister. And, the most important thing, I reconnected with God and that came with so many blessings.

After four years of living in the United States country, I learned important life lessons. I learned how to enjoy every little detail of life as if it was my last day on earth. I learned that Americans care. They care if you're a good student; they care if you are good at your job; and they care about you. You might not be a good student, but teachers will still look out for you and help you reach your goals to succeed.

On November 19, 2024, Malden High School raised the Brazilian Flag - a few weeks before they raised the Haitian flag as well - to celebrate their Brazilian students. This day made me reflect on how grateful I am for being here. The speech of the staff member was inspiring and it shows the importance of when cultures collide. We learn from each other. The respect we share, the experiences, and the friendship. My time with them made me feel inspired to try my best to achieve my goals because nothing is impossible. We just have to try it! Keep trying because no matter where you're from, if you are trying, you'll get there.

On the one hand, we're learning to always try our best and succeed. On the other hand, we're sharing love, affection, dedication, and our funny way of being. We are all learning from each other and this makes us stronger. The unity gets stronger every single time. Empathy and love increases. I couldn't be more grateful for having this opportunity and being part of this culture.

I am very thankful because if it wasn't for that trip to Orlando, my parents wouldn't have been influenced by the magic of another country. In the end, when the two cultures collide, the magic happens.

# Shashi

## Everett High School

**Honorable  
Mention**

### Keeping My Heritage

Growing up in a Nepali household in America, I have always been surrounded by my culture. Holding onto my previous heritage before moving here has always been important to me.

Celebrating Dashian and Tihar, traditional Nepali holidays, has always brought me back to my heritage. As my parents and older family members put tika on my forehead and give me blessings about my educational future or how I should treat and respect my elders. The loud lok dohori music is playing as my parents dance together. The scents of my favorite foods like khasi ko masu, dal and bhat, and momos engulf the atmosphere. This all gives me a sense of belonging. I feel connected even if I'm not present in Nepal, yet this feels like I am back at home.

Besides festivals and food, having these different traditions than others has always taught me to be respectful of others, even if they come from different backgrounds.

At school, I explain the importance of these Nepali holidays to my friends, and I explain how they help me feel connected to my roots back in Nepal but also help add diversity to the community. I realize that everyone has their own traditions, their own beliefs, and their own roots where they come from. These all help shape America like a quilt. All different fabrics piecing together to make one whole. Not everyone and their traditions are the same, this is what helps shape America differently.

Seeing this happen, I feel proud of where I come from; the cultural ideas and values have stuck with me. Though having to adjust to the American lifestyle, I have not forgotten my roots and where I come from.

# Taithsa

## Malden High School

### Born to suffering

I'm Haitian, in the past other countries knew us as the first black country that had taken their independence from the French colonization, it was with pride. But now, my country is considered as the most poor and dangerous, and as dependent on other countries. I have talked to my Haitian friends and they define Haiti as shame for them. But do my PERLE DES ANTILLES deserve that? Does the country that my ancestors left for my people deserve that? The one that they fought with blood. The one that they were humiliated and massacred for. If my ancestors were looking at this new generation, what would they think? Look what we have become of our own self. We became culpable for ourselves as the victims.

When I think about those terrors, when I think about the rest of my family, the rest of my people that are still living under this pressure I cry. They do not deserve that. When I think about those babies, about those teenagers like me, those women that are getting murder, assaulted, violated, and killed, what are we? Are we born to be a crime? Not only that, I mean to always feel that insecure to feel that something is going to happen to us because we are the target of those gang predators, where did the time when people would not be afraid to be outside when student like me would not be afraid to go home by themselves or to play outside with friends, to be able to breathe the fresh air that is given to us, to listen to the voice of robbers, but today it is the completely the opposite people are afraid to go outside just to not getting kidnapped, we smell burn, we listen firing gun. Where did this pride go? Where Haiti was considered as the mother of all Haitian, look what they did to you mother of my nation.

I left my country with a sentiment of shame, the sentiment of letting my country down. After some time my perspective changes completely by having my family, friends, and educators beside me. Now I see it as I am here to make my country proud to become someone and to serve my country when I will be older. Everyone who is living in Haiti is in a war, often when they mention war people always think about weapons, I am not talking about this type of war, I am talking about a mental war. Where they have to choose one of them is to give up, take the situation as it is and lose everything, or stand up bravely to say "stop".

I believe in a better Haiti, I believe that I can bring a change to my country, That the people who live in Haiti can bring that change, and the people the people who had the opportunity to leave the country to have a better life can bring it. All Haitians dream of a different Haiti, we are dreaming for a safest place to live. Where children can have access to good education. This time will come, it may be after decades, but I will live to see this change. My beautiful country this was dedicated to you.



# Sophia

## Malden High School

### My Grandma's Garden

“Wèn tāmen shìfǒu xiǎng chī nánguā,” my grandma calls, asking in Mandarin if our neighbors would like to try her squash. I translate this phrase often. She grows so much Sponge Gourd for the family that we are able to have one a day for the whole summer, with there still being some to share with neighbors. She loves to plant Sponge Gourd because her mother would always plant it, and she would eat it when she was young. Because she has struggled with food insecurity, she believes it is important to share food with others.

When my grandma was thirteen, she suffered from malnutrition. Many people starved to death during this time because of what is now known as the Great Chinese Famine, which caused food shortages all throughout China. Mao Zedong, the chairman of the Chinese Communist Party during this time, sought to better China's economy and allow industrialization. His government confiscated my great-grandparents' -and countless other people's - crops and livestock, not allowing them to grow their own food on their own land. Instead of boosting the economy, this led to millions of people starving, including my grandma and her family. At first, she would receive food from her school and the adults would receive food at work, but there was not enough food being grown to support the millions of people living in China. Because the government was not doing much to grow more food, people quickly ran out. My great-grandfather and great-grandmother were forced to work on communal farms owned by the government. My grandma would often go to bed hungry—to be expected, as she barely had anything to eat. She resided in Fuzhou, China, near the Min River, so she and her family would have fish on rare and special occasions, hence contributing to the reason why fish is one of her favorite foods today. Though her meals were small and special treats like fish were hard to come by, she considered herself lucky because, unlike people in some regions, she was actually able to eat something, whereas some people had to resort to eating mice or even human flesh to survive.

The famine in China ended after three long, gruesome years, and my grandma's family once again had access to their own land and planted all the vegetables and fruits they could water. My grandma eventually moved away from the countryside in China in order to find work. She said goodbye to her garden for a few decades, only having her small house plants. Eventually, she and her family found themselves in a foreign land that spoke a different tongue, away from everything she ever knew. She struggled because opportunities were limited due to jobs being scarce, and her family didn't know anyone. Eventually, she found herself in Malden, an ideal place to live as an immigrant, with almost half of the population being born elsewhere. She is slowly but surely becoming accustomed to the ways of

the American people, all while integrating her own traditions and culture. Here in Malden, she now has a garden of her own, which she takes great pride in, no longer having to worry about food shortages and looking for jobs. She has successfully retired and is now in her 70s, and she dedicates time to gardening.

She grows all her most beloved foods, some of which remind her of when she was back in China, including her favorite, the Sponge Gourd.

Another reason she loves living in Malden, aside from having a space to garden, is our diverse neighbors who are from places all over the world. People in our community preserve their cultural traditions by bringing their languages, food, dances, and so much more, sharing these traditions with neighbors and friends while learning more about other cultures and traditions themselves. This allows immigrants to remember their origins while fostering a more interconnected community. Through her love of gardening, my grandma keeps her Chinese traditions alive while also sharing and learning about other cultures. When she came to America, one of her new favorite dishes was a tuna sandwich, an unheard-of combination back in her hometown. She loves to see how our neighbors of different cultures cook their vegetables, like how one of my neighbors, Mrs. Zalk likes to cook her squash in a pizza-like way or recipes that include cheese and breads that are more foreign to her. Our neighbors from Bangladesh cook her squash with all kinds of spices like saffron and cubeb, and they even taught my grandma how to cook the leaves of her squash like how they do back in Bangladesh. Here in Malden, she feels she has truly achieved the American Dream, where she now has a life of stability and a community rich in different cultures while being able to share her own.

# Sophie

## Malden High School

**Honorable  
Mention**

### The Power of Food

Having been born and raised in the United States, more specifically Malden, Massachusetts, I was always surrounded by people with similar backgrounds, as most children were born and raised in America, while their parents were immigrants just like mine. When I was younger, I had school lunch, which included typical American foods like hamburgers or hot dogs. I always thought they were extremely different from the home cooked meals that came from my Vietnamese and Chinese heritage that my parents would make for the family. Now that I am older, I treasure keeping to tradition at home while integrating into American society at school. It always reminds me to remember where I and my ancestors came from.

Food has the power to draw people together, as food is often shared within communities and families. With Malden being a diverse city, there are many celebrations regarding holidays from all around the world, giving everyone the chance to share their own traditions or take part in others. These festivities give people a way to socialize together. Food at these parties provide a common ground for everyone and allows for easy conversation. During these conversations, everyone has the time to connect with one another through shared experiences, especially those with food involved. With the number of new foods that are typically present, people often find themselves trying new things, allowing for an even stronger bond to grow from sharing the experience of tasting the same foods for the first time together. Like everywhere else, America has its own national holidays that bring people together with food. Thanksgiving is a prime example of a community coming together to share food. Nowadays, the foods that appear on a Thanksgiving table are not just the traditional turkey, mashed potatoes, gravy, etc. There are foods people might share that have connections to their roots instead of sticking only to traditional Thanksgiving foods. The sheer number of people that food seems to amass further proves how powerful food really is in bringing people together.

America is a mixing pot of all cultures, making it important for society to continue to share, learn about, and respect new cultures as well as support each other. As I was raised around children of immigrants around my age, I made friends with people of all different cultures and customs they were proud of. I was invited to different family gatherings. Although I enjoyed different foods and found similarities in some customs, I was reluctant to try new foods. However, now, I have become a foodie. I love all kinds of food and jump at the chance to spend time with friends, especially when I learn that there is food involved. As I dined with my friends and their families, I also found how people from all over seemed to have at least one food that shared one similarity. There was always some kind of food that was usually enjoyed on-the-go, just like burgers in America. There were egg rolls from China, spring rolls from Vietnam, kathi rolls

from India, samosas from India and South Asia, kimbap from Korea, and sushi from Japan. Even tacos and burritos originating in Mexico, shawarma from the Middle East, gyros from Greece, lumpia from the Philippines, empanadas from South America, and gözleme in Turkey.

With all this variety, there was no surprise when all family gatherings I attended seemed to have at least one food that a person could grab and go.

As an athlete, I always feel hungry. My busy schedule often pushed me to find new foods that were quick and easy to eat on the go. There are a lot of different restaurants in or near Malden which helped me to discover foods I had never heard of and made sure that I never ate the same thing twice in a week. Places like Levant Delight, Santa Fe Burrito Grill, the food court inside the 99 Asian Supermarket, etc., provide a multitude of options for on-the-go foods. Food's power is special. It isn't only for satisfying our hungry stomachs, but is an easy start to understanding different cultures and religious customs in America's cultural mixing pot. Nowadays, we see a lot of innovative fusion cuisine on restaurants' menus. This symbolizes showing appreciation and welcoming each other into the American way of life.

Another trait that I found in common from family to family was the amount of family recipes that were passed down from generation to generation, tying each and every person back to their unique ancestral heritage. My love for food only grew as I stayed around the same people as they began to share more and more stories of food and how everything was made in a certain way to honor traditions. For example, some dumplings are folded in a way that resembles gold ingots to symbolize wealth and prosperity, with some people even hiding clean coins within one lone dumpling for good fortune. Oftentimes, I found myself in the kitchen learning from my mom on the way to fold a perfect dumpling, which was her way of connecting me to my heritage. My friends all shared the same kind of experience of recreating family recipes with their own parents. Nowadays, people share about finally learning family recipes from their parents and reconnecting with their roots online. These moments became precious to us and we hold them close to our hearts. Through the creation and consumption of food, people are able to both share and remember their roots.

America is a country rich with immigrants who bring unique traditions and foods along with them. When enjoying these traditional foods together, connections between people are fostered through the shared experiences of food. Sharing and never forgetting traditions is vital for everyone and staying in touch with their roots, all while joining American society. I am proud to say that I have so many traditions that I stay true to at home, while I treasure and enjoy the ways of American life every day.

#### About the author:

I have been a lifelong resident of the city of Malden, Massachusetts, enjoying the diverse community in Malden. I enjoy competitive swimming and volunteering because there are many times I can share and support everyone around me.

# Thaylla

## Malden High School

### My Immigration Story

Hi, my name is Thaylla and I'm 14 years old. I'm from Brazil, from the city of Minas Gerais, I remember that I spent hours and hours on the street playing with my friends and laughing with my brother and cousins. I had a quiet life in Brazil, I didn't have a rich life, but I thank my mother who never let me miss anything and always did everything good and the best for me and my brother. I didn't have a father, I mean, and some time, years, of my life I had my father's love. But, things suddenly changed when my father gathered his things and my mother was crying a lot and I didn't know what to do. Honestly, even in so long, this scene of seeing my father leaving and crying still runs through my mind. I remember my last hug of our "last" I love you I felt insecure, I didn't know what to do, I couldn't cry..I only knew how to ask my mother, why he is leaving me.. my mother said that he would only travel and I would keep waiting for my father's return, for 5-6 years. Until one day my fix fell, I no longer had a father, which made me sad sometimes because every child needs the love and protection of a father. But what made me softer was the fact that I still have my mother. Let's say that my mother was a mother and a father to me. So it wasn't often that I missed my father. In fact, the comfort of my mother's love made me forget that I never needed a father.

My mother always gave me clothes, food, house, water and shoes. But what I never told anyone, was the emptiness I felt inside me..it was the pain of the abandonment of my best friend (my father) time passed I turned 11 years old

And 3 years ago I had the great opportunity to get to know this giant and wonderful country. (Uses)

In fact, this place is everything that people who never even came to visit said. Before arriving here, I went through things that I didn't wish for anyone. I had heat, thirst and hunger. But that's the least.. because what really hurt was seeing my whole family gathered to say goodbye to me and my mother. That was my last hug, my last physical contact... That's how much an immigrant who doesn't have a visa has to go through just because he wants to conquer his dreams. We walked for almost 1 hour until we reached the end of the trajectory, arriving at the top of the walk, there were several policemen, asking to take off the cold blouse, the shoelace of the sneaker and the hair clip.

We had to go to a "chain" for us to be "approved"

Before entering the United States. (I was stuck for two days)

People had a bad time with food, and my mother saw a child vomiting a lot, so she forbade me to eat anything they offered me, so I was hungry for two days. After leaving, I saw my mother crying and hugging my aunt hugging my mother.

I listened to everyone speaking in English, I didn't know what to do, I didn't know where to go I felt like a baby, looking for my mother I cried wanting to go back to Brazil where I really feel at home. Home, where I was free where I laughed and felt comfortable. The beginning is always difficult, I didn't speak or understand English so I felt inferior to the other children, I felt lost and very ashamed to sit where the Americans sat. I always tried to get away, sit far away and walk away everything because I didn't know how to speak English.

I went through this for 7 months, for 7 months I was stuck in my life without knowing what to do. I talked to my aunt, she had gone through the same thing as me so I knew how to calm down. And take away the anxiety that was on my chest every night before going to sleep. I moved to Mass where I finally unleashed my fear of speaking, I said few things and very short, but it was already quite an advance, for those who were even ashamed to say "Hi" and "bye"

Time has passed and today I know how to speak well, not fluent, not SO well but today I accepted the fact that no one is perfect, and for perfection everything, has a time, everything has a process. A slow and painful process but victory is always good to live.

Immigrants actually suffer here. No one tells the pain of seeing their family members celebrating special days and the only person missing there is you. Seeing your cousins together playing and laughing, it really hurts because you're not there to laugh too. It's been a while since I don't know what it's really like to feel at home, but it's from the house where I leave, that today I have a good opportunity to be who I want to be in the future.

I think I want to be like my mother, strong, wise, hardworking and special. All immigrants, should just give the chance, to show the world, that the life of immigrants also matters, and also important. The beginning is always difficult, always painful, you will hardly be able to continue with a smile on your face you will hardly see your family happy and you will be able not to think how good it would be to be there too.

But you can, you can do it, but I won't lie, it will hurt, it will hurt but what you can't, and give up and this is not only for me but for all the immigrants who go through the pain of this far from home.



# Valeris

## Malden High School

### Paths To the American Dream

#### My story: long but safe process

My name is Valeris, I am Honduran, originally from Yoro-Yoro, or better known as the city of the rain of fish. Honduras is surrounded by high mountains and has great gastronomic options. One of my favorite Honduran foods is baleadas accompanied by a good cup of coffee. My immigration process started thanks to my mother. She met my stepfather through social media and they had mutual friends. He was interested in her and decided to take a risk and win my mother over, which he did. He has been living in the United States for a long time and gave my mother the opportunity to enter the country legally so they could be together. After that, he wanted my mother, my brother and I to be together, and here we are. I am very grateful to God and to them for giving us this wonderful opportunity and I do not intend to waste it. Although the term “legal” may sound like an easy path, the reality is that the wait was long for my brother and me and full of uncertainty.

For five years, we lived in the hope that one day we would receive final approval. In the meantime, we faced many challenges: desperate hope, the anxiety of not knowing if everything would work out, and the difficulty of living with the distance between my mother and us and the new life we hoped to build.

After five long years of waiting, I remember getting a call from my mom that would change everything. She tried to hide her emotions to give us the surprise that we could finally be together. After a lot of things we had to do, the day of the trip came. We took a flight from Honduras to Miami and then from Miami to Boston. I was so excited to see a really different world and I was so excited to be with my mom, but I was also sad because I was leaving my family. It was like a part of me was staying in Honduras.

When we settled down and started school it was very difficult because there were so many people from different countries and they spoke a different language. It is a big challenge to learn new things, but I am willing to do that and much more to be able to succeed. Malden High School gives everyone a lot of opportunities to have a great future. There are such kind people that make you feel at home. It is also very fun and interesting to meet people from other countries and their different types of culture. I will always be very grateful to all the people who held their hand and gave me their support.

Unlike undocumented border crossers, I did not have to risk my life in a desert or hide from immigration authorities. However, our story also had its sacrifices. Bureaucracy, long wait times, and uncertainty are invisible barriers that many legal immigrants face before reaching their destination.

### The Other Path: The Struggle of Those Without Legal Options

For many people, waiting years in a legal immigration process is not an option. Extreme poverty, violence in their home countries, and lack of opportunities force them to take a much more difficult and risky path, such as crossing borders, a deadly journey. Many undocumented immigrants cross the southern border of the United States in the hope of finding a better life. However, the path is full of dangers:

Those who manage to reach the United States without being detained face new challenges. They cannot access formal jobs with benefits. They end up in low-paying jobs without job protection. The constant fear of being deported forces them to live in the shadows, which limits their ability to work. In many cases, undocumented children face difficulties in accessing higher education and growth opportunities.

Despite everything, many immigrants manage to get ahead, either through personal effort, education, or the opportunities that come their way. What unites all immigrants, regardless of their legal status, is the desire for a better life and the willingness to work to achieve it.

My question is: Is it fair that some people have to risk their lives to have a chance in this country?

Immigration is a complex and nuanced issue. While some have the ability to follow a legal process, others have no choice but to risk everything in search of an opportunity.

My story is just one of many. I recognize the sacrifice of those who take a more difficult path. In the end, we all share the same dream: the hope of building a better future in a land of opportunity.

Immigrants from my country make America special because we are humble people who do our work with love and honesty. Immigrants not only work and pay taxes, but they also innovate, create jobs, strengthen cultures and contribute to the greatness of the United States. The United States is a country built by dreamers, by those who with hearts full of hope and hands willing to work, have crossed borders in search of a better future. Throughout history, immigrants have been more than just workers; they have been the spark of innovation, the voice of diversity and the soul of a nation that makes us proud. Although immigration is sometimes seen as a problem, the reality is that without immigrants, the United States would not be what it is today. They bring with them something more valuable than money or labor: they bring dreams, sacrifices, and the unbreakable desire to build a home in a land that promises opportunity. It doesn't matter where they come from or what language they speak, because in each one of them lives the true American spirit: that of those who, against all odds, continue forward with the certainty that the future can always be brighter.

#### About the author:

Valeris is an 18-year-old Honduran-American student from Malden. In her free time, she likes to cooking and spending time with family. She always puts effort into everything she does.



# Vanessa

## Malden High School

### My Story

Hello my name is Vanessa , Im a student from Malden high school , I'm 16 years old and I'm here to talk about immigrating to the USA .When I came to the United States for the first time in 2019, everything seemed huge and strange. The English she studied at school in Brazil didn't look like the same as people spoke here. The streets, the houses, the food everything was different. I missed my family. The desire to go back to Brazil was huge, I missed my father, I kept seeing our message photos. My friends and even the smell of fresh coffee that my mother made every afternoon.

At first, school was a challenge. In Brazil I was the best in school, I always raised my hand for questions but here I feel invisible. I only understood a few words and was afraid of saying it wrong. But, over time, I started trying to speak. ESL classes helped me a lot. I used to watch films with subtitles, listen to music in English and practice with my colleagues. But every lost family birthday was sad, every family party I only saw on screens. In the most difficult moments, I said to my mother: "I want to go back to Brazil. I don't want to stay here anymore." But the answer was always the same: "Now our lives, daughter. You'll get used to it."And, little by little, I got used to it a lot. I learned to speak basic English more confidently, I made some friends, I started to feel part of that new world. But the longing never disappeared. Whenever I saw a plane crossing the sky, I felt a pang in my heart and I could only imagine being inside it, returning home.

Now, at 16, I realize that I've gotten used to it and more than that, I've learned to love my new life in the United States. I love the freedom I have, the diversity of people I've met, the possibility of dreaming big. The opportunities at school, the events that seemed like something from a movie are now part of my daily life. I fell in love with American traditions. Thanksgiving, Christmas which, although different from Brazil, has its own charm, with the streets lit up and the snow falling gently. And, of course, the spirit of the Fourth of July, when the cities are full of fireworks and very beautiful, it reminds me of Brasil, where people would set off fireworks for whatever reason.

I'm very happy when I see Brazilian flags in the markets, when I hear someone speaking Portuguese, when I pass by soccer fields on the street, and see teams of girls and boys playing Brazilian Soccer and it's great to see that we brought our culture here because everyone knows that Brazilians are the best players or even when I discover restaurants that serve rice, beans and cheese bread. On Sundays, I return to my family reunions at home, surrounded by the joy and the sound of friends laughing, and the smell of the food I love so much. Brazilian parties are also here. Carnival groups organized by immigrants, June festivals, typical June festival foods, pastel caldo de cana, watching children dancing square dances like

I did at the school in Brazil, watching national team games in a Brazilian restaurant. Whenever I go in a Brazilian bakery and buy a guaraná with coxinha, I know that no matter how far away I am, Brazil is present in my new life.

But what makes me love the United States most is knowing that I didn't have to give up Brazil and my culture to belong to this place. Brazilian culture is everywhere in steakhouses, at parties, in supermarkets that sell guaraná and cheese bread and especially in my heart. I'm sure this is my place, I don't want to live in Brazil again. And if God allows me, I want to visit whenever I can, see my family who I miss so much, feel the warmth of Brazil. Go back to my city in Minas Gerais, eat my grandma's food. But my life, my future, are here. I don't see myself living anywhere else in the United States. Here I found my space and I am very grateful to this country, it taught me a lot and brought me many new things.

### About the author:

My name is Vanessa , Im a student from Malden high school , I'm 16 years old and I'm here to talk about immigrating to the USA.

# Wania

## Malden High School

### Sharing My Culture

Coming to the United States felt confusing at first. I was surprised when I first heard about the different houses in school and I was really shocked and with the mix of emotions, I started my school journey. I learned more about these houses like—each house has its own advisors and activities like sport tournaments, academic competitions and creative contests. I also learned about their community services like volunteering. Now, I think this is a great way to build teamwork, leadership, and a strong sense of community in school.

Since coming to the U.S., I learned about the new education system when I got admission and started attending school which is very different from my home country. U.S. high schools offer a much wider variety of subjects to choose from. For example, in my country, we could choose between computer science and biology in high schools and if we want to make our career in science or medical field we have to study science or biology. Here, we can study both.

Nevertheless, it is also important to me to hold on to traditions. One important tradition from my home country is the month of “Ramadan” according to Islamic calendar, during which we fast from sunrise to sunset. We wake up early in the morning before sunrise to eat and drink, as this is the last opportunity before fasting begins for the day.

During the day, we are not allowed to eat or drink; focusing instead on patience, self-discipline, and faith. Then, at sunset, we break our fast with dates and water followed by the special dishes we don't usually eat at other times. In my home, we make kachori, a deep-fried, spicy, stuffed pastry originally from Marwar.

On the evening of the 29th fast, we all gather around the TV, impatiently waiting for the news to announce whether the crescent moon has been sighted. Those moments are always special, as we all hope to hear tomorrow is Eid. If Eid is confirmed, all the males go to barbers, while we apply henna designs on each other's hands. Meanwhile, our mothers start planning what to cook for the next day.

I remember that back in our country, my mother used to cook chicken biryani and vegetable salad for the whole family. My aunt, on the other hand, prepared kheer, also known as rice pudding, which is a milk-based dessert served either warm or cold. Another aunt used to make Dahi Vada, a dish with a mix of spicy and sweet flavors, made from yogurt, soaked vada and spices.

Back to the childrens we pressed our clothes and after completing everything we went to our beds and I barely slept at night in the excitement of Eid. We woke up early in the morning, everyone took quick showers and we got ready.

After getting dressed up, we all went to the mosque for Eid prayer, where we met our neighbors and greeted everyone with Eid Mubarak. Then, we came back home and gathered to enjoy delicious food. All the female cousins and besties formed a little group and excitedly went to our elders—to ask for money as a gift. It was always a joyful moment filled with laughter and teasing from the elders, making the tradition even more special. The Eid celebrations last for three days, but the Eid prayer is only held on the first.

I still remember one time in Ramadan when we were all gathered around the TV on the 29th evening of Ramadan, waiting for the news. If the crescent moon was sighted, it would mean tomorrow was Eid—but it wasn't. So, we all went to bed as usual. I normally slept, but when I woke up before sunrise, I got the shocking news it was Eid! I felt a mix of emotions from surprised to excited because I wasn't expecting it all. I quickly got ready, and joined my family.

My family and I continue this tradition by practicing our faith. We do this by fasting, praying, and coming together as a family to celebrate Eid. After a month of fasting, Eid feels like a well-earned reward, filled with joy, gratitude, and togetherness. It's not just about food and gifts—it's about appreciating the lessons Ramadan has taught us, such as self-discipline, kindness, and the importance of family.

On Eid, we don't just celebrate among ourselves; we also think about those who are less fortunate. We give Zakat-al-Fitr, which is a form of charity, so that everyone can enjoy Eid, no matter their financial situation. It's a reminder that true happiness comes from sharing and caring for others.

One way I share this tradition is by telling others about the beauty of Eid and the happiness and kindness we celebrate together. I love explaining to my friends and classmates how Eid is a day of joy after a month of fasting, where we dress up, visit family, and enjoy delicious food. I also share memories, like walking up early for Eid prayers, hugging family, and the excitement of receiving Eidi (money or gifts from elders).

I am sure I am going to miss those moments, but I also believe I can balance my culture and American life by embracing both with an open heart. My traditions are deeply important to me because they shaped my identity, connected me to my roots, and strengthened my faith. By sharing my culture with others, I hope to make America even more diverse and welcoming. It's exciting to think that people here can experience new traditions through me—whatever it's tasting traditional foods, learning about religious customs, or embracing different styles and celebrations.

Culture is what makes a place special, and I'm proud to bring a piece of mine to my new home.

#### About the author:

Wania is a 14-year-old originally from Pakistan and now living in Malden. She enjoys celebrating and sharing her cultural traditions. In her free time, she loves watching Pakistani dramas, which keep her connected to her roots. She values her faith and believes that holding onto traditions while embracing new experiences helps her stay connected to her identity.

# Yarrah-Lynn

## Malden High School

### American Dream or Illusion?

Haiti, “La perle des antilles” which translates to The pearl of Antilles. Born and raised in Haiti, I grew up listening to my parents saying that our culture is unique. Our beach has beautiful blues, as a summer clear day. Such as Anse D’asure beach, Moulin sur mer Beach or Kokoye beach. Our food, plantains, grilled beef, and fufu known as tonton, dances and games are a combination of the Haiti I grew up in. This is the Haiti I wish people knew.

In November 2023, I moved to America. I used to come here for vacation but knowing that I was not going back home felt weird. Everything was different, the weather, the food, the way of living made me realize that I’m actually really far from my country. Felt different but was ready to see what the American dream was about. Slowly, I started to see what being black was in the U.S. Never in my life have I felt ashamed to be black but coming here as an Black Haitians showed me that I will not be liked by everyone during this journey. Not even one time I had hatred towards me but I saw and heard what Haitians endured in the U.S.

And all of a sudden, Haitians are known as criminals. My ancestors didn’t fight for decades to have freedom to be back as slaves, not as before, but enslaved by other nations’ words and treatments. Our government destroyed our country for their own good and we have to pay. I’m all aware of the fact that the gangs in Haiti are Haitians, but Haiti does not produce weapons. Corruption. Somehow the government found a way to let weapons enter the country. Us citizens had to see our country falling apart, and were unable to get help from anyone. We got corrupted, but are criminals. Women are getting raped. Criminal. The lack of food is increasing, kids are unable to go to school, people are running away from their houses that they put a lot of sacrifices to build due to gangs evasion.

I may be safe where I am but I’m not safe in my heart. The guilt of living in America is growing larger day by day. I feel like I should suffer as much as they suffer, shouldn’t be able to find food, shouldn’t feel free to enjoy the opportunities that I have here. My family is in Haiti and they are suffering. Forcing myself to smile when I’m talking to them but holding the tears to not show my weakness. How am I supposed to live the “American Dream” if my dream is for Haiti to be as beautiful as it used to be?

Beside all of the hate, Haitians immigrants do have a good impact on America. In my point of view, we make America special by our hard work and creativity. Haitians are one of the most resilient nations. From fighting for our independence, to being the first free black nation, we are not scared to work any types of hard jobs in America to provide for our families and to serve the country. Our creativity by

developing businesses such as restaurants to invite Americans to our culture and involving the world in our resources. And one important tradition from my home country is our remedies with plants such as Ceracee, the most bitter thing you could ever drink, because most Haitians claim that it is better than medicine because of the chemical products they are made of. This tradition is one that I will keep and make sure to pass generation to generation because when I’m sick plant remedies cure me faster. I want to introduce them to my American friends or friends from places around the world to improve people’s knowledge of plants that are popular in Haiti and how we use them for illness.

Born to be in the streets of my country and enjoy the Caribbean atmosphere forced to be abroad and hear horrible news. I want to be strong for my people, I want to succeed in helping to put my country back together even if it’s in 10 years or more I want to fight back. I want the Pearl of the Antilles back. End.

This is the end of this essay however, not the battle. I won’t be silent until my country gets its respect back. Because black don’t crack. This is my experience, my story, my pain as an Haitian immigrant.

#### About the author:

I’m Yarrah-Lynn and I’m a 16 years old girl in 10th grade at Malden High School, born and raised in Haiti. I love reading and writing poems. My other passion is kids, I enjoy helping youth improve their knowledge in diverse activities. This is my first time participating in an essay competition and I will talk about my home country.



# Jason

Malden High School

First  
Place

Eternal Embrace of Liberty / Digital artwork



**Artist's statement:**

My piece explores the cultural impact of immigration, symbolized by the Statue of Liberty holding hands with children dressed in traditional clothing from different backgrounds. It represents unity, diversity, and the welcoming spirit of a new home. I created it digitally, using layered textures, glitch effects, and halftone patterns to give it a dynamic and slightly fragmented look. This visual style reflects both the richness and the struggles of immigration.

# Kathleen

Malden High School

Second  
Place

Cherished Chaotic Cafeteria / Procreate



**Artist's statement:**

When I think of immigration, I think of diversity; I think of a bunch of new people, new foods, new stories. I'm immediately brought back to my elementary school days where everyone would share food, where someone would always ask about what I brought from home for lunch, where we'd play games in a language we didn't know, where we'd work on projects together. In a way, it's chaos, tasting so many different flavors and remembering so many new rules, but they are colorful memories that add so much more complexity to my life.

And color is where I began this piece. With vibrant colors overlapping and intersecting, I sought to capture the many interactions that happen in a cafeteria--a place of sharing and energy. Even now, new perspectives and new people from new places add more colors and flavors that make communities more lively, school more new, and life more enjoyable.



# Nelly

Malden High School

Third  
Place

**Arrival** / Watercolor, color pencils, micron pen and white gel pen



**Artist's statement:**

The creature in the middle is a portrayal of how immigrants are seen when they first arrive in the US; seen as abnormal and unfit, to the point where they themselves might start to believe such claims. The environment surrounding the creature is one that clashes with the creature, it does not embrace them or feels like home and this is unfortunately is the reality of countless immigrants; but what they bring to America are new traditions, perspectives, and languages that are passed down from generation to generation and it what makes America diverse and therefore unique.

Furthermore, just how the creature's necklace and flower charm match the flowers blooming in the river- despite all the unknown- immigrants find solace in things that remind them of home in a foreign land and share it with others. This includes food, language, art, music, and holidays that enhance American's knowledge and values and helps shape them into well-educated and diverse individuals that can fit in foreign countries and are less keen on having racist and discriminatory behaviors.

Moreover, the creature surrounded by rocks and trees evokes a sense of isolation and restriction and in this case, for immigrants these are often language barriers, lack of education, and the feeling of being unable to move forward. However, most immigrants stay resilient and find a path out into a better place like the rock steps that face the creature's boat. This new path might be through learning English, getting a better job, or having children that grow up with better opportunities and elevate their environment by sharing their cultures and knowledge.

# Samira

Everett High School

Third  
Place

**What we share** / Watercolor, colored pencils



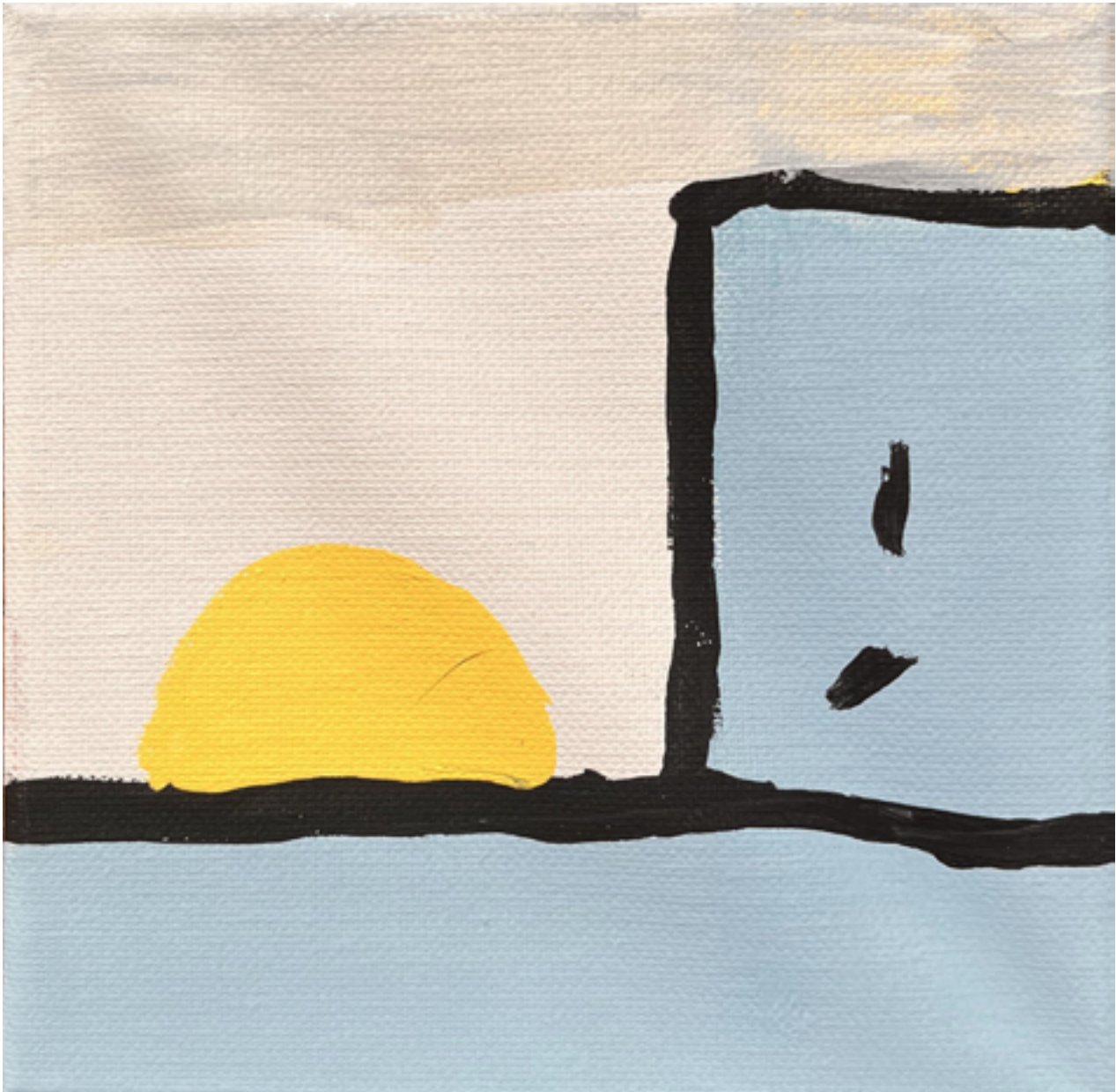
**Artist's statement:**

The human wrapped in the American flag symbolizes immigrants sharing their identity with the American life, hardships, and culture. Many immigrants consider America their new home hence being wrapped around in the American flag and the person being comforted by it. My drawing represents the beauty of immigrants and what they bring to America, I wanted to display the values that immigrants have that makes them special, especially to America where its a nation of Diversity Unity and Freedom.



**Abraao**  
Medford High School

Abraao / Paint



**Andy**  
Medford High School

I am here / Paint





# Elizabeth

Everett High School

Mi perspectiva / Photography



Artist's statement:

My piece is about my community and how immigrants come together this picture shows a rose for the love we have with another as a community. The rosary represents our religion, and lastly our “sombrero” that shows what we are and what we come from. These factors contribute to us being the loving community we are!

# Esther

Malden High School

Immigration: Into the Sun / Digital art



Artist's statement:

I created this piece to show some of the problems in Haiti and how my journey to the USA brought happiness and joy into my life. Immigration has changed my life for the better and helped my family and friends.



**Gabriel**  
**Medford High School**

**Honorable  
Mention**

**Halls Cleaner** / Paint, marker



**Jessica**  
**Malden High School**

**Honorable  
Mention**

**Culture brings Beauty** / Watercolor, colored pencils



**Artist's statement:**  
A qipao is a traditional Chinese dress. It's known for its elegance and is worn by many. Blue eyes are from northern Europe, while curly hair typically stems from those of African descent. Would all these different features, embraced by one person, clash? In actuality, it's the blending of cultures that can bring out our beauty. I wanted to create this drawing to counter the rising accusations of cultural appropriation, when in reality, many people love the culture and want to show an appreciation of all of its complexity. As I'm Chinese, I love it when people wear a qipao, as it's not something I get to see unless it's during the Lunar New Year, and I feel that people are honoring my culture. I believe culture should be shared amongst people and shouldn't be restricted to a single group.



**Karollyne**  
**Medford High School**

**Honorable  
Mention**

**Flickers Between Moments** / Painting on paper using pastel oil crayons



**Artist's statement:**

The artwork captures a moment among a group of friends gathered on the floor and playing UNO. I think that is a very special moment because all of us are first-generation students who sometimes get really scared with all the news about immigrants being at risk of deportation just because we are not like everyone else. This moment depicts exactly the feeling of security of being in school and in the class of our favorite teacher Ms. Miller <3. It has the intention of bringing tranquility so that even in hard times we can find support in each other's company.

**Kivia**  
**Medford High School**

**Sun Set**





**Magdelawit**  
Medford High School

**Honorable  
Mention**

**Straighten. Dye. Conform. Repeat.** / Colored pencils



**Artist's statement:**

This piece is about a girl changing her hair to the colors of the American flag over the colors of her home country (Ethiopia). This piece was inspired by immigrants in my community who I often see dye their hair brown over their natural black hair as well and straighten in order to fit in. It touches on the themes of conformity which immigrants as well as people of color face as we deal with a constant feeling of being different and judged. I hope to bring more awareness to this issue and hopefully encourage people to embrace themselves for who they are.

**Marc**  
Medford High School

**I am Marc** / Paint





Rose  
Malden High School

The Rebirth of Haiti / Digital artwork



**Artist's statement:**  
I put together two images digitally. The first image shows Haiti as it is now, but in the second image on the right, I imagine the potential for Haiti in partnership with America. The eagle represents what I think the partnership could be like.

Samaelle  
Malden High School

The Haitian Storm / Digital artwork (Canva)



**Artist's statement:**  
This piece is about Haiti and the problems that Haiti has, including gun violence, the economic problems, and gangs. I wanted to capture the sorrow people are feeling in Haiti. A lot of people cry expecting that something will change, but it seems so far that nothing has. I wanted people to be aware of these problems affecting the Haitian immigrant community.



Trini  
Malden High School

Before the Sun Fully Rises / Digital art



Artist's statement:

As the child of an immigrant, I know full well how hard immigrants work. Many immigrants work in the agricultural industry and wake up before dawn in order to support not only their families but help feed people throughout America. In this piece I use digital art to pay homage to the many immigrants currently at risk of deportation who are just trying to live a better life.

Honorable  
Mention

Valentina  
Malden High School

Conflict / Watercolor





Vaulande  
Malden High School

A New Departure / Digital art



**Artist's statement:**  
I created this piece to symbolize my family's move from Haiti to America. We all have differences we experience, like difficulties at school or experiencing a new place. However, I have hope for the future.

Vitor  
Medford High School

Electrical Engineering / Paint





Walter  
Medford High School

Untitled / Paint



Widson  
Medford High School

Black Live Matter / Paint



Artist's statement:  
We better together

Yan  
Medford High School

Mountains / Paint



Watch the videos!




**First Place**



**Hana**  
Malden High School



**Second Place**



**Maya**  
Medford High School

**Artist's statement:**  
I am proudly to submit my video about this topic! I want to thank everyone who participated within this video, their time and consideration meant everything to me and I couldn't have done without them.