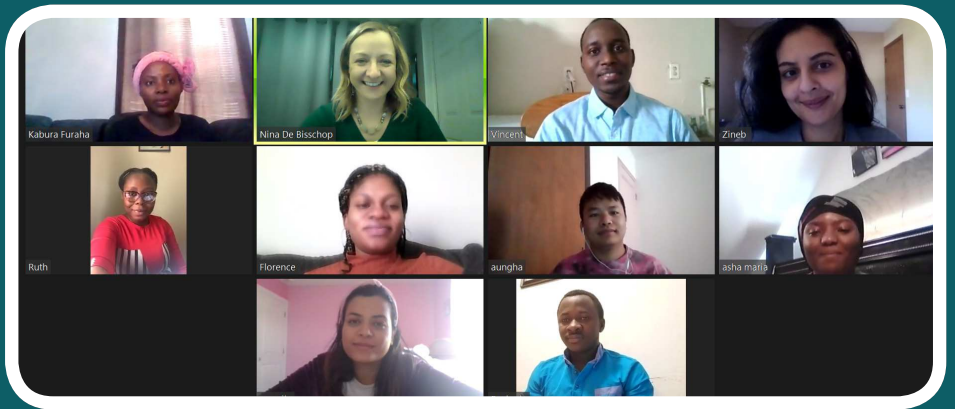




INTERNATIONAL VOICES

at Black Hawk College

FALL 2020



OUR SIDE OF THE STORY

Table of Contents

Mieaad Abdalla

Weddings in Sudan.....3

Noor Adel

Believing in Yourself.....5

Rachade Agoro

Consequences of the 2005 Rebellion in Togo.....7

Rugaia ELtayeb Attiyah Allah

Sudanese Culture.....8

Farida Baba Traore

My Life as an Immigrant in the USA.....10

Khaoula Benhanachi

The Holiday Eid Al-Fitr in Algeria.....12

Pramila Bhattarai

Traditional Holidays in Nepal15

Aliou Diouf

The Tabaski Feast in Senegal.....18

Minsun Fletcher

Self-Care During a Pandemic21

Kabura Furaha

Traditional Drummers in Burundi.....23

Rhezlane Gourari

Life in Morocco25

Aung Ha

A Better Life in the U.S.....27

Zineb Haimoud

An Immigrant's Life During a Pandemic29

Ali Hayder

My Journey to a Country of Freedom32

Humbelina Herrera	
Mazatlán Carnival	34
Ruth Hounkpe	
To Be Educated in an Illiterate Family	36
Za Iang	
Moving from My Home Country to a Different Country.....	39
Asha Maria	
Gender Roles in Burundi.....	41
Jamie Mondragon	
Places to Go on Vacation in Mexico.....	44
Juan Ortiz	
Things I Wish I Knew When I Was Young.....	47
Rahem Ranjit	
The Role of a Son in Nepalese Society.....	49
Vincent Rurayi	
<i>Fufu</i>	52
Akouvi Tossou	
How I Was Saved from Suicide.....	54
Gedeon Yacoubou	
Responsibilities of the Firstborn Child.....	57

**These essays and cultural pieces were written by the students in the ESL
Advanced Writing class.**

We would like to thank the Marketing Department for designing the cover.

Nina De Bisschop and Erin Ogden

Mieaad Abdalla

My name is Mieaad Abdalla. I was born in Sudan in the city of Omdurman. I moved to Egypt when I was only two years old. I just turned 18 in April. I graduated from Rock Island High School. This is my first year at Black Hawk. I don't know what I want my career to be, but my goal would always be to be successful in a job that I enjoy. I'm an introvert. That means that I'm not a very outgoing person. I like to keep things to myself, and I don't open up easily, but I'm currently working on that by trying to talk to more people and be more outgoing. I can speak Arabic fluently.

Weddings in Sudan

Wedding preparations in Sudan last for days. The traditions are a mix of culture and religion. Arranged marriages are pretty common in Sudan. But whether the marriage was arranged or not, the groom has to go on a visit to the bride's house with his parents or the whole family to ask for the bride's hand in marriage. They usually bring sweets and gifts with them. In Sudan, people have a lot of respect for their family, so the family approval is so important. If they don't approve of the marriage, then it usually doesn't happen. During the visit, both families talk about the *muher*, which is the money that the groom brings for the bride that she can use however she wants. He also has to bring golden jewelry for the bride that she will be wearing at the wedding ceremony. Sometimes, they also bring clothes, and they also bring chocolate and soap and things to make the bride smell good.

The bride has to stay at home for about two months to prepare herself for the wedding. That starts with something called *duhan*. It's a wood that they burn in a hole and put a chair on top of the hole. The bride takes all her clothes off and sits on the chair and covers herself with a big blanket. That wood has a lot of health benefits, and it makes the body smell good because the wood itself smells really good. After the *duhan*, the bride does something called *delaka*. It's like a body scrub that looks like dirt. It smells really sweet and good. The bride will keep using that body scrub throughout the two months.

After the bride finishes preparing herself for the wedding night, the groom reserves the hall for the wedding ceremony, but the bride is the one that has to pay for the dinner that will be served at the wedding ceremony. Also, before the wedding day, the bride's mom makes lots of sweets, and a small group of women will take them to the groom's mom's house. They will all sit and eat, and each one of them will get a gift.

There are two parties that happen before the wedding: one for the bride and one for the groom. Both parties happen at the same time. It's called the henna party. The party for the groom only includes the groom, his male family members, his best friends, and the bride's male family members, so it's a male party where they spend time with the groom and apply henna on his hands and feet. The bride's party only includes female family members and friends. They sing songs for the bride and get a henna artist to draw henna on her hands and feet. Her friends also draw henna on their hands.

After the henna parties, there is something called the *reges al areas* (the bridal dance) where the bride gets dressed up and has make up on. Usually, only women are allowed to attend this dance, and the groom is the only male that is allowed to be in there because the bride is going to be dancing in front of all the guests, and she is going to have a dance with the groom where she falls and the groom tries to catch her. In today's world, you might find bridal dances where both sexes are allowed, but it's rare. The

dance is really serious to the point that the bride will hire a dancer so that she can learn all the moves correctly. The dances are very sensual.

Right before the wedding, the groom and the bride get all dressed up and go to take professional pictures. After the pictures, they go to the wedding hall where everyone is waiting for them. At the wedding, traditionally, the bride wears a beautiful red *thaube* with gold, and the groom wears a white *jalabiya*, but he also has to have red somewhere on his clothes. In today's world, you will also see the white dress and the black suit worn by couples for their wedding, and some people do wear both at the wedding night.

Sudanese weddings are always packed; you don't have to be invited to attend a wedding, which makes them fun and unique.

The Sudanese *thobe*

The Sudanese *thobe* is a very traditional piece of clothing that is worn by Sudanese women. Sudanese men wear something different called *jalabiya*. The Sudanese *thobe* is a colorful dress with beautiful designs. There are different types of *thobe* for different occasions. There are ones that are casual and can be worn every day, some that are for parties, some for weddings, and some for funerals. No matter what it's used for, it's a huge part of Sudanese culture, and Sudanese women still wear it today.



Noor Adel



My name is Noor. I'm 18 years old, and I was born in Iraq. I came to the United States five years ago with my family for better opportunities. I came from a country that lacked opportunities because of the government that led it. Also, my house got bombed, but God protected us, and nothing happened to my family. I have three brothers older than me, and two sisters younger than me. I haven't decided what I want to be, but I'm very passionate about fitness and health in general. I started working out when I was only 14 years old. I wasn't consistent until two years ago. I admire the gym because it helps me gain confidence, strength, and stress relief as well. In the future, I want to inspire others and motivate them to work out. The gym helped me to be strong mentally and physically. I hope one day that I make my parents proud of me.

Believing in Yourself

Every successful person truly believes in who they are, knows that they can accomplish their goals, and has a positive mindset. Believing in yourself means having confidence about who you are; however, that doesn't mean being arrogant. People who believe in themselves have a prosperous life. When I came to the United States, I struggled with believing in myself because of the fact that I didn't know the language; thus, I decided to work on myself and believe that I can achieve my goals. It's very important to know your self-worth because it substantially influences your choices and decisions to be a successful person. Believing in yourself needs a lot of practice to control your thoughts; in addition, you have to be patient with yourself. There are many ways to enhance and improve believing in yourself. I'm going to share with you three ways. In order to believe in yourself, you need to have positive thoughts, courage, and take care of yourself.

One way to help you believe in yourself is to have positive thoughts. It's so important to think positively because it's going to contribute to developing your confidence. Practice positive self-talk; for example, instead of saying, "I give up. This is too hard," say, "I can try again with a different method." You need to be able to control your negative thoughts; otherwise, you're going to overwhelm yourself, and stress out. Your actions rely on your thoughts, so be careful what you say about yourself when you want to make successful decisions.

Also, to be positive, you need to surround yourself with positive people. You don't want to be around toxic people who don't know your worth and doubt you. Finally, try to use affirmations to nourish your brain with positive thoughts. Being able to control your negative thoughts is one way to have confidence about who you truly are. Secondly, being courageous is another way to help you believe in yourself. Challenging yourself to take significant risks is one way to encourage you to stand up for

yourself. Teach yourself that it is okay to say “No” to others. Go into situations you're not familiar with and learn to be okay with it. Tell yourself that it is okay to fail; thus, this is only going to teach you a lesson. You need to embrace the things that you are scared of. Face your fears and don't let them hold you back from believing in yourself. Being courageous is one of the most important things that can help you to start believing in yourself.

Finally, taking care of yourself is very important to start believing in yourself. Nourish your body with healthy food; also, treat your mind and body to regular exercises. Practice breathing regularly; this is going to help you control your stress. Try to do the things you enjoy every day. Also, find ways to relax, for example, meditating, taking a walk, and listening to music. Another way is to get enough sleep because sleep can have a huge impact on how you feel emotionally and physically. Being able to take care of yourself has huge effects on believing in yourself. You need to exercise, breathe regularly, relax, and get enough sleep.

In conclusion, you should believe in what you're capable of. Everyone can accomplish any goal they want, but they need to believe in themselves. Your thoughts are the reason you are what you are right now. Whenever you think negatively, instead, find a positive way to switch it. What you believe about yourself determines who you become, so have positive thoughts and faith in yourself. Sometimes, we think we cannot accomplish something, but we just need to have control of our subconscious mind and the courage to take steps toward our goals. Finally treating our body with healthy food and regularly exercising is very important to help you believe in yourself.

Makhlama

A delicious famous Iraqi dish is called Makhlama, which is basically a breakfast. I grew up eating this recipe with my family every morning; in addition, it's one of my favourite Iraqi dishes. My mom used to make this dish on a lazy weekend day because it's very simple and tasty. It's made out of eggs, onions, tomatoes, potatoes, and spices. You can also add some ground beef, but it's optional. First of all, you need to fry the onions and the potatoes together. Next, you add the tomatoes to the other ingredients because they cook very fast. Lastly, you add the eggs and scramble them with the other ingredients. You're going to blend all the flavors in one pan. You can sprinkle some cilantro and cheese on top if desired. It's served with warmed Iraqi bread or any type of bread.



Rachade Agoro



I respond to the name Rachade Agoro. I'm from Togo, a West African country, specifically from the city Sokode in the central region. I was born in 1997 in the same city. I got my high school diploma at Cheikh Hamdan bin Rachid of Sokode. After that, I went to the University of Lome, the capital of Togo, where I was in the Languages and Arts Department. I'm currently a Black Hawk College student. I'm from a polygamous family, and I have four brothers and one sister. Before my arrival in the USA, I was studying to become a teacher. But now, I no longer want to be a teacher. Now I either want to become a technician or informatician in my future. I try to simplify everything for people around me, and I like organized people.

Consequences of the 2005 Rebellion in Togo

After thirty-seven years as president, Gnassingbe Eyadema passed away on February 5, 2005. The same day, his son Faure Gnassingbe was nominated president illegally and against the constitution. The Togolese people refused this decision, and a rebellion was formed. This rebellion led to lives lost and slowed down the economy and infrastructure progress.

After the events that occurred in 2005, the consequences were various consequences. First, one of the worst effects after these events were the lives that were lost. After the new president was nominated illegally, the Togolese decided to protest against this decision made by some military heads. Therefore, in order to control the rebellion, they decided to use violence against the population, and this violence resulted in a lot of people's deaths.

Additionally, another effect was the slow-down of the economy. As one of the worst in West Africa, Togo's economy was not stable before the 2005 events. Unfortunately, after these events, the economy became the worst in West Africa due to international sanctions inflicted on Togo. All neighboring countries closed their borders, and economic sanctions against the government of Togo were implemented. Also, the country's public debt increased considerably, and then poverty increased.

Finally, destruction and regression of infrastructure progress was another effect. During the events, a lot of structures like post offices were destroyed. Public offices and services were mostly the victims of this destruction. Some of them were burned. As a result, Togo regressed a lot in terms of infrastructure development.

To conclude, the 2005 events in Togo caused a lot of damages in Togo. Principally, these damages cost a lot of lives, influenced the economy negatively and caused a regression in the development of the infrastructure.

Rugaia ELtayeb Attiyah Allah

My name is Rugaia Altayeb, and I was born on March 28, 1998 as a first child of three to a lovely Sudanese couple. My name in Arabic means spell or enchantment. I was nicknamed Roka, which I found quite adorable. I'm from a city in Sudan called Wad Madani, which lies on the west bank of the Blue Nile. We moved to Egypt when I was little and spent our lives there as refugees. My father passed away when I was only a little girl, and I miss him every day. My mother worked hard to support us and get me and my two brothers into school. I attended the Sudanese school in Egypt and later got accepted into Cairo University to study pharmacy. I had many friends in school and college. I realized quickly which people I wanted to keep in my life, and I'm proud to say I made a good decision. I worked in Egypt and helped my mom with the bills. During my second year of college, we traveled to the United States and even though I miss my friends back home, I enjoy living in the United States. I enjoy cooking, especially making desserts and pastries, reading novels and watching romantic comedies. I would describe myself as a fun loving, sweet and kind girl. My career goal is to be a successful pharmacist. I want to study hard and help people.

Sudanese Culture

Every culture has certain rules telling people how to act or talk, especially in a social setting. A foreigner who doesn't know the culture of a certain place while visiting it could fall into trouble. There are differences between the culture in Sudan and the one in the US. One who is new to a certain culture may face miscommunication, conflicts, and problems, which could lead to losing a job or even end in a fist fight.

In the United States, in a social setting, not maintaining eye contact when speaking to a person is considered rude as it suggests that the person isn't listening or paying attention, whereas in Sudan looking a person in the eye is considered rude and disrespectful as the Sudanese people believe that it's a threat. This difference can cause a misunderstanding, hostility, and a struggle on both sides, so it's best to learn about the culture beforehand. In Sudan, especially when speaking to an elder, one must look down as a sign of respect. In the US, when first meeting someone asking about their marital status and other details is very intrusive and not common while in Sudan when first meeting someone, it is very common to ask about their marital status and occupation because it will help determine how one must interact with the person. This may cause problems to immigrants in the US as it may seem as very intrusive and creepy.

One of the main difficulties Sudanese face when they move to the US is the difference in body language. The differences in cultures collide, and it is very hard at first to change everything one has learnt to learn a new culture. For example, when I first arrived, seeing people of the opposite gender showing physical affection to one another seemed very different and new to me because in the Sudanese culture, physical affection among the same gender is normal, but between the opposite gender it is prohibited. While sitting with someone, one must not point the soles of their feet at another person as it is considered very rude while the way a person sits or points the sole of their feet isn't a problem in the US. Using your left hand to offer or receive anything is not recommended since the left hand is used for cleaning and hygiene whereas you can use whichever hand to receive or accept things and greet people in the US. In Sudanese culture, being very close to someone as they speak is normal while in the United States it is considered inappropriate and uncomfortable. In Sudan, like in many Arab countries, people greet each other with kisses and hugs while in the United States the same greeting from a stranger would be considered harassment.

Hospitality in the Sudanese culture is very important and is taken very seriously. Offering a beverage to a guest is considered a sign of friendship, and it is considered very shameful to be a bad host. Being a good host means that one must serve their guests food and drinks. If the host is poor, they must serve water. To be a good host also means to ensure the conversation is welcoming and friendly and sit in a very welcoming position, which means one must not cross their hands or their legs. Even though hospitality in the US is a bit similar to Sudan, there are a few differences such as declining an invitation is normal in the US while in Sudan it would be shameful and the way a person sits isn't read into like in the Sudanese culture.

In Sudan, respecting the elders is a very important thing. When greeting an elder, one must kneel or bend to show respect and kiss the foreheads of grandparents and parents. You aren't allowed to call an elder by their first name, which is not the same case here. People refer to elders by their titles such as Uncle, Aunt, Doctor or Haji while in the US people refer to elders and people of higher status as Mr., Miss or Mrs. or by their first name if the relationship allows it.

It is important to understand that not every culture is the same, but we must respect every culture. Especially when we visit a certain place, we must learn and obey the culture of the given place, as the famous saying goes, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." In addition to language, immigrants have a lot to get used to like learning about the culture and therefore the people, which may be done by observing other people of the culture interact, researching online, not being afraid to ask about one's culture and making a genuine effort to learn the ways of a new country's culture thus making new friends, respecting the law and the people of the country.

Weddings in Sudan are distinctive and full of joy and pleasure. The families of the bride and groom are happy. One of the first customs and traditions of Sudanese society at weddings begins with the groom and a part of his family going to ask for the hand of the bride that he chose to be his life partner from her family. After the completion of the engagement, the stage of preparing called *sheila* begins. It consists of assembling the bride's supplies of perfumes, Sudanese clothes, her ensemble and other clothes, skin care creams, accessories, shoes and other things. There is an inherited tradition in which the so-called "wind blowing" is performed for the bride. Here, aunts and neighbors of the bride meet to participate in making the Sudanese perfume for the bride, which is a customized perfume used by married women, and this day is not devoid of songs and some dance. After that, a date is set (the marriage contract), and everyone who comes to the contract is honored, even if they are not invited. Here the bride wears the Sudanese dress, and the groom wears *galabia* and turban, and the day will be delightful with playing the beautiful Sudanese songs inherited from our grandmothers. After that, the groom's henna is determined, and one of the groom's sisters puts henna on the hands and feet of the bridegroom among his friends and family. Sudanese songs are also sung with the *doluka*, and it is a beautiful and joyful day. On the other hand, there is the bride's henna in the midst of her friends, her family, and some members of the neighborhood. A dance party is held between the relatives and friends of the bride in training for the dance of the bride, which takes place on the wedding day. On the morning of the wedding day, breakfast is brought by the bride's family, and the "breakfast of the groom" includes the best foods for the groom's family and strengthens the relationship between the two families. In the evening, the wedding ceremony is held, and all the family, friends and neighbors are invited to attend the cheerful event full of songs and dancing. In the last part of the wedding ceremony, a so-called *jirtuq* is made, for which the bride wears a red Sudanese dress decorated with the most beautiful shapes, and the groom wears a white *jalabiya* with red lines at the edges. The mother of the groom begins by tying a red cloth called *harira* around the hands of both the groom and the bride, and a blind is placed on the groom's head, which is a white color with a distinctive smell, and beautiful traditional songs are played. After that, the "Bride's Dancing" takes place in the presence of the ladies, the groom, and the bride only. The bride begins to dance harmonious dances inherited from our old grandmothers, amid the applause of the ladies and the singing of some of them using the *daluca*. Thus, the marriage ceremony takes place according to Sudanese traditions and culture.

Farida Baba Traore

My name is Farida Baba Traore. I am from Togo, West Africa. I have one brother and one sister. When I was 17 years old, I was in Africa with my two siblings and only with our mom. Our dad had left Africa when I was 5 years old, but now we are all here with him. Time flies, and we have been here for 5 years. We are still continuing our education and working part-time jobs. I could not believe that I improved my English because I remember when we first got here, I could not speak that fast and was shy to speak. I am preparing that one day I will visit my family back home in Togo and be thankful to all my teachers who taught me a little English and how to write before I got to the US.

My Life as an Immigrant in the USA

When I was in Togo, I had many dreams about how wonderful my life would be in America. I thought I would study for two years and get a good job in an office at a big company. However, reality has been very different from what I expected.

My plan was to study business courses for two years and be ready to work in an office, but I had to take English classes for too long. Therefore, I could not get the job that I had dreamed of. I could not wait for two years to get my dream job, so I got a job at McDonald's. It helps to pay my bills, but I feel sad and frustrated.

Actually, before I came here, I watched American TV shows, and I thought it was easy money. Everyone in the movie had fancy cars, big houses, and fashionable clothes, but I found that it was difficult to make money. Everybody needs money, but it is hard to make enough money working at McDonald's. The worst part is not having money for a car. If you have a car, you also need money for insurance and gas.

In conclusion, the things I expected such as taking business courses, having good jobs, and making enough money didn't happen. I remember my first day in Moline, I was tired and lonely because there were not a lot of friends. In the meantime, I have made a lot of friends, and I appreciate my job at McDonald's for now. I still have a dream about a wonderful life in America, but the reality was difficult in the beginning.

Riz au Gras

Riz au gras is the most amazing and delicious dish in my country Togo. It is also the most common food in my country, and we make it for ceremonies, weddings and birthday parties. We have different sorts of rice to make *riz au gras*. Some rice we use is couscous rice and long grain. We also used Maggi seasoning, thick tomato in cans, meat, chicken, shrimp and soy sauce to make *riz au gras*. To start the dish, you need to cut and wash the onions, green peppers, garlic, leaves, rice, carrots, and ginger. First, we put the oil and onion in the pan and keep stirring it. After that, we add the thick tomato and the seasonings. We have to wait a little bit and put the meat broth or chicken in that. We wait for five minutes to wash the rice and put it in the microwave for a little bit. After that, we put the washed rice in that mixed broth. We mix and cover it with the lid. After another six minutes, check to see if the *riz au gras* is done cooking. Otherwise, if it is not ready yet, leave it on the stove for another 3 minutes. The dish could be served and people could start eating it with all the delicious smell and taste.



Khaoula Benhanachi



My name is Khaoula Benhanachi. I am from Algeria, and I am 30 years old. I am married, and I have three cute kids. My son Mohamed Idris is 8 years old, and my two daughters are Belqees, 7 years old, and Lamees, 2 years old. I finished my education in Algeria. I got my BA degree in 2010, but here in the USA, I need 38 more credit hours to get my BA degree here. I am working as a Bilingual Paraprofessional for Arabic in the East Moline School District. I came to the USA in 2010 after my graduation and a week after my wedding, so it was a double trip my honeymoon and my immigration. I got my US citizenship in 2014. I am finishing my ESL program at Black Hawk College. I want to complete my credit hours in Education field because I love teaching and I want to be a teacher in an elementary school. I hope to complete my master's degree and my PhD in education, too.

The Holiday *Eid Al-Fitr* in Algeria

Algeria is an Arab country located in the north of the African continent. It's between Morocco and Tunisia. It is the largest Arab country in Africa in terms of area. Its capital is Algiers, and it is the most densely populated country, and most of the population lives in the northern part of the country, due to a moderate climate. Algeria is also called the country of a million and a half martyrs, due to the number of martyrs of the national liberation revolution against the French occupation that lasted seven and a half years. The official religion in Algeria is Islam, and its first language is Arabic. Because Algeria is a Muslim country, it celebrates Islamic holidays such as *Eid Al-Fitr* and *Eid Al-Adha*. *Eid Al-Fitr* is an Islamic holiday on the first day of the month of Shawwal, one of the lunar months, which is a calendar for Muslims that has twelve lunar months. Muslims break the fast and celebrate the completion of the worship of fasting in the month of Ramadan.



At the close of the end of the holy month of Ramadan and the approaching *Eid al-Fitr*, Algerian families are accustomed to preparing in advance for this holiday. The father buys *Eid* supplies that are prepared, new clothes for him and his family, and decorates the house with lights and *Eid* decorations, while the women deep clean the house and change the covers and curtains, especially for the living room and the guest room, and then they begin to prepare the most delicious dishes of sweets. Algeria is very famous for its sweets, as it is the first in the Arab world and the second in the world in the sweet category. That is why they are interested in making many types of sweets, as the average number of types of sweets in a family is about 10 or more dishes, and all of



them are distinguished by the unique wonderful taste and elaborate decoration. Among the most famous sweets are: *Al-Makrout*, which is called the Sultan of the Table or the King of the Table, Algerian *Baklawa*, *Sabli*, *Dziriyat*, *Arayesh*, *Makroud el louz*, and many others.



The night before *Eid AL-Fitr*, it's a very busy night and everything should be ready for the next day, so the women serve their sweets on special plates, and they put them on the coffee table or on the buffet table with a special set of coffee and teacups, and they cover everything. Then the whole family goes to the hair salon to get their hair and nails done. After that, they get their new clothes ready for the next day, and everyone is very happy and so excited.

It's the day of Eid! Everyone wakes up very early; they get dressed up, and they go to the mosque for *Eid* prayer. It is a special prayer just for *Eid*. After the prayer, they go back home, they get their breakfast, and they start calling and congratulating each other on the holiday, and give their kids money instead of gifts. The kids go out to celebrate with their friends, and go together to the toy stores and buy different toys, and then they go to their closest family member's house to congratulate them, and those family members welcome those kids and give them their sweet dishes and juice and also money. The kids are very happy, and they keep going in groups to their family members and their neighborhoods too until they get tired, or it's time to go back home. The women and men spend the first day at home relaxing and welcoming the kids who come to them, and the women give them sweet dishes, and the men give them money.

On the second day of *Eid AL-Fitr*, the brothers and sisters meet together in their parent's house with their kids, and they take a dish of sweets with them, and they have a special lunch together: couscous, Algerian soup, *shtiitha tajin* made with lamb, sweet tajin, a special bread called *kasra*, and much more. After that, they have tea or coffee with different sweets, and everybody is so happy, and they talk and laugh with each other about good stories and happy memories, and the kids play with their cousins and share their new toys too.



On the third day of Eid, the families visit each other, and they exchange their sweet dishes, and then they go out together as a group of families and have a picnic outside in a beautiful park. The kids play on the playground or play soccer, and the women serve the sweets with coffee or tea, and sometimes the men barbecue and sometimes just relax and have fun with their family.

Eid AL-Fitr in the USA is a little bit different because we don't have our family members with us here, so we celebrate together as a Muslim community from different countries. We see a lot of traditions for the celebration of *Eid*. Also, the *Eid* prayer is held in an open space that can fit a big number of people. After the prayer, usually, the Islamic Center serves breakfast for the community and the neighborhood. In the afternoon, they set up a festival, and all the families are there to celebrate *Eid*, so you can see bouncy houses for kids, ice cream trucks, food trucks, and a lot of surprises, especially for kids. For me as an Algerian woman, I make some sweet dishes, and we buy gifts for my kids, and we celebrate with our community. On the second day, I cook some Algerian food, and we invite some of our friends to share our happiness and our traditions with them. Also, here in the USA, the Islamic Center writes an excuse letter for the kids to take one day off from their school, so they can enjoy their holiday.

It is an amazing Holiday, and we are waiting for it every year to celebrate with our friends and families. In Algeria, it is an official holiday, so everyone has three days off to celebrate and enjoy their time in Eid Al-Fitr. All the Muslims around the world are so happy celebrating this holiday.



We have a prevalent traditional dish in Algeria called couscous. It is served on special occasions such as weddings, parties, holidays, and even special events. It is a delicious dish that everyone loves. To prepare couscous for six persons, you need the following: one pound of couscous, two pounds of lamb, two gravy, two tomatoes, two carrots, one onion chopped in small pieces, one hot pepper, a little butter, a little oil, a particular spice, and salt to taste. How to prepare it: in the pot, we put a little oil, onion, and the meat; we put them on low heat and stir for ten minutes. Then add the tomatoes and continue stirring for a few more minutes, and then add a liter of water and leave it until the meat is half-cooked. Add the vegetables with the spices, hot pepper and salt and stir until it simmers and turn off the stove. When it is done, put it on a large plate, add the butter to it, water it with broth, and decorate with vegetables and meat on top and serve hot. Couscous is so delicious, and it is prevalent and traditional.

Pramila Bhattarai



My name is Pramila Bhattarai. I was born in Nepal. I am 30 years old. It's been five years since I came to the United States. I am married. I have two kids: one daughter, who is eight years old, and one boy, who is three years old. Now, I live in Silvis, Illinois, which is very close to the college. I am a housewife and part-time student. I have been studying at Black Hawk College since 2019. I was working on my Bachelor of Science in medical lab technology in Nepal. I was unable to complete my studies in Nepal because I got a visa to the United States. This semester I am taking the advanced writing class. My major is nursing. I am planning to do my prerequisites at Black Hawk College and get a BSN from Western Illinois University. My hobbies are shopping, cooking, dancing and partying with family and friends. I also love to travel. Being a mother of two kids, it's a little hard for me to manage my time for my study. I usually do my assignments after putting my kids to bed. I know it is very hard for all of us to learn English, but with our hard work we can learn English and speak fluently. I used to feel very lonely before joining Black Hawk College. Now, I am very happy that I am learning English, and one day I will be able to speak English very well.

Traditional Holidays in Nepal

There are many festivals celebrated in Nepal each year. Nepal is a religious country, so all the festivals are based on religious beliefs. They believe in god, so they always worship god in the morning and evening as well. The three main festivals in Nepal are *Teej*, *Dashain* and *Tihar*.

Teej is the first main festival in Nepal, which falls in the month of August. According to the religious beliefs, the goddess Parvati used to pray hard at the bank of the Ganga River. She prayed for her husband's longevity. Since then, the *teej* festival has been celebrated by women. They all want their husband to have a long and healthy life. The *Teej* festival is celebrated for three days. The very first day is known as *Dar khane din* (feast). *Dar* refers to the varieties of food cooked especially for that day.

Married women gather at their parents' home or close relatives' home. Women wear special red clothes like a saree or kurta with gold ornaments. They sing *Teej* folk songs and dance together. The main food cooked on this day is *latte*, which is sticky rice cooked with ghee and sugar, bamboo shoots, rice pudding, goat meat, etc. Women sing, dance and eat for the whole night. The second day is a fasting day. Women dress up like brides. They wear everything bright. Married women wear special red clothes, red bangles and gold jewelry from head to toe. They worship the god Shiva and the goddess Parvati for the longevity and prosperity of their husband. They don't even



drink water on that day. On the last day, which is *Rishi panchami*, women usually take a bath on the banks of the river. Women do *panchami puja* by taking a bath in the river. *Panchami puja* is devoted to the seven sages.

The second main festival of Nepal is *Dashain*, which falls in the month of September. The *Dashain* festival is celebrated for ten days. During *Dashain*, the goddess Durga is worshiped. For *Dashain*, people usually clean their house and decorate it well. People believe that the goddess Durga will visit their house and bless them with peace and prosperity. The first day of *Dashain* is known as *Ghathasthapana*. People sow seeds of barley and rice in a small pot to grow jamara. Jamara is the grass grown from the seeds of barley and rice. The goddess Durga is worshipped for nine days, which is known as *Navaratri*. The tenth day is known as the main day *vijaya dashami*. People receive tika which is red colored rice seeds on their forehead and jamara on their head from their elder ones. People wear new clothes on this day. Men usually wear shirts and pants while women wear a saree, kurta and gold jewelry. People visit their relative's houses to receive tika and blessings for long, healthy and happy lives. People enjoy delicious food like goat meat, a variety of vegetables, steamed rice, pickles etc. In this way, people in Nepal celebrate *Dashain* with their family and relatives.



The third main festival of Nepal is *Tihar*. This is the festival of brothers and sisters, which falls in October. This festival is celebrated for five days. *Tihar* is the festival of light, during which the goddess of wealth Laxmi is worshipped. People clean their house and decorate it with lights for *Tihar*. People believe that if their house is clean, the goddess Laxmi will bless them with wealth and prosperity. The first day of Tihar is *Kag* (crow) *Tihar*. People worship crows and offer them grains. People believe that if they are happy, they will not bring any bad news in future. The second day of Tihar is *Kukur* (dog) *Tihar*. People worship dogs. They offer food like rice and milk to dogs. They put marigold garlands around the dogs' necks. People believe that dogs have the soul of dead people. The third day of Tihar is *Goru* (ox) *Tihar*. People worship oxen, which are important animals for farmers. The fourth day of Tihar is *Laxmi Puja*. On this day, people mainly worship the goddess Laxmi. People also play *Deusi bhailo*. *Deusi bhailo* is like a Christmas carol. People go to other houses to sing songs and dance. The fifth day of Tihar is *bhai tika*. On this day, sisters put five colors of tika on their brothers' foreheads and garlands around their necks. Sisters pray for their brothers' long and healthy lives with god. The sisters prepare a variety of sweets like *ladoo*, *peda*, and *selroti* for their brothers. In this way, *Tihar* is celebrated in Nepal.

In conclusion, Nepal is very rich in festivals. There are more than twenty festivals each year, but *Teej*, *Dashain* and *Tihar* are the three main festivals, which are celebrated by all Nepalese. All families and relatives reunite on these three main festivals to celebrate together.



Nepalese *Momo*

Momo is one of the most famous foods in Nepal. *Momo* can be eaten as an appetizer, lunch or dinner. It is also my favorite food. In my house back in Nepal, my mom used to make *momo* on weekends. I am sharing my mom's recipe for *momo*. The most important thing is we need to knead the dough first and let it rest for like fifteen minutes. The dough becomes super soft and easy to roll into a small round shape. The second step is to prepare fillings for the dough wrap. We can use any kind of minced meat like chicken, goat or pork. We can add chopped onions, garlic, ginger, and chopped green coriander. We need to add spices like cumin powder, coriander powder, *momo* masala, and black pepper. We need to mix all these things together in a big bowl. Then we can add salt and some olive oil. Our fillings and dough are ready. Third, we need to roll the dough into a small round shape. We need to put a small amount of filling in the center of the wrap. We can either make *momo* in a round or an elongated shape. We need to close the wrap properly; otherwise, all juice will come out. After we are done with the fillings and wrapping things, we need to put all the *momos* in the steam pot for fifteen minutes. Finally, the *momos* are ready within fifteen minutes. You can serve the *momos* with tomato chutney or any other dipping sauce.

Aliou Diouf



My name is Aliou Diouf, but most people call me Lindo, which has been a nickname since my childhood. I was born in Senegal, a country located in the far west of Africa. I'm part of a big family of 10 people, my 7 siblings, and my 2 parents. I was living in Dakar, the capital city of Senegal. I started elementary school when I was 6 years old. And at 17 years old, I started going to Yeumbeul High School, where I got my high school diploma in 2013. Thereafter, I attended the Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar, the biggest public university in Senegal, and one of the best in west Africa. I was studying BCGS (Biology, Chemistry, and Geosciences) in my first 3 years; after that, I was doing a professional bachelor in Geosciences. I, unfortunately, did not finish my last year of study because I had to move to the United States before my visa expired. As a result, I did not graduate. Hopefully, I will have the opportunity to continue my studies here and finally graduate from university. Once in the U.S, my dream has always been to go back to school and become an engineer in Mining Geology/Oil and Gas, to have a better job and help people in need, especially my parents and friends back in Africa. That's the reason why I'm improving my English now in order to continue my studies in this field at the university. My main hobbies are playing and watching soccer, surfing social networks, chatting with friends and parents, and reading.

The *Tabaski* Feast in Senegal

Eid al-Adha, also called *Tabaski* in Senegal, is an Islamic holiday celebrated worldwide each year. Although the *Tabaski* feast is celebrated almost the same way all around the world as recommended by the Islamic religion, each country has special events depending on their culture and their way of life. It is the biggest holiday celebrated in Senegal; that's why it's given special attention. Therefore, there are big events before, during, and after the holiday, ranging from the preparation to the celebration, and other particular acts.

The *Tabaski* feast is celebrated each year by millions of Muslims all around the world. It honors Ibrahim's submission to God, when the Almighty wanted him to sacrifice his son Ismael. Ibrahim accepted the divine recommendation but, at the last moment, God ordered the Angel Jeebrel to send a sheep from heaven to be sacrificed in place of Ismael. So, Muslims around the world celebrate this day to commemorate and perpetuate this act, which marked the Muslim religion.

Tabaski is the biggest festival celebrated in Senegal, and the big preparation that revolves around it makes it special. It starts just after the previous *Tabaski* feast because some people will start making projections on the next feast. While some people think about what kind of clothes to dress in the following year, some others think about what business to run. Farmers who provide sheep to the population start finding younger sheep in order to raise them and sell them the following year. Generally,

on the feast day people are used to saying to each other, “Fekke deweun!” which means, “See you next year.” So automatically, people think about the next *Tabaski* feast after each one.

However, the real preparation starts a couple of days before *Tabaski*, and people can feel it all around the country. Businesses start running well, TV and radio remind people all the time about the feast, and stores play music all day in order to attract clients. At the same time, traditional dressmakers who are everyone’s focal point are open 24 hours a day. Many Senegalese living overseas come back home to celebrate the feast with their families. The closer the *Tabaski* feast gets, the more intense the preparation gets. In Senegal, the government through organizations such as the Servir le Senegal Foundation comes to the aid of the poorest populations by offering them sheep and food vouchers so that they too can spend the holiday in the best conditions. At the same time, sheep set the scene in Dakar where we can see them everywhere tied up in street corners, on the roofs of cars, on carts, in houses, etc.

The celebration of the *Tabaski* feast is the most important step of the process. First, people wake up early in the morning with great joy and happiness. Children wash the sheep while older ones are getting dressed. People wear their most beautiful clothes and prepare to go to the mosque for the prayer, which is the first step of the Islamic recommendation for the day. All the family gets together and goes to the mosque chanting Allah’s name. After the prayer, the imam gives some recommendations and reminds people of doing good things and strengthening their belief in Allah. He slaughters his sheep first, and then people return home to prepare for the slaughter.

Another essential step of the celebration of the *Tabaski* feast is the sacrifice. Indeed, when people return home after the prayer, they prepare for the slaughter. They get rid of their beautiful clothes and put on adequate ones for the work. The head of the family usually takes care of slaughtering the sheep. To do this, they dig a hole in the ground, and the sheep is put there with the neck stretched over the hole, the feet firmly attached so that the sheep does not move, and then a very sharp knife slits the throat of the sheep and the blood flows into the hole. At the same time, women are making other dishes. Afterward, the dead animal is butchered. All the parts of the animal are used for a specific purpose.

The meals prepared during the *Tabaski* feast represent another essential aspect of the celebration. After the animal is butchered, one part of the meat is reserved for meals during the feast, and the other part is sent to neighbors who cannot afford a sheep to slaughter. The meat that is ready for the meals is given to the ladies who prepare many kinds of delicious dishes such as *Touffé*, *Thiebou Yapp*, etc. The celebration remains the most important step of the *Tabaski* feast, during which mutual aid is very present.

Senegal is a country that is known for the solidarity, hospitality, and mutual aid that exists among its people. That’s the reason why it’s called “Le Pays de la Teranga,” which means “The Country of Hospitality.” That solidarity and mutual aid are very present during big events like the *Tabaski* feast. First, the mutual aid starts several months before the day. In fact, during the preparation for the *Tabaski* feast, people need money for their expenses. So, wealthier people usually give money, food, or clothes to those in need; also, Senegalese living abroad send money to their families back home in order to prepare for the day. Furthermore, when the feast gets closer, some charities and other organizations donate sheep and food to poor people. Also, people from other religions are invited by Muslims to eat and to take away foods; proof of interreligious solidarity that exists in Senegal.

Finally, the last and most important proof of the mutual aid during the *Tabaski* feast in Senegal remains the famous *Ndeweneul*. It symbolizes solidarity, mutual aid, and the spirit of living together in Senegal. In fact, during the feast, people (especially children) get dressed up in their most beautiful clothes and go door to door in the neighborhood or visit their parents to ask for a special gift (mostly money) called *Ndeweneul* in Wolof. Children can receive lots of money from the different homes they

visit. Not only are children avid for this event, but also the older ones too. Therefore, the *Ndeweneul* stage is the most attractive event with incessant comings and goings in the houses, an extraordinary atmosphere with music in all corners of the city. It is also an occasion for people to seek forgiveness from each other expressed through “Balma Akk! Balnala! Fekke Dewen!”, and to get rid of their sins. The mutual aid in Senegal is a big reality and it is highly proven before, during, and after the *Tabaski* feast.

Thiebou Dieun

Thiebou Dieun is the most famous dish in the Senegalese kitchen. Not a week goes by without this dish being prepared in Senegalese households. Its notoriety is not limited only to Senegal, but it is also appreciated throughout the West African region and even beyond; hence the different names such as *Jollof Rice* in Nigeria or Ghana, *Benni Tchinn* in Gambia, *Riz Gras* or *Tchepp* in Guinea, Mali, etc. This dish is basically made with rice and fish, hence the name *Thiebou Dieun*, which literally means rice with fish. But there are other essential ingredients for the preparation, such as certain vegetables (carrots, cabbage, eggplants, sweet potatoes, peppers, cassava, onions,...), *Dakhaar* (made from tamarind fruit), *Beugeudj* (made from a mix of sorrel leaves and okra), *Soull* (made from a local natural spice), dried seafood, some natural spices (garlic, black pepper, green onion, green pepper,...), and tomatoes in case we're making a red *Thiebou Dieun*. The preparation requires a few steps: First, heat the oil in a pot, and then grill some of the fish. After that, grill the dried seafood lightly, add half of the *Nokoss* (a mixture of the natural spices, salt, and seasonings) and let it boil a bit. After the mixture is brown, add the water (a liter and half) and let it boil a little before adding the vegetables, the other part of the *Nokoss* and the fish. Let everything boil for about 40 minutes; at the same time, prepare the rice (clean and precook in the microwave). When the time is up, take out all the cooked ingredients from the pot and put them aside, gradually add the precooked rice and stir, boil over low heat for about thirty minutes, and your rice is ready. This can be served any day and at any time of the day as many foods, but it's usually served as lunch between 12 p.m. and 3 p.m. However, some people prepare this with chicken or meat instead of fish. In that case, we call it *Thiebou Yapp* (rice with meat) or *Thiebou Guinar* (rice with chicken).



Minsun Fletcher



My name is Minsun Fletcher. I am from Seoul, South Korea. I am 39 years old. I am married, and I do not have kids yet. I came to the USA in the spring last year and live with my husband in his hometown, Rock Island. I have parents in Korea. They are around age 70. I still miss them and worry since I am not near them, but with the internet, despite the long distance, I can communicate with them very often. I graduated university with a major in English Literature and had worked as a tutor in Korea. Now, in the US, I am thinking to change careers to the hospital field. To prepare for that, I am attending the ESL program first at Black Hawk College. Advanced English composition is my first class. I am nervous and a little stressed thinking English composition is too hard. At the same time, I am really excited to learn new things at my age. I hope I pass and will improve my writing skills.

Self-Care During a Pandemic

How do people take care of their health while staying at home most of the time while the Coronavirus pandemic is going on? When people are mostly at home, their physical activity is significantly reduced, which can pose a risk to health issues such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and so on. It is important that people not only do their part by practicing social distancing to avoid the coronavirus but also by taking care of their own overall health. Now, many students must continue their education through online classes, but they also need to take care of their health daily. Students can take care of their health better when they stay home most of the time because they have more free time, and it does not cost much. Self-care can be done by using nature, exercising, and getting good sleep.

First, we can use sunlight. It is said that the best cure from heaven is sunlight, which everyone can use. Sunlight is provided free of charge, and health care using nature is the best medicine. If you are at home, you can be mentally depressed or bored, so during this pandemic, people have been feeling more depressed; however, just by getting in the sun on a sunny morning or at lunch, you can see a change of mood and a lot of health benefits. For example, there are ways to eat lunch outdoors. It is not exceedingly difficult to take care of your health by lifting your sleeves and using the time to see the sun on your skin during the day. Also, sunlight is the best natural source of Vitamin D, and Vitamin D deficiency has been linked to coronavirus.

Second, we must exercise. If we are at home, our physical activity will be significantly reduced, making it easy to lack exercise; on the other hand, it is also an opportunity to exercise more because there is more time, and an effective way to exercise that anyone can do is walking. Besides, there are many articles in the literature that suggest treating a disease with a lot of walking. For example, it is not difficult to eat and walk for 30 minutes during lunch time, and you can get the sunlight as a bonus; therefore, when we make walking or exercise a lifestyle, it will make up for the lack of exercise for remote students. The

health benefits of exercising also include lowering your stress level, which will also help manage weight, reduce the risk of heart disease, manage blood sugar, and improve mental health and mood.

Third, we need to sleep well. When studying at home, there are no time restrictions, so sleeping time can easily get messy. Also, poor sleep can lead to hormonal imbalances, so even if you cannot fall asleep, it is better to turn off the lights during bedtime and sleep regularly so that you wake up in the morning. It is a great help to limit the intake of caffeinated beverages, such as coffee, to be able to sleep. When we sleep, the brain consolidates and practices what the student learned during the day and forms long-term memories; hence, enough sleep is vital for students to improve their academic performance.

Self-health management is not difficult, and anyone can and should do it. Hopefully, you are making health management a habit at some point. Thus, using nature, regular exercise, and good sleep can effectively raise your immunity and increase your home study efficiency.

***Kimchi* Recipe**

You can make the traditional Korean food, *kimchi*, at home. It is a fermented cabbage, so it is rich in lactic acid bacteria. It is usually served as a side dish so that you can eat it with rice as if it is a pickled side dish.

Ingredients: 1 cabbage, 1-2 tablespoons minced garlic, 1 teaspoon minced fresh ginger, 1 teaspoon sugar, 2 tablespoons fish sauce, 5 tablespoons red pepper flakes, 1 cup sea salt, water.

First, simply wash the cabbage and cut it into half. Second, use a large bowl, and put enough water to submerge half of the cabbage and add sea salt until the water tastes a little salty. Soak the cabbage in salt water for about two hours. Third, make the seasoning while soaking *kimchi* with fish oil, ground garlic, and ginger. You can add the vegetables you want to add, such as radishes and onions. Fourth, mix the seasoning with the *kimchi*, and then it is completed. *Kimchi* is made from raw vegetables and fermented in salt water.

You can eat *kimchi* just as you eat pickles, but *kimchi* is also often used with rice. You can eat it by putting it on the rice, or you can stir-fry kimchi.



Kabura Furaha



My name is Kabura Furaha. I am from Burundi, and I was raised in Tanzania. I am married, and I have three beautiful children. I have been living in the United States for 12 years. I am attending Black Hawk College to fulfill my dreams. I have been working in health care for six years. I am a certified nursing assistant, and my biggest goal is to become a registered nurse. After finishing my ESL classes, I would like to complete the nursing program so I can make my dream come true. Because I have faith in God, I know one day I will be a registered nurse.

Traditional Drummers in Burundi

Have you ever heard about traditional Burundian drummers? In Burundi, we have many traditions mostly in dancing and traditional drum music. People love to listen and dance to the traditional drums. In Burundian culture, a long time ago, when people gave birth to baby boys, the king would wait until the boys turned 10 years old, and he selected some of those boys from different families to *Abahebera* and *Intore* groups, to be trained in the kingdom. My uncle used to tell us how he loved and cherished the traditional songs. In Burundi, we have a several groups that perform traditional dances including the *Abahebera* and *Intore*.

Firstly, *Abahebera* are men who play traditional drums in Burundi. Years ago, the country of Burundi was ruled by the king. The king would select 35 boys from the selected families. They were the ones who had the right to play the hallow drums. The drums are made of wood and are covered with cow's skin. *Abahebera* perform on special days, which are the king's birthdays, royal family events, and Independence Day. On those days, *Abahebera* would play the traditional drums. For example, on the king's birthday, the king would invite people to eat and drink different kinds of food. They would play traditional drums to welcome the special guests. In addition, when the royal family would have an event, they played them. At that time, the drummers also sang and danced. *Abahebera* in Burundi wear a uniform; their clothes look like Burundi's flag. They wear red, green, and white clothes.

Secondly, we have *Intore*. *Intore* is a group of men who already prepared from the age of four until 35 years of age. *Intore* is a special dance, which is performed on holidays. Independence Day is a day people value and respect. They prepare a special meal and invite their families and friends to celebrate together. *Intore* in Burundi wear a uniform; they dress like warriors. Their clothes are made of tiger's skin. The button of the clothes looks like a skirt, and they tie their waist and shoulder with ropes. They also decorate their head with woven colored papers. When they are ready to perform, they hold a stick with a

blade on it. *Intore* were also the king's soldiers. *Intore* were meant to dance and to provide what the king wanted. The *Intore*'s outfits are beautiful to see, especially when they are dancing. In addition, now, young kids like to wear *Intore* outfits for different events. They are often invited to perform at different events in different countries.

In conclusion, Burundi has good groups of dancers. The outfits of the *Abahebera* and *Intore* are all so amazing. Those groups make the country of Burundi known all over the world. My wish is to see people around the world get to know Burundian culture. I hope people will go visit Burundi and see the traditional drummers.

How to Make *Fufu*

Fufu is a traditional dish. This dish is common in all African countries. All African countries like their *fufu* differently: some like their *fufu* when it is hard and others when it is soft. Africa has many delicious dishes, but *fufu* is a traditional dish that can be eaten anytime of the day. *Fufu* is very easy to cook.

You need cornmeal flour, cassava flour, and plantain flour.

First, you boil the water in a pot. When the water is boiling, add any kind of flour you like and mix it with the boiling water. Second, once the water is boiling, keep mixing it with a wooden spoon until it sticks together. After 10 or 15 minutes, when it sticks together, put it on a plate, and the *fufu* is ready to serve. *Fufu* can accompany many different soups, for example, fish soup, cassava soup, and vegetable soup. You must use your fingers when you eat it. This is how this recipe is made. I hope you really enjoy it if one day you decide to cook it.



Rhezlane Gourari

I was born on a winter day in December. Morocco is where I lived most of my life before I came to America. I lived in a small city with my parents, two brothers, and three sisters. Like all siblings, we fought all the time about anything, like dogs and cats. Sometimes, when I had money, I bought cake and candy, and I shared with my siblings, but I didn't know why until I grew up, and I realized I love them. I started school when I was six years old. I was hardworking at school, active, and patient if some child wanted to fight with me. When I was in middle school, I won a lot of books. I participated in competitions at school because I like reading books at the library every day. My attendance was perfect; I never missed school, except when I was sick. I planned to finish my education and to be teacher. I feel very happy when my dream and my goal become true. I am grateful to my parents because without them and without their support, I could not succeed in my life.

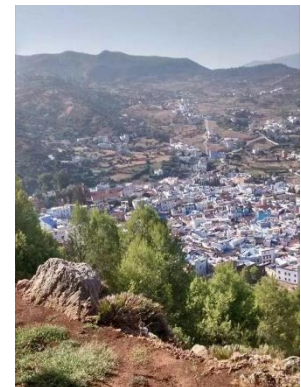
Life in Morocco

Morocco is an ancient country with a strong and different sense of culture. Morocco is a mountainous country located in the north of Africa, and it is bordered by the Mediterranean in the north and the Atlantic Ocean in the west. The Berbers are the original people of Morocco. In addition, Morocco had a big migration from Arab countries in the 7th century, as well as from Jewish, French, and Spanish people. Morocco is rich with culture, and it has kept the ancient architecture and traditional customs until now.

Algeria borders Morocco in the southeast. There are two high mountains: the Atlas and Mount Toubkal. Morocco is a constitutional monarchy with two legislative houses. The most popular holidays in Morocco are *Eid Al-Fitr* and *Eid Adha*. Agriculture is rich and varied from vegetables to fruits.

Morocco has various ethnicities. The majority of people in Morocco are Arabs and Amazighen. Also, there are French, Spanish, and Jewish people, who all live peacefully and share the same land. Arabic is the first language, and Tamazight became an official language in 2012. French is the third language, and Spanish and English are used all the time.

Finally, the cultural life in Morocco is a mix of Arab and Amazigh culture, which also includes aspects from the groups who have migrated such as Jewish, French and Spanish people. Daily life and social customs still focus on the home and family, and include watching TV together at home and watching soccer in cafes. On the weekend, people walk in the park or on the beach and go shopping in the boutiques. Moroccan cuisine is rich with spices; chicken, meat and fish are the most popular ingredients. The most famous dishes are *bastilla*, *tagine*, *harrira*, and *couscous*. The music is very varied depending on the area where you are. The most popular styles are *GNAWA*, *Chaabi*, and *Malhoun*.



In conclusion, Morocco is a beautiful country, fabulous and various in all fields. Anything you imagine you will find there. If you look in the South, you can find desert and shining stars at night, the West has the big beautiful mountain, the North has hills and rivers, and the East has big cities and golden beaches.

The Moroccan *Tagine*

Moroccan *tagine* is one of the most popular foods in Morocco. It is one of the most delicious foods. The *tagine* is a pot made of clay, and it preserves the food's nutrients and gives food a distinct flavor. I will tell you today how to prepare the Moroccan tagine step by step.

We need:

4 boneless pieces of chicken

Onion cut into slices

Tomato slices

One minced garlic clove

Two teaspoon of vegetable oil

Two potatoes cut into quarters

Two carrots

Green beans

Fresh cilantro, Cinnamon, saffron, salt and black pepper, paprika

How to cook the Moroccan *tagine*?

Tagine takes just 30 minutes to cook. The first step is to heat the oil in the *tagine* and add chicken and onion until it begins to roast for about 5 minutes. Then add salt and spices, and cilantro. Finally, pour in one cup of hot water, and add potatoes, carrots, and tomato slices. After that place the *tagine* over medium heat, and leave it for about 15 minutes.



Aung Ha



My name is Aung Ha and I was born on December 10. I am from Chin State, Myanmar, which is a small area in my country. I have three young brothers, and I am the oldest son in my family. Now my two young brothers live with my mom and dad in Myanmar, but one of my younger brothers lives in Malaysia. I finished high school in Myanmar. After high school, I went to college for two years, and my major was history. When I was 21 years old, I decided to leave from Myanmar because I didn't want to live with the bad government, and it was a very difficult time for me. I left my family, and my country behind. I went to a UN refugee camp in Malaysia. I lived there for almost four years. In 2015, I arrived in the United States. I first came to Lancaster, PA, and I lived there for two years. After two years, I moved to Moline. I now have a wife and two young daughters. I have been living here for almost six years. My future dream is to own my own business.

A Better Life in the U.S.

I have been in the U.S. for almost six years. I moved here from Myanmar where I grew up. Life in the United States is better than in Myanmar because education is better in the United States, salaries and job opportunities are better, and the governments are not the same.

First, education is better in the U.S. because school is free until college in the United States. In Myanmar, school is not free, and a parent must pay for it. Also, class sizes are smaller in the United States. In Myanmar, classes can have seventy students in the room. It is very difficult for the student and the teacher to learn because the class time is very short, and the students don't have enough time to ask a question to the teacher. Now, I understand that here the students go from class to class, but in Myanmar the teacher goes from class to class, so the teacher is always in a hurry to get to the next class. In addition, the computers are used in the classroom from an early age in the United States. In Myanmar, the teachers don't teach the students how to use computers at school because the government doesn't supply computers for the students at school.

Next, most people are in the lower class in Myanmar. In Myanmar, an average salary is three dollars a day, and sometimes it's also not easy to make that much, but in the United States, it is very easy to make more per hour. In the United States, there is a minimum wage in each state. In Illinois, the minimum wage is \$9.25 per hour. In Myanmar, many people make 50 cents an hour. Job opportunities are also better in the United States because there are many companies in the United States, and each state has many



companies. In Myanmar, job opportunities are very bad because there are fewer companies, and most are family companies. In Myanmar, some people get a degree, but they cannot get a good job because there are only small family companies. In the United States, if they have a degree, many people can get a good job.

Lastly, the governments are different because Myanmar is communist, and the United States is democratic. Myanmar is communist because the government uses the power to control the people, but in the United States, the government doesn't control the people. This is the reason I chose to leave Myanmar. I saw a government in Myanmar that was bad, and it didn't allow people to improve their life, so I came alone to the United States to have a better life.



In conclusion, life in the United States is better than in Myanmar because education, salaries and job opportunities, and the government are better in the United States. I am so glad to have come here because I will have a better life than other people in my family.

The Traditional Chin Festival *Long Yu*

Myanmar is one of the Southeast Asian countries. There are many traditional cultural festivals in Myanmar every year. Myanmar has 135 ethnic groups, and they each have their respective cultures. Chin is one of the ethnic groups located in the west of Myanmar. The Chin people live not only in Chin State in western Myanmar but throughout the country, especially in the western part of Chin State in Myanmar. My favorite cultural festival is *Long Yu* (the traditional Chin feast). Firstly, the festival is usually celebrated after all the crops have been harvested. The main livelihood of the Chin people in Myanmar is shifting cultivation. The crops harvested at the end of November are stored in a barn. The festival is usually held sometime between the end of February and the end of March. This festival usually takes two to four days. Depending on the amount of material the Chin people can afford, they kill two to fifteen *mithuns*. A *mithun* is a domesticated animal that lives in northeastern India, Bangladesh, Rakhine and Chin states. During the *Long Yu* festival, you can enjoy a variety of meat with traditional Chin rice-made wine. The festival is believed to enhance the dignity of the Chin people. Nevertheless, celebrating this event will require the individual to work harder. Moreover, it makes everyone work competitively. Second, celebrating *Long Yu* brings unity among relatives; it also binds all brothers and sisters or friends with love. When the *Long Yu* festival has come, friends from neighboring villages are invited to take part in the festival. Rice wine can be enjoyed with invited guests. Even some relatives who have not been seen for a long time meet at the *Long Yu* festival, having lots of friendly conversations with friends and other guests. Thirdly, lovers often meet at the *Long Yu* event. There are many young girls from other villages who come to the festival. Adult boys have the right to propose to adult girls. In addition, boys and girls can perform traditional dances at the festival. Therefore, the *Long Yu* festival can also bring a life partner. Finally, you can eat as much beef as you like, no matter how rich or poor you are. The *Long Yu* festival can even be called a form of charity. Beggars and people with disabilities are given priority. The elderly are also taken care of in this way. It can even be considered a big and noble donation that anyone can participate in. Young girls and boys prepare food for the elderly. The *Long Yu* festival can create good moral values. In conclusion, it inspires Chin people to work hard and not get bored. It is a festival of unity and harmony. It also promotes warm love and appreciation, mutual respect, and supportive behavior. It contributes to the spirit of self-sacrifice and generosity. It also fulfills the dream of destiny among young people. Therefore, I am very fond of the Chin *mithun*-sacrifice festival (*Long Yu*) in Myanmar.

Zineb Haimoud



My name is Zineb Haimoud. I am 29 years old, and I am married. I speak French and Arabic. I was born and raised in Casablanca, Morocco, a North African country bordered by the Mediterranean Sea in the north and the Atlantic Ocean in the west. I am the youngest child in my family, and I have four siblings. My father died when I was 11 years old. I finished high school in 2010. I got my bachelor's degree in economics and management in 2015, the same year I first met my husband. I worked at one of the biggest banks in Morocco and Africa in the department of risk management for three years. I had to resign because I got married, and I had to work on my visa process, which took one and a half years. I moved to the US in September 2019, which started my new adventure, trying to validate my diploma, learning English, and dealing with culture shock. Since I was a kid, my only dream was being a hospital CEO because I was inspired by my oldest sister who is a doctor, and I wanted to combine it with my characteristics as a leader. Now I am too far from my dream, but I want to stay on the same path. I want to be child counselor and found an association for disabled kids. I believe in efforts; if I work hard and study hard, I might succeed with God's help.

An Immigrant's Life During a Pandemic

Pandemics have been with human beings since the beginning of history. This word is still an abstract word for our generation. It was taught in school and even told as stories. Some of them became an inspiration for authors; others helped skilled people to become doctors, but most of them were the most brutal killers in human history. Still others impacted the economy and changed history. Nowadays, we are reliving what our ancestors experienced during a pandemic, but differently due to human development. COVID-19 is the pandemic for this era, and it has spread all over the world affecting our ways of life, our futures, and our health. As a new immigrant coming to the U.S, I had a dream about integrating into the U.S. culture and learning the language. Unfortunately, with the pandemic, my dream became a nightmare that I had to cope with. I came to the U.S last September after getting married to an American. My first six weeks in the U.S. were really challenging. I struggled to adapt not only to my new life as a newlywed but also to my life as an immigrant. In my home country, I was an independent woman who had never stayed at home, and work was an important thing in my life. In contrast, my limited communication skills in English and not having a driver's license made me reliant on my husband. For these reasons, I badly wanted to integrate into the society as quickly as possible. I wanted to learn more about the American culture, improve my basic English, and have a job.

In November, my life started to light up after taking an English class at the Black Hawk College Outreach Center. I studied for four months, and they were the best months that I have had here. There were lots of immigrants from all over the world and all age groups, which gave me hope and encouraged

me to work on my new life. Therefore, with my husband's encouragement, I started taking the bus, going to the gym, and preparing for my written driving test. After taking these steps, I became more motivated and relaxed. I felt like I was making real progress. Suddenly, all of this progress faded as the virus started to spread. In fact, the struggles of the first six weeks that had been so challenging showed up in March to terrorize me for six months this time. Again, I started another long journey from my newly found haven that led me to hell. My days were a mixture of terror, anxiety, insomnia, and depression because I could not do the things that give me pure bliss, such as going to the gym, to school, and for walks. Moreover, my life turned into a disaster, and my head split into two parts, one in Morocco and one in the U.S. Worrying about my family's safety and my obscure future here led me to a nervous depression. Also, I was deeply disappointed that visiting my family might be impossible. In the first two months of the pandemic, it was extremely tough to deal with the situation. Even though the school had found an alternative to keep us studying, I could not join them for Zoom meetings. Even my personal trainer sent me some videos to work out at home, but my mental blocks prevented me from doing so. After increasing my spirituality and being supported by my husband, family, and friends, I finally overcame my hurdles. In fact, I concluded that it is unknown when this chaos will end, so I just needed to get through this tough time. As a result, I went back to studying online, and I tried to find alternatives to help me find happiness again. I already knew that my delights manifested themselves in learning English and taking care of my physical and mental health. Therefore, I started watching my favorite shows with audio and subtitles in English. Also, I downloaded a lot of fairy tales on my Kindle along with audio books. Besides that, I exercised regularly at home while I was watching videos of personal trainers. Through all of this, I tried to develop a positive mindset and turned my home from a prison cell to a peaceful place.

With this in mind, new immigrants' lives have never been easy in the beginning, and adapting became even more difficult with the pandemic. However, the pandemic taught me in any case to always look for the bright side of a situation. Because of the pandemic, I learned I had the strength to turn my life around and persevere.

Moroccan Brides

Many brides want to look like beautiful fairy tale princesses in their white dresses. However, Moroccan brides want to look like queens from the ancient world. Brides need to wear at least five outfits, which represent the diversity of our culture. Accordingly, brides dress up in the outfits that reflect their family's region of Morocco, but they must be in green, golden yellow, blue, red, and white. The green one indicates fertility, and it is the first one to start the ceremony. Once the bride is seated, a group of women who are devoted to take care of the bride put a plate of boiled eggs, dried fruit, and henna in front of her. After that, the bride puts on a golden yellow dress and sits on a huge square cushion that is supported by four golden pillars and a triangular roof. The golden dress and cushion represent wealth and prosperity, so the crowd hoists her on their shoulders just like a queen from ancient Egypt. The third dress must be worn during dinner time, and it can be any shade of blue. This color is worn not only to show hospitality but also to symbolize transparency and trust. Next comes the most favorite dress for the brides, the red one. In fact, this outfit must be chosen carefully by the bride and her family because it shows which region they are from. Besides, it represents love, passion, and glamor. Finally, the most beloved dress that everybody at the wedding is waiting for is the white one. It is a universal custom, so Moroccan dressmakers got inspired by the European wedding dresses, and they successfully combined it with our own traditional outfits. This blend makes this last outfit a special and unique one.



Ali Hayder



My name is Ali Hayder, and I was born on 10/07/2000 in Mosul, Iraq. I have been living in the US for 6 years, and I live with family. My family and I had a long journey to come to America legally. In 2007, we had to move to Syria, and in 2014 the United Nations approved our application to get here. So, my family and I had to wait seven years to get to America legally. I have two brothers and three sisters, and my older sister is still back in Iraq. Also, I finished my high school in the US, and so did my siblings. Now, I am attending Black Hawk College, and I started as an ESL student. My dream is to be in the medical field, and I hope someday my dream becomes a reality.

My Journey to a Country of Freedom

I was very lucky that my parents moved from Iraq to Syria. I grew up in Iraq, and before 2003, life was wonderful and peaceful in Iraq. After 2003, killings, bombings, and kidnappings by terrorist groups started to increase. In 2005, a terrorist group attacked my people during a funeral in a mosque. Two years later, my family decided to leave my city, Mosul, and emigrate to Syria, seeking a better, safer life. I have lived in three different countries since I was born. So, in this essay, I will talk about my life in two countries and escaping from war to a safer area.

Because of the terrorist threat, my family decided to move to Syria. First of all, my family had lived in Iraq for hundreds of years, and everyone in the family was doing well. Before 2003, everyone was living peacefully, and everything was available. For example, we had great education, diverse neighbors, great medical teams, and all kinds of food. Also, it was very safe. For example, my father used to hang out with his cousins until 3 a.m., but when the war started, everything changed. After the war started in 2003, terrorists showed up, and they started killing, bombing, and kidnapping people. In 2005, I lost three of my uncles and three of my mother's uncles from a terrorist attack at a mosque in Mosul, Iraq. Early in 2007, we received a letter on the door, and it was saying, "Either get out, or we will kill you." The next day, we packed what we could carry and went to my uncle's house. We stayed at my uncle's house for a couple of days, and in those couple of days, my parents decided to move to Syria.

Our life in Syria before moving to America was hard. When we moved to Syria, we rented a small apartment in Aleppo. An Iraqi family recommended us to go to the United Nations organization. We had to go by bus because it is in Damascus. When we went there, the agent welcomed us, and he asked my parents some questions. We were qualified to get food stamps, cash, and health insurance from them. Also, the agent asked my parents if we wanted to go to a foreign country. My parents said, "Yes!"

and the agent gave my parents the option of which country we wanted to go to. My mother wanted Canada, but it was full. Because Canada was full, my parents chose America. My parents signed some documents, and the agent told us to keep waiting no matter what. In 2011, people started to protest in Aleppo, and my parents knew that something bad was going to happen. After the situation got worse in Aleppo, we moved to Damascus. We rented an apartment until our application to come to America was approved in 2014.

We are starting a new life in a country of freedom. Our trip was long and difficult because from Syria to Lebanon we had to use the bus, and we flew from Lebanon to Cairo. Then we flew from Cairo to New York, and from there we flew to Chicago, Illinois. We lived in Chicago for six months, and we moved to the Quad Cities because it's cheaper. In Moline, my mother started to work for the elderly people, and my father gets disability help from the government because he is a prisoner of war. Also, my sister, brother, and I graduated from Moline High School, and we started to go to Black Hawk College. My younger brother and sister go to elementary school, and they are doing well.



In conclusion, our journey from countries of war to a country of freedom was difficult and hard. We have accomplished our goal of escaping from a country of war to a safer, better country. Now, my family and I are U.S. citizens, and we are very happy that we are here.

Iraqi Food *Dolma*

There are a lot of unique things in my culture: food, clothes, jewelry, poems, holidays, etc., but I will choose food. There are many kinds of food that Iraq has, and I will choose one dish called *dolma*. *Dolma* can be translated to stuffed vegetables or grape leaf. It is made with vegetables like eggplant, green pepper, onion, tomato, potato, and zucchini. The ingredients are ground meat, rice, spices, tomato paste, and lemon juice. Also, the inside of the vegetables can be chopped and mixed with ingredients. *Dolma* can be served for any kind of event, and it has to be served on a big or medium sized round stainless-steel plate. Also, when we have a feast, my mother cooks it first, and she cooks other foods like chicken and rice.



Humbelina Herrera



My name is Humbelina Herrera. I was born in Tepehuanes Dgo on April, 26 of 1984 in the country of Mexico. I'm 36 years old. I'm the first of two children. My parents are Cristina Diaz and Rafael Rios. My father passed away in 1996 when I was 12 years old. I came to the United States for the first time in 2002, I lived in Nevada for a while until I settled in Davenport, IA in 2014. I'm married and I have three children. Two of them are girls. They are 14 and 13, and I have a three-year-old boy. I'm studying accounting at Black Hawk College. My goal for this semester is to complete my Accounting Clerk Certificate, but in the future, I would like to get my AAS in Accounting. My hobbies are walking by the riverside and working in the garden.

Mazatlán Carnival

Mazatlán is a harbor in Sinaloa, Mexico, located in the northwest part of Mexico, and it has one of the most important and beautiful beaches of Mexico. Since the 19th century, this city has celebrated an extraordinary carnival that they celebrate just before lent time around the first week of the month of February. People used to break all the rules by drinking, dancing, and doing all kinds of things breaking the law. People kept adding and changing the tradition. These days, they celebrate with a big fun party for seven days. They go to the streets on floats, wear costumes, and dance to traditional music. People of all ages can enjoy the celebration; these days, those things do not break the laws.

First, people drive on the main streets of all harbors on floats decorated by hand with spectacular colors. People create floats representing different themes like giant dolphins, mermaids, birds, sea animals, weather, and places. Some of them are sponsored by big companies, which makes an interesting marketing opportunity for each company, but the main purpose of the floats is a channel of entertainment for the audience. People on floats wear their best costume and dance on the floats for hours and full days. The floats participate in a contest. The audience selects the best decorated floats. Also, people use costumes as an important part of the tradition and walk through the streets dancing and drinking. Everyone chooses the costume that represents them, and they participate in a contest to win prizes for the best custom of the carnival. For example, a person who travels on a float with a sea theme could wear a Triton costume to represent his float. Last but not least important for their celebration is the music. It is truly a tradition in Mazatlán to walk with a band playing regional Mexican music with wind instruments. People in groups follow traditional bands and dance on the pier. This is why Mazatlán has very popular singers.

In conclusion, Mazatlán carnival is the most important celebration in the north of Mexico. This is an event that everybody enjoys. Some people participate on floats, others walk with their best costume, and others walk with the band, dancing and singing. It is a holy day for all the habitants of Mazatlán and visitors of all ages.

Durango's Scorpions

Scorpions, or *alacranes*, in Durango are very common, dangerous, and emblematic. The history of this arachnid started as an important part of a legend about a man who survived in a prison where all prisoners had died for unknown reasons. This man was forgiven for his crime because he found out the cause of all deaths was a scorpion picket. Some people think that it was many *alacranes* because the ground is a good habitat for them. In summertime, it is very common find them in houses, gardens, closets, dark places, and on wet ground. A particular thing is that you can go to the market and buy them. It is an arachnid that you can find very often. They are very dangerous. If one of them stings someone, they could be suffering a risk of death because their poison causes asphyxia. Every year, hospitals receive a lot of patients who were stung by this arachnid. However, it is the most emblematic item in Durango State. People dissect them and do crafts with them. Some of the crafts are keychains, wine bottles, clocks, shirts, bags, candies, and jewels decorated with *alacranes*. Artisans from Durango design the most beautiful jewels, decorated with *alacranes* and silver, which also is an important item from Durango. They add some *alacranes* to the traditional wine and food to decorate. Also, sport teams from Durango have been called "Alacranes from Durango" or "Alacraneros de Villa." In conclusion, *alacranes* are an important part of history, a very important cultural piece, and a quotidian item. People from other parts of the country could think that it is something strange, but the truth is that *alacranes* are a very emblematic item in Durango, and every person from Durango around the world can recognize *alacranes* as the most emblematic item in our state.



Ruth Hounkpe



My name is Ruth Hounkpe. I am 23 years old. I come from Charleroi, Belgium, but I was born in Lomé, Togo. I am the second of a family of five children, all of my siblings currently live in Belgium. I graduated from ARYV High School in 2015, and after that, I did four years of engineering management in science and technology at the University of Namur in Belgium. When I was a child, my dream was to have a big job later because in my family many didn't have a degree. I would like to make a difference and give a better life to my family. In that perspective, I have hope, and I believe I will make this dream reality. I moved to the United States in September 2019 after I married a US citizen. Now I have a daughter, but I have not forgotten about my dream. It is for that purpose that I am taking ESL classes at Black Hawk College in order to transfer my credits to a university.

To Be Educated in an Illiterate Family

Some people have the opportunities and financial resources that can lead them to a proper education. This cannot be the only factor we use to conclude on the state of mind of a person, and it is important to avoid any judgment concerning the level of knowledge of one person. In this life, education is like a winning ticket that not everyone can have, and there are challenges that come with being an educated person in an illiterate family.

Above all, education in this context can impact our lifestyle in two different manners: our life vision and behavior. First, if you live in that kind of family, your life vision is clearly determined; you look at everything differently than if you live in a family where everybody is educated. Your life goal is your key to motivation because you want to make a difference; you want to be among the best and prove to others that it's not because 90% of your family are illiterate that you can't make it. When it comes to deciding on any topic, you pay close attention to the result or to the consequences of the action you are going to take. Second, your behavior is noticeable among many because either you take every remark or advice as an insult to your background, and you react in an aggressive manner, or you are humble by accepting your background and taking advantage of it by learning as much as possible.

Also, you think that the education system is standing against you. In fact, you start with a handicap since you don't have the basic skills, so you try to work hard to be at the level of the others. Moreover, others are doing well without much effort, but on the contrary, you need to prove yourself by studying hard. On the one hand, you have pressure and encouragement because some in your illiterate family want you to progress and have the life they never had. On the other hand, you have deception and

discouragement because some are jealous of your opportunity; they think it is not necessary to be educated, and it is a waste of time.

Then, in terms of opportunities, the influence of your illiterate family could help you grab or miss an opportunity. The impact appears when it comes to finding a job or to making friends. Although you have a degree, the search for a job is a big deal; either you have a good position or an inferior position. For example, if you need to choose between two jobs with different exigences, and you are in doubt, or you are undecided, your illiterate family will only see the financial aspect and the level of the position to give you advice. In some situations, this kind of analysis will indeed help you, but you also need to analyze it with your educated eyes, and then you can make your choice. Similarly, if you are making friends, your background can affect the kind of friend you want to have. When all your friends are educated people, it is a problem in the eyes of your illiterate family; for them, it is like you are denying your identity, or you are thinking that illiterate people are not good enough for you. Therefore, you need to make a mix of friends whether you like it or not; it is the only way to avoid conflict.



Lastly, to exemplify, my parents didn't have the opportunity to go to school, but they have realized the importance of school even though, in Africa, it is easier to manage without a diploma. My parents had their own business, and they were doing great. However, they gave up everything, and they decided to move to Belgium to give their children a better education and opportunities. In Belgium, it was more difficult at the beginning to do something without at least a basic education; moreover, with children, it was very hard. They enrolled in different programs to have a certificate in order to have a good job to provide for the family. This experience increased their encouragement for us to go to school for the purpose of having a better life later. My father always says, "As far as you want to go in education, I am ready to pay," and they expect so much from us because they have given us all the opportunities to succeed in this life. In addition, they always have something to say in each of our choices and actions. Even if sometimes, it is irritating, we must give them a listening ear before deciding.

In short, if you're or you want to be an educated person in an illiterate family, your approach to life, education and opportunities will be different. Your family will always have a word to say. Moreover, education is one of the human pillars because without it, the world could not go on, and there would be no technology. It is great to keep in mind that education paves a way for you wherever you are.

The *Gille* Costume

The *Gille* costume is a special outfit only worn by people called *Gilles* at the Carnival of Binche in Belgium. This event gathers many people from different places since it was included on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list in 2013. The outfit is composed of pants, a blouse filled with straw, wooden shoes, and on top of this, a big majestic hat with ostrich feathers. Every *Gilles* wears a pleated lace ribbon around their neck, and they hold a basket filled with blood oranges, which they distribute to the crowd. It is generally worn by men who live in Binche or whose family is originally from Binche. Moreover, Belgium authorities authorize this clothing only on one day in the city of the Binche in order to keep the folklore and the unique side of the carnival of Binche.



Za Iang



My name is Za Iang. I was born in a small village in Chin, but I didn't stay in my country because my family moved to Malaysia. I used to live in Malaysia. I had been working at Times Square Mall for six years before I left. After a U.N. officer had called my mom, she told us that we could go to the U.S. I never thought we would come here, but we were always hiding from the soldiers, so it was a good idea to move here. In Malaysia, we had a hard time because we were not Malaysian citizens, so the soldiers were trying to find us and send us to jail, so it was very hard for us. Now, I'm living in the U.S. I have been dreaming about my future trip back to my country. So far, I have saved \$1,000 dollars for my trip. When I go there, I will be visiting my relatives. They will have been living in the same village since we left. I will probably visit Chin after I get my U.S. citizenship.

Moving from My Home Country to a Different Country

Moving from my home country to a different country was very difficult at first because we were not familiar with new places. We didn't know where we were supposed to go, and we didn't know where or how to get a job so that we could work. The hardest thing was not being able to speak the language and not being able to ask someone for help. Buses were our only transportation, and we couldn't read the signs or ask questions. The bus drivers were kind, but they could never understand us. It would have been really hard for us, but we were so lucky to get a lot of help from organizations, churches, and the generous volunteers in those organizations.

The first organization to help us when we arrived in the U.S. was World Relief. We couldn't speak English, so the friendly volunteers in the World Relief office translated for us and made important contacts for us. When we first got here, it was very scary because we couldn't speak enough English to ask directions to take the bus, but an older woman who worked at World Relief took the time to ride the bus with us to show us the way. Before we could work, we had to get a social security number, an ID, and a work permit. That would have been impossible without the World Relief caseworker. My mother and brother received their social security numbers and IDs sooner than I did, so they could go to work after about three months. However, all I received was my social security card, and I was so worried because I couldn't get a driver's license if I didn't have an ID. I waited for three years, but it still didn't arrive. Finally, I went to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) office and asked them what I had to do. They told me to bring a letter mailed to me at my address to prove my place of residency. That was the only required



document missing from my file. They already had my signature, social security number and date of birth. I provided the letters, and they gave me my ID. When they handed me my ID, I almost cried. I had waited so long, but now I could finally get my driver's license. I was really happy.

Secondly, the move from my home country to the U.S. was made easier by the help we got from two Chin churches in the Quad Cities. The members spoke our Chin language and understood how difficult it was for us to get started in a new country. When we arrived, we didn't have enough to pay to rent a house, so Pastor Josef paid for our rent for three months. In the beginning, we also didn't know where the stores were located or how to shop, but the church's pastor came to our house and gave us rice. Three months later, my mom and brother had jobs, so we could pay for renting a house and buying supplies.



Thirdly, moving from my home country to a different country was very difficult at first, but we had help from generous volunteers and church members. My mom and I had to go to the market to buy food, and we had to carry a lot of bags of food on the bus. It was really hard for us, but generous volunteers and church members offered to give us rides if they had time. Every Sunday, we had to go to church, and members picked us up and drove us to church and home again. Church members and World Relief volunteers came to visit us and brought clothes, shoes, and food. We were thankful for their generosity, but now we can speak English, and my mother and brother have jobs, so we don't need help from people anymore. That is a good feeling; I don't feel scared anymore.

In conclusion, our move to a different country was difficult and sometimes scary because it was very hard to take care of ourselves. We were always thinking about where we could live, and what we would have to eat tomorrow. Sometimes, we were worried about whether we could find a job or not, but it was made easier by World Relief, churches and generous volunteers.

A special holiday in my culture is New Year's. In Chin, most people are Christians, so New Year's is a big holiday. When the new year comes, Chin people are very excited to celebrate. On New Year's, they choose expensive food, clothing, and gifts. If they can't afford to buy something, they borrow from their friends or families, so they can buy everything they want. Chin people who live in other cities come back to their home for New Year's. Before New Year's Day, our church leaders have a meeting, and they buy cows, pigs, and chickens to kill and cook for New Year's Day. Then the Chin people meet in the church to pray before they eat together. Poor people usually don't have meat to eat; they just eat vegetables. However, on New Year's they can eat meat, and they can also wear new clothes. In addition to eating together, Chin people also buy presents to exchange with friends and families.



Asha Maria



My name is Asha Maria, and I prefer people call me Asha. I was born on July 5th, 1999 in a refugee camp in Mtabila, Tanzania. I am 21 years old, and I speak English, Kirundi and Swahili. My family and I have been here in America for twelve years. My parents had a total of nine kids, and we all were born in a different country because of war. I graduated from Rock Island High School, and it's my second year attending Black Hawk College. I'm still an ESL student, and I'm learning things I didn't get to learn back in high school. I go to school to become a CNA (Certificate Nursing Assistant), and from there, I will see what to do in the future. For now, my goal is to finish my ESL classes. I love traveling, so my hope is to travel back to my country and to Itaewon, South Korea.

Gender Roles in Burundi

In Burundi, gender roles are a cultural thing. A long time ago, mothers would sit with their daughters to teach them the difference between female and male roles. Males were likely to do what they wanted, but females had things they had to do, and they didn't have a choice. Even now, the culture is still prevailing, but only for some families. Behavior, the way to dress, and responsibilities are the main rules for females back in Burundi.

First, our behavior changes depending where we are. When we are home, we are free. We talk as loud as we want. Sometimes, we even dance like crazy because no one is there to judge us. On the other hand, in public, we are completely humble unlike when we are home. Even when you are a stranger, we must greet you because it shows how respectful we are. Furthermore, women as guests in Burundi behave differently than in other countries. Instead of being a guest, we are more like a house wife at a stranger's house. When we visit a friend or a neighbor, we would greet them first and then check their kitchen to see if there's anything that needs to be cleaned. If there are a lot of dirty dishes, we wash them without asking. This shows that our parents taught us good manners.

Next, there is the difference in how females dress depending on where they are. When we are in school, we either wear a skirt or a dress. Pants were made for men only, not women. If an elder sees us wearing pants



KITENGE

as women, they ask our parents to discipline us because to them it means we have no manners. Even when we are home, we wear skirts and dresses. If we are home wearing pants, we must wear a kitenge over it. Kitenge is an African traditional fabric, which was made mostly for women back then, but now men can also wear it as pants and t-shirts. In Tanzania, when a female wears a kitenge, she is really more beautiful than wearing skirts and dresses. When we are in church, we also dress in kitenge. Some females love wearing pants because they look stylish.

Lastly, women have specific roles at home. When we go home after school, we do the house chores before doing our homework. First, we cook for the family, go to the well to draw water and sweep the house before doing homework. For the boys, they go ahead and do homework. They even go to play around however they want. Also, when welcoming a guest, we pause everything that we would be doing at that moment and greet them. We make sure they have water or juice while we are preparing food for them. After serving the food, we sit and wait for the guest to finish eating so that we can clear the table. In addition, when the family is done eating dinner, we clean up. Unlike the male, when they are done eating dinner, they go to shower and get ready for bed while we clean. We make sure the dishes are washed and there are no leftovers before going to shower.

To conclude, I understand that women and men are different physically, but that doesn't mean that women don't have the right to do what they want. In Tanzania, they still do what our ancestors did back then. Because some parents still do this to their daughters, it makes them feel like they don't have the right to do what they want. Even my own mother still does this to me and my sisters, but we always tell her that it doesn't have to be that way. As girls and boys, we divided the chores in the house, and things are much easier than before in my family. The way we should dress as girls has changed a bit. Not only here in America, but also in Burundi, wearing pants as a Burundian girl is not a problem to some parents. We can now wear pants in public, but when we go home, we change into a skirt or dress. Everything else is still the same. Until now, some families still do this to their daughters. As we grow older, we must have good manners, dress traditionally, not be lazy, and instead do chores.



Ubugari

Let me tell you about *ubugari*. *Ubugari* is a popular dish back in my country; it is called fufu in English. *Ubugari* can be made from potato, corn, cassava, and rice. *Ubugari* is not only popular in my country; it is also popular around Africa. Where I was born, it was eaten throughout the whole week. The weekend was the only time when we ate a different dish. When you make *ubugari*, you only need boiling water. After the water boils, you add the flour and stir the flour until it becomes hard enough for someone to swallow it. After you finish preparing it, you serve it right in the middle of the table because there are different kinds of side dishes around to eat it with. The way we eat *ubugari* is not by spoon or fork. First, we wash hands and pray before eating. We use our fingers to scoop the fufu into the palm of our hands and scoop the fufu into the different side dishes; then we eat it. This is the dish I enjoy eating the most and will never get tired of.



Jamie Mondragon



My name is Jamie Mondragon. I'm 20 years old, and I was born on October 31 of 1999 in East Moline, IL. I lived in East Moline for two years. After that time, my mom decided to go back to Mexico to finish her career. I started my education in Mexico. When I was 15 years old, I came back to Illinois to finish my education at United Township High School. The first year was a bit difficult because of the language, but I adapted quickly. I graduated from high school in 2019. After my graduation, I went to Mexico to visit my family. I started college a few months later. I am currently taking classes at Black Hack College. I am going to study two years at this college. Then I will transfer to a university in California. My plans are to study architecture and be someone successful.

Places to Go on Vacation in Mexico

Mexico is a country located in the southern part of North America. It is one of the most diverse countries; Mexico has large forests and peninsulas, as well as jungles, oceans, seas and more, so it has become one of the must-see tourist locations; there are many places to go on vacation, especially these three: Oaxaca de Juarez , Cabo San Lucas and Mexico City. These three wonderful places are known for their gastronomy, beaches, museums and more; they are perfect for a family vacation.

First, the city of Oaxaca has beautiful architecture with a huge gastronomy, history, and handicrafts. The architecture of Oaxaca is part of one of the richest and most original ensembles in Mexico whose heritage originates from the colonial era. Some of the most important buildings are Zocalo, Auditorio de la Guelaguetza, Alameda de Leon and the Convent of Santa Catalina Siera and the Museum of Modern Art in a mansion from the 17th century. This city stands out for the production of mezcal, an alcoholic beverage. Some of the most famous dishes of Oaxaca are the different types of *mole*: red, black and green, as well as *tlayudas*, which is a large corn tortilla with beef, cheese, sauce, onions, and lettuce. In the streets of this beautiful city, it is also very common to find fried *chapulines* with chile. Oaxaca has been rated as one of the top 15 cities in the world, definitely a place to visit someday. Their voters call it the most wonderful city they have ever visited.



The second place to go on vacation is Cabo San Lucas. A city of approximately 70 thousand habitants, it is located in the state of Mexico and is also known as the Marine Aquarium, named for its wealth of marine life. Cabo is a very popular place especially for its beaches, landscape and wonderful climate. All that is a great attraction for families and people who enjoy the sea and the sun. It is also popular for so-called spring breakers, students who during their spring break decide to go as a group to enjoy the hotels, clubs, bars and all the wonders that this place gives you.

The third and final place to go on vacation is Mexico City; without a doubt, it is a beautiful city, with a wonderful history. If you are a person who likes art, this city is perfect for you; it has great museums, such as the Anthropology Museum, Wax Museum, Science Museum, the great Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera museum and many more. It also has large amusement parks, the best known is Six Flags, where you can enjoy yourself with friends or family. Another of the great attractions of this city is Xochimilco, a town with a lot of history, where the myth of La Llorona is originated. La Llorona is a myth that has caused fear in children generation after generation. It tells the story of a woman who lost her children and found them drowned in a river. Since that day, the woman seeked to recover her children by taking other children who are alone at night. In this small town, you can enjoy canoe rides while taking a tour of the same place. Another wonder of Mexico City is the food. During your stay, you can enjoy many Mexican specialties as well as the typical food of the place. If you are looking for a place to visit, consider this beautiful city.



Mexico has many places to visit like Cabo San Lucas, Oaxaca, Mexico City and more, but these three are the best ones. You must visit them one day. The experience will be unique and fantastic. Most of the people who visit them come back every year to repeat the wonderful experience.

Mole Rojo

One of the most famous dishes in Oaxaca is *mole*. Even though it has many ingredients, it is a very delicious dish.

Ingredients: Chicken pieces (breast or legs), onion, garlic, water, sauce, guajillo chili, ancho chili, tortillas, a bread, almonds, peanuts, chocolate bar, cloves, cumin, pepper, oil.

Steps:

1. Clean the chicken and boil it in water with onion and garlic.
2. Season the chiles and then soak them in water.
3. In a pan, heat a little oil and fry the onion, garlic and peanuts with the almonds. The tortillas should also be fried.
4. Blend all the ingredients together with the chili, garlic, pepper and add water.
5. Put oil in a pot and add the *mole*. Let it boil for 20 or 30 minutes and then add the chicken, seasoning, and salt to taste.
6. Serve and enjoy the *mole*. You can add rice to your plate.



Juan Ortiz



My name is Juan Ortiz. I'm from Celaya, Guanajuato, Mexico, which is a little city just right in the middle of the country. I'm the oldest of three. I was born and raised in Celaya, Mexico. I used to practice different sports, such as Tae Kwon Do, soccer, basketball and swimming. I finished high school back in Mexico in 2016. After that, I started the university. I decided to enroll in nutrition classes, but I noticed that nutrition wasn't for me. After that, in 2017, I got into med school. I studied there for almost 3 years, until my family decided to move to the U.S. Last year, in 2019, I moved to the Quad Cities with all my family, so I had to leave my life in Mexico. I started to take English classes at Black Hawk College Outreach Center for one semester. Also, I got a job at Hill and Valley, which is a bakery. In 2020, I started to take ESL at Black Hawk College, but COVID-19 changed everything. Since March, I have been taking just online classes. This fall semester, I finally decided what my career goal is. I decided that I want to become a nurse practitioner. Now, I'm continuing with my ESL classes, but I also started to take one of the pre-requisite classes for the nursing program while I continue working my full-time job. I hope to reach my goal in the future.

Things I Wish I Knew When I Was Young

Most people, when they are old, wish they could have done something different in their earlier years, things like taking care of their health, doing things without caring about what people say, using their money wisely or using their time in an appropriate way. If you are young and want to hear some wise tips, this is perfect for you.

First of all, the most important thing in life is your health. Taking care of your health not only means to eat healthy. This goes beyond just that. You have to do exercise regularly. That is going to help you a lot with your health. Also, rest is fundamental to have good health. People think that it doesn't matter, but it is just as important as exercising and healthy eating.

Second, don't care about what people think about you. When we are young, we overthink most of the time and give too much importance as to what people would say about us. We think that their opinion matters just to fit in with society. Don't stress too much about this. It isn't as important as you think. Just be yourself and do the things that you enjoy doing. Be happy, and you'll see how your life is going to change in a positive way. It is also okay to say no when you do not agree with something. Don't be ashamed to share your preferences or opinions. Remember, each person has a different worldview.

Another important thing to know about is money. Sometimes, when we are young we don't understand the importance of money. We don't think about how much our parents struggled to get that money. You need to learn the value of money. I understand that when you're young, you want to have a

nice and expensive car, name brand clothes, and the latest in electronics. You need to realize that all those things may give you short-term satisfaction, but thinking long-term, you could have saved a lot of money buying less expensive things. Instead of throwing away your money, you can invest in medium or long-term goals. Plan your future with anticipation. So please, don't waste money on things you want but don't need.

Finally, use your time wisely. You don't want to spend your life doing things that you don't really like. That's why it is important to find what you are passionate about. Knowing this is going to help you see more clearly the life that you are going to enjoy. Acquiring new knowledge is important. When you get old, you will regret that you never did things because you never took the time to learn something new. Because of this, it is important to experience, learn and get excited about new and different things. You never know when some of this will come in handy. So, don't be lazy and don't waste your life sleeping or watching T.V. You can always find new hobbies, join social groups, do different activities and meet new people.

I'm still young, and I appreciate that I still have time to do all these things. I am very grateful to my parents for telling me all of these things before it's too late to do them. You still have time to put all these life hacks in practice. I guarantee that in the future you will be satisfied with the results of having a fulfilling life. Take care of your health to live longer and be healthy, don't care about what people think about you, spend your money wisely thinking about a better future, and use your time wisely to try new things. These are the keys to succeed in life and never regret not having done something in your past. Don't be afraid to try new things.

Cajeta

Cajeta is also known as "dulce de leche." It is a Hispanic sweet and thick milk caramel sauce or syrup. In Mexico, this sweet confection is known as *cajeta*, but in other parts of Latin America, it is called dulce de leche. I'm from Guanajuato, Mexico, which is known as the place where you can find the best *cajeta* of the world. There are several different types of *cajetas*, but the most common are the regular *cajeta*, which is also called *cajeta quemada*, and the other famous *cajeta* is the *cajeta envinada*, which has alcohol that could be rum or brandy in its recipe. *Cajeta* is used as a sweet topping on almost anything people want. One of the most popular ways to eat *cajeta* in Mexico is by spreading it on a piece of *bolillo*. It's just like spreading jelly or peanut butter on a piece of toast. Another good way to eat *cajeta* is on pancakes. There are many different uses for *cajeta*, and it's pretty much something to use as you would like.

Rahem Ranjit



My name is Rahem Ranjit. I am a native citizen of Nepal, and I come from a middle-class family. I am 26 years old, and I completed my high school in Nepal. I speak four different languages. I am the only son in my family, so I got to take care of everyone in my family. Therefore, I have struggled very hard right from the beginning to make my parents happy. It's been about 7 months since I came to the USA. Before I came to the USA, I was in Paris, France for my higher education, a bachelor's in Business Administration. I lived there for about three years. Also, I love to travel and visit new places. Since I moved from France to the USA, I couldn't finish my studies; therefore, I had to start all over again to get my degree. I am very passionate about getting a degree in computer science. I am planning to finish my studies and graduate in three and a half years, so I started my college without wasting any time here at BHC. I believe I will be able to complete my targeted goals and be a very successful person in the near future.

The Role of a Son in Nepalese Society

Nepal is a culturally diverse country where people live together with love, peace and harmony. All the people in my country have their own sorts of caste, culture and traditions, which have their own significance. Although all of them are culturally different, they do have a common view, which is about their continuity of the culture that is generally represented by the son of their family.

Basically, people in Nepal live in a joint family with their parents as it has been in practice since ancient times. People believe that living together with family helps with better expansion of culture, tradition and even sharing much love with their elders and juniors. However, with respect to that, people in Nepal believe that the son is the only person responsible for the continuation of their culture, as well as a standing support for their families and their future offspring. People believe that the only way for the continuation of their traditions and culture is to have a son although the daughter has a role of her own. People have a trend no matter how many children you have, you must have a son to preserve and protect your traditions and culture. Also, they have a mindset that the son is the only person who will help them transfer their culture, values and norms to the next generation. Similarly, to preserve tradition and culture, people arrange their own son's marriage, and the bride must be from the same cultural background. Neither the son nor the daughter has the freedom to choose a spouse on their own due to the importance of cultural preservation in our society.

Similarly, people think that the son is the only person who will support his parents and family. Having said that, the son carries a lot of pressure on his own in the future. Since early childhood, he is told that he will be the person responsible for his family and their culture. Furthermore, most people think the person that can handle the family business is only the son; therefore, parents prepare their sons

well for the future by sending them to better schools for education. The son is always treated well and is served good food to eat and even given nice clothes to wear. Likewise, many people think that the son will help his parents in the future not only by supporting them when they get old, but also by taking good care of them and if his parents had any debt left, he will help them to clear that debt as well by doing hard work even if the son had to leave the country for employment opportunities.

These types of concepts and traditions have been there in our country for decades. Likewise, many people think that the continuation of the family line is possible by only having a son. Therefore, every family believes that they must have a son for the continuation of their family line. People continue to have children until they get a son in their life. Men even remarry if they don't get a son from their first wife. This has been a practice that's been carried out by our ancestors since ancient times. A son from a family is always protected in every aspect of his life. He is taught every behavior by his parents especially from his grandparents and father so that he will be able to cope with their traditions and culture after them for the continuation of their culture. Also, there is a belief that the daughters are born just to get married and go with her husband's family, so daughters are given less importance in every sector including education and the quality of life. Additionally, daughters are treated as a worker in their home where they are obliged to learn to cook and clean only. Therefore, with respect to the society the son has a great role that he plays for the betterment of his family's culture.

The son has always been a source of inspiration and hope to Nepalese people as people think the son is responsible for the continuation of culture and tradition. In addition to that people have a belief that the son is the only standing support in their life and that of their coming offspring. To sum up, I think being a son in Nepalese society is to have all the major responsibilities by birth.



Choila Recipe

Choila is a kind of meat dish that people of our culture make for every festival. It is considered the most important dish in our culture as it is used for various reasons. We use this dish especially when we have festivals or when we have any kind of programs. Before we serve this dish, we make a serving of this dish for the God of our religion. The recipe of this dish is basically the meat of the water buffalo, which is cooked on a fire like a barbecue on our lawn. Cooking the meat in that way enhances the taste and provides a rich smoky flavor. After the meat is cooked, it is cut into small square pieces. We have different spices to make this dish more flavorful. Here are some of the spices we use: cumin powder, chili powder, raw chilies, garlic paste, green garlic, salt, Szechuan peppercorn powder, turmeric powder, chopped tomatoes, onions and cilantro, and two tablespoons of mustard oil with some fenugreek seeds. All these spices are mixed with the meat and on top of that we take some mustard oil in a pan and fry the fenugreek seeds until they become dark red and then it is poured into the meat again. After that, it is mixed well again, and it is ready to serve. People from our culture like this dish spicy; therefore, we add a little more chili powder. This dish is loved by all the people in our country and has become the favorite dish which is served in every restaurant in our country.



Vincent Rurayi



My name is Vincent Muhore Rurayi. I'm 24 years old. I'm from the Democratic Republic of Congo. I have five sisters and two brothers. I'm the seventh child in my family. I was born in a village called Minembwe, located in the province called South Kivu in Congo. I grew up in two places. First, I grew up in a city called Bukavu. It is a small city in the same province of South Kivu. I studied there for two years. Then, we moved to Burundi, a small country located in East Africa. There, I finished my primary school, got my high school diploma and studied one year at the university. I grew up with a dream to work in the medical field. Now, I'm planning to finish college and then complete my bachelor's degree in Laboratory Technology.

Fufu

Have you ever heard of a food named fufu? It is a food that Africans like in most of the countries in Africa. I will talk about what the ingredients are, what countries eat *fufu*, the importance of *fufu* as a staple food, and when *fufu* is eaten.

First, let me tell you what ingredients *fufu* is made of and how it is cooked. *Fufu* is prepared with corn or cassava flour. Sometimes *fufu* is made of potato flour, etc. The color of *fufu* depends on the flour used. If the *fufu* is made with cassava, for example, the *fufu* takes the color of the cassava flour. The first thing to do is to heat water until it is boiling. Then you take the flour and put it in the boiling water. After that, you mix the water and the flour using a wooden spoon.

Second, I will tell you what country they eat *fufu* and the importance of *fufu* as a staple food. In Africa, there are many countries that use *fufu* as a meal, especially in West Africa. In Congo, for example they eat *fufu* in every different tribe. In Togo, they also eat *fufu*. The importance of *fufu* as a staple food is that *fufu* is very healthy since it has protein low cholesterol, and potassium.,

Finally, *fufu* is eaten at different times, and it is served in different ways. Some people like to eat it at lunch and others at dinner; it depends on the behavior of people. *Fufu* is served in the shape of a ball. It can be eaten with sauce, for example, meat or bean sauce; it depends on the preference of whoever eats it.



In conclusion, as said above, *fufu* is made with flour, such as corn flour, cassava flour, potato flour, etc. I invite you to eat *fufu* because it is a healthier food.

Independence of Congo

In my country Congo, we have a celebration on June 30 of every year. On this day, the government gives a holiday to all schools and companies. After that, no one can go to school or to work in companies except hospitals. The day of June 30 is to remember our hero who fought for the independence of our country. The name of our hero is Patrice Lumumba. Patrice Lumumba was a young man who freed our country from the colonizers from Belgium. On this special day, there are many events. People and different companies have parades. There is also a parade of soldiers and the police.

Akouvi Tossou



Akouvi Florence Tossou is my name, and I am from Togo, a West African country. I was born on December 1 in Lomé, a city in Togo. I have two brothers and one sister. I have only my mother as parent now because my father passed away last year. I studied management in school, and I earned my bachelor's degree in executive management in 2013. I worked a year as a phone advisor in a call center. I got married in 2016, and I joined my husband in the United States three years later. I started my ESL classes this year because I want to improve my English. My dream is to become a business woman and a Gospel singer. I would also like to invest in humanitarian programs to help people in need. I like singing, dancing and drawing. I will do all my best to make my dreams come true.

How I Was Saved from Suicide

I am Akouvi Florence Tossou, a young fighting lady and a survivor. Everyone has once had a difficult time in life, and I have also had many of these moments. I always fought and held on until the end, but there is one experience that upset my whole being and almost took my life. Depression pushed me to suicide, but I was miraculously saved.

Two years after our wedding, my husband was back from the United States for the second time for vacation, and I was still living in Africa. His return to the United States was painful this time because I was 3 weeks pregnant with our first child. I had a difficult time with this pregnancy, especially in the beginning because I had complications; then everything became normal for a while until the unforgettable night came. It was 10 p.m. on my due date; the labor had started, and the hospital was 20 minutes from my home. Although our house was close to the main road, my mother-in-law and her daughter had to look for a vehicle to go to the hospital; they even knocked on the doors of our neighbors who had vehicles to ask for help, but it was in vain. Nobody opened because it was late, and people are afraid of thieves. At this moment, I was suffering on the floor in my room; I couldn't even walk anymore. The name of Jesus was the only thing I was saying with the rest of my strength because I'm a Christian. We finally arrived at the hospital, but it was 4 o'clock in the morning. As soon as I arrived, the doctor told me that I needed surgery urgently. After several hours, I finally woke up with a big wound in my lower abdomen. My family and in-laws were present; I asked after my child, and they told me he was in pediatrics for a while because he had complications too.

Two days later, on a Thursday evening, the doctor gave me the painful news. My boy had died after he had started to break down in my womb before I got to the hospital, and they had even buried him. This time the blow was too strong; I didn't know if I should scream, cry, or run; in short, I was more upset than I had ever been. Two days later, something terrible almost happened. It was almost noon on a

Saturday, and as usual everyone had left for lunch, and I was still left alone with my mother. Due to fatigue, she hadn't done the laundry in the morning, so she went into the shower that was in my room to do the laundry. From time to time, she opened the door to check what I was doing, but at one point she had to concentrate on her laundry to finish quickly. At this moment, I saw, two men coming into my room and towards my bed. It was not a dream; I was wide awake; I couldn't move or scream. These men, who were spirits, were talking to me. One spoke too much; he reminded me of the things that I had endured since my childhood and of what awaited me when I left the hospital; he asked if I could stand seeing people's children, people's insults and mockeries. He convinced me that I could decide not to continue to suffer if I ended my life that same day, and he gave me a plan to do so as well. The second man didn't speak much; he just repeated a phrase to me: "Don't do that." I chose the first advice. Oh yes! I couldn't take it anymore. I had to execute my plan quickly before my mom finished, or people would come back. Since I had not been able to get out of bed and walk yet, I don't know how I managed to get up from my bed. Leaving the room quietly, I headed for the stairs. The hospital has four floors; I was on the third, and my plan was to go up to the top and drop down. I knew that at the time no one would be there, and even the nurses would be downstairs for their break. The stairs are in the corner; when I wanted to take the corner up the stairs, what did I see? Some of the midwives were sitting on the stairs and chatting peacefully. So as not to arouse suspicion, I continued by going downstairs as if to take some air in the reception room because I knew they would never allow me to go up. They were surprised and congratulated me because it was the first time they saw me walk alone. I cried all the tears I had that day. I had just been saved from suicide. Why did I get a second chance?

Afterward, I learned in the reception room that there was a power outage, and I understood why the midwives were not downstairs to watch their show, but why at this moment? Two minutes later, I saw my mother come into the reception room in a sweat and begin to scold me: "You scared me. I thought you had done something stupid. I looked for you everywhere." If only she knew what had happened. I have become stronger than before since that day because a second chance in life is not given to everyone. A power outage, which caused the midwives who would be watching their TV show at this time, to occupy the path that I had to take to commit suicide. Wow! A month after this experience, my visa was finally approved after years of silence from the embassy. I arrived in the United States nine months later. At that time, my husband and I experienced more problems; we were taken out of our apartment because I forgot something on the stove when we went shopping. Although nothing burned in the room other than my food, the landlord informed us that he does not accept smoke in his apartments and gave us five days to leave. I was informed of my father's death due to an illness that same time, and that day was one year after I lost my son on September 25, 2018. It was very hard, but I was determined to carry on with my life no matter what. On this day of their memory, I would like to give hope to all desperate hearts who read this.

In conclusion, I have advice for those who are going through difficult times; we are fighters in this life, and only you can choose to be a loser or a winner. If you happen to be beaten, fall, and cry, don't forget to get up and continue your run. Never give up because better news awaits you at the end, and above all, your life matters and is a blessing for someone. You can do it. Choose to be a WINNER.



***Moyo* Recipe**

I would like to share the recipe for a special Beninese dish. It is a tomato stew that the Beninese love to consume, and this dish is called *moyo*. The preparation of *moyo* is very quick and easy. Its ingredients are smoked fish, onion, ginger, chili, peppers of different colors, salt, seasoning and tomatoes. First, you must crush the onion, the tomatoes, a little pepper, and the ginger together; then put them on the stove in a pot. When the water in the sauce is reduced, the cooking heat is completely reduced. You must now add the smoked fish, the cut peppers, salt, seasonings and a little water if possible. Finally, you add cut tomatoes and onion for decoration; then you take it off the stove. Yes! Our *moyo* is ready and is often eaten with fermented corn dough called *akpan*. It can also be eaten with rice. Enjoy your meal.



Gedeon Yacoubou



My name is Fadil Gedeon Yacoubou. I'm nineteen years old and came from Lomé, a city in Togo. I am the firstborn of my family, and I have seven siblings (three brothers and four sisters). This my second year of college, and I am majoring in computer science. I'd like to be a computer programmer because since my young age, I was interested in computers. I want to own a business too. In the US, owning a business is a good thing because you will be your own boss. I like playing soccer, basketball and traveling. I haven't traveled yet, but I'm planning on doing it in the future. In conclusion, coming to the US is like being one step closer to my dreams, and I hope I'll accomplish them.

Responsibilities of the Firstborn Child

Being a child in a family is good. When you are a firstborn, there are more responsibilities added to your life than the youngest. When you are the firstborn, you need to be hardworking, you have to be a good listener, and you have to be responsible.

When you are the first born in your family, you have to be hard working. You have to work well at home. For example, you have to do most of the chores in your house like clean the dishes, wash your clothes and your parents' clothes, etc. You have to work well at school. Every time you bring your report card, your parents must be proud of you instead of complaining. You must have all As. You also need to have a job as soon as possible. When you are the first born, you parents are expecting you to take care of your siblings when they are growing, so you need a job and start making money. To summarize, you have to be hardworking so that your parents can use you as an example for the youngest.

A first born must be a good listener. Talking about a good listener, a firstborn must listen to his parents. When your parents are talking to you, you need to listen carefully and do as they say, or else they might disgrace you in front of your siblings or other people. You must listen to your siblings, too. Whenever they want to talk to someone, they need to come to you. For example, if your siblings can't talk to you when they need to talk to someone, it's just like you are not a good person or the right person to talk to. To sum up, you need to listen to both your parents and your siblings whenever they want to talk to you.

You have to be responsible as a firstborn. When you do something wrong, you have to take the blame. By doing that, you are teaching your siblings how to be responsible too. You have to take care of your siblings when your parents go to work. When you take care of them, your parents will trust you

when they tell you to do something for them. To sum up, you need to be responsible every time so that your parents can trust you and use you as an example for your siblings.

In conclusion, being a first born is not that easy. You have to be hard working, you have to be a good listener, and you need to be responsible. These three characteristics are not the only ones you need, but you must have them because not only will it help you with your family, it'll help you on the future.

The two lions are a part of the National Emblem of Togo. These two lions have in their hands a bow and an arrow. Those two things are put in the hands of the lions to show that all citizens are active to defend the freedom of the country. The lions themselves represent the bravery of the citizens.

OUR SIDE OF THE STORY



English as a Second Language Program

6600 34th Avenue • Moline, IL 61265

www.bhc.edu • 309-796-5000