

Celebrate America 2026 Creative Writing Contest

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. Please visit: www.celebrateamericawritingcontest.org for details.



First Prize Winner:

A Classroom Full of the World

My backpack felt bigger than me that day,
Filled with pencils, hope, and words to say.
The morning sun was warm and bright,
As I walked to school in the golden light.

My parents walked beside me, calm and proud,
Through streets that buzzed with voices loud.
My mom fixed my ribbon and smiled with care,
My dad gently brushed a strand of my hair.

I was born here, under America's sky,
Where dreams feel big, and hopes fly high.
But my parents came from India, far away,
Searching for an opportunity in a distant place.

They came so that one small girl could grow
In a place where endless chances flow.
A land where effort lights the way,
And tomorrow shines brighter than today.

Inside the hallways buzzing with cheer,
So many different kids were here.
Different faces, cultures, names,
Different foods and different games.

A girl from Mexico waved and said hi,
A boy from China smiled and walked by.
A friend from Denmark bounced a ball,
And a girl from Idaho waved in the hall.

At lunchtime, I opened my box to eat,
Warm rotis and curry smelling sweet.
For a moment, I wondered if they would stare,
At the spices floating through the air.

But a girl leaned over with a friendly hum,
"That smells amazing—can I try some?"
Soon we were sharing bites and laughs,
Trading stories across the class.

I told them of India, my parents knew,
Of monsoon rains and skies so blue.
Of cricket games and summer heat,
Of busy streets and markets' sweet.

They told me of baseball, pumpkins, and snow,
Of autumn leaves that brightly glow.
Of sledding hills and winter cheer,
And summer camps that come each year.

The teacher smiled and wrote on the board,
"Welcome, Class," in letters adored.
She said, "In this room we learn and grow,
And every story matters, you know."

I looked around at the many bright faces,
Different languages, cultures, and places.
And suddenly something felt so clear—
This is what makes this country so dear.

America felt like a giant tree,
With branches for you and branches for me.
Each leaf a story, each root a land,
Yet growing together, hand in hand.

It's a place where cultures meet and blend,
Where strangers smile and become your friend.
Where children of immigrants stand tall and free,
Learning together like one big family.

So on my first day in fifth-grade class,
I watched the busy moments pass.
Fear turned to laughter, quiet but clear—
And suddenly I was happy here.

I thought of my parents standing near,
Of the long road that brought them here.
Across the oceans, across the years,
Through hard work, courage, and hidden tears.

My backpack still felt big that day,
But my heart felt bigger in every way.
Because in this classroom, bright and free,
America had made a place for me.

By Aneri Kakrania, grade 5, California.

Aneri will be honored during the American Immigration Council's 2026 Immigration Impact Awards on Friday, June 19, in San Diego, California.

A long, long time ago		Or if you see ICE you can give a yelp
There was water		Or if you don't have the time
Then, there were trees	<i>Pomosh</i>	You could donate a few dollars
Then		A quarter, a dime
There were animals		But whatever you do
And bugs and bees		No matter how big or small,
Then there were humans	<i>Bangzhu</i>	You'll make someone happy
Living together		And that helps us all
Making friends		Think
Playing forever		Think about yourself
But their population became more		Your ancestors immigrated
And they got angry		A long, long time ago
And started a war	<i>Help</i>	So if you think, "Why help them?"
People became unwelcome		I just want you to know
They wanted to leave their countries		That your family went through hardships
To resettle in a different one		That long, long time ago
Where there was peace		This might convince you
But their culture began to come undone	<i>Hilfe mich</i>	Maybe it won't
Then the governments said		But if you can help there's no reason you don't
"You're not welcome here"		Because no matter where they come from
"We have enough people"		No matter where they are running from
"We want you to disappear"		Immigrants are human
Through days of travel	<i>Ayuda</i>	We are human
They could not rest		So no matter the color of their skin
Walking and walking		Or their accent
Doing their best to not be afraid		Whether its thick or thin
Of the guns		Kindness
Or the blood		Kindness helps us all
They might shed in a raid	<i>Pomosh</i>	In good times, in bad times
This		Whether we are rising
This still happens		Or about to fall
This		We need to work together
This is why		Whether we're with family, friends
This is why we need to be welcoming	<i>Bangzhu</i>	Or people we will not be with forever
Welcoming and helping those in need		Be welcoming
Why help the governments?		Whether you're welcoming immigrants with signs
Why help them when they're doing something wrong?		Or welcoming a family to their new home
This		You will be helping
This is why we need to help		So however you can
You can help with housing		Just do your best to help.

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—Beatrice Gordon, grade 5, North Carolina.

Third Place Winner:

What It Means To Be a Welcoming Nation

A welcoming nation opens its door
To people searching for hope and more.
It offers kindness, a helping hand,
And a safe place in a brand-new land.
It listens to stories from near and far,
And treats each person like a shining star.
Different languages, foods, and names,
But inside, we share the same **Dreams**.
A welcoming nation stands tall and strong,
It chooses love and right over wrong.
When we open our hearts and let others belong,
The world shines brighter-together we are strong.
It is a place where children can play,
Where laughter is heard throughout the day.
Where new friends are greeted with a **Smile**,
And kindness spreads across every mile.
A welcoming nation shares its light,
Helping others through the darkest night.
It teaches respect, fairness, and care,
And shows that everyone has a place **There**.
It is more than a country or land,
It is reaching out a gentle hand.
It means believing in hope and dreams,
Even when nothing is as quiet as it seems.
A welcoming nation celebrates each **Voice**,
Each story, culture, and choice.
When people feel safe and truly free,
Our nation grows stronger for all to see.
In a welcoming nation, every voice is **Heard**
No one is left behind or blurred.
From mountains high to river wide,
People are valued, nothing to hide.
It is a place where dreams take flight,
Where hope can bloom in the darkest night.
Where hands join across land and sea,
Together we build our **Community**.
So when we welcome others in our nation,
We build a world full of imagination.
We stand together, hand in hand,
A brighter future across the land.

—Haram Naseer Ahmed, grade 5, California.