

Celebrate America 2023 Creative Writing Contest



Honoring our immigrant past, shaping our immigrant future

We are pleased to present the national winners of the American Immigration Council's Creative Writing Contest for fifth graders. ***Skipping Stones*** is one of the cosponsors of this annual contest. Visit: www.celebrateamericawritingcontest.org for more information.

First Place Winner: "3" By Lillie Villezcas

I am number 3, but how does number 3 apply to me? I am the third generation of an immigrant family, the third generation of fading traditions and lost nationalities, but I refuse to let that be me.

My grandmother immigrated into this country with high hopes and her luggage full of dreams. In this country she made a home and started a family, holding on to her culture and her beliefs.

As she passed that conviction to my mother, she knew it was a vow of importance for her to keep. My mother held on to those values a little tighter, but it wasn't as easy as it seemed; everything is different in the land of the free.

English became my mother's primary language, she learned to hide her accent until there was no more trace left. She began to identify more with her peers, same style, same likes, but certainly not the same face.

I have yet to experience stories such as the ones my mother once told us, a warning to never feel as if we don't belong. There may be name calling or discrimination, but stay true to yourself, and to your roots, be brave, and no matter what always stand strong.

Whenever I am in doubt or feel out of place, I recite our national anthem, for this is the home of the brave. Brave like my grandmother when she left for the land of opportunity, and brave like my mother when she chose to stay true to herself, rather than just fit in.

Now it is my turn to take the vow to pass on through our next generation, our culture, our traditions, and our appreciation for this nation. For it is easy to forget where we came from, but in my family I will always find my motivation.

For I am number 3, a number that will always be of meaning to me. I am the 3rd generation of an immigrant family, the 3rd generation of lasting traditions and 2 nationalities, and the one to carry this on will be me.

—Lillie Villezcas, grade 5, Nevada.

Second Place: "Belonging" By Katrusia McPeck

My country is at war.

I am not safe.

Mother and father

Try to hide it.

But how could I not know?

Mother thinks we should leave.

Father thinks we cannot leave our life behind.

But I think my family should be happy and safe.

It is not safe.

Every day there are

Flashes

Light

Heat.

I can no longer

Go to school

Play

See my friends.

I hear of the deaths.

People with their lives

Taken for this war.

Mother and

Father have been fighting

But they stop

When we get a call from

My uncle,

Ivan.

He tells us that Auntie

Is dead.

We are all

Upset,

Frightened.

But mother most of all.

The arguing gets worse.

Then one day mother

Breaks the news to me.

Katrusia she says

In a tone that tells me to worry,

We must leave tomorrow.

My heart sinks.

I heard my parents

“Belonging” ... *continued*

Talking about it, but
I never thought it would happen.
I want safety
But also
My home.

We are leaving!
The nerves telling me to feel
Scared
Excited
Apprehensive
Nervous.
Mother spent all her savings
On the train
But we couldn't pay for father.
I can tell he is actually
Happy.
He will never want to leave.
He is sad that we will leave, though.
We sneak to the train at night.
We are on it for weeks.
Mother keeps saying we will
Get there.
We don't.

We are finally here.
America is a place of wonders.
We are on the shore
as we walk towards
The long line.
We finally got through the line.
I look around
And see all kinds of people
Shops of different cultures
Pressed up together.
I learn the name of the city I'm in.
New York.

New York is
Where we are together.
It is where the noise
and tumble of cars rush by.
The smell of the Subway
Rushing past
The wind swirling in my hair.

I can tell
Mother misses
Ukraine

Father
But she is
Happy to be
Alive
To have me.

School in New York is hard.
Mother wishes she could set up a private tutor.
I barely know English.
We barely have money.

I would be good at school.
But every subject is different.
Math

When I'm asked to explain my answer
How can I,
Without English?
Science

A mix of words I don't understand
Of words that weren't in the
Learning English textbook.

Walking around New York, I see
All cultures
Immigrants.
Slowly,

I don't feel so out of place.
Immigrants made New York.
I fit in here in the way
That I don't fit in.

My English is getting better.
I am the best at math class.
I have friends.

Father calls
He is happy to see me
But so sad to be apart
To have war.
He tells me to stay strong.

I am happy.
I have friends.
I have love.
That is why I'm glad
America is a nation
Of Immigrants
And we all
Belong.

—Katrusia McPeck, grade 5, New York.

Third Place: “A Welcoming Nation” *By Mae Seavey*

Welcome means inclusion,
hands held out to catch you when you fall.
It means families living in peace.
No worry of hate.
Welcome does not mean
Walls built around borders.
Families reaching for their children,
and being dragged away.
Rage they're not able to say.

It means always having
a safe haven, somewhere to go
when life gets you down.
Inclusion, not segregation.
Not barely scraping by,
because you are paid less.
And the laws are a mess.

Being inclusive can mean
not being left out,
not having to pass a test to be legal,
not being treated like you are special.
Not special enough to be a citizen.

Coming home to a loving family,
Being able to provide your family with food,
Being safe.
These are all things that everyone deserves, regardless
of the place they were born.
But those ideas are now torn.

Nobody deserves
inequalities
violence
separation.
But this is what some people got.
And some did not.

Unfairness exists in many different forms.
This one we may be able to change, though.
After centuries of hostility,
we could live in tranquility.

A welcoming nation
Is not ours.
A beautiful nation
has not been ours.

—Mae Seavey, grade 5, Indiana.