

# 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](http://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 3rd generation of an immigrant family, the 3rd 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 onto 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, and she learned to hide her accent until there was no 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 Aunt

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”

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.

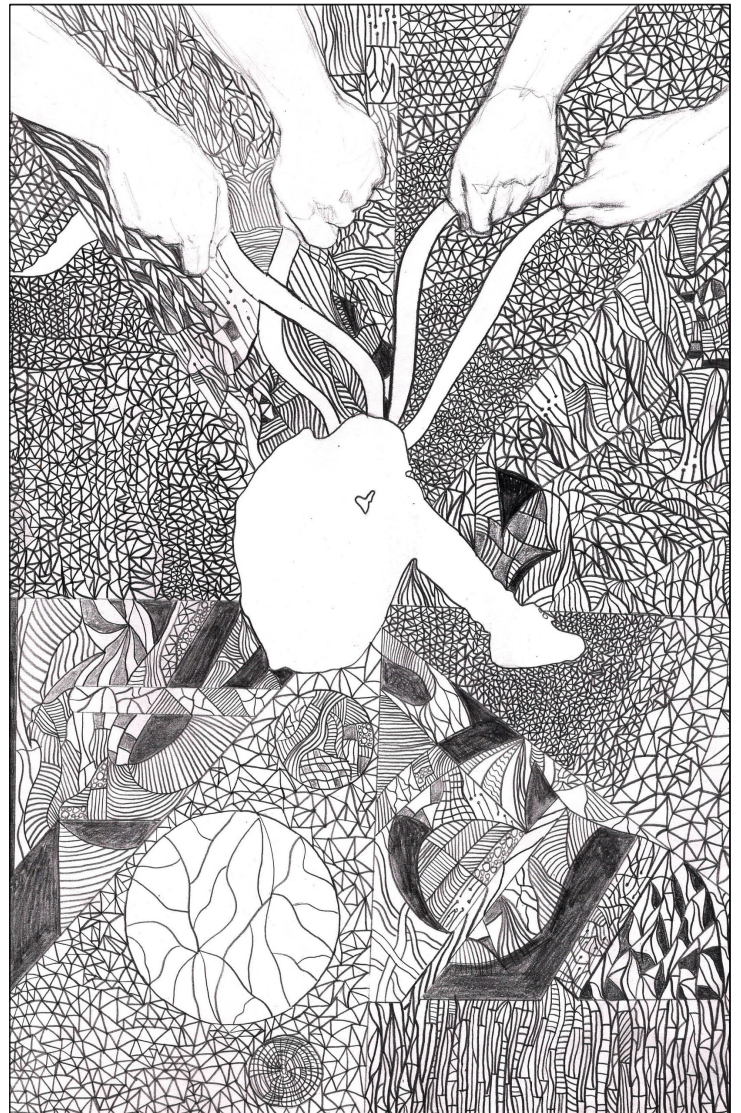
A welcoming nation  
Is not ours.  
A beautiful nation  
has not been ours.

—Mae Seavey, grade 5, Indiana.

### The 2024 Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest

The contest challenges fifth graders across the country to reflect on and write about one of two themes: “**Why I Am Glad America Is a Nation of Immigrants**” or “**What Does it Mean to be a Welcoming Nation**” The American Immigration Lawyers Association runs the contest at local levels. Winners move on to the regional and then national levels. *Skipping Stones* often publishes the national winners. If interested in entering, please visit:

[www.celebrateamericawritingcontest.org](http://www.celebrateamericawritingcontest.org)



**Alone** by Chungman Jung, grade 11, Jeju, South Korea.  
Chungman explains: “This piece is about the sensation of being alone, and I tried to convey the feeling of solitude.”