



# Teen Perspectives on Immigration 2024

from Everett, Malden and Medford High Schools Students



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**Cover art:** Nuevas Esperanzas/New Hopes by Gabriela Paniagua Castro, Everett High School.

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# Dear friends,

## What immigration means to me.

We asked students from Malden, Medford and Everett public high schools to share their thoughts on this topic, and did they ever deliver! The 39 pieces in this compilation are heartfelt, honest and truly inspiring. From personal stories to insightful analyses, their approaches are as diverse as their backgrounds, yet all speak to the profound impact immigration has had on their lives.

We would like to extend our gratitude to the student artists, authors and videographers whose creativity and passion shine through in these works. We also honor the invaluable support and guidance provided by their families and teachers. The future is bright!

Warm regards,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diane Portnoy".

**Diane Portnoy**  
Founder and CEO



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vincent Rivers".

**Vincent Rivers**  
Executive Director



**The Immigrant  
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The submissions in this volume are published as they were submitted.

All views expressed are the authors and artists' own and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Immigrant Learning Center.

# Karla Reyes Merino

## Malden High School

### What Immigration Means to Me

I invite you to take a trip with me on my immigrant journey from the beautiful mountain area of EL Salvador to the busy city of Malden, Massachusetts. My journey started in South America. I was born in the beautiful city of Apastepeque, EL Salvador. It is a magical place framed with mountains, palm trees and wildlife. A long time ago, a volcano erupted and left a huge crater in the land. That crater is now a freshwater lake, it is a place for people to enjoy nature and outdoor activities.

My family moved about 3 hours away from the mountain and I went to a school named Centro Escolar Cantòn San Felipe. It is a small school of about 300 boys and girls that wore uniforms blue and white, the color of my El Salvador flag. I had a lot of friends and like my teachers, they prepared me for my future success at Malden High School.

At first, It was difficult moving to a new country because the environment, weather and food are not like EL Salvador. But, I am brave like my family, I came to USA to build my education and skills for my future career. I felt nervous, excited and sad all at the same time. My heart was in half. One piece of heart in USA and other in El Salvador. Strength and courage from family helps me prepare for my dream to be a success. My immigration story is a serious privilege. I am determined to reach my life goals. I will make my family proud of the sacrifice they made for me. They take care of me in this new country with pride and hope.

Attending high school in a city in is very different than EL Salvador. Loud traffic and students fill the salem street area before and after school. Many cars and buses are outside packing kids into the ride. When I first arrived to Malden high this made me feel nervous. I missed my sunny EL Salvador, palm trees palm trees and Pupusas!

Malden high has like 2000 kids from all over the world who speak many languages. Malden high is so big it has 4 different houses. I was confused why Malden calls the 4 parts of the school a house. I learned that each house has a principal and counselor that helps students. We all belong to different houses but we are a school family.

Like a house, Malden has a free warm breakfast and lunch everyday for students. We learn better when we are not hungry or worried. Not all kids have food at home. Malden invites all students to join clubs, sports, music, drama, faith, science, and social clubs. The school activities for students and family build a community. Students and family from different countries can meet new people and share resources.

Malden high also opens the school in the hot summer for students to study and go on trips with teachers. We get to visit colleges and take the train to historical places. I saw museums, and parks in Malden and Boston. Another nice thing is they gave students gifts. We got a Malden shirt, water bottle in a backpack. This makes me proud to be a Malden high student.

Malden teachers are smart and explain the different choices you have in school. I like to have choice in my education. Teachers and students use more technology in Malden. I am happy to learn complicated subjects in school. Ms. Kansoun hard genetics and other biology topics prepare me for life. Ms. Ruell is nice and says hello at her classroom door. Ms Ruell math lessons on inequality and absolute value is hard work and we do not give up. I feel safe and welcome in my ESL class with Ms. McCabe. She teaches new immigrant students from all over the world. We learn how to read driving license permit handbooks, banking, loans and how to buy a car or house. Ms. McCabe's class is bright with sun and I see artwork on the walls from different countries. She has inspiration message for us to never give up and we belong here. I study with books and computers everyday because I can do great things in life. I have honor and respect for all adults in my life that make sacrafices to help me learn and become a powerful woman.

I want to thank my family and the people in Malden who help me work on future life plans. Thank you to Immigrant Learning Center for sharing this contest with ESL student like me. I love people in my new community care about me and other immigrat students. Malden high school has friendly people who help in the office, clean the school, make breakfast and lunch. Malden high is not just about students, teachers and leaders. I see many people like all the principal and counselor that like to help new people from all countries to make a better life. We all work together and that is my new immigrant experience will prepare me for my future profession. I also want to help other people like me. Thank you for my chance to share my immigrant story. I hope you can feel how important this time is in my life. From Karla



# Gabriela Paniagua Castro

Everett High School

Nuevas Esperanzas/New Hopes





# Angela Phu

## Malden High School

### Mother Always Knows Best



# Hannah Nambooze

## Medford High School

### My Immigration Project Essay

What do you think immigration is? Well, in this essay we shall discover what immigration is. Fun fact: We shall also find out how it became a part of my personal life and how it affected me. Not only that, but we shall also learn about the various aspects of immigration, including its impact, challenges, and benefits.

As we all know, immigration is the movement of people from one place to another looking for settlement. There are various reasons as to why people move. As an immigrant, it has always been my dream to move away from my home country and settle in America, but as I moved it affected me in positive and negative ways. I immigrated to America in 2023, I would say that it was my best year but also my worst year. It was good because it had always been my dream, of course, but the sad part was leaving my siblings. I do know for sure that they will join me, too, one day.

Coming to America changed my life. How? I would say in ways: culture, weather, dressing, and talking. And how did my culture change? I will give an example from where I come from in Uganda. It is our culture to kneel while greeting elders but as for here, you stand and greet a person. Even when serving food to an elder, we kneel down as a sign of respect. Another thing is the language. I didn't really find trouble in language because in Uganda our official language is also English. The only thing I had to change was my accent so it didn't really affect me that much.

How did it affect my dressing? When I came to America it was during fall, a little bit chilly and cold. I never wanted to put on a coat but at the end of each day it got colder, which I was not used to, so I started to put on a jacket because it was too cold.

Last but not least, how did it affect my school experience? After coming to America and enrolling in school, I felt like it was all a movie because most of the stuff I would see on TV was all real now. The first day of school wasn't bad at all, I made friends and everyone was so friendly. The only difference between the schools in America and Uganda is that in American schools they use a lot of technology while in Uganda they use some, but not a lot. For example, no phones are allowed in school. In America, children are allowed to have hair in schools while in Uganda, in most high schools, it's not allowed. Students have to shave their heads because they believe that children will be distracted with hair and instead of forcing on studies. Also, in Uganda, colleges are not expensive like in America. In Uganda, most of the schools are boarding schools because of the children's population and for safety. The government is trying to prevent things like kidnapping children on their way back home from school and they are also trying to help children who come from long distances because it would be so expensive for them to commute.

As a young immigrant, I've had some challenges, like feeling overwhelmed by cultural differences and struggling with language barriers in academic settings. For example, the American English was a little bit too fast for me to understand. I've also felt homesick and felt a lot of pressure to excel academically and maneuver the college application process without a strong support network.

There are some benefits to immigration, like acquiring new skills and perspectives, building a diverse network of friends, learning about different cultures, and adapting to change more easily. You can also develop empathy and resilience.

In conclusion, being an immigrant is a good experience that helps people become more understanding, learn from their challenges, and develop a good character. Immigration can also make communities more interesting and diverse.

# Simran Tamang

## Everett High School

### The Nose Ring on My Lip

Nose rings are cultural in Nepal. Girls get the left side of their nose pierced as a sign of femininity—a nod to their elegance. Grandma got her nose pierced just five days after her birth, and Mom at age three. Amongst my family, I was a late bloomer at age nine.

Months prior to my piercing, I rambled endlessly about the perfect color, the perfect gem, my friends and classmates victims to my excitement. When the needle finally pricked my skin, the promise of a Kinder Joy chocolate alleviated any pain. At that moment, I was eager to participate in my culture—to be patriotic, a characteristic I longed to protect.

One month, two plane rides, and countless painstaking goodbyes later, the high from the glory diminished. Before I knew it I was standing in front of unknown juvenile faces, introducing myself. In this crowd of 4th graders, I saw no one who looked like me. No red tikka on their foreheads, no necklaces with Ganesh the God. And no shiny nose rings.

“My name is Simran, and I am from Nepal,” I choked out with a shaken voice.

Did their features contort into nasty visages as a reaction to my strange accent, or to the shiny gem placed on my nose?

While only 6mm long, the ring had clawed its way to my lips, piercing it shut. I couldn’t release another word in class for the rest of middle school. I wanted to rip my nose ring off.

At home however, I was free to be outspoken. I was an accountant, honored with the task of translating tax papers. Adjusted Gross Income. Capital Gains. Cost Basis. I fought to translate each word precisely as does a tenured employee.

“Ohhh, I get it,” My father said. The next day, he and I met a tax advisor over Skype, and my translation services were on full display.

While dreaded by most people, I anticipate tax season. It’s a time when I embrace my identity as a Nepali, and I cherish the duty to advocate for my family. I let my tongue flow back to its native intonation, easily switching to a well rehearsed accent when necessary.

Numerous chats with advisors and experts later, my voice isn’t confined merely to Skype calls, but ascends in increments, steadily flowing out of my larynx past the doors of our home to the councilors of



City Hall and to members of my school community. Rather than retaining the pitch of my mother tongue or the cadence of this acquired dialect, my every articulation commands attention: be it towards justice and representation for youth in my city or helping immigrant families build foundations for their future. At the annual Nepali function held every June, a middle-aged woman recognized me from her frequent visits to community and school events.

“You kids are amazing,” she exclaimed.

I had helped translate Nepali to her at Parent-Teacher Conference nights. Being able to converse with her daughter’s teacher allowed her to finally understand the best ways to help her daughter succeed in school.

I came to understand then that I am helping immigrant families navigate the dangerous cycle of naivety that constrains them from thriving in their strange surroundings. These appreciative smiles directed to me, and thank you messages sent over social media motivate me to sustain my efforts.

The flow of my vocal resonance slowly maneuvers my nose ring out of my lips and back to its former residence. No longer are my lips sealed by the ornament decorating my face. More so, I am delighted to uphold a piece of my culture in educational settings and beyond it. I am a presence who transcends beyond the nose ring that once governed my life. I am an advocate for my community, a skilled accountant, and just a girl with a nose ring.

And proud of it.

# Anonymous

## Medford High School

### **How the Immigration Experience is Different for Each Individual**

Every individual experience comes with one's perception of it. Two people can experience the same thing and come back with vastly different stories and recently I conducted two interviews where this is shown based on their experiences with the immigration process. The first was a fellow student who is 16 years old and the other was a teacher of mine. After conducting the interviews, I was able to compare how the experience of immigration is for different age groups, as well as how the process has developed over time. This project shed light on the process itself as well as the difficulties they still face as an immigrant.

To give a brief overview, in the interview with my classmate I learned more about growing up as a young immigrant and what he faces today. He came here from Colombia in his mid elementary school years and did not speak any English. He spoke about the classes he had to take in his own time to learn the language and learn about American culture. The second interview went more in depth on the actual process for a teenager and his family moving from Albania in the year 2001.

I found it very interesting how the two stories differed so much given the different situations the two individuals were in. As a result of the different time periods, my teacher experienced a much longer immigration process in comparison to my classmate. It's also important to note that I mentioned he came here in 2001, following the attacks of 9/11. He spoke about how this caused his family to rethink moving to America because they were coming here partly for safety reasons and that was taken away. Ultimately, they did make the move and found it worth the hassle and time. On the other hand, my classmate experienced the immigration process in the early 2010's. He mentioned the process was significantly faster but as a child he found it very difficult to learn a new language and understand the "American way of life". Navigating elementary and middle school while balancing all of these challenges was, as said by the interviewee, the hardest thing he has ever had to overcome.

Along with many differences, the stories were also quite similar. One of the main motives of moving for both interviewees was in search of better opportunities. My classmate's parents were looking for better jobs and my teacher's family wanted to give him better options for education. In both cases, the adults in their families were trying to provide their children with a better quality of life and give them more than they may have had growing up. Unfortunately, they also both spent a decent deal of time telling me about the discrimination they have faced as an immigrant. My teacher's stories were more personal to him. Since he came here as a teen, he was looking for a job and found that he was often given a harder time given his background. He was mistreated at several jobs and had a difficult time navigating his

education, but in the end was successful and graduated from high school and college. My classmate mentioned certain instances in which his parents faced discrimination in the same scenario, while looking for job opportunities. However, he also said as a child who didn't speak perfect English, he was given a hard time by other kids.

One of my biggest takeaways from these interviews was how they gave me a real perspective on immigration and went into detail on life after the process. In school, we learn about how immigration started and how brutal it was back then but the story ends there. We don't talk about the progression of immigration and the ways in which it has improved or stayed the same. It's often forgotten that the process is still extremely extensive and time consuming. My teacher lives separately from his wife for this reason, she has been living back in Albania waiting to be approved for citizenship. It also sheds light on how differently it can affect individuals coming at a different age, from a different background, or during a different time. Many things can affect one's perception of an experience and these stories are a good representation of that.

# Karollyne Paniago

## Medford High School

The Pain of Being Misunderstood





# Magdelawit Takele Magdelawit

Medford High School



# Avani Chhetri

## Malden High School

### 58,827 Square Miles to 3,809,525 Square Miles

In 2017, a middle aged woman, just a few inches shorter than me, left a country she spent forty years in, with her two kids, and six bags. I questioned her, “How come you decided to leave forty years of memories in a blink of a second?” In a soft spoken voice she replied, “Education for my kids.” I followed up with, “Have you gotten an education?” and she hesitantly nodded her head. “Where have you previously worked?” I asked. She answered, “Can you repeat it again, I don’t understand English very well.” I slowly repeated the question again. This time she answered, “No, I have not worked.” “Are you going to be working here?” I asked. With a sharper voice she replied one last time, “I am going to do everything.”

For the next few years, the woman hustled through jobs, working two jobs at a time, and some weeks working up to sixty hours. Her kids progressed through school as she juggled her duties at home and work. This continued for around six more years.

Until recently, I questioned her again, “How has working been?” She replied one more time, with the same soft voice, “It is hard but my kids are doing well, they have opportunities.” Her older child graduated high school and her younger child is in high school now.

“Do you think you made a good decision?” I asked a slightly deep question. Her mind wandered, a few minutes later, she said, “Yes, my kids are happy...” She didn’t finish the rest and I asked her to continue. A few more seconds later, “And I am independent...financially.”

Independence and education, the story of the woman in this story just so happens to be my mother. According to the San Diego Immigration Law Center, the most common reasons for immigrating are education and work. Similarly, the same story goes for my mother. The questions above me were a part of the multitude of experiences that my mother and my family have been faced with once moving here. While answering these questions through the course of several years, the education for her kids is no longer the only answer to immigration but rather also the independence she has accumulated. As my mother looks at me, she often tells me she sees a version of her younger self but one in where there are both opportunities and independence. The course of this story highlights the path of my family from a small country in South Asia that is roughly 58,827 square miles, Nepal, to one that is 3,809,525 square miles, United States of America. Then a steady path to the City of Malden, where different families all have a similar story to ours, which makes us realize, even though our cultures, customs, and values differ, we are not all so different after all. In the school that I step in everyday, the kids that I walk past, without realizing all in the end may share a fairly similar story.

# Islambek Karagulov

## Medford High School

### **The Idea That Multiculturalism and/or Multilingualism is a Superpower**

Polyglots - people who know many languages - often report experiencing shifts in personality when they switch between languages. Such activities of learning many languages may affect brain structure and social life in different ways. There are several benefits of knowing multiple languages.

Researches suggest that knowing multiple languages can enhance cognitive functions such as memory, problem-solving, and multitasking, delaying the onset of age-related cognitive decline. This happens as a result of remembering thousands of words, processing sentences with new grammar structures, and switching between different languages. These sorts of challenges develop polyglots' psychological skills and help to maintain these perks.

People who possess multiple languages experience different cultures. This may range from signs of good luck to decades-long ongoing traditions. Such unique features of different ethnic groups allow the growth of understanding. Those people have many different friends from different countries. This sort of variation may bring positive results, having different cultures as examples.

Multiculturalism and multilingualism open up incredible opportunities. In our globalized world, being flexible in different countries is a priceless feature. Whether it is economical or political, a good international friendship comes from mutual understanding. This is a huge advantage polyglots have with which it is much easier to climb their career paths.

In conclusion, multicultural and multilingual people have their minds sharpened, learn upon other cultures, and are flexible enough to reach new heights. All of these stunning benefits are the result of learning languages. So that's why multiculturalism and multilingualism are indeed superpowers.

# Jelani Tah

## Malden High School

We live in a world of contradictions. It is beautiful yet dangerous, and so large but always seems so isolated and constrained by the biases of others and ourselves. Because of that, I've always been proud of my immigrant background. I got to spend the first two years of my life in Italy, and the next 5 in Cameroon and since then I've been living in the U.S. My experiences growing up in three different countries combined with stories from my family gave me access to a diversity of views. Living in Cameroon was completely different from living in the U.S. There were no bustling marketplaces, no farms, or huge family gatherings and while I barely remember my time in Italy, from the stories my parents told of their experiences and the few times I've visited there it's very different from both the U.S and Cameroon. This constant change in perspective has played a huge role in my development as a person and as I tried to navigate. Moreover, it has allowed me to maintain an open mind amidst the drastic changes American society has gone through in the past four years, a skill becoming increasingly invaluable as we only seem to grow further divided as a country. As of late, however, voices of opposition and prejudice towards immigrants and their experiences have been getting louder. These voices fueled by fear and nimbyism echo the sentiment that immigrants are to be feared and that they put a burden on our country, but at the end of the day, they do little to solve the broader issue.

Malden is "the most racially diverse school district in the state"(Ciurczak), and I see people of all different backgrounds roaming the city streets and halls of Malden High. I have friends from many different countries, each with unique cultures that only make Malden greater. While Malden is not comparable to the United States for a myriad of reasons there are a few things we can take from the relative success of its community. Firstly and most importantly, diversity is powerful when the right tools and systems are in place. Secondly, adopting a mosaic rather than a melting pot view on inclusivity can change conversations. "The old idea of the 'melting pot,' in which ethnically diverse individuals 'assimilate' into a monolithic American culture and identity, while losing roots to the culture of origin, has long been debunked."(Andoh) One cannot expect to reap the benefits of diversity while stripping away the greatest asset it brings to the table: the traditions, the languages, and the lifestyles people bring to a community. Whether the differences are small or large they help paint a picture of what a society can be. As like in a mosaic each person represents an individual tile with richer experiences making up the most vibrant tiles. These tiles make up a picture that is constantly evolving and changing, a picture that might forever remain incomplete. For many the idea of there never being a definitive picture of the United States might be uncomfortable and even anxiety-inducing. I however find comfort in this.



Because of my experiences growing up, I've always had a hard time answering the question of who I am. It was always easier to say who I wanted to be, what I wished I had, and what I aspired to be. I wished I was more Italian, that I could speak the language as fluently as my parents. For example, my mom who is so accustomed to the Italian lifestyle that now and then she would slip into the language mid-conversation. I wished to be more Cameroonian, to own more traditional outfits, and to be more in touch with my family. Yet at the same time, I wished to be more American; I wished I could speak with the ease of my peers without the worry of slipping into an accent. That sentiment of not having somewhere you truly belong while at the same time being slapped with a label by others around you is probably one of the worst parts of the experience of someone like me. As I grew older and challenged myself to take ownership of that uncomfortable position while trying to find my identity that transformed from a curse to a tool. Undeniably, it still had the potential to weigh heavily on my spirit. W.E.B. Dubois speaks of a similar idea in his book *The Souls of Black Folk*, a sort of "cognitive dissonance" (Smith) he calls double consciousness. Essentially this idea illustrates the struggles of Black Americans as they try to be part of a society that views them as a threat to the institution that privileges light-skinned, English-speaking citizens. Hidden beneath the dark implications of this idea, however, I find a silver lining. A broader and more complex view of life that has allowed me to learn much more from my peers than I could have without. Hence, I would encourage others to view this incomplete masterpiece of varying cultures, conversations, and languages not as a burden or a reason to be afraid, but rather, as the superpower it has the potential to not only unite us but also expand our horizons. In that way, we fundamentally change the nature of discussions around immigration and diversity allowing greater discourse coming from an understanding and empathetic perspective rather than one filled with misguided prejudices.

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# Prince Exavier

## Medford High School

My name is Prince Exavier, and I was born and raised in Desdune, Haiti. My mother, Yolande, was a single mother of two, working tirelessly to provide for my older brother and I. My father, Petit-frere, lived in the United States, and we would only see him occasionally when he would come to visit. Growing up, I struggled to understand why my father wasn't with us. My mother would tell me that he was working hard to provide a better life for me. But it was hard to understand why he couldn't be there with us. Despite the distance, my father would send us money and gifts but only for me because my brother is my half brother and his dad died so he had no one to really provide him with the resources that he needs, but I would still share my gifts with him.

As I grew older I began to realize the sacrifices my mother was making for us. She would work multiple jobs, not that there were any legit job opportunities in Haiti, but she would sell food, and buy clothes and resell them. But even then she still found the time to take care of us. I knew that I wanted a better life for my mom and my brother, and I began to dream of joining my father in the United States. In 2010, my father started the process of bringing me to the U.S through the family-based immigration system. It was a long and difficult process, but finally, in 2015, I received my Visa. I was 10 years old when I boarded a plane to Irvington, New Jersey, to start a new life with my father.

The transition was not easy. I had to learn a new language, adapt to a new culture, and navigate a new school system. But my father was there to support me every step of the way. He worked hard to provide for me and my other half older siblings that were already in the U.S with him, and he encouraged me to pursue my dreams. I struggled at first, but with time, I began to thrive. I made new friends, excelled in school, and discovered a passion for football. I joined the football team and I came to realize that I really was really good at it, so I chose to play football with the hopes of going pro one day to be able to take care of my family the way they really should be taken care of. Today I have 5 offers as a Junior 1 d1 offer and the rest d3. I decided to take upon this journey in order to have the life that I want, and by constantly pushing myself to my full potential and praying a lot, my dream is heading in the right direction.

As I grew older, I realized that my journey was not just about me. It was about my family, my community, and the sacrifices that were made for me to get here. I became involved in my community, volunteering at local organizations that supported Immigrant families. As I was growing up in Irvington New Jersey I realized that life as a black african american immigrant is not easy because I would always deal with racism and privileged american kids making fun of me for being from another country, however I never

let any of that bother me because I realized my second language gave me an advantage for when I want to really stand out for a job opportunity or something. Despite me trying to stay on track and do what I am supposed to do, It was always a constant battle in Irvington because of the gangs and the bad environment I was growing up in.

My journey was not easy, but it was worth it. I am proud and grateful for the opportunities that the United States has given me. I've realized that I'm not alone, and that there are millions of immigrants like me who are working hard to have a better life for themselves.

# Diana Aguilar

## Medford High School

### My Own Immigration Story

My name is Diana. I am from El Salvador. I am 20 years old. In this essay I will be talking about how my immigration experience was. Well, I will start off with how my life was in El Salvador. I will try to tell you a little bit about my background. I was born in El Salvador. When I was 7 months old, my dad decided to go to the United States, and told my mom that he would be with us, always helping her and contributing to our expenses. With the passing of the years, my sister and I were growing more and more and we realized that our dad didn't help us enough even when we told him that we needed money.

I was the older sister, and my dream was to help my family. I always told them "Mom, one day I will go to the United States and I will help you. I will make a house for you." This may sound strange, but my dream was to come and work for my family. One day, when I was already 17, my dad met someone else, but because my dad didn't help us, my dream was also to meet him. He met a woman and I asked her, "Please, please talk with my dad. I want to go to the U.S!" She told me, "I will help you. You will leave El Salvador next week, and I was surprised, but I was also happy because it was my dream. When she told me that I also was sad because it was too hard to leave my mom and sisters. In July of 2021, I left my country. I remember that day. I was scared. On the way, I was alone. I had no family, but I said, "God will provide angels," and that's how it was. I had to face many things, hunger and days without sleep. I walked for days and I cried. One day, on August 27th of the same year, I entered the United States. 11 days later, my dad received me pitifully. My relationship with him was not good because he had vices like alcoholism, drugs, and others. Six months later, I decided to come to Boston with my sister's mom, and my life changed. I started going to school and also working after school. I was putting in a lot of effort, but I was happier and finally was accomplishing what I came here for.

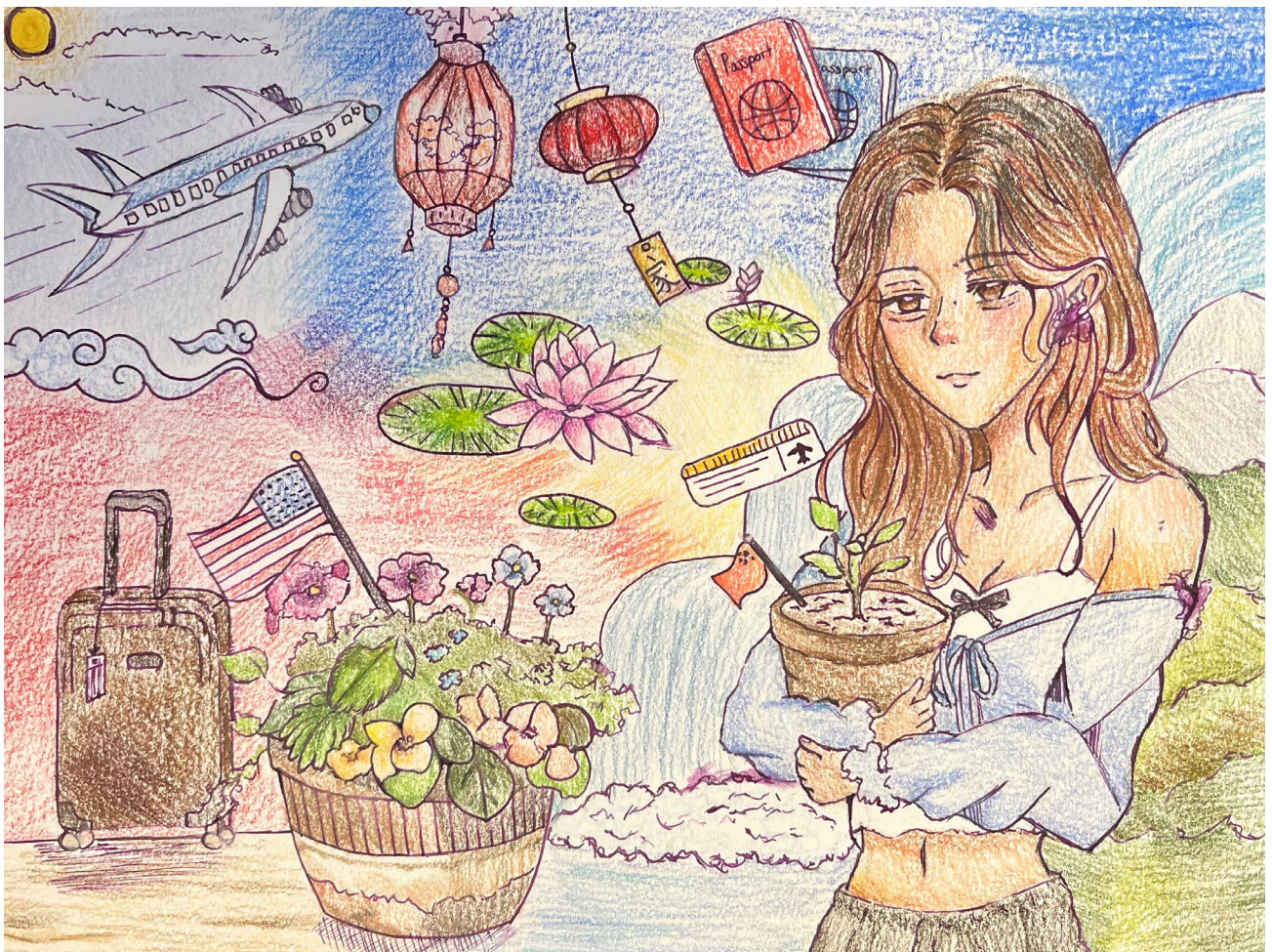
Today, on April 23, 2024, I have accomplished many of my goals. For example, I built my mother a house in El Salvador, and I brought my sister here. This is my last year of high school, and I am grateful to God because all the effort has been worth it. I still have many more goals to achieve. I will continue to strive so that each of my goals are fulfilled. My life has not been easy and I have cried a lot, suffered depression and anxiety, but I have never, ever given up. I am happier now and feel proud of myself because my mom is happy now, and she is also proud of me.



# Miaoyi Hu

## Malden High School

### Embracing My Heritage



# Bruhanna Josinvil

## Everett High School

### What Immigration Means to Me

I've always been conflicted about how I feel about immigration i was born here in the US but my mom is a immigrant she came to the Us from Haiti. Haiti is a beautiful country the food the strong yet delicious species the people everyone their is afuwllly nice if youre respectful the drinks but more importantly the love its everything and i associate with warmth and happiness, Haiti is currently it shambles ovethrown with gangs and corrupt poltications and americam imperssiem but weridly it the last part that scares me the most. My mom is the hardestwoking person ive ever ment she gave up everything for me and that comes with a lot pressure a lot of sacrifices that i have to make because i have to my education is not just for me but for my mother as well and its hard to remain the repation. I dont watch the news anymore its like everything on their is a dumpsterfire but one thing ive seen in the past few years is that crimes when a mallgreanlized peole do them you know about it everyone knows about An lgbt+ idenfrying person rubbed a bank or an immgrant asslouted a lady of course l those things are bad but i cant help but think its pushing something because when a privileged person, citizen commites a crime it seen as tragerty but if an immgrants committe the same crime then its why do we treat thesse people as humans? Immmigrants are treated like garbage in this country not just immagrnts but all people who are not the norm. They see immgrants who come here for freedom a better life and oppertuintiys as crimimals, vermin, Just because how you entered the country ethier illeagal or legall. All immgrants struggle but more recerecy a cretian type of immgrant has earned the term as the lileagals this inhumaziing terms has mostly been used on black, mexican, brown skins immgrants then white immgrants so truly this lllgeales nonsense is rooted in racsium another way to dehumanze people.

#### A Immgrants story

I reached out to a person to provide more context on how it is for them living here how hard it is for them. They'll remain a anonymous for personal reasons.

Every since i was little, america was my dream everyone l knew was talking about it in haiti and i just wanted to experience it myself back then i was a very hard busseieniss women l made things to sell and traveled all over the caribbean one day i found opportunity that i could not refuse a pilot offered to fly us to america if we payed me and 5 other haitians were on the plane when i arrived i was so excited and happy my dream would finally come, suddenly my heart sank when immigration they questioned me and other passengers the poliet said that he was held hostage by us. So we were arrested when the put the handcuffs on me l felt sad and shame because my country Handcuffs meant you were a criminal and

clearly I wasn't. I went for federal prison for nine months before they found the evidence that the pilot was lying when they let me out I went back to immigration to get my papers so I could work 21 long years past I've worked a lot of jobs housekeeping restaurants childcare I face a lot of discrimination because I'm an immigrant It's hard sometimes I cry but I never I never stopped trying and I'm never hopeless because if I gave up I knew no one would provide for me I'm proud of my kids who finished the education I still work very hard to pay my bills I live paycheck to paycheck I still take care of my youngest children I'm not happy here I wish everyday I could go back to my country here I have no friends or family when I was little I thought America was the life of the party but now I know America's living hell to everyone reading this I give you the strength and the courage work hard and I promise one day you'll live a better life.

In CONCLUSION I have many feelings towards me from an immigrant family and me being a US citizen myself I feel anger and shame that we treated people like this but I'm happy that I have my culture it's something that so close to me.







# Nery Castaneda

## Medford High School

### My Immigration Project

**MY IMMIGRATION PROJECT**

Nery Castaneda  
El Salvador

**About me**

I left my country in 2021, and the path I had to go through to get to the United States was not easy at all. I had to go through the countries with the most crime in Central America and live with people I had never spoken to, but at the same time, they were a great help in convincing me not to go back.

**FRIENDS**

Departure and entry day  
March 10, 2021!  
May 17, 2021

Through this experience I met wonderful people who help people every day without pay and who care about them.

# Daniela Licono-Cruz

## Malden High School

### **My Culture Is My Super Suit**

“Ni de aquí, ni de allá; neither from here nor from there” is a popularized phrase amongst the children of Latine/Hispanic immigrants which serves to express the feeling of being too non-white in a room of Americans and too American in a room of people from their parents’ motherland. Contrary to this popular sentiment, I believe this center of life being formed is likely the best phenomenon to have happened to our generation. Because has it not been the proposition of so many philosophers that you don’t know what you have until it’s gone? Even more so, it is often expressed that talking to people with different perspectives and experiences expands our own. Children of immigrants have access to these opportunities from birth and, though it can be a difficult road to navigate, it could be the grounds for such well-rounded and successful individuals.

From a young age, the practice of multilingualism—though we may not have a word for it at the time—stimulates our brains with a broader understanding and allows us to experience life in more “colors,” if you will. My personal experience pertains particularly to music and other forms of media. I was immersed in this colorful world of ritmos de rojo (rhythms of red), auxilios pintados azul (cries for help painted blue), and dolores en dorados (gilded pains) where I was connected to my roots and felt the powerful, prideful voice of my people. It almost felt like a secret code that only certain people could understand and I was part of the lucky few. Adding on to music, I got to watch shows in Spanish and even read novels in Spanish that held different values to their typical American counterparts which gave me valuable life lessons. For example, a soap opera titled *Mi Prima Ciela* (My Cousin Ciela) was a story about a girl who was sick with leukemia and taught me that life is about living and sometimes leaps of faith are necessary. I believe that the experience of multilingualism from a young age also gave me a capacity for empathy and appreciation that some do not have. I was able to awe at my friends from different backgrounds who told tales of what meals they ate rather than withdraw in wrongful disgust. Now, as a high school student, I have taken almost three years of American Sign Language (ASL) and it has opened my eyes to yet another wonderful community and culture. My teacher, Daniela Ioannides, is Deaf and has made it her objective to not only immerse her students in the beautiful language of ASL but the culture as well. She highlights the struggles of many Deaf people so that we as hearing individuals are no longer ignorant. However, she also shines light on the interactive and exciting Deaf culture which allows us students to view Deaf people as what they are: fellow human beings. These experiences have further allowed me to enjoy different cultures and to this day aids in my journey of self-discovery as well as my growth as a human being. The experience of different languages has given me not only a bigger

understanding of the world, but a bigger capacity for love and empathy; which is what drives my fight for injustices both locally and around the world.

Furthermore, I want to illuminate just how fulfilling life can be when we strive to be the best versions of ourselves and how multiculturalism aids in this fulfillment. I want to say first that I believe we as humans are never finished growing. Every stage of life is centered around some sort of growth; whether it be physical, social, mental, or emotional. It is also my belief that no singular way of life is right—what I mean by this is that there is no way that one religion, one culture, or one person has the answer to everything for everyone. As I get older, I find myself picking different pieces of information of different cultures, norms, religions, beliefs, and people. Like my mother and father are always telling me, “agarre lo bueno, desecha lo malo” (take the good, throw away the bad). Life is complicated and confusing, if we stick to one recipe for the rest of it then we’re bound to end up with a bitter taste in our mouths when we’re searching for dessert. However, if one remembers to stock up on spices, vegetables, etc. and is willing to try new things then their horizons expand. This life is meant to be lived and how you choose to do so is your decision, but it is important that we remain open-minded as even the quick hare can be beaten by a patient turtle because of its own ignorance. More food for thought is that when I shed the religious context, many people seem to hold similar ideals. I have actually seen firsthand how a community like Malden benefits from our multiculturalism in comparison to other communities. In third grade, when I attended the Tenney Grammar School in Methuen, Massachusetts it was shocking to me to see less students who looked like me and how there were certain customs they did not understand whereas in Malden they seemed to be common knowledge amongst the student body. Especially now in high school, I never fear that I am expressing too much of my culture. In fact, I find it comforting that faculty make room for it and encourage us which is what led to my friend Merari Flores and I founding the Latin American Culture Club.

In other words, multiculturalism and multilingualism are kind of our superpowers. It strengthens our social and emotional intelligence as people and amplifies our society’s future. My experience is just one example of many that have created exceptional students. Our multifaceted worlds are shaping us into superheroes of modern society to inspire the younger generation who have to live in this place between two worlds and are trying to find their balance through it all.

# Elizabeth Connell

## Everett High School

### **My Family and Their Immigration**

I was born in America and I have always lived in America. My mother, her siblings and my grandparents on the other hand were not born here. My mom and her siblings were all born in Argentina and when my mom was about 10 years old my grandparents wanted to move to America. They wanted to move here so they could have more opportunities such as, starting many of their own businesses and having their children have better education so they could open up more opportunities for themselves. My family already did have a pretty good life in Argentina but they wanted a new setting, they wanted a change, they wanted to be able to experience what American people experience.

I am grateful that my family was able to come here of their own free will, I know many other people are not so lucky having to leave their country to a completely different place. People from all over the world come to America for many different reasons such as, seeking a better life for them or their children, seeking refugee from their country, and or, just wanting to move somewhere new.

To me, immigration means people leaving their country for better things, things they may not have had in their own home. Immigration is taking the risk that maybe things won't work out at all in a new country but that it is still better than living where you have no rights or a say in anything at all. One thing I hate is when people who don't understand what it's like to have to leave your home and past life behind you in an effort to be safe in a country where they can have freedom and rights get mad that there are people who find the courage to leave everything behind and begin a new life even though all they wanted was to feel safe and accepted.

Growing up my mom would always tell me stories of when she was living in Argentina and how different life was for her once she moved to America. It did take a lot for my family to get adjusted to a new environment, there was some hate but they got through it together. My mom is very proud of where she came from, which is something that I love because although she hasn't been to Argentina since she moved away, she always talks about what her life was like when she lived there.

I love to cook, which is something my mom doesn't like to do much, so when I cook I like to make some of the ethnic foods my grandma used to make all the time when she was a kid. It makes me feel happy when I cook ethnic foods for my mom because it brings out the inner child in her, she says that it makes her feel nostalgic and how it takes her back to when she lived in Argentina.



I hope that there is a day where I can take my mom back to her home for a couple days or weeks because it would make me really happy to get to experience all the traditions and celebrations she used to celebrate with her.

Immigrating somewhere you don't know may be difficult and it may not turn out to be the way that some people imagine it but most people get through it. My family is living proof that no matter how hard change is, as long as you have your family, friends and supporters by your side you can get through the change.

# Gabriel Ponce Lemus

## Everett High School

### **The Intergenerational Impact of Immigration on Families: Immigration Stories From Your Family (Recent and/or Long Ago) and What You've Learned From Them**

It was January 13, 2001, it started like any other ordinary day with my mother leaving my 7-year old brother under the care of my grandmother as she went to work. At around noon, a 7.6 magnitude earthquake struck El Salvador – demolishing several homes – killing thousands of people. My mother was devastated with so much loss as she didn't feel like she had the resources to provide for her family anymore. She decided that it was necessary for her to leave the country in search for a better life, to provide for her family. As she wept, she said her goodbyes to everyone she has ever known, her mother, brother, sister, uncles, aunts, and most importantly of all, my 7-year old brother who had to stay behind. My brother would ask my mother “Will I ever see you again mom” to my mother's response “If god lets us”. My mother decided to embark on her journey to reunite with my father who previously immigrated to Los Angeles as he felt his life was in danger if he stayed back home.

My father's adolescence was filled with the sound of gunshots, and violence as he grew up around a war zone during the Salvadoran civil war. The civil war started due to socio inequalities between the rich and the poor. My father's family worked on a farm where they demanded better working conditions but nevertheless they were met with violent resistance by the Salvadoran government. They decided to join a group called the FMLN who believed that the government should provide land reforms to the poor people of El Salvador, thus joining a war that stretched for 12 long years. The U.S government would start funding the government to attack the FMLN to prevent the spread of “Communism” which terrified my father's family as everyday they would wake up with the fear that each day could be their last. After the civil war ended, many people kept receiving death threats which prompted many of my father's family to seek asylum in other countries, with my father deciding to immigrate to Los Angeles to save his life, and to send money to my mother and my brother.

After my mother reunited with my father, they were both granted TPS (Temporary Protected Status) where they were given work permits and legal status to live and work in the U.S. TPS is a program that was created to be temporary and the U.S president has the choice to not renew it every 18 months. My parents would be scared that maybe one day TPS might not be renewed and during this time they lived in a dangerous neighborhood called Huntington Park where it wasn't safe to travel at night so they'd have to make sure to be home before the sun went down. My parents didn't have much luck finding stable income in Los Angeles so they decided to move to Boston in search for more job opportunities, and for a safer life. Unfortunately, not long after moving to Boston, the U.S department of Homeland Security rejected my father's renewal of TPS which meant he lost his legal status. My father would do his best to appeal the decision but it came to no avail.

After living in Boston for two years, I was born, and I became the first person in my immediate family to be born in the United States. My parents made it their mission to make sure I never forget my roots as they would constantly send me to visit El Salvador with my uncle so I could meet my family members back in their home country. My parents would primarily only speak to me in Spanish so I wouldn't forget their native tongue, and they would have me watch shows and read books that were in Spanish so I could embrace my culture. My parents would tell me stories of when they would constantly go days without eating due to lack of resources. I would learn to be grateful for everything I had: food, toys, water, and a roof over my head. As a second generation American, I learned to appreciate everything I had and to take nothing in life for granted. My parents' immigrant story has motivated me to push through my hardships in life, so I can one day succeed in my family's honor. A running gag that my mother often tells me is "one day I'm going to clean your office", symbolizing that she wants me to one day be stable enough to not have my family worry about having basic necessities.

I want to one day go to Law School, so I can represent immigrant families like my own. Since my father was randomly stripped from his TPS status, he's been prohibited from leaving the country which means that he hasn't been able to visit my brother in over 20 years. There's many more immigrant families that have been separated from each other for decades and I want to make a career out of reuniting families like my own.

# Hadjar Yousfi

## Malden High School

### Teetering Over the Line

For as long as I can remember, I have struggled with my identity. As a young girl, I struggled with loving my ethnic hair, language, and more. I hated the fact that my cultural background was so different from my white peers. I hated that I struggled to accept the fact that though I was born in the United States I would never be seen the same way that my white peers were seen. As I got older the struggle with my identity switched from wanting to be what one would call a “Traditional American,” to wanting to be Algerian.

For the past few years of my life, I have wanted nothing more than to be back home. I have always wanted to fit in back home, I wanted to be able to share experiences with my loved ones and speak the language that I was born to speak with fluency and experience. I felt at a loss as I saw my family grow together while I made the occasional appearance once every few years, dropping into their lives just as quickly as I disappeared again. And though I knew there was always a spot waiting for me, I would never feel as though I truly belonged no matter how much I wanted to.

Instead, I found myself teetering over the line of what it means to be “American,” or “Algerian.” Even now, years later I struggle with the fact that I will never be able to just be one or the other. No matter how much I wish my identity was simple, I know deep down that I am made up of so many experiences from different worlds, both my own and my ancestors. Through my blood race the blood of several Algerians of different tribes, experiences, and cultures.

Though I will never be able to experience my home country in the way that I so wish I could, and I will never be the American girl I used to want to be, I have made it my mission to share my culture with the world, to showcase to those around me what it means to be an Algerian Woman of the Ouled Sidi Nail tribe. I want to showcase my favorite foods, clothing, dances, and more, to be an example to all those around me, despite my internally conflicting worlds and experiences.

No matter where you come from and where you are now, you have earned the right to represent your identity and share it with the world around you.



# Lily Nguyen

Malden High School



# Kathleen Yick

## Malden High School

### **Immigration: The Bridge to Connection**

If anyone asks my mother, a first generation immigrant from Hong Kong, she'll tell you that she came to America for the "clean air"—or in her words, the "kōngqì hǎo." What she won't tell you about are the mountains she's scaled: the language barrier, the cultural differences, and the separation from home.

She tells me that the air flooded her lungs differently when she first arrived in the U.S., but the fact that there were other immigrants like her was even more breathtaking. A relief that she wasn't the only one here with a suitcase that could carry her entire life into another country.

There were others just like her that had come from afar. Others that have stood their ground in spite of the heavy gusts of discrimination. She followed that sense of relatedness to Malden, stumbling upon a community that embraced her differences and didn't make her feel like a weed in a patch of flowers. In Malden, our city with approximately 41% of its population immigrants, my mother quickly discovered empathy and comfort, familiarity and freshness ("U.S. Census").

Even in a place where one might not speak English as fluently as their neighbor would, immigrants continue to thrive and persist with a remarkable determination in the face of economic and racial adversity. Immigrants have carried the seeds of their cultures and cultivated them here in Malden to grow into restaurants with the taste of their country and businesses with their own ethnic touch. The impact of immigrants speckles the streets of Malden in vibrant patches of diversity.

Upon my mother's arrival, programs such as the Immigrant Learning Center had given my mother the words to express her culture and the opportunity to understand her new environment. I still remember vividly one such interaction: my mother laughing with a dark-skinned woman behind the counter, asking "where are you from?" in hesitant, unsure syllables, the other woman replying "the Carribean Islands" in her own distinct accent, showing my mother photos of her home instead when met with a confused look, my mother then making a face of understanding, and responding fervently with pictures of her own.

I remember this because of how proud of my mother I was for giving it her all, for not letting the language barrier limit her as an individual. I marveled at the sense of community in spite of the difference in languages. The memory encouraged me to step out of my own shell and adventure into other cultures.

By understanding one another, Malden has fostered an empathy that will be passed onto future generations. Malden will forever be my paradigm of a diverse community for dedicating its best efforts to help immigrants persevere while also embracing cultural differences. Having grown up in

Malden, I've taken advantage of the fruits of immigrant labor, not having understood the importance of immigration. Yet now, I see the imprints of immigration everywhere in Malden, the cuisines brought over from different oceans, the myriad of cultural clubs at school, the faces I see on the bus, and the unique experiences we share with one another. Knowing that no one is the same relinquishes us from the pressure of having to feel and be the same. Cultural differences aren't a barrier, but in actuality, an opportunity to learn and share.

Immigration—if you search it up—means the “the movement of persons into a new country with the intention to reside in that country” (“Immigration”). To Malden however, immigration is at the heart of our businesses and schools. The fruits and seeds of immigration run through the veins of us all, in the foods we try for the first time and the words we share with one another. Immigration is the perseverance to share and connect in an unfamiliar environment. It is the unadulterated courage to enable one's family a better future.

Immigration in Malden is a comfort. It gives my mother a piece of home. It inspires students to try and reach out to other cultures, to expand their horizons to discover something new. It is a community of shared experiences and contrasting flavors. It is a bridge to explore.

To Malden, immigration is the perseverance and courage to share, the sprouting of something wondrous.

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# Anonymous

## Medford High School

My name is Fabiola, a 13-year-old girl who had to see how her mother suffered, her 9-year-old sister and her 1-year-old brother, we were in Haiti, everything was complicated, everything was difficult, and my grandmother died when my mother was 13. Since then, she I was left alone without anyone, without dad, we couldn't eat everything, it was horrible, my mom started a business which started a little well, but some people started to hate her. That's why they gave her problems, they wanted to kill her, they threatened to kill her children if she didn't get out of there and my mom had no choice but to leave. Her status changed and people followed her to kill her wherever she was because the business was food and she cooked very well. She had more customers than others people. My mother didn't want to die or lose her children so she couldn't do anything but leave the business, she had the idea of going to another country with the little money we had left, we were a lot, the money was little. She had to send me because I'm The eldest daughter. Then she sent a loan to enter my brothers and she did the same and later. When she arrived there in Chile, she found a man. They fell in love. This man arrived for a moment, he looked at me strangely, he stayed with my mother for all the beating, it always hurt me to see that. He yelled at her, she was pregnant, he hit her a lot and the baby died and he always looked at me and told her not to look at me, he said he would kill me and my mom if I didn't say something to my mom, I was scared, I didn't say anything.

And one day my mom thought about it a lot, we ran away, my mom said that she wants to get to the United States, let's see if this way we will live much better, we started the journey, it was very difficult, we had to cross more than 10 countries, all walking without any hope, without food, we spent in a country The call to Colombia was difficult, we spent 8 working days in a forest drinking water from the dead, seeing suddenly dead people and dead babies. We had no food or how to sleep there. Very dangerous animals. We had faith only in God. Thank you. Our legs were full of wounds. Our backs and our entire bodies. With God we moved forward, in one of the 10 countries we passed we arrived in Mexico, it is the country closest to the USA. We arrived. It was difficult to live with a lot of racism. They did not want to rent us a house because we were immigrants. Immigration ran after us and beat us up. We resisted, the way they treated us was horrible, we had to hide, we went to a city called CDMX and at first it was calm, then the immigration also looked for us there. I was afraid of being deported again because of everything I've been through.

I felt bad because I couldn't help my mother. She cried every day asking God why we had to live like this, but my mother always told me that I had to have a lot of faith in God. We went to a city called Reynosa. I looked for a job cleaning cars. It was difficult, since I am a woman, men touched me, I cried a lot, afraid



that something would happen to me, I held on just so I could bring something to my mom at home and my brothers, little by little, we went to the United States border. When we arrived, they deported us again to Mexico. About 3 times my mother had no hope for anything, we cried every day because to go to the border it was difficult you had to give something in return or they would rape one of your children or you or they would kidnap you or they would kill you. We had no hope but everything was complicated without homeless food it saddens me to see my mom with my brother sleeping on the street, and we decided to go back to the border there some thieves grabbed us we took my mom me and my sister to a different place I was scared with fear I didn't know why they were taking my mom.

After 40 minutes maximum, they brought my mom back all bleeding, her swollen face sad with her torn clothes crying. I wanted to hit those people but I couldn't. I hugged my mom tightly. I asked her how she felt. She didn't respond because of so much beating they had given her. She lay on my legs, kissed me and my brothers and rested and the next day they let us go. We were very sad and afraid, we thought they were going to kill us, they opened the dead body and we ran away from there, I carried my brother and sister in my arm. Next to me and my mom next to me.

We entered the immigration wing, my mom was all bleeding, I ran to tell the US immigration police that they would help me and they came with an emergency, they put us inside, they gave us our papers with the sad story that we went through, they let us pass, when they gave us the papers, I couldn't go nowhere my mom was there in the hospital and there was nowhere to go either, my mom made a call and a friendly family member received her after 3 days later we went to her. In Boston when we arrived she treated us well she gave us comfort after 2 months changed and we left the house without knowing where to go we went to a hospital to ask for help and they helped us they gave us a shelter where we can't cook but at least where to sleep without threats with safety and my mother will be very well one day mom will call me She told me that the day the thieves took him away, they raped her, was it one of us or her? She sacrificed her life for us. She said it with tears. She started to cry. I hugged him. He said, I'm sorry, Mom. I know it's hard to forget, but we'll get through it. I want the world to get ahead and one day live well and I will keep that promise.

My mother with tears said I trust you daughter. I am very happy, it gave me strength every day I think about that when I am at school that gives me a lot of strength I am very happy because finally all the suffering is over now we are much better than ever thanks to God and USA to change our visa I want to be a military nurse I don't have a green card to be able to do it but I will fight to fulfill my dreams Being an immigrant is not easy but nothing is impossible.

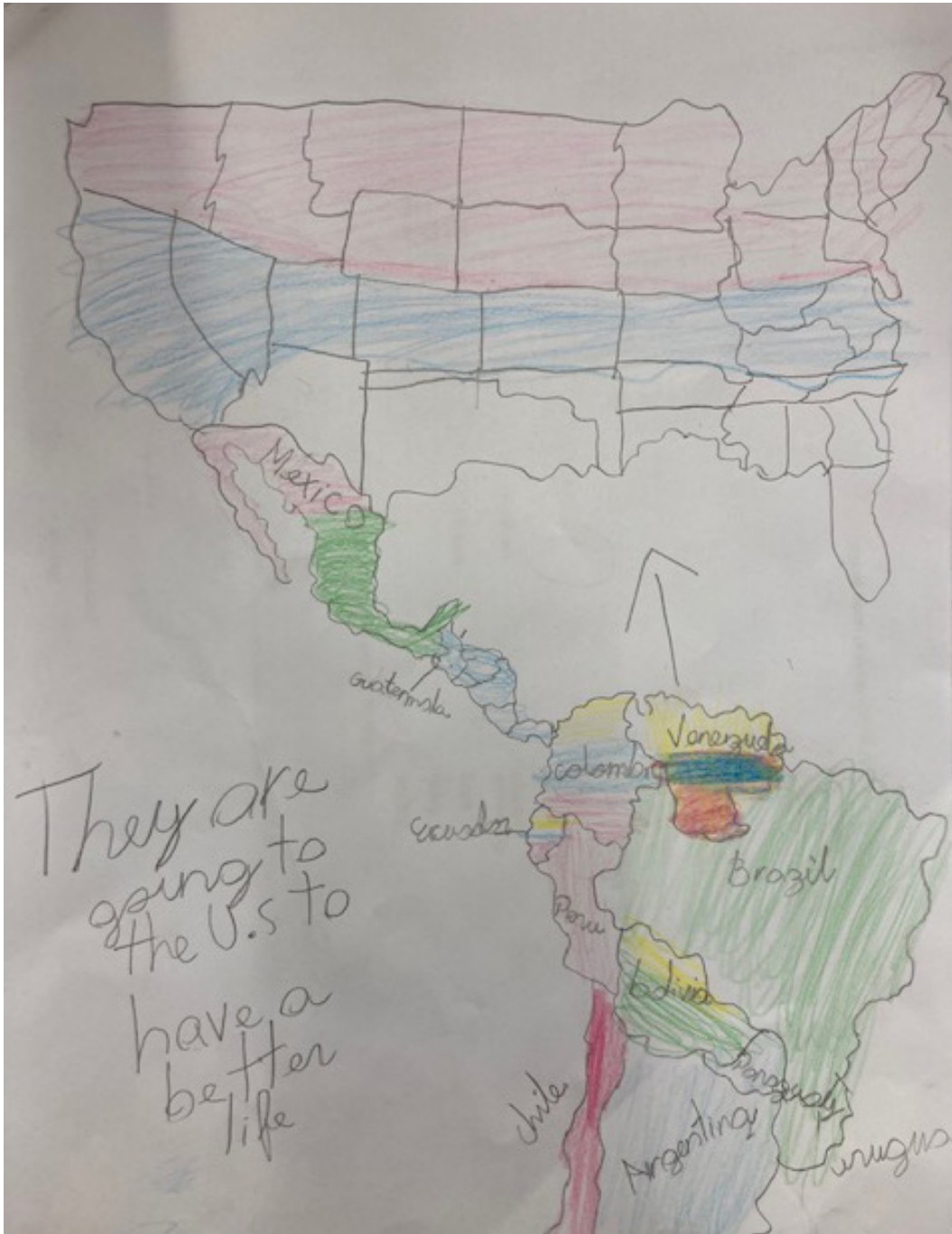
# Juan Carlos Sanan Lopez

Medford High School



# Aquiles Puissing

Medford High School



# Lily Nguyen

## Malden High School

The circumference of the earth is 24,901 miles.

Now imagine that for every person who would ever become a citizen of the city of Malden, you tied a piece of ribbon to their feet at birth. Every step that furthers their distance from where they first began increases the length of the ribbon until they reach Malden.

I bet you a good five dollars that someone's ribbon is over 20,000 miles from their country of origin to Malden. In fact, if I did bet, I'd win because if you look it up, approximately 20,000 miles across the world from our 02148 zip code is 6280, which is the zip code of a little town in Australia called Busselton, and that is only driving distance from the city that the parents of one of my closest friends here is from.

Every single person has a unique story to tell, but in Malden, it's special because our stories come from far and wide—some from distances longer than the span of continents and a few oceans. In every person's ribbon, there are beautiful stories etched into its fabric. Yet, regardless of the distance traveled, each ribbon finds its way home to Malden, where acceptance and understanding await.

That is why growing up, my parents constantly reinforced to me that I am fortunate enough to live in Malden for its cultural diversity. It was to the extent that over twenty years ago, when they had immigrated to the U.S. and attended school in Boston, they chose to live in Malden because it was not only a good distance from the city by train, but because they had heard from friends and through newspaper stacks they read of *The Boston Globe* praising the city that it is a welcoming haven for immigrants. A bonus was its small but established Vietnamese community, which my parents would have never anticipated having in what they believed at the time was an inconspicuous suburban town on the outskirts of the capital.

The beauty of Malden encompassed more than just immigrants who brought their first languages with them to share, but also their empathy. With their broken English at the time, even if a fellow citizen didn't speak Vietnamese fluently, my parents could still be understood and helped by them through their genuine kindness and compassion. That was something my mom would always mention when recounting their first memories in Malden, because it was also when she realized that it is not a city of immigrants, but for immigrants. One vivid memory I had was when my family and I went to a block party, where diverse families in our neighborhood shared traditional dishes and stories of their homeland. Among them, my parents found solace and camaraderie, and they formed strong bonds that surpassed language barriers and cultural differences.



With the culmination of these experiences, no matter how they knew it was the place for my sister and I to grow up in an environment where we can learn to love and be compassionate through being exposed to a diverse group of citizens, one that we would not have found in the ethnically-homogenous community in which she'd been raised. Where my parents had grown up in, which were villages dotting the coastline of my home country, everyone had an extremely similar, if not the same, set of beliefs, cultural norms, and attitudes. However, with the way that Malden's diversity managed to change my parents' conservative perspectives, it made me realize how much more special the city in which I lived my whole life is.

Just as my parents found solace and community in Malden's welcoming embrace, so have countless others who discovered this new place to call home. Here, amidst the mosaic of cultures and backgrounds, we learn the true meaning of empathy and compassion. It's a reminder that Malden isn't just a city for immigrants—it's a sanctuary for those seeking refuge, opportunity, and belonging.

Ultimately, it's important that citizens celebrate the beauty of our diverse community, recognizing that it is the threads of our differences that make us stronger together. In Malden, every ribbon finds its place in the ever-expanding circle of acceptance and unity, encircling our city with boundless compassion and hope. Everyone's ribbon is a different length—and even though some citizens, such as the children of immigrants like me who've been raised here, would have ones small in length, I imagine how our older siblings, parents, and grandparents and other immigrants in our community cut a snippet of the ribbon and give it to the children of the next generation as if they're sharing and passing on a piece of their cultural heritage, because that sense of community is exactly what continues to expand and diversify the city of Malden.

# Linh Le

## Malden High School

### **Embracing Diversity: My Parents Story and How It's Impacted Me**

My family and I have called Malden home for as long as I can remember. Growing up in an immigrant family has taught me many life lessons, from perseverance to how to whip up the best Pho soup. In Malden, there is so much cultural diversity, connecting families from around the world, each with their own story to share about how they got to where they are today. My parents have overcome so much to be where they are, and their story continues to inspire me. It's a simple yet inspirational tale of big dreams, resilience, and hope, one I find worth sharing.

Both my parents were born and raised in Vietnam. They lived in a tight-knit community surrounded by family and friends. Life was quiet and simple... So why did they ever want to leave in the first place? The answer: They wanted more out of life. They carried big dreams and were willing to take risks to get there. Both my parents shared the vision of coming to the U.S. Where during that time, was a "land of opportunity." However, the transition to the U.S. wasn't as simple as many may imagine.

"You gotta give to get" and my parents were all in.

My dad immigrated to the U.S. before my mom did. Having only known life within Vietnam's borders, the big jump was nerve-wracking. Yet, the hope and dreams for a better future helped him continue. When my dad got his citizenship and officially moved to Malden. He faced a set of new challenges. He didn't know how to speak English and frankly, didn't have a solid plan. During this time, my mom was still in Vietnam, taking care of 2-year-old me. My dad had to get paperwork done to allow my mom to be able to come to the U.S. The whole process itself was rough. My parents had to be separated for over a year to get things worked out. Despite that, my parents were determined to start a life in the U.S., even if they had to wait years. But time eventually did its thing. And my parents were together in the U.S. again. But that marks the beginning of a whole new journey.

To achieve her dream of moving to the U.S. my mom had to make sacrifices of her own. She had to leave behind her family, job, and everything she had known all her life. I was two years old when we made it to Massachusetts. Upon arrival, my mom was both eager and anxious. Everything was different here—the environment, people, customs, food...the weather! It was a drastic shift in her life, and like my father, she faced significant challenges. My mom didn't know how to speak English and didn't have a laid-out plan. But she knew one thing. She wasn't going to sit around for miracles and stay at home all day. She knew that to live the life she wanted, she needed to take action. She began to learn English from scratch, then went back to school and enrolled in university to get her degree. All while my dad worked on his business.

I remember my parents telling me that this time was the hardest period for them. It was a difficult stage of life since my parents had to balance many things simultaneously. They managed work, education, and adjusting, all while being wonderful parents to me and my brother. Their perseverance pushed them to keep going, and any challenges faced were met with open arms and determined minds.

Eventually, as they always say, “Tough times don’t last, but tough people do.” My parents made it to points in their lives that made them happy and satisfied. They went through so much to get to where they are now. They made sacrifices in the hope of a better life, for not just themselves, but their children too. I look up to my parents; they are my utmost role models growing up. I learned so much through their story, from their determination to unwavering grit. They inspire me to follow my dreams and dreams, whether it be big or small. I’m proud to say that their sacrifices and hard work have paid off. The older I get, the more grateful I am for all they have done and continue to do. Their story is one I hope to keep alive, to show that you can get whatever you put your mind to. My parents are some of the hardest working people I know, who embrace the concept that there is “no success without sacrifice” wholeheartedly.

Hearing their journey not only reminds me of important life lessons but also reminds me of the significance and beauty of diversity within my community. From the very start, me and my family have resided in Malden and got to experience its range of culture firsthand. Malden is a community made up of people with a variety of backgrounds, cultures, and traditions. It’s lovely to be able to experience such a wide range of cuisines within one single community. Being able to surround myself with cultural practices and people from around the world, all in one place, is a special quality of Malden I embrace.

In my eyes, immigration is beyond just the process of moving from one country to another. It’s an opportunity to immerse yourself in other worlds. It allows you to experience the customs, traditions, and foods of cultures you would never typically experience. Having the chance to engage with people from different cultural backgrounds is the most valuable of all. Being able to connect with people with such unique cultural backgrounds adds a whole new depth to the connections people make and further expands our understanding of the world as a whole.

# Raphael Orcino

## Malden High School

### Palitán

As an American-born child of Filipino immigrants, my identity is a mosaic of cultures, experiences, and aspirations. Although I've never crossed international borders myself, the stories of my parents' immigration and my high school journey have profoundly shaped my understanding of migration and adaptation. Through their experiences and my own, I've realized that we are all migrants in our own right, constantly navigating the shifting landscapes of opportunity and belonging.

My parents' decision to immigrate to America was driven by a desire for unique opportunities and the pursuit of the American "dream." Growing up, their immigrant status was not just a legal designation; it was a defining aspect of our family's identity. Their stories of sacrifice, resilience, and triumph served as the foundation upon which my worldview was built. From humorous stories of cultural misunderstandings to emotional reflections about leaving loved ones behind, their narratives provided invaluable lessons in empathy, perseverance, and the pursuit of excellence.

Transitioning from Mystic Valley Regional Charter School to Malden High School further solidified my connection to my parents' immigration journey. Like them, I found myself thrust into unfamiliar territory, grappling with the challenges of adaptation and self-discovery. Moving from my old high school to a new one was similar to crossing cultural borders, as I navigated unfamiliar social dynamics, academic expectations, and extracurricular opportunities. Yet, amidst the uncertainty, I discovered a reservoir of resilience inherited from my parents – a resilience that enabled me to change and forge my path forward.

Through my parents' immigration stories and my high school experiences, I've come to understand that migration is not just a physical journey; it's a deeply personal and transformative process that shapes our identities and worldviews. Whether crossing oceans or navigating the halls of a new school, the migrant experience is marked by moments of triumph, challenge, and growth.

At its core, my parents' immigration journey embodies the universal human quest for a better life and the pursuit of opportunity. Their decision to leave behind familiarity and embrace the unknown speaks volumes about their resilience, determination, and unwavering commitment to success. It's a testament to the enduring spirit of migrants everywhere – the belief that with hard work, perseverance, and a little bit of luck, anything is possible.

Similarly, my high school journey reflects the complexities of migration and adaptation in a microcosm. Moving between different schools forced me to confront my insecurities, expand my horizons, and



embrace the diversity of human experience. Like my parents before me, I learned to navigate unfamiliar terrain, forge new connections, and carve out my place within a changing landscape.

However, amidst the challenges of adaptation, I discovered the true beauty of migration within the cultural tapestry of Malden. Initially noticing the prevalence of Haitians and Brazilians compared to my old school, I soon realized that Malden's uniqueness stems from its immigrant roots. The city is a melting pot of cultures, with diverse student association clubs, eclectic restaurants serving global cuisines, and vibrant cultural festivals hosted by local schools. These elements of Malden's cultural fabric complemented the lessons learned from my parents' immigration journey, reinforcing the idea that diversity is not a barrier but a bridge connecting us in our shared human experience.

In conclusion, being the child of immigrants and navigating the challenges of high school has taught me invaluable lessons about the migrant experience and the shared struggles of adaptation and change. Through my parents' immigration stories, my high school experiences, and the cultural tapestry of Malden, I've come to understand that we are all migrants in our own right, constantly navigating the shifting landscapes of opportunity and belonging. As I continue on my journey, I carry with me the wisdom of my parents' immigration story and the vibrant spirit of diversity embodied by the city of Malden, serving as guiding lights in navigating life's ever-changing terrain.

# Shelina Nguyen

## Everett High School

### What Immigration Means to Me

In 1985, ten years after the fall of Saigon, my mother fled the shores of Vietnam to escape persecution by the Communist government. Although she was barely eighteen, she, along with my grandfather and eldest aunt, took passage on a boat that was freedom-bound. They spent four days and three nights on a boat, starving and parched- carrying only the hopes in their hearts as the tides of the Pacific Ocean swept them further and further into uncertainty. On their third night at sea, hope finally came in the form of a Japanese trading ship, whose occupants took notice of them and contacted a refugee aid group. My mom would later learn that if that trading ship hadn't stopped to help, their boat would've floated straight into a whirlpool. They sent my family to live in a refugee camp in Singapore for four months before moving them to another camp in the Philippines, where they spent a year learning to speak English. On October 31st, 1986, they finally landed in Massachusetts.

My mom was lucky to have made it out on her first try. My dad sadly wasn't as fortunate. In 1989, my twenty-year-old father also escaped Vietnam by sea with his little brothers, traveling five-hundred-and-two miles to a camp in Thailand. Even after spending three and a half years there, Thailand officials sent him and his siblings back to Vietnam after he failed to justify his staying at the camp in an interview. Apparently, fleeing political retaliation, wasn't a "valid" enough reason for being there. They chose to send him back the five-hundred-and-two miles he sailed to get there, where he struggled to live under an oppressive government for a year. It wasn't until his older brother, who was already living in America, sponsored the rest of the family. After four years, he was finally given permanent residence on American soil.

My parents risked it all to get here, but that's something you'll hear from almost anyone who's left their homeland, because no one leaves their home unless they have to. My mom and dad only left Vietnam because they knew it was for the best. Their experiences are just two out of several millions of stories- not only of the people who escaped Vietnam on boats, but of people from every corner of the earth searching for a better life. As unique and remarkable as every person's journey is, there are two things I think all people who come to America have in common: their resilience and their sacrifice.

I'm not an immigrant myself, and I can't claim to ever fully understand the experience of overcoming struggle after struggle. But I catch glimpses of the accomplishments of immigrants in every place I go. I can feel their pride when someone blasts music in their car driving down the street. I taste their courage in my grandmother's phở and spring rolls. I see their strength in the eyes of their children at school, as

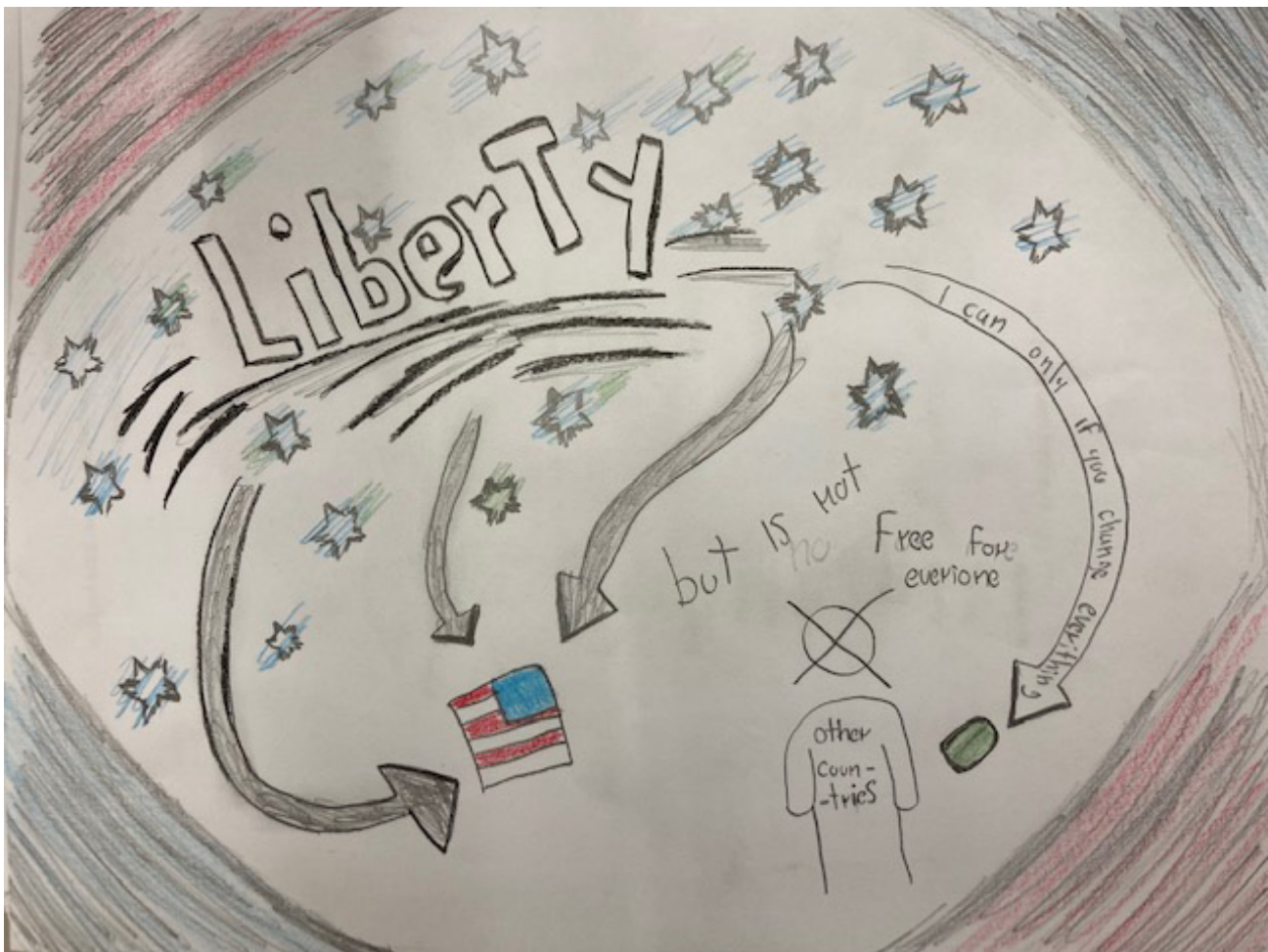
they get an education to be even more successful than the ones before them. I see their resilience in every city block I walk. I see their adaptability in supermarkets, and nail salons, and bakeries, and hair salons, and corner shops, and local restaurants. It may have been the “American Dream” that drew people to the States, but it was their sheer determination and sacrifice that led them to where they are today.

Amanda Nguyen, a civil rights activist and the first Vietnamese astronaut, once said that her mother “went into death to seek life,” and that’s what immigration means to me. To me, immigration is my parents throwing away their youth so they could give me the best childhood. To me, immigration is my grandparents connecting to home by growing Vietnamese vegetables in the backyard, but never once regretting leaving. To me, immigration is finding victory in loss, and finding life after having to survive.

Last year, my family spent the summer in Vietnam. The last time I had ever visited home was when I was too young to remember, so most of what I knew of Vietnam was through family stories and Western movies. I had an incredible time seeing where my parents grew up, eating the food they loved as children, and hearing the different accents of my people. I was walking down the sandy beaches of Da Nang when I realized how much my family had done to find their freedom. The vastness of the ocean’s horizon hit me. I was overwhelmed by how big it was, and how utterly terrifying it must’ve been to travel into the unknown like that. I put myself in my mom’s shoes, and even though I was almost the same age as her when she left, I don’t think I have even a fraction of the courage she had to do what she did. Because she faced death in the eyes and demanded a better life for herself. Whether it be violence or misfortune, she never let anything silence the freedom singing in her heart. That is what immigration means to me.

# Nicolas Polanco

Medford High School





# Maya Berrouet

Medford High School



# Tima Tracy Monalisa

## Medford High School

### Life of an Immigrant

An immigrant is a person who comes to live in a country other than that of his or her birth. No matter if that person has taken the citizenship of the destination country, served in its military, married a native, or has another status—he or she will forever be an international migrant.

An immigrant is not always an illegal person, as a legal immigrant living in the United States I can say that life is not easy like some people said it is even when you are legal and you have all the confirmation to stay in the country you will always see some people discriminate you and being racist. It could be for your skin color, your personality, or your character because every country has their way to communicate and to talk.

I remember when I first came to the United States, I did not have friends and I did not talk English very well but I was struggling to learn English for having friends and to understand if someone wanted to talk to me. As one goes along I'm starting to have a few friends.

Before I met my friends I was always alone on my own and listening to music, now I'm always with my friends playing, gossiping, talking, etc... I'm still doing my homeworks and participating in all my classworks and projects and I always have good grades, because previously I had a goal which is to pursue my dreams, and making my family proud of me. One day at school we had a new Haitian student and they asked us to help him find his way when he was lost.

One day he came to see us in the cafeteria at lunch time and said there is a guy who says that he hates him because he's Black and he's ugly, he even beat him. The other Haitian boy asked him if he did nothing like if he did not defend himself or counter attack and when he said no they were about to go and talk to the other boy and beat him because he can't say that because that's racist, and they do not accept this kind of behavior at school, and that's very disrespectful, it is like he was disrespected by his own mother because he said Black and his mother is also Black.

The same thing happens to me too once at school there was a white girl that hit me with her shoulder and she does not even say sorry to me she just kept walking like nothing was, it's like I did something to her but I swear I did not do anything to her.

Being an immigrant is to live in a country knowing that at any time they can send you back home. It's also to live in fear and in the shadow of people who were born in the country, because you know that with the slightest mistake you will not be spared. And even if you are a permanent resident or if you are a citizen you will always be considered different or not like one of them. Most of the time you have to deal with things that no other person can because you have a dream and you know that if your country was able to help you, you would not have taken refuge in another country.

**The best part of being and immigrant**

There are also some good things about being an immigrant ,example: you making new friends,traveling,meet new people,religions and cultures.And for me traveling was the best part of my life because my country was not in a good situation but now i have economic opportunities to pursue my dreams and to help the other members of my family that still living in haiti because they do not have no one but those who are here to help them in times of need. When immigrant enter the labor force,they increase the productive capacity of the economy and raise GDP.Their incomes rise,but so do those of natives.

One of the best ways to allow immigrants to coexist with locals is that they must stop racist remarks because racism is one of the biggest problem in this country.Im not saying that it is all or most people in the country who are racist but there are many.I remember when i arrived at Medford High School the first person who showed kindness and sympathy towards me and who helped me find my way when i was lost was a young Brazilian girl,an immigrant like me with the only difference in color but that did not stop her from helping me.She might not have helped me but she did and also allowed me to ask her for help at any time.

**Who is considered a US immigrant**

Lawful permanent residents (LPRs) are foreign nationals who have been granted the right to reside permanently in the United States.LPRs are often referred to simply as “immigrant”,but they are also known as “permanent resident aliens”and “green card holders”.

**Five important facts**

- Immigrants do not endanger public health.
- Immigrants cannot vote until they become citizen.
- Immigrants create jobs and improve the United states economy.
- Most immigrants in the United states hold lawful status.
- Throughout U.S.history,the percentage of immigrants has remained steady.

There are people who immigrated to the United States or any other country who are not theirs,not because they do not have family,friends security,food or because their country does not has fun but because they want to learn something new,it could be a new culture,meeting new people or new places.

There are also people who immigrated to another country because they did not feel safe in their country. Let’s take an example of all the haitians who immigrated to the United States,most of them did not immigrate here because they did not love their country but because they were not safe.

# Jennifer Soirilus

## Medford High School

### What Immigration Means to Me

Personally immigration means strong people who take a step towards their dream and go to an unfamiliar country or state for the wellbeing of themselves and their family. There are many reasons as to why you may see people migrate from where they are to a different location. During this period of time you would see millions of people immigrating to multiple countries in search of a job for stable income to survive, school for their kids to have a brighter future, safety because they may have been faced with a much worse discrimination where they were from than where they migrated to, and for freedom for things like religion. I believe Immigration is about a lot of people who struggled for a permanent move to a foreign country, or state. Some of the people who go through immigration tend to have gone through a thorough and rigorous process. Not only do the people go through a rough process but even after arriving at their destination they are faced with massive challenges such as; finding a good permanent job, racism, discrimination, as well as gender norms.

I was born in Haiti and came to America at a very young age. To be allowed entry into the country my mother, older brother, and I required a lot of help from my grandmother and aunt. They took care of a lot of the processings for us to have a green card and all other necessities we will need for both before and after arriving in the country. I know that all the things they did for us to get here was not easy and was definitely a lot of work. They say that they had a lot of running around to do, getting information on how to get us in and making sure that we will have all necessities ready in hand. My mom had to get things ready for us on the part of Haiti, getting our passports and anything else the airport may require my grandmother made sure to have mother acquire the items.

As an immigrant myself I have seen my immigrant mother struggle to find a job to take care of my brother, my grandmother, and I. My mother decided to come to America to give my brother and I a better life, and a wider range for education, with the help of my grandmother, and my aunt as mentioned before. The reason why I believe that immigration is about strong people who take a step towards their dream is because of what my family experienced and also because of the way they still kept pushing no matter the obstacles. Being from an immigrant family I remember my mom working really hard to find jobs even though she couldn't speak the languages, most jobs she found required her to do a lot of lifting or bring in an extremely cold place. At the beginning things were very hard for us, my brother tried his hardest to learn english quickly and what he learned he taught me as well, so that we can help our mother who struggled with learning the english language. My brother began to read the letters and help my mother with more important things, while I tried to help take care of my grandmother and help



around the house. Of course my mother tried to make us do less things because we were still kids, and made sure that we took breaks and played outside, and made friends with multiple people so as to not feel out of place.

Though because I was young I don't remember everything but I do know that even after coming there were still things to do, my mother did make friends with some other Haitian people from our communities, very lovely and kind people. They are people that we still interact with today, to the point that we consider them family. When my mom struggled or felt bad they always helped out, invited us places, and my brother and I often hung out with their kids so we all became really close. Through everything I am glad that we met them and became close, sometimes when my mother felt things were going badly I tried to help her calm down and cheer up but there were times when I couldn't do anything either, but they always knew how to calm her down and give her the motivation that I as a kid couldn't understand.

One day I asked them a question that I will not forget I think I was around the ages of 7-8, seeing how they were able to calm my mother down when I couldn't I asked them, how they were always able to stay motivated and happy because I knew that there are definitely times everyone feels bad but not once did I see them upset, they said to me. "We stay motivated and happy a lot because of our friends and family. We see our kids growing up happily with good education and surrounding themselves with good friends, like you and your family." I didn't get it at that time but when I told my brother and my cousins about it they explained that families will lean on each other in times of need so if they see one smile and tell them that 'it's okay and they can get through it', they get motivated to work harder. Knowing that I always worked hard and did my best, smiling through everything for my mom to be motivated and always stay happy. Right now I am 17 years old and still continue this process, because seeing my mother who always worked hard for us smile, laugh, and just be happy was the best thing for me.

So to say once more what immigration means to me, immigration is about the people who struggle and work hard for themselves and their families wellbeing. Immigration is about the people who can smile and care about those around them despite the situation. Immigration is about a bunch of lovely and wonderful people who want to be seen, heard, happy, and to survive with their family. Though there are a lot of hardships, these are people who always pull through with everything they have, through all the obstacles, with or without help.

# Tsering Shakya

## Malden High School

### My Dream

I am Tibetan. My language is banned in my country. To be me is to be a crime. I have endured enough, at seventeen years old why do I feel lost? My family tries to keep my culture alive but it's hard when everyday it slowly fades away. Can I consider myself Tibetan without knowing how to participate in cultural activities for the preservation of Tibet? My grandparents trekked from Tibet to Nepal in hopes of freedom, my parents immigrated to America for a new opportunity, where will my journey take me to find my purpose? My parents have worked so hard to provide me every opportunity possible that allows me to embrace my identity as a Tibetan American. So, why do I feel like an outcast looking for my "American Dream?"

Although I participate in Tibetan opera, guitar, dance, and literature, it doesn't feel like enough. From 10am-6pm every Sunday since 2014 I have attended TAB, (Tibetan Association of Boston). Although my weeks may be busy, I know every Sunday I am able to gather with a group of people that have become a lifeline to preserving my culture and in that I feel solace. How can I stop showing up, knowing that my presence makes a difference? Today Tibet is recognized as a part of China, how can we accept this? The invasion stripped Tibetans of everything, the political repression is active to this day. My culture is so beautiful, how can we just diminish it? My mom had dreams of being an opera singer, to perform as part of TIPA (Tibetan Institute of Performative Arts), but won't perform until she can freely. Tibetans in exile suffer in silence, China feeds the media propaganda that the world accepts blindly. What am I against all of China? How do I make my voice heard in such a small body?

Together my peers and I work to educate ourselves about Tibet with the sliver of information that breaks through the great walls of propaganda that have been fed to the world. We relay this knowledge to the youth in hopes of never forgetting the fight for a free Tibet. I have been to protests all my life, I have baby pictures as proof, every single March 10th (National Uprising Day) I have walked miles, screaming for freedom, screaming for life, screaming for liberty. I can't help but wonder why is nothing enough?

I look in the mirror some days and I don't see anything, I'm a reflection of a hollow body. How am I supposed to be Tibetan-American when I don't know how to be either? I look and see my friends surrounded by their people, but as I look around I feel disheartened, where are my people? I feel so guilty because I know everything that I have available to me, are things people would kill for back home. I think why me? Why do I have to stand up, what if I fail? I want to be the best I can be, I have to. Generations of my family had sacrificed everything for me to be where I am. I won't let them down.

My uncle has been detained by the CCP, my father is not allowed in Nepal in fear of his freedom. Getting citizenship to America, my parents gave up everything they had in Nepal, they came to America as refugees for political freedom. Being Tibetan I've always known my voice matters, showing up to protests my whole life. I've learned to speak up, but it's hard when no one is listening. In America I will take my opportunities and knowledge to become something important, no one will silence me. Then when I make it big I will tell my story, and everyone will listen. I will pass down my story. My "American Dream" is to speak for Tibet.

# Anonymous

## Medford High School

### **The First Lie: My Immigration Journey and What It Means to Be True to Myself**

The first time I realized I was different, I was a couple of days into fourth grade, my heart pounding with excitement and nervousness. Our teachers had assigned a project where we were to describe our bedrooms, and my classmates were eagerly sharing tales of spacious rooms, fancy toys, etc. As each student took their turn, my anxiety grew. I knew I couldn't reveal the truth about my living situation—a small corner of my aunt's house that my family had been calling home since arriving in the country a year and a half ago. Our room was cramped, shared among several family members, far from the image my classmates painted. When it was finally my turn, I hesitated. I couldn't bring myself to admit the reality of our circumstances. Instead, I wove a tale of a lavish room with a big bed, a gaming console, and a wall-mounted TV. It was a small lie, a white lie, harmless, I thought. That lie became the catalyst for a series of decisions and actions that would shape my identity and perception of self for years to come.

Desperate to maintain the illusion of fitting in, I began to distance myself from my cultural heritage. I straightened my hair to mimic my classmates, suppressed my accent, and avoided anything that might reveal the truth of my immigrant status. The pressure to conform and the fear of judgment weighed heavily on me. I avoided bringing homemade lunches to school, fearing the teasing and ridicule that might follow. I distanced myself from family gatherings, ashamed of our customs and traditions that felt foreign and out of place.

As I entered Middle School, the door became transparent and the glass started to crack. I struggled with self-esteem issues, grappling with an identity crisis fueled by the lie I had woven years ago. I resented the person I had become—the person who hid behind a mask of falsehoods to gain acceptance. It wasn't until high school that I confronted the truth behind the first lie. The realization hit me like a tidal wave—I had been denying my heritage, my roots, and ultimately, myself. The lie that once seemed so innocuous now looked large, casting a shadow over my sense of belonging and self-worth. With newfound clarity, I went on a journey of self-discovery and redemption. I embraced my natural hair, spoke my native language proudly, and celebrated my cultural traditions without reservation. I sought forgiveness from my family for the distance I had created and embraced their love and support wholeheartedly.

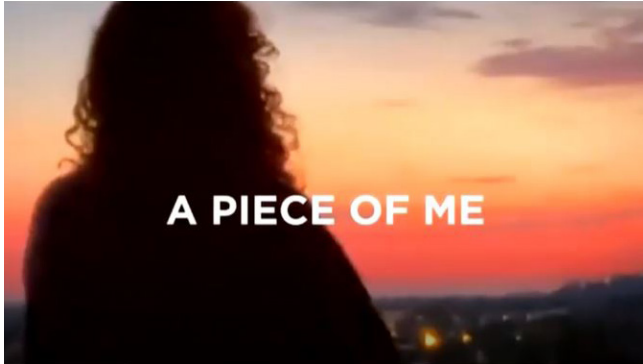
Today, as I reflect on the journey that started with a single lie, I am grateful for the lessons learned and the resilience gained. Immigration taught me the power of authenticity—the courage to be unapologetically myself, flaws and all. The first lie may have defined me temporarily, but it was the journey of acceptance and redemption that truly shaped by identity and sense of belonging.



Immigration, to me, means embracing my heritage and cultural identity with pride. It means standing tall in my truth, regardless of societal pressures or expectations. It's about honoring the sacrifices of my family and ancestors while forging my path with resilience and determination. Immigration is not just a label—it's a journey of self-discovery, acceptance, and empowerment that continues to shape who I am today.

# Watch the videos!

Three high school students created videos to show what immigration means to them. Check them out!



**Elisa Alves**  
Everett High School



**Mosammat Habiba**  
Medford High School



**Michael Pach**  
Medford High School