



*Celebrate America*  
2017 Winning Entries



## 2017 Winners

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## **About the Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest**

The American Immigration Council works to strengthen America by honoring our immigrant history and shaping how America thinks about and acts towards immigrants and immigration.

As part of this mission, the Council partners with American Immigration Lawyers Association Chapters to host the Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest, which challenges fifth graders across the country to reflect on and write about the theme “Why I Am Glad America Is a Nation of Immigrants.”

## **About the 2017 Winners**

We are proud to announce that the first place winner of the American Immigration Council’s 2017 Annual Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest is Lauren Rocke, whose poem was submitted by the AILA’s Northern California Chapter.

In an interview, Lauren shared that her inspiration for the poem came from *Home of the Brave* by Katherine Applegate, in which the main character Kek immigrates to America from Sudan and “finds friends that make his life much happier.”

Lauren also added, “I am glad that the U.S. is a nation of immigrants because it brings culture, experiences, and foods to our lives, and because without immigration, a lot of us would not be here.”

The second place winner is Guadalupe Chavez whose poem was submitted by the AILA San Diego Chapter. Honorable mentions were awarded to Charlotte Muller from Chicago, Carly Rogalla from South Florida, and Naseam Smith from Nevada.

# First Place Winner: “Immigration”

By Lauren Rocke

Northern California Chapter

## **Change**

Everything has changed

Everything happened at once

The war

The plane

Seeing my new home

Crying

I didn't like the change

The change brought uncertainty

I did not want the change

I did not welcome the change

But my family did

If I had a choice

I wouldn't have gone

## **Lost**

We lost everything

Our home

Grandmama

Grandpapa

My friends

Everything

I hate the people

Who did this to my family

I am lost in this new place

## **America**

U. S. A.

America

My new home

Good bye Syria

## **Goodbyes**

I never got to say goodbye

So here it is

Goodbye, Friends

Goodbye, Grandmama

Goodbye, Grandpapa

Goodbye, House

Goodbye, Village

Goodbye, Everything I knew

## **The Perfect Fit**

I have not found a fit

In my new life

I do not fit into the puzzle that is my school

I stick out like a piece

From a different puzzle

I do not fit into my new town

I do not fit into America

At least I don't think so

Mama says, "It will pass, you will make friends."

Papa says, "Friends will come to you, just wait."

So I wait

## **I Wait**

I wait for a friend to come

Every day

And then she does

**Yara**

Is from Afghanistan

Is just like me

Is smart

Is funny

Is my friend

**Celebration**

I finally fit into the puzzle that is this town

Today they threw a party celebrating

Yara's family

And mine

We celebrate immigration because without it

None of us would be here

**I Will**

I will live in America

I have lots of friends

I have a beautiful home

I love America

We celebrate immigration

# Second Place Winner: “Why I’m Glad the United States Is a Country Full of Immigrants”

## By Guadalupe Chavez

### San Diego Chapter

**Lady Liberty:** Come in! Come in! Welcome to the United States of America! Pleasure to meet you!

**The Wall:** Wait... No! No! Stop! Leave! You’re trespassing!

**Lady Liberty:** What’s wrong with you? Why are you so close-minded? We’ve always welcomed people here. People have traveled from all sorts of places like China, Mexico, Philippines, Japan, Canada, Australia, and so many more.

**The Wall:** No. No. No! I’ll block their path. They’re different, maybe dangerous. They shouldn’t come in, they are not welcome.

**Lady Liberty:** What’s wrong with you? Many of the people that live here in America are immigrants. So if we push them away, that will mean fewer workers, less money earned, no variety of food, and no more diversity. Basically, there would barely be anything for the citizens.

**The Wall:** No, no, we don’t need them. We have our American citizens. We get nothing from them.

**Lady Liberty:** Unless you are a Native American... Wait, no, not even them! Even they migrated here from Asia through the land bridge that existed in the Bering Strait. Every person that lives here nowadays has ancestors who brought something to America.

**The Wall:** Yeah, right! They only bring problems.

**Lady Liberty:** That’s not true! They bring so many different things we enjoy day-to-day. Just think. Look around you. What do you eat?

**The Wall:** Well, my favorite food is tacos with spicy sauce and soft tortillas.

**Lady Liberty:** Guess what? That’s not from America! What do you do in your free time?

**The Wall:** I text, and use Twitter most of the time.

**Lady Liberty:** Well, guess what? The iPhone you are texting with was invented by Steve Jobs whose father was a Syrian immigrant. What’s your favorite song?

**The Wall:** Oh I love Bob Marley songs! (begins singing) “One love, let’s get together and feel alright.”

**Lady Liberty:** Yeah, definitely Bob Marley, who came from Jamaica, getting us all together and making us feel alright. Well, singer songwriter Bob Marley grew up in Jamaica. I’m surprised that even when you’re just sitting there without moving you don’t notice the beauty that immigrants bring to the country. Just look around!

**The Wall:** I only see fields and factories from here.

**Lady Liberty:** Well, most of these fields that grow beautiful crops of oranges and avocados are worked by people from Mexico.

**The Wall:** I guess you have a point. I’ll try to be more open to new ideas. I guess you are right, we’ve always been a country of immigrants and whether I like it or not, they’ve had a huge impact on the country we are today.

**Lady Liberty:** Thank goodness, you were making me so angry I was turning green.

# Honorable Mention: “Overcoming the Obstacles”

By Charlotte Muller  
Chicago Chapter

My grandparents are immigrants.  
My grandfather  
couldn't jabber away in English;  
he was teased, yearned for his family.  
He had to adapt to  
a new environment,  
they had to work twice as laboriously.  
My grandfather was shoved around by  
unfeeling bullies  
because of the country he immigrated from.  
He shared his troubles with family,  
worked constantly to learn English,  
searched endlessly for ways to earn money.  
He accepted, and was inspired by,  
the kindness and generosity  
of others.  
My grandmother  
had to overcome discrimination.  
She had to be proud of her culture,  
had to learn English.  
She had to face rude questions and stares for  
looking, speaking, acting  
differently.  
She stayed by family, had close friends,  
pushed herself to be nice to others.  
She handled her  
time and used it to  
knock over barriers,  
and lift away hardships.  
She is always doing.  
She honors her culture, and  
embraces her new culture.  
My grandparents, and so many other  
immigrants, have jumped over obstacles.  
Had to learn, to work,  
to adapt to a new life.  
They had to kick away  
insulting remarks and  
indignant stares.  
We in the United States  
may now understand  
others'  
cultures, religion, and countries.  
We must embrace  
these immigrants,  
and welcome them  
and the bravery they have.



# Honorable Mention: Untitled

By Carly Rogalla

## South Florida Chapter

I awake. Swoosh! I can feel the harsh winter breeze brush against my face. Long streaks of amber brown hair fly back into my eyes. I can picture the smooth amber sap rolling down the trees in spring. I can see the sun, with amber rays, beating down on the beach in summer. I can imagine the amber leaves falling from trees in the fall. But nothing is amber in winter. Everything is coated in a thick layer of white frost. White snowflakes dance across the sky. But no color, just white.

“Paige,” Papa hollers from downstairs. “Remember that we are leaving tomorrow. Pack up half of your clothes. We are riding on a small boat that must hold lots of people.” My shoulders droop. I don’t want to leave the rolling hills and rows and rows of flowers in the meadows of Switzerland. I can picture the vibrant colors. But I can only imagine.

I board the boat with caution. The deck moves and it seems as if the whole town of Bellinzona, Switzerland is trying to board the same smelly ship. I carry my heavy bag and struggle to keep my balance. Mother is carrying my little sister, Lynn, and Papa is carrying all of the other luggage. The boat sways back and forth, left and right. I hum a little tune to the beat of the waves.

Boom-Boom!  
Splash-Splash!  
Crash-Crash!

To me the boat is an evil monster waiting to crush my dreams. The ship lures its passengers in, who will soon be experiencing their worst nightmares.

When I see where we will be sleeping, I feel as if the frightening monster has just struck an arrow through my heart. I slowly lie down on the stiff mattress imagining all the pleasant times I had with Marie and Kathryn, my two best friends. I will miss them dearly. But deep inside my heart, I know that life in America can’t be so bad. After all, many people in my class are quite jealous that I get to travel many miles across the big blue sea and travel to America. Papa says that the reason we are going to the U.S. is for a better life.

I awake to the sounds of beating waves. Mother is on the mattress next to me.

“Paige,” she says in a sweet voice that lights up my morning. “Did you sleep well?” she asks.

“No,” I reply in a tired voice. “The mattress is too hard. I had a nightmare that when we got to America I ate American food, dressed in American clothes, and over time I forgot about Switzerland.” She wraps her arms around me. A tear rolls down her eye and hits me on the head. Then I realize something. Coming to America is Mother’s dream come true, and she is sad that I am not enjoying it with her. Suddenly a ball of guilt forms in my stomach.

“Mother, I’m sorry.” I lay in her arms and wait for our new journey.

# Honorable Mention: “Living Color: The World I See”

By Naseam Smith  
Nevada Chapter

When I think about this nation, I can't ignore immigration,  
Because, really, this country is built on just that foundation.

From food, to culture, merging with sports and education,  
Is born a vivid melting pot of a brilliantly spiced civilization.

My belief in pro-immigration is supported by a simple explanation.  
My ancestors journeyed here, so I extend the invitation.

When I see the Statue of Liberty, it screams “Cultural Exploration.”  
Living among the mixture of others should extend to my generation.

Living in black, gray, and white is a form of multicultural dehydration.  
Youthful yellows, radiant reds, and beaming browns, emit colorful inspiration.

Besides the Native Americans, our history is assembled with migration.  
So who are we to judge who's in or who's out of this nation?