



# INTERNATIONAL VOICES

at Black Hawk College

## OUR SIDE OF THE STORY



**FALL  
2021**

## Table of Contents

<b>Melafo Adjoble</b>	<i>Education in African Homes</i>	2
<b>Noureddine Ayad</b>	<i>My Last Vacation in Morocco</i>	4
<b>Ferry Dongmo</b>	<i>How to Integrate in the US without Losing Your Own Culture</i>	6
<b>Hada Doucoure</b>	<i>Traditional Food from Mali</i>	8
<b>Kodzovi Yamin Dute</b>	<i>Living by Myself in the United States</i>	10
<b>Koffi Dzoso</b>	<i>High School in my country</i>	12
<b>Samah Gorashy</b>	<i>Sudanese Wedding Traditions</i>	14
<b>Anish Gurung</b>	<i>Growing Up as An Immigrant</i>	16
<b>Ashok Gurung</b>	<i>Tamu Lhosar</i>	18
<b>Hanan Hayder</b>	<i>Traditional Clothes in Iraq</i>	20
<b>Hassan Hayder</b>	<i>An Iraqi's Life in Syria and the U.S.A.</i>	22
<b>Spae Htway</b>	<i>Speaking Two Languages (being bilingual)</i>	25
<b>Faeza Hussein</b>	<i>Our Immigration to the USA</i>	27
<b>Kamalpreet Kaur</b>	<i>Places You Should Visit in India</i>	29
<b>Jhansi Kudumula</b>	<i>Traditional and Alternate Medicine Systems of India</i>	31
<b>Janvier Maniragaba</b>	<i>Marriage in Burundi</i>	34
<b>Kpantukyo Napala</b>	<i>The Ingenious and Secure "Somba" Castles of Northern Togo</i>	36
<b>Bienvenue Panla</b>	<i>Process of Palm Oil</i>	38
<b>Alondra Paredes</b>	<i>Misinterpreted Holidays in the USA</i>	40
<b>Eh Paw</b>	<i>Childhood in Thailand</i>	43
<b>Hicham Saam</b>	<i>The Power or Strength of Immigrants</i>	45
<b>Yawavi Toko</b>	<i>The Most Visited Town in Togo for Tourism</i>	47

These articles were written by the students in the ESL Advanced Writing class. I would like to thank Kris Meyer for taking our photos and designing the cover.

Nina De Bisschop

# Melafo Adjo Adjoble



My name is Melafo which means abundance, and I grew up in Lomé. I have a wonderful family of six members, which are my father, mother, sister, grandfather, brother and myself. My family provides me a sense of thrust and motivation to do well in life. I will never forget that day my grandfather, who used to be a nurse, saved someone life in a car accident when I was going to church with him. Since I was a child, I have liked to take care of people, and that day when I saw my grandfather did, it really touched me, and I had no doubt I belong in that field. When the opportunity knocked on my door to come to the United States in 2018, I first started ESL at Black Hawk College and in the meantime worked at Tyson Fresh Meats. After that, I did a training for patient care and phlebotomist in Health Sciences for nine months. After the training, I applied at Genesis and am working there now. My dream is to pursue my education and become a registered nurse, and with that certificate, I can open a clinic in my hometown to help more people and have an organization that will help orphans with their education and daily living because my strength is my determination to succeed no matter what comes my way, and I will never give up on my dream and hopes.

## Education in African Homes

Education in general is the most important key in the life of a human being. Every parent has a process for raising and educating their children from birth. Education is the most powerful thing that helps children in every step of their life. For a child to be something good for society, they need to have some values and support. So in African homes, parents are so severe about domestic and social education of raising children.

When growing up in an African home, parents teach their children self-discipline about domestic learning as they are raising them. For example, when you get up in an African home, the first thing you should do is to pray. After that, you go knock on your parents' door to greet them, and then you wait until they tell you to get in. My father was so strict and rigorous about my sister's and my education because he always said we are the women of the house, and it is us who are going to marry a man one day. In addition, my father made a list of our everyday jobs that should be done before leaving the house for school. So my duties were getting up early around five in the morning, refreshing the water, making breakfast, and polishing the sofa. African parents generally keep their eyes on girls' domestic learning more than for boys. In other words, they usually say it is a girl who is going to show in another family what she learnt from her parents' house.

Secondly, in an African home, social education plays a major role and is the most important part in the children's future in societies. To illustrate that, when I was in middle school every Sunday my father got me up around 9 in the morning and asked me to bring a history, science, or geography book, and by his side

was a cane in case I responded to questions wrong. If it seemed some answers were wrong, I had to be punished, and I had to stay up and learn the lesson. Sometimes, we were not allowed to watch television that day until we got every question right. He also warned me to not make friends with any boy because they would ruin my future by making me pregnant. For my father, education is the key to success, no distraction, no bad friendships, no alcohol and no cigarettes until I become someone better for society. Therefore, my parents knew all my study places and came to check if I was there studying or not. Even though African parents' view of education was hard to follow, children in general understand their mind-set of taking action because they had been taught the same way from their parents, and my father mentioned to me that with problems, prevention is better than cure.

In conclusion, domestic and social education are most important in an African home, and parents make sure their children learn every step of the way. African parents did not want their children to neglect African culture, so they made them practice in everyday life and pass that to future generations. As for today, with the ability to use social media, some parents have learned a lot and stopped punishing their kids; instead, they have realized that advice is the best part of helping a child's future.



### *Jollof Rice*

*Jollof rice* is a rice dish from West Africa. In the country I came from, Togo, we called it *riyoga*. The dish is made with long-grain rice, tomatoes, onions, spices, vegetables and meat or sometimes fish in one pot, and this is perfect for regular nights or special occasions. *Jollof rice* is welcome at every party. So to prepare *jollof rice*, while the pot is on the fire, you pour a little oil in, add some of the pureed tomato maybe  $\frac{1}{2}$  or  $\frac{2}{3}$ , sliced onions, and spices. Then stir everything in the pot for a moment, and then pour in water. If you want, you can season it with curry powder and dried thyme. So when it is boiling, you add the rice and stir it all together again. After a few minutes, turn off the heat but leave the rice covered for another 8-10 minutes, so the steam will continue to cook the rice. Serve it with fried, ripe plantains, which we call *amandan* in Mina and fried chicken if you like. Even though it always contains the same ingredients, the preparation methods may vary across different regions.

# Noureddine Ayad



My name is Noureddine Ayad. I'm from Morocco. I am 37 years. I have been in the United States of America since 2007. I'm single, and I live in Moline. I work at Tyson Foods. In my country, I got my high school diploma with a focus in modern literature. Then I studied law in Rabat with a specialization in public law, and then moved to the United States of America. My dreams are to be a professor of English in my country, and to open a business like a café or restaurant because I do not like to work in companies for a long time.

## My Last Vacation in Morocco

After two years of working, studying and planning for a wonderful vacation in Morocco with my family and friends, I asked my sisters to choose the cities they wanted to visit, and then I finally traveled back to Morocco. It was a wonderful vacation, during which I visited many family members and friends, traveled a lot, and ate a lot of organic and fresh food.

First of all, I visited many family members and friends. I visited my parents' family like my uncles, my aunts and my grandmother. Before I visited my uncles, I called them, and I told them, we should meet at my grandmother's house because they live near to her. After that, we met on a Sunday, we drank tea, and we ate chicken, and my grandmother started telling us about how life had changed from the past to the present. Also, I visited my aunts, and they asked me, "Have you found a bride, or are you still looking for her?", and I answered, "I'm still looking for her." I visited some of my best friends, Aziz and Yassine, and I spent a lot of time with them. Also, I went with them to the sea. Sometimes, we swam, and sometimes we sat next to the beach to watch the sunset and some boats.

Secondly, I traveled to many big cities in Morocco. I traveled to Tanger, Martil and Casablanca. I went to Tanger with my sisters. When we arrived, we stayed in a nice hotel near the sea. After that, we took a break, and we went to eat fish, and we enjoyed the beauty of the city through the form of the buildings and its location. Also, we took the kids to play and ride on small horses. I visited Martil, but my sisters did not like it, and then I visited



Casablanca with my friend because it is the largest city in Morocco, and we went to the Moroccan mall for shopping. Also, we went to the Hassan II Mosque, and we took some pictures with it. When we heard the *Muezzin*, we entered the mosque to pray.

Thirdly, I ate a lot of organic and fresh food. I ate a lot of grilled meat because I like it. For example, the first day when I went to Morocco, my father took me, my sisters and my mother from the airport to the restaurant, and he bought some grilled meat for us, and it was delicious. Also, my sister is a good cook, and she cooked a lot of different kinds of food for us at home like couscous, and we ate it every Friday. Also, she cooked a lot of fresh fish. I ate a lot of organic fruits like apples, watermelons and grapes, and we drank tea every day.

To conclude, I enjoyed my last vacation to Morocco by visiting my family and friends, traveling and eating. Also, my last vacation in Morocco was a great opportunity to spend beautiful times with my family and my friends and have all kinds of fun; furthermore, it came after a long period of work and study, and a journey full of getting up early and doing homework.



### *Eid al-Fitr*

*Eid al-Fitr* comes after fasting during the month of Ramadan, and it is the first day on which Muslims break their fast after fasting an entire month, and that is why it is called *Eid al-Fitr*. A week before *Eid al-Fitr*, people begin to get ready for *Eid* by buying new clothes especially for children, and traditional clothes for adults. Also, women begin to prepare sweets, and most stores expect big business, especially for clothes. *Eid* is a day of joy and happiness. On this day, Muslims go to pray at 8:30 am, and after that they meet, exchange greetings, and visit their families and relatives, and this is known as the kinship relationship. Muslims also visit their friends, receive friends and neighbors at their homes, and show kindness to the poor. It has been the custom in many Islamic countries for Muslims to eat some dates or sweet cakes stuffed with dates on *Eid*. The majority of people do not work on *Eid*, but some people prefer to work on this day, such as people who work in transportation like taxi drivers because the demand for them is high. To conclude, *Eid al-Fitr* is one of the best days of the year. It is a happy day for Muslims and an opportunity to meet a large number of family members and friends.

# Ferry Dongmo



My name is Ferry K. Dongmo. I was born on in Cameroon, specifically in Douala. Douala is the second largest city of Cameroon after Yaounde, which is capital city. I have four sisters and one brother, and I am the fourth born. I am a single man without any kids. I graduated high school in Douala in 2011, and I went to the University of Technology of Douala where I studied mechanical engineering. I was studying there for only two years, and then I got my visa to come to the USA. My goals are to become a mechanical engineer, having a lot of work experience in the US and go back to my home and open my own business so I will be able to create many jobs. I got to the USA in 2016, and I was only working. I was making decent money as a single person, but then I decided to go back to school, pursue my studies and make very good money so I can take care of my siblings and my parents.

## How to Integrate in the U.S. without Losing Your Own Culture

Coming from one country to reside in a new country is not very easy. People have to develop new habits that they need to facilitate their new integration and not forget where they are from. People who want live in the U.S. must acquire knowledge, and they must develop it if they want succeed in their integration and also keep their own culture with them. Integrating in the U.S. without losing your own culture can be done in three ways: maintaining your native language in the USA, being around American people and people from your country and keeping in touch with your hometown.



First, people must maintain their native language in the U.S. A person who lives in the U.S. must start to learn English to facilitate his integration while still speaking his own language. For example, when you live in the U.S., you are going to learn English, and you are going to speak English constantly. In addition, you have to speak your own native language when you speak to your family who stayed in your hometown. This is going to help you to keep your native language and your own culture. When you live in a country as the U.S., there are events that people from your community organize sometimes. The purpose of these events is to help the community to stay together and continue to promote the culture. For example, some communities organize traditional dances to help their people not forget their culture. In addition, parents must speak their native language to their kids at home, so the kids will not lose their origin at the same time that they are going to school in America.

Second of all, being surrounded by American people and people from your own country in the U.S. is another way to succeed in your integration in the U.S. Living in the U.S. is going to give you the opportunity to build friendships with Americans. They are going to help you to learn English every day and practice it as well. For example, when you are at work, you can be friends with American people, and they are going to help you to speak more English and understand their culture. Hanging out around those people is going to be beneficial for you. For example, if you are friends with American people, you will watch them every day and see how they act, how they do some things and you will start to understand the culture very well. In addition, you must have friendships with people who came from the same nation as you. They are also going to do the same thing as Americans to support your integration in the U.S. For example, you can hang out with them just to make sure that you do not forget your own culture.

Finally, keeping in touch with your home is another way to succeed in your integration here without losing your own culture. When you live in the U.S., you do not see your family like you used to when you were living in your hometown. To keep your own culture while living in the U.S., you should keep calling your family and friends who stayed back in your hometown. For example, you can call your family and friend when you have time. It is obvious that when you live in the U.S., you do not have another option than to start learning English, and it is going to be your primary language, and you will learn the habits and the customs from the American people. It is important to keep calling your family and friends very often because this is going to help you keep speaking your native language, and you will not forget your own culture and where you came from. To keep your own culture with you, you can go back home at least once every two years or every three years to revitalize your connection with your own culture.

#### A Special Holiday in My Culture

A special holiday in my culture is called Youth Party. This holiday is celebrated every February 10 of the year. It is a big festival that takes place all across the country. It is called Youth Party because it is dedicated to the young people who are between 5 and 40 years old. This event unfolds during one week. It always starts on Monday and ends on Saturday with the parade. Generally, this event is for students from elementary school to college. During this event, the students show their competences in diverse areas of school. All the students of each school organize cultural activities during this week. All across the country, the students show what they can do and what they have made. For example, there is a competition that each school organizes to show who the best students in math are in the school. This competition unfolds in front of the parents of the students. We do that in other disciplines, such as chemistry, physics, literature and biology. During this event, the students also organize other competition. For example, the best food, the best poem, and best singer are chosen. February 10 is a big day of celebration, and there are also parades with students across the country.



# Hada Doucoure



My name is Hada, and I am from Mali in West Africa. I am 20 years old. I was born and raised in Mali until 2015 when my dad brought my two brothers and me to the United States. I have seven siblings back home with my mom, whom I really miss. I am the second oldest. My mom lives in Mali, so when we came here we stayed at my dad and stepmom's house, which was a little tough, but it is all good now. Since 2015, I haven't visited my home country, but it is on my mind, hopefully next year, but until then, I would like to focus on my studies.

## Traditional Food from Mali

Mali is a country in West Africa, and it is the biggest country in West Africa. The capital city of Mali is Bamako. Two of the most traditional foods you must try when you visit Mali are *jollof* rice and peanut butter stew. I spent most of my childhood eating these delicious foods.

Firstly, *jollof* rice is known as a traditional food in Mali and many other countries, like Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, Gambia, etc. This dish is very delicious. In my culture, this food is mostly served on special occasions like weddings, baby showers, and other celebrations in West Africa. In order to cook this dish, you will need ingredients like tomatoes, pepper, onion, bell pepper, vegetable oil, salt, curry powder, garlic, dry thyme, rice, fish or meat, and a seasoning cube. In a blender, combine all the vegetables and blend until smooth. Add the mix to a large pot with a little oil and put the pot on medium heat along with the meat, salt, curry powder, and thyme. Stir it until all is well fried; then add water to cook your rice thoroughly. Then wash the rice and add it to the pot, cover it and reduce the heat to low. Wait until the rice is well cooked; then you have delicious West African *jollof* rice.

Secondly, peanut butter stew actually originated in Mali. In order to make this delicious peanut butter stew, you will first need peanut butter, garlic, tomato, pieces of meat or chicken, seasoning cube, slice of onion, and water. First, add all the ingredients into a large pot with a little water to brown a little.

Then you fill the pot with water and let it cook until it is smooth and creamy. That means it is well cooked. After that, you cook white rice to eat with the stew. This dish is typically served at lunchtime when the whole family gathers and eats together. Making this dish is very simple. That is why it is common in my country and easy to make for lunchtime.

In conclusion, *jollof* rice and peanut butter stew are the most traditional foods in West Africa and are used for parties or special occasions when people get to eat and enjoy themselves. They are very easy to make; I hope you all will try these two special foods. Bon appétit.

Drums are special instruments used to celebrate weddings and other happy occasions in my culture in Mali. Only men play the drums. The drums come in three different sizes, and each one makes different sounds. One of the drums is carried under the arm. Drums in general are kept in families and given by fathers to sons. During weddings, they start playing the drums in the morning while the bride and groom are somewhere else taking photos. When bride and groom arrive at the circle where guests are sitting, the drums get louder and louder. It is very exciting, and people start throwing money to the

# Kodzovi Yamin Dute



My name is Kodzovi Yamin Dute. I am a 21-year-old man from Togo in West Africa. I am from a family of seven people, which means that I have four siblings: two older brothers, one younger brother and a younger sister. In November 2019, I moved to the United States, and now I study at Black Hawk College in Moline. Actually, I'm taking some ESL classes and some preparation classes for nursing. My career goal is to become a neurosurgeon, but I will start with nursing and further my education later. In my spare time, I like doing online research, watching movies. I like soccer, and I like working out, too. I live by myself, and my whole family is in Togo. But I hope that one day, they will come and stay here with me or at least come to visit me.

## Living by Myself in the United States

In November 2019, I came to the United States from Togo. I lived with a friend, but a few months ago, I started living by myself. And living by yourself in the USA does not only have advantages, but it also has a lot of disadvantages.

Before I came here, I had so many friends. I usually went to their house, or they would come to mine. I had a good relationship with my friends and my family. I always had somebody when I needed them. Things were going very well. I could go anywhere I wanted, when and how I wanted. But I was under my parents' control.

Now that I live by myself, I live by my own rules. My parents cannot control my actions anymore. In other words, I can still do everything I want, but there is nobody to see me, control me or check on me. And, I don't deal with problems anymore that you usually have when you live with a roommate. For example, I can watch TV late at night, and no roommate is going to tell me that the sound of the TV is disturbing him. So basically, it is still the same idea, which is that I can do whatever I want.

But there are so many problems when you live by yourself. In my case, I feel so lonely all of the time. I am still new in the USA. And because of the snow and COVID, I didn't have time to make good friends. I did have some friends when I came here, but COVID prevented us from seeing one another and most of these friends were not good friends. So, I am stuck in the loneliness. All I do every day is go to work and attend my classes that were on Zoom and were mostly boring. That loneliness led to depression, anxiety, and sleepless nights. And honestly, it hurts like hell. Sometimes, I get angry for no reason. And I lost any motivation to do anything. I even wanted to stop attending classes or drop out of college. But I quit some jobs, and I got fired at other jobs. The fact that I could not stick to one job led me to financial problems.

Most of the time, I go below \$0 on my bank account; and when that happens, I usually get charged. Being under \$0 and getting charged is not good at all. Sometimes, these things sound like curses to me. One last problem is the fact that I have to do everything by myself in the apartment. If you live with a roommate or your family, you are going to share chores to do in the house or apartment. But alone, everything is on you. Sometimes, I get so tired when I come back from work. But I have a lot of homework to do; at the same time, I have so much housework like cooking, cleaning the bathroom, tidying up things in the room...It's though.

Anybody, in a situation like this, always tries to find a solution. So, in my case, I turned to my family and friends, but all of them are in Africa. It is very difficult to connect. They are five to seven hours ahead of me; when I am awake, they are sleeping, and when I am free, they are busy. Sometimes, a whole week goes by without getting in touch with them. Apart from my family and friends, I reached out to my school advisor. She did her best to help me, but our relationship or interaction was strictly professional, which means she was limited. She had other things to do, so she could not spend all her time with me. Besides all of that, I tried to distract myself with some activities, such as going to the movies, playing games, and reading books. But one thing is for sure: these things will never replace people, and what I need is people.

Right now, things are a little better than before. We can attend classes in person now, so I see and interact with people. That is helping. But I still miss my family and friends. Somebody said, "Not only is family important, but it's everything." I clearly understand that. So we must spend every moment that we have with our family fully because nobody knows what will separate us apart or when. It hurts when it happens, no matter the reason. Many foreigners, including me, made this mistake: before we came to the USA, we thought that everything would be easy and good and that we are going to have a wonderful life. Honestly, it is the opposite that usually happens. We must inform our family, friends, and relatives that it is good to have dreams, but before coming here, they must not think that everything will be easy for them.

In short, living by yourself in the USA may have some advantages, but we must never forget that there are also so many problems. Obstacles and problems are always on the way, and you must work hard to fight them.

One of my favorite foods is called *fufu*. *Fufu* is made of yam or cassava. Some people even use potatoes. Here is how we cook *fufu*: first, we cook the yam or the cassava. We cut them into small pieces; and after, we add water and salt and boil them for 30 to 45 minutes. After being well cooked, we let the yam or the cassava cool down a little bit. Then, we pound or crush them very well in a mortar with pestles. Nowadays, a machine has been invented, and it does everything itself. So, people do not crush the yam physically anymore. When the yam is well crushed, it is, then, ready to be served. *Fufu* is served with so many sauces, such as peanut sauce or palm oil sauce. You can use any kind of meat that you want. It can be fish, chicken, beef, etc. Personally, I like it more with peanut sauce and chicken. So delicious! Try it, and you won't regret it.

# Koffi Dzosu



Hi my name is Koffi Dzosu. I come from Lomé, Togo. I am 32 years old, and I have my high school diploma from my country. I have four siblings, two sisters and two brothers. My father passed away, but my mother is still alive. All live in my country, and I am alone here. My dream is to become an engineer in network administration to help my country and the rest of the world. Now I live in the USA. I study ESL. After I finish my ESL, I will continue my studies to get an engineering degree. I would like to become a very important personality.

## High School in My Country

Going to school and learning is not easy, but we have to do that to honor our parents who fight for us to get better future. That is why I am going to talk about how high school is very hard in terms of study, severity of the teachers and conditions for learning in my country, Togo.

Firstly, high school is very hard in my country. In my country, the students have difficulties coming to school because they do not have school busses, and if your house is far away from your school, you are obliged to walk there and back; in addition, the students have difficulties to eat. For example some students come to school without money or food because their parents are poor and the school does not offer free food to help them.

Secondly, there is the severity of the teachers. The teachers punish the students who come late to school even though they do not know where those students live and if they walked to school. Another example is that the teachers can help the administration of the school to expel the students who have bad behavior in class. The right thing to do would be to call those students and talk with them to find out about their problems and help them prepare for their future.

Thirdly, high school is hard in terms of learning conditions. There are more than one hundred students in one class because we do not have enough high schools in my country, and every year the population increases. Everybody wants to go to school, but we do not have enough schools. Another example is that the classrooms are too old. Every year, the classrooms should be repaired for the safety of everyone, but it is not like that. When it is raining, everybody (teachers and students) must stop and wait for the rain to stop before continuing because the roofs of the classrooms leak.

In conclusion, despite those difficulties that the students undergo in my country's high schools, they never give up, and the government should do its best to take care of those students who will end up becoming very helpful and important for my country.



### Okra Sauce

In my country, Togo, okra sauce is our favorite sauce. Every house in my country eats okra sauce for dinner. I am going to tell you how we cook and eat it. First, you buy okra , fish, pepper, red palm oil, onions, and ginger powder. At home, you wash the okra, put it on the stove and add water. When it boils, you add the fish, pepper, red palm oil, onions and ginger. After that, you leave it on the stove for 15 minutes, and then you remove it. Then you cook *fufu*, which is a powder of yams mixed with water, which you put on the stove. When it becomes a paste, you remove it. Now you can serve the okra sauce on a plate with the *fufu*, and you can eat it. At every party in my country, without okra sauce, the party is not a party. Also, it is like an obligation for every farmer to cultivate okra. To conclude, I like this sauce because it comes from my country, and I would feel sick if I did not eat it.

# Samah Gorashy

My name is Samah Gorashy. I am 29 years old. I am from Sudan. I am a mother of two kids. I have been living in the U.S. for about two years. In my country, I studied in a medical school, and I hope to complete my study here. I am very interested in science and health study. I want to raise my English skills to a higher degree because this is the language to communicate with the people here in the U.S. I dream of graduating from a medical school within the next four years.

## Sudanese Wedding Traditions

In my country, it is not important to fall in love before you get married. The groom can choose the bride by himself, or he can ask his family or his close friends to choose for him. Sometimes, the bride and the groom see each other for the first time on the wedding day. The Sudanese wedding traditions vary between families and regions, but there are traditions that are found in all Sudanese weddings. The Sudanese wedding usually focuses on the bride and her family, and most of the preparations are done in her house.

The wedding starts with *Golat AlKheer*, which is carried out by the elderly people from both sides. The groom's family comes to the bride's house and brings gifts, treats and sweets with them. The groom's father asks for the bride's hand from her father. If the bride's father says yes, that means the father gives his daughter to them. After this occasion, the couple can meet each other and start the preparations for their wedding because dates between males and females in public without this tradition are forbidden in Sudan.

Five days before the wedding day, the preparations start in the bride's house by making special Sudanese perfumes called *Khumra* and special incense called *Sandal Bakhor*. The next event is the henna party, during which special dye is put on the hands and feet of the bride and groom separately in their houses. The bride celebrates with the females of her family and friends and puts the nicely decorated dye on her hands and legs. This is the most important tradition for the bride. The groom has a henna party, too. He celebrates with the males of his family and his close friends, and he also puts dye on his hands and feet. The Sudanese people think that the Henna will bring luck and happiness to the couple's life.



The next event is the wedding contract signed by the close friends or relatives of the couple, not by the couple themselves. It is usually held in a mosque. This event is associated with a big feast served by both families to their relatives and friends.

After that comes what we call *Jirteg*. It is a very important tradition in all Sudanese weddings because the people think it will prevent the evil eye and give good luck to the bride and her groom. For this event, the bride wears the traditional Sudanese cloth called *Toub*, and it should be mainly in a red color.

The groom should wear the white traditional cloth called *Jallabeia*. The bride and groom sit close to each other, and in front of them, there is a beautifully decorated table containing Sudanese perfumes, incense, sweets and milk. The couple gives the sweets to each other seven times to represent the promises of taking care of each other. After that, the bride and the groom give sweets, perfumes and incense as a gift to the guests. At the end of this event, the couple drinks milk from the same cup, which means they will share everything with each other. After this event, most of the Sudanese wedding is completed, and now the bride and groom are ready for the honeymoon.

These are important events in Sudanese wedding traditions starting with the choice of the bride, *Golat Alkheer*, the preparation of special Sudanese perfumes and incenses, the henna party, wedding contract, and finishing with *Jirteg*. I hope you enjoyed reading it.



#### Sudanese Cookies

In Sudan, we have delicious cookies, and we serve them for *Eid Al-Fitr*, which is a celebration that comes after finishing Ramadan, a fasting month for the Muslim people. The ingredients are one cup of cow butter, one cup of sugar powder, and two cups of all-purpose flour. Mix them well. Then we need to use a cookie press to make different forms of cookies. Then, they should be baked in a preheated oven for 15 minutes. Some Sudanese people serve them like this, and others would add jam, chocolate, or honey. It is a very easy recipe; anyone can do it. I hope you will try it, and I am sure you will love it.



# Anish Gurung



My name is Anish Gurung, and I am 18 years old. Right now, I am a freshman at Black Hawk College. I always have been interested in problem solving, and at the moment, I want to become an engineer. My hobbies include playing video games, reading, and talking to my friends. I was born in Nepal, and my family and I came to America in 2012. I have been living here since then. My family and I came to America as immigrants, and after several years of living in America, we became citizens of America. I was eight years old and in second grade when I started school in America. Growing up in America was very difficult for me because of the language barrier. I started feeling confident with my English around my middle school years, and right now, I think I have good grasp of English, at least the speaking part of it. My hopes and dreams are to finish college and get my degree in engineering. After my degree, I hope to get a good job, build a company, and have a family with kids. In my final moments, I want to smile and die peacefully.

## Growing Up as an Immigrant

As I stepped off the plane into this new world, I never expected to face such challenges that would define me. I was eight years old on my first day of school starting second grade with no knowledge of English. Some kids in my class would look at me as if I did not belong there, and as time passed, they started harassing me. I was an easy target for them because I could not speak the same language, and the situation would get worse if I gave them the reaction they wanted. The feeling of helplessness would be overwhelming as I could not ask for help because of the language barrier, and I was afraid to tell my family as they were already dealing with so many of their own problems. Many young immigrants are going through similar scenarios like I did, and I want to spread awareness about the challenges that we face, which are language barriers, cultural barriers, and bullying.

First, language barriers are a very challenging part for immigrants because we must learn a new language. Moreover, learning a new language is not that easy as it takes a very long time, and with all the new letters and concepts that we must learn about, it is easy to give up. Also, having a language barrier means that we are not able to communicate with people that are natives. For instance, in a situation where we are lost or in danger, it is important to communicate and get help. Furthermore, for young immigrants, school can be difficult as they do not understand what the school is teaching, and that affects their learning. For example, when the teacher is teaching, it is hard for us because we cannot understand their language, and it can lead us to fail the class. Language barriers are a difficult part of being an immigrant as we must learn a new language, have a harder time communicating, and this affects our ability to learn and understand.

Second, cultural barriers are also a challenge we young immigrants face as we come across a new culture. Especially for young immigrants, it is very demanding to adapt to a new culture as well as keeping

their own. For example, there is a constant fight inside of themselves to switch back and forth between their way of living and the new lifestyle, and that could break them mentally. In addition, when we immigrants show people our own unique culture and beliefs, we often get judged as we are different. For instance, there is always a situation where you get looked at or made fun of when you dress a certain way; as a result, this could lead to wanting to abandon your way of living. Cultural barriers are a big deal when adapting to a new way of life as they can harm your mental health and your way of life.

Lastly, having a different language or culture makes immigrants a target for bullying because of how different we are. Bullying happens mainly to young immigrants; in some cases, it is due to the way we look and our skin color. For example, we get picked on or harassed because we are black, white, yellow, or another color solely because we are different looking. Moreover, the way we speak and the accent we have can lead to bullying as well. For instance, due to our native language background, we do not sound the same as other people; therefore, people laugh and look at us funny. Also, because of our home customs, we get judged and made fun of. There are times when people come to our homes, and there are different home rules, a different smell, and a different way we eat. And some people do not seem to understand that these are our customs and proceed to make fun of us. As young immigrants are going through bullying, they are faced with differences in their looks, their accents, and home customs.

In conclusion, as young immigrants, we are faced with hardships as we live in an area where we face a language barrier, where we are not able to communicate and have a difficult time learning. We are also faced with cultural barriers, a fear of getting judged, and not being able to balance a new culture. Lastly, we get harassed solely because we have different skin, a different accent, and different home customs. These situations could be harmful to our mental health and could potentially ruin future leaders, doctors, and engineers. So, treat us like people, not by our skin color, the language we speak, or our beliefs.



### *Tihar*

*Tihar* is a Nepali festival that represents light and also refers to happiness. *Tihar* is celebrated around October or November, depending on the Nepali calendar, and this year the celebration of *Tihar* starts on November 5. *Tihar* is celebrated in five parts that last for five days, and each part constitutes one aspect of *Tihar*. On the first day, we celebrate the day of the crow where we try to feed the crows. On the second day, we celebrate the day of the dogs where we put some form of flower necklace around their neck and feed them. On the next day, it is the day of the cows where we feed them, put flower necklaces on them, and acknowledge them. This is also when we celebrate the day with lights and fireworks. On the fourth day, it is the day of the ox where we do the same to acknowledge oxen. On the final day, it is the day of the humans but mainly brother and sister day. On this day, the sisters feed their brothers, and the brothers gift their sisters a present, and when the day ends, *Tihar* ends as well.

# Ashok Gurung



My name is Ashok Gurung, and I am 29 years old. I am from Chitwan, Nepal. I am the oldest son in my family. Besides me, I have a younger brother and my mother in my family. I completed high school at Ashirwad College back in my country in 2010. I did not continue my education back then, which is one of the decisions that I am not proud of. So, more than ten years later, I have decided to continue my education and get a college degree. With that goal in mind, I have joined Black Hawk College. My aim is to become a successful programmer and have a secure career. Apart from that, I like to play soccer, table tennis, and also like to go fishing in my leisure time.

## *Tamu Lhosar*

Although most people around the world think about New Year's as January 1<sup>st</sup>, in many Asian cultures, people celebrate different days of the year as New Year's. Likewise, in my Tamu culture, we also have a different day of the year that we celebrate as New Year. We call the new year *Tamu Lhosar* in my culture. Our surname is "Gurung", so it is also known as "Gurung Lhosar". Apart from being New Year, *Tamu Lhosar* has its own significance, its own rituals, and its own fun activities that we do to celebrate *Lhosar*.

First, on top of starting a new year, *Lhosar* carries a great significance in our culture. It is celebrated every *Poush* 15 of the Nepali calendar, which generally falls right around the end of December. In my culture, we have twelve signs, and each year is assigned a sign. Every new year, the signs change from one to the next in a predefined order. These signs are called *Lho* in our language. The word *Lhosar* is made up of two words: *Lho* meaning sign and *sar* meaning change. Thus, *Lhosar* marks the change of signs. Every child born each year will have the sign of the year they are born. According to our culture's beliefs, these signs play a significant role in determining how the child's behavior will be and what his/her future will look like.

Furthermore, every *Lhosar* in most Tamu communities, all Tamu people visit Buddhist monasteries known as *Ghumba* in our language. We pray for prosperity and happiness for the upcoming year. *Lamas*, the priests of our culture, hold a special kind of ritual called *Graha katne*. During this ritual, *lamas* chant various scriptures, and all of us listen to those scriptures. Sometimes, *lamas* explain various parts of those scriptures to us. At the end of this ritual, we are offered blessings by the *lama* along with some *prasad* (fruits mostly) and a piece of sacred thread that we wear around our neck. The purpose of this ritual is to wash away all the bad luck. Apart from this, we also raise a special kind of flag at home or at the mon-

asteries every year. When doing this, we take down the flags that were raised in the previous year.

Lastly, on this day, men wear our traditional attire called *Bhangra*, and women wear *Ghalek*. We always have huge gatherings for family, friends, and relatives on this holiday, and other community people are also welcomed if they would like to celebrate with us. On this holiday, everyone of the Tamu community all around Nepal organizes different cultural events, which include dancing, singing, and wishing each other a prosperous new year. For some big events, celebrities are also involved in this holiday celebration, which doubles our joyfulness during *Tamu/Gurung Losar*. On this day, everyone sings and dances the whole day and night. We wish and hope that the whole year could be just like New Year's Day.



In conclusion, like every new year in every culture, ours is also filled with joy and celebrations. People from all backgrounds come together and celebrate it with honor and respect. *Tamu Lhosar* is not only the marking of a new year but also the very identity of my Gurung culture, and I am very proud to inform you about the significance, rituals and celebrations attached to it.



#### *Gundruk and Dhindo*

*Gundruk and Dhindo* is a typical part of Nepali cuisine. It is considered one of the national dishes. Mostly people in the hilly region consume this dish. *Gundruk* is made from leaves of vegetables like radishes, turnips, and mustard greens. The most common one is from mustard greens. Usually, leaves are beaten and marinated in a pot for a couple of days. Then, they are sun-dried to prevent it from going bad. *Gundruk* is mostly sour in taste. People usually make curry with it, eat it by itself or by mixing it with potatoes. Some people prefer to pickle *Gundruk*. *Dhindo* is made from flour of millet, buckwheat, maize, or wheat, basically, any grain that can be ground into flour. The preparation of *dhindo* is very simple. Water is brought to a boiling point, and the flour of choice is put into water little by little. While putting in the flour, it is continuously stirred with a wooden spatula called *dabilo*. Once the flour is cooked, the *dhindo* is ready to be served. A combination of these two dishes is considered a unique experience for foreigners visiting Nepal.

# Hanan Hayder



My name is Hanan Hayder, and I am from Iraq (Mosul). I have three brothers and two sisters. My favorite hobbies are basketball and tennis. My goal is to become a doctor to help people and save their lives. In 2008, my parents decided to move to Syria because there was war at the time. We lived in Syria for almost eight years. In 2014, we came to the United States. When we came to the United States, my father said, "We are safe now." I studied in middle school and high school in the US. In August 2019, I entered Black Hawk College. My parents brought us to the US to have a better life and education. My siblings and I are very thankful for what they have given to us.

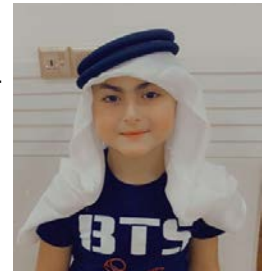
## Traditional Clothes in Iraq

Do you know what traditional clothes Iraqi people wear? In the cities of Iraq, different people have different styles. In most of the cities, women wear long dresses with hijabs, which are scarves that cover their heads. Men never wear hijabs. In this essay, I will talk about traditional clothing in three different areas, Kurdistan, Baghdad, and Karbala.

First of all, Kurdistan is part of northern Iraq. They have different kinds of clothes. The men's outfit consists of loose trousers called *shawls*. They wear jackets of the same color and fabric as the *shawls*. The belt is made of a wide, light fabric in different colors and with different designs sewn on. Most of the men wear scarves wrapped in a circle on the top of their heads, especially the old men. The women's dresses are usually long and mostly cover the soles of their feet. The dresses have long sleeves connected to two long conical tails called *faqinah*. These dresses are sewn from transparent fabric and silky threads that are soft to the touch. The upper part of the costume is a very short sleeveless jacket, and in the winter they change the jacket to one with long sleeves that reaches below the knees or almost to the ground. The women and daughters of wealthy families wear golden belts. On their heads, they wear a hat that has gold strands that reach below the jaw. These women and daughters wear a lot of gold, especially if there is a wedding or party.

Secondly, Baghdad is the capital of Iraq, and it is a very busy city. The men wear a *dishdasha*, which has colors of black, white, or brown. Mostly the old men wear a white *dishdasha*. When they wear the

*dishdasha*, they wear a *qhutra*, which is a scarf on their heads. In the *qhutra*, they wear an *eqal*, which is made from black wool. These are head coverings that are fashionable in all the Arab countries. The women also wear *dishdashas*, but theirs are designed with flowers and have different colors. *Dubara* is a form of cloth; it has many colors in the form of yellow, red, black, and blue stripes, and it is tied around the forehead of the women. When they wear *dubara*, they wear *kellabs* made of gold or silver, which are placed on the right side of the face.



Finally, Karbala is a city in central Iraq. Karbala is a religious place where the Shia Muslims go to visit Imam Husayn and Abbas, and also to pray. When people go and visit, they should wear long clothes. Women should wear a long dress called an *abaya* with a hijab. Women must cover their bodies for the reception with Imam. If they don't wear *abaya*, they should wear a very long hijab, or otherwise, they are not allowed in Karbala. *Abayas* are always black and are made from silk. For men, it is fine to wear pants, but not short pants. Wearing *dishdasha* is more respectful than wearing pants.



In conclusion, we can see now how each city of Iraq has its own traditional clothes. People in most cities such as Kurdistan, Baghdad, and Karbala wear long dresses, and women wear hijab headscarves. From these few examples, we can easily see how men and women wear different traditional clothes and how those clothes are sewn.



In Iraq, we celebrate Ramadan and Eid. During Ramadan, people fast for one month. People are not allowed to drink water or eat food at that time. They wake up at 3:00 am to eat breakfast, and after eating, they wait until it is time for praying. They fast from 4:30 am until 8:00 pm. Each day, the time changes by one minute. For example, they will start eating at 3:00 am and stop eating at 4:29 am. The same thing happens for the dinner. They will start eating at 8:01 pm. Until Ramadan ends, the minutes keep changing. During Ramadan, people take food to their neighbors or their relatives, who then give them something back like food or sweets. At the end of Ramadan or on the first day of Eid, people give *zakat* to poor people. On the first day of Eid in the morning, people go to the *Masq* to pray the Eid prayer. The relatives and friends meet together in one house to celebrate Eid. The women start to make special food like *dolma*, *biryani*, and *kibbeh*. After the food, they start making the Eid sweet called *klejh*. It tastes good, and they buy baklava too. The old people give money to the kids, so they can go and buy their favorite snacks. Eid is not as long as Ramadan, Eid is just three days. In the three days, people form a group to go to the park or different places.

# Hassan Hayder



My name is Hassan. I am originally from the Middle East, Iraq. I was born in Iraq, but my family and I moved to Syria. I lived there in Syria for eight years. I am 19 years old. I hope to pass all my classes in college. My goal is to be a doctor. After Black Hawk, my goal is to go to medical school. I live with my parents, two brothers, and three sisters. My big dream is to buy a Lamborghini. My favorite sport is soccer. I like to read magazines. One of my favorite hobbies is lifting weights. I work out every day for two hours.

## **An Iraqi's Life in Syria and the USA**

I was born in Mosul, Iraq, where I was living a dangerous, creepy nightmare. When I was five years old, I lost my Grandpa Baker and three uncles, Hassan, Shaheed, and Qahtan, in a big explosion. After the explosion happened, my family moved to Aleppo, Syria. I thought I would find the dream life in Syria, like a good education with better schools and good teachers, but I was wrong; everything was the opposite. In 2014, my family and I were lucky enough to be chosen to come to the U.S. Our lives changed because we found our freedom. When we were refugees in Syria, we experienced religious discrimination, but in the US, my family and I can choose any religion that we want to follow. Changes in education were the most dramatic for me because I was school age, and there were a lot of adjustments to make. Furthermore, our lives also changed in another way by adding individual household responsibilities for males.

The most significant change for me was education. I started my formal education in Syria in 2007 when I was six years old. I was miserable, and I cried a lot. The run-down school building was large. However, the classrooms were small and crowded. There were 25 to 30 students in each class, and they sat on old, wooden benches that they shared with a partner. The rooms were dim and sweltering hot because there was no electricity for lights or air conditioning. Most of the walls were full of graffiti because the wild students wrote on the walls during class. The majority of the teachers treated the students savage-

ly and hit them violently. Fortunately, we had to suffer through it for only half a day because another class came in the afternoon. After coming to the U.S., I enrolled in middle school in Rock Island at the age of 14. The building was modern with electricity and air conditioning, and the teachers did not use corporal punishment to control the students. Nevertheless, it was still a difficult transition. Even though they knew I did not understand English, the teachers talked very fast without taking time to consider whether I understood anything or not. When we moved to Moline, I attended Moline High School. The teachers were stricter about behavior, but they spoke slowly and taught carefully and logically. When I raised my hand to ask for help, they were happy to help me. For the first time, I felt welcome in a new school.

The other significant change in the U.S. was in my responsibilities as a male. In the past, my responsibilities were very different than now. My mom used to cook for me in Syria, but when we came to the U.S, I had to start cooking for myself. At first, I was shocked when she told me to prepare my meals, but now I understand that it is acceptable for males to help in the kitchen. It is even necessary when women have jobs outside the home. I could not imagine a male washing dishes in Syria. Furthermore, my mom and my sister used to wash my clothes, but now I often do the laundry. I was embarrassed to walk into the laundromat the first time because I thought I would be the only man washing clothes. However, when I go to the laundromat now, I am no longer surprised to see other men there. Taking care of my younger siblings is also something I would not have done in Syria. Here in the U.S., when my mom goes to work, I am in charge of my younger siblings; that includes preparing their meals, washing their dishes, and checking their homework. I feel very frustrated and trapped when I am left in charge because I still do not see myself being asked to take care of children. I still feel a male's place is playing sports, working out, or racing cars.

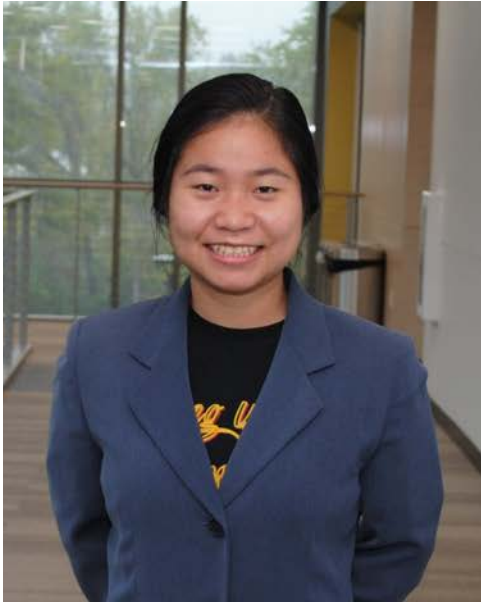
In conclusion, my life in the U.S. has come much closer to meeting my dreams than life in Syria. After graduating from high school, I entered Black Hawk College, and I am on the path to becoming a doctor. I feel like all of the obstacles have been removed. I am actually enjoying some of my new male responsibilities because I understand they are part of American culture.





In my country Iraq, traditional parties are cultural events, and they are different from the parties I have attended in the U.S. We invite our close families and friends to our great occasions. At Iraqi parties, we present the best food to guests. For example, we prepare *dolma*, a rice and vegetable dish, and *biryani*, which is rice and meat with nuts. The meal also includes soup, salad, and a lovely sweet dessert called *baklava*. At parties in my country, we host the guests perfectly and respectfully. In addition, when we dance at parties in my country, we dance powerfully while we listen to popular Arabic music. When the guests arrive at the party, we serve hot tea. After dining, dancing, and celebrating, we conclude our Iraqi parties by staying up late at night to discuss life in general. We dress in fancy, traditional clothing for the parties as well. We always try to be careful that the guests do not get bored at the party, so we try to make it as fun as possible.

# Spae Htway



My name is Spae Htway, and I am originally from Thailand. I am 18 years old, and I am also a student at Black Hawk College. I have one older brother and a nephew. My parents moved to the United State when I was very young. They moved here so that we can have a better life. They wanted my brother and me to have better opportunities and to be able to get an education. My goal is to become better with my English. I want to work on my grammar and my spelling. My hope and dream is that I pass my class and will continue to study hard so that I can have a good decent job. When we first moved to the United States, we landed in Florida. We got to know the place a little, but then afterward we moved to Rock Island, Illinois, where we had many relatives. I started to learn English in school and got a little better at it. I was very thankful that I was able to learn English so that I can continue to understand and be able to help my parents a little. This is also my first year at Black Hawk college. While I am here I want to continue to learn as much as I can.

## Speaking Two Languages

When it comes to speaking two languages, I think that it is a great skill because not many people are able to do that. Speaking two languages has had a great impact on my life, and it also feels like a burden. Even though I speak Karen and English, I struggle with it from both sides. Many people can speak more than two languages while others can speak only one. It is not always easy for me and requires a lot of focus. When speaking two languages, I find it difficult, helpful, and advantageous at the same time.

To start off with, there are difficulties that come with speaking two languages. Speaking two languages can make you forgetful. One thing that happens to me the most is that I end up forgetting small fragments of my native language. This affects the way I speak to my family members or friends. Also, when I am speaking more of my language, I end up forgetting some words in English. This usually leads to a lack of communication. Sometimes, when I am helping my parents, it becomes difficult for me to explain to them what was being said to me because there are some words that I cannot explain or know what they mean. In addition, speaking two languages can become time consuming. It is not always easy. You could have other important events to be at, but you have family members that cannot speak English who have an important job interview or a doctor's appointment. There are many difficulties when speaking two languages. It's not always a piece of cake. So in order to prevent these things from happening, it helps to continue speaking your language more and having good time management.

Also, speaking two languages is helpful for me and others. One way that it is helpful is that I end up learning more. When I help my parents do paper work, I learn how things are pronounced and have a better understanding. Another helpful part about speaking two languages is being able to help others, helping them read papers, explaining what it is about and helping them understand what to do next. The last part is better job opportunities. Many workplaces require people to speak two languages. People who are able to speak and understand two languages are highly likely to be hired.

Lastly, it is advantageous. When you understand a language, you will never have to wonder if you are being lied to. For example, having a better understanding makes things much easier. I used to not understand what people were talking about when they spoke English, but as I kept learning in school, I began to understand what my teachers were teaching me. Because I understood, I learned what my other teachers were teaching in math class. Finally, another advantage with speaking two languages is that you no longer need help, like from a translator. Instead, you are able to speak for yourself and ask any questions if you need to. Being able to speak for yourself helps you in more ways than one. The advantage of speaking two languages is how you can accomplish this yourself without having to worry about anything.

In conclusion, speaking two languages is a very important skill to have. With these skills there are some obstacles and great opportunities that come your way. It can be difficult, helpful and give you an advantage in life. But as long as you keep studying and also focus on your language, you will be able to do it.

In my culture one of my favorite beverages is *yee ge tho*. *Yee ge tho* is common in the Karen culture; it can be made or bought. It is also made in different ways in other cultures like India's. The names may not be the same but the ingredients are. There are three reasons why the Karen culture likes it so much: it is easy to make, great for the summer, and a great after-meal drink. To begin with how it is made, you need to have a cup of any size. This beverage requires ice or cold water, but most Karen people use shaved ice so that it melts faster and be edible. Then you can add any type of bread or cracker, which you break apart into little pieces to put in the cup. You also add jelly and chopped peanuts with condensed milk. One other ingredient to add is Hales. It is a flavor syrup that adds the color of the *yee ge tho*. The most common colors the Karen people use are red, yellow, and green. Afterward, you can begin to mix it until it the ice melts and all the ingredients are blended. When all that is done, you can begin to drink it and chew it. These are easy ingredients, and that is why the Karen people make it so often.

# Faeza Hussein



My name is Faeza. I am from Baghdad, Iraq. My native language is Arabic. I have been in the USA since 2009. In my first year here, I did not have the opportunity to learn English because my kids were babies. I have three children, two girls and one boy. We lived in different states such as Tennessee, Wisconsin, and Illinois. I am not working right now. However, I am studying to finish my last two English classes, writing and reading. I had an Associate's Degree in Biomedical Technology from my country. I worked in the hospital for four years before I came to the USA. My job was to repair and fix medical equipment. In my free time, I like to watch movies, walk, and exercise. I also read stories.

## **Our Immigration to the USA**

We immigrated from Iraq to the United States for better living situations. We were having difficulty living in our home country because it was a dangerous place to raise a family. We were looking for a better life and future for our family, so we found the opportunity to immigrate. We applied for an immigrant visa. We moved to the USA for many reasons like security, education, and job possibilities.

Firstly, we moved to the United States looking for peace and safety. Our life was in constant danger because of terrorists. These terrorists killed anyone who worked with Americans. My husband was working at U.S. bases in different cities in Iraq, which could lead to danger. His work was to provide support for the Army inside the base. He went to work every day. One day, we received a threat from terrorists written in front of our door because of his work. Iraqis like us were working with the U.S. Army because they wanted to improve their lives, but that put them in danger.

Secondly, we moved to the USA to get the best educational opportunities for our children. There is free public education here for children. For instance, the USA has perfect learning environments, such as good teachers, school activities, free transportation, and school buildings that are safe. Another thing is that the school provides free meals for lunch and breakfast. These advantages are not offered in other countries. Colleges and universities in the USA have financial aid and student loans for students who want to complete their studies. There are educational opportunities for immigrants to get a degree and improve themselves. For

example, my husband had the chance to study for an engineering degree from the University of Tennessee. He also took out a loan to pay for his education. When he got a job, he paid off his loan through monthly payments.

Thirdly, another reason to immigrate is for better job opportunities. We decided to come to the U.S. for job availability. For instance, my husband got simple jobs in his first year here. He worked as a cashier at a Home Depot store. Later, my husband got a good position in a company when he finished his degree in electrical engineering. It is also easy for people to open up businesses. We have some refugee friends who opened their stores that sell all Arabic products. Another example is that teenagers or students can start working at age 16. Work is not easy to find in other countries. People are immigrating to the USA to improve their living conditions.

In conclusion, we immigrated to the USA for better life opportunities. There are several reasons why we moved to the U.S., such as security, education, and job opportunities. Overall, we moved to the USA to improve our living conditions and raise a healthy family.



#### Iraqi Dolma

The Iraqi *dolma* is one of the most famous dishes in Iraq. The way of cooking differs between north and south of Iraq. As Iraqis, we learned the recipe from our parents. It is passed down through generations. All religions in Iraq make this famous dish on their religious holidays. In general, Iraqi people make this food during special occasions (like *Eid*) and when guests visit. This food is a symbol of greeting because of its delicious taste. There are two types of *dolma*. One uses chard leaves, and another uses grape leaves; however, both use the same ingredients. The contents of *dolma* include vegetables such as onions, eggplant, zucchini, and green pepper. The meat contents of *dolma* include lamb. We also fill it with rice. We mix the meat with rice and add cut tomatoes. We also add tomato paste. It is seasoned with different spices and lemon juice and red pepper. We then mix it up and roll it in the chard leaves or grape leaves. We also put the mix in green pepper and eggplant. We line and stack it up and then put it in the pot. We use oil and also add hot water to it. It is cooked for an hour. After it is done cooking, it is flipped on a big plate and then served below.

# Kamalpreet Kaur



My name is Kamalpreet Kaur. I was born in Adam-pur, Punjab, India. I came to the USA in June, 2017. I am 17 years old. I love to learn about new things. I can speak three languages. I want to become a regis-tered nurse. I live with my parents. I have two sisters. My whole family lives in the USA, except my grand-mother, who still lives in India. I love to meet people from other countries and learn about their language, country, and culture. I graduated from Sherrard High School in 2021. I always tried to give my best in high school, and I will always give my best in my college classes, too.

## Places You Should Visit in India

India is a beautiful country. It has so many different cultures and languages. India has so many beautiful places to visit. The different places describe the different history and show their own beauty. There are so many places that you must visit in India when you go there. Some of them are Amritsar, Jaipur, Kashmir, and Ladakh.

First, Amritsar is a beautiful city in Punjab, India. It is the most famous for *Harmandir Sahib*, also known as the golden temple; it is a Sikh temple. The *Harmandir Sahib* has a four doors that represent equality, meaning that anyone from anywhere can come there and be treated be equally. The city has some really famous food, too, for exam-ple *amritsari kulcha*. It also shows Punjab culture. There are a lot of shops there. You can find *salwar kameej*, *Punjabi jutti* (footwear), different types of food, and a lot of different things there. And there are also other his-torical places you can visit. For example, *Jallianwala Baghi* preserves the memory of those who were wound-ed and killed in the *jallianwala bagh* massacre that occurred on the festival of *Baisakhi*. It is very peaceful there, but it still has marks of gun shots.



Second, Kashmir is located in the northernmost part of India. It is very beautiful. It is well known for Pashmina shawls and blankets. Kashmiri shawls are made from goat hair called *pashm*. This is not the only

thing that Kashmiri shawls are made of. There are numerous valleys and 596 named mountains. Dal lake is one of the most famous lakes in Kashmir. Nishat Bagh (terraced Mughal garden) is one the most famous gardens; it is located on the eastern side of Dal lake.

Thrid, Jaipur is the capital of India's Rajasthan state. Jaipur city was founded in 1727 by Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II. It is well known for Rajasthan's traditional jewelry. *Borla* is one of the most popular Rajasthani ornaments. It is also known for Rajasthan's fabric. Jaipur has a lot of historic buildings. For example Amer Fort, Jal Mahal, the Archeological Museum, etc.

Fourth, Leh Ladakh is famous for a lot of things. It is famous for its mountains; Stok Kangri is the highest mountain there. People love Ladakh's breathtaking natural beauty. The crystal clear lakes and clear sky are so beautiful. Kyun Tso and Ryul Tso are two beautiful lakes known as the twin lakes in Leh Ladakh. Pangong lake is one of the most famous lakes in Leh Ladakh.

Every country has historic or other places that you must visit when you go there. For example, if you go to Paris, you should visit the Eiffel Tower. There are so many beautiful places in India that you should visit, but these are some of the most important places that you should visit when you go there: Amritsar, Kashmir, Jaipur, and Ladakh.

India has so many traditional dresses, some of them according to states, but the most popular and known dress is the *sari*. *Sari* is a garment consisting of a length of cotton or silk elaborately draped around the body. A lot of Indian women wear them every day. The everyday *sari* is mostly casual and lightweight. Women also wear them at weddings, but those are mostly bright colors and have different designs and are frequently embroidered. In most of the states, people wear *saris*. In some states, people wear *saris*, but they have a different way to wear it, and they have different designs. I have never worn a *sari* before because I am from Punjab, India, and in my state, we mostly wear *salwar kameez*.

# Jhansi Kudumula



My name is Jhansi. I was born in Hyderabad, India, in a typical middle class family of four. My mom and dad had a small business. I am the first child, and I have a brother who is six years younger than me. I had a normal childhood like many other kids, like going to school, having fun with friends and helping my parents with their business, etc. I finished both my schooling and college in my hometown, Hyderabad. I got a Master's in Business Administration. My first language is Telugu, which is my native language. Recently, I joined the ESL writing class to improve my writing skills. I got married in December 2009. My husband works for John Deere. I moved to the U.S. in the Year 2010. I have two children, a nine-year-old girl and a five-year-old boy. Currently, I am a stay-at-home mom. I love gardening and listening to classical music. I also like to experiment with different home decor ideas.

## Traditional and Alternative Medicine Systems of India

Traditional medicine systems, also called alternative medicine systems, are ancient healing methods used for centuries to treat diseases. Traditional medicine systems are mostly based on belief systems like religion, culture and traditions and used by different groups of people worldwide. Traditional medicine systems mostly use plant-based products and minerals, and follow diet and exercise plans in the healing process. Traditional medicine systems are often criticized for substances used in their medicines. However, for generations traditional systems have played an important role in meeting the health care needs of people in India and around the world. India, well-known for its cultural and traditional diversity, has four recognized traditional medicine systems. They are *Siddha*, *Ayurveda*, *Unani*, and homeopathy.

*Ayurveda*, one of the oldest and most ancient systems of medicine, dates back more than 3000 years ago. *Ayurveda* is derived from the words *ayuh* and *veda*, which means life and science; therefore, *Ayurveda* means science of life. According to *Ayurveda*, the human body is a mini universe, comprised of five elements of life: fire, earth, space, air, and water. These five elements combine to form three types of *doshas* (humors) in the human body: *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*. *Ayurveda* believes that any illness in a human body is caused by the imbalance of these five elements. Every individual has a unique body. So, *Ayurveda* uses different combinations of treatment procedures depending on each body type. In this system, herbs, roots, spices, and other plant-based medicines are used in the form of powders, juices, thick jam like pastes, and oils to treat the diseases. The treatment process starts with body detoxification, followed by changes in diet and herbal medica-



tions. Sometimes, massage therapy, yoga and meditation are also included in the process.

The *Siddha* medicine system is also one of the oldest traditional and holistic medicine systems of India, developed during Indus civilization. This system originated in Tamilnadu, located in the southern part of India, and belongs to Dravidian culture. *Siddha* and *Ayurveda* are closely associated with each other; therefore, sometimes it is also called *Tamil Ayurveda*, yet they maintain their own distinctiveness. Like *Ayurveda*, *Siddha* is also an elemental and holistic type of healing system. The term *Siddha* is derived from the word *siddhi*, which means achievement, and the person who practices *Siddha* medicine is called *Siddhars*. *Siddhars* are traditionally trained by spiritual gurus; hence the combination of spiritual and medicinal practices are used in *Siddha* healing system. Medicines used in *Siddha* are classified into three groups, first *thavaram* (herbal products), second *thadhu* (inorganic substances like mercury, copper, gold, Sulphur, etc.) and *jangamam* (animal products). Both *Ayurveda* and *Siddha* focus on treating the cause of the illness rather than the symptoms associated with it.

Homeopathy is the second most popular traditional medicine systems in India, after *Ayurveda*. Homeopathy originated in Germany in the late 1700s, and it entered India in the 1800s. In the beginning, it was mostly practiced by amateurs. Because this system believes in the theory of “like cures like,” a similar substance to the one that brings symptoms of illness in a healthy person is used in a tiny dose for treating the ill person. In homeopathy, very tiny amounts of plant and mineral substances, which are available in various forms like sugar pellets, gels, lotions, drops, and tablets, are used in the healing process

The *Unani* medicine system, though popular in India, like homeopathy, did not actually originate in India. It was brought to India by Arab travelers during the Mughal period; therefore, it is also called Arab medicine and mostly practiced in Islamic cultures. The term *Unani* means Greek as it is based on the teachings of Greek physicians. The *Unani* system to some extent is influenced by Indian medicine systems like *Ayurveda* and *Siddha*, again based on the theory that, health or sickness of the human body is the result of balance or imbalance of five elements and four humors (*doshas*), blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. The *Unani* system uses herbs, minerals, animal products, oils, etc. in the treatment process.

To sum it up, although scientific medicine has a dominant role in the modern world, it cannot be denied that traditional medicine systems are playing their own role in meeting the health care needs of people in the most populated developing countries like India. Traditional medicine systems are also criticized for the use of certain inorganic substances, like sulphur, mercury, etc., but it should be noted that the synthetic drugs prescribed in Western medicine systems also cause side effects if used for longer periods. So, it can be concluded that sometimes natural methods of traditional healing systems prove to be better than biomedical systems in treating certain ailments.



**Chai (Indian Tea)** - Chai is a morning refreshing beverage, which is very popular among Indian households, just like coffee in some parts of the world. Chai is an Indian version of tea made with black tea leaves, milk, and sugar. Some spices and herbs are also used to give a special flavor to chai, but these are completely optional. In Indian culture, chai is offered to visitors or guests as a welcoming gesture. There are different varieties of chai depending on the spices or herbs used in the recipe, like ginger chai, cardamom chai, tulsi chai, masala chai, etc. However, the recipe below is adrak chai, in which ginger and cardamom were used as flavoring agents.

2 cups of water	2 pods of cardamom, crushed
2 cups of whole milk	4 tsp black tea leaf powder
1 tsp ginger, chopped or grated	5 tsp sugar

**Preparation:** Pour the water and milk into a vessel and bring it to a boil on the stove top. Then add black tea powder, crushed cardamom, and ginger pieces to the mixture. Let it boil on medium heat for five to six minutes, or till it is reduced to half of its consistency. Add sugar to your taste, and serve it hot with biscuits and enjoy.

# Janvier Maniragaba



My name is Janvier Maniragaba, but I go by Mani. I am 18 years old. I was born in Lukole, a refugee camp in Tanzania, but I am originally Burundian. My parents are from Burundi, a country in East Africa and a landlocked state that borders Tanzania, Rwanda, and DRC. On the Burundian flag, there are three stars in the middle of the flag, which represent the national motto “Ubumwe, ibikorwa Iterambere.” It translates to unity, work and progress. I grew up in Tanzania, an East African country known for its vast wilderness areas. I came to the United States when I was 13 years old. I have two sisters and three brothers. I grew up in a place where many languages were spoken; therefore, I speak four languages: Kirundi, which is my native language, Swahili, Kinyarwanda, English, and I also understand Kibembe and a little bit of French. I love going to church and singing because I believe in God and trust him through rainy days and sunny days. My dad is a pastor in the Light Mission Pentecostal Church. My parents received little education and so did my older brother. Even though I am not the first person in my family to go to college, I still want to be the first person to graduate college and make my parents feel proud. I went to Rocky (Rock Island High School), and I am a student of the class of 2021. When I was in high school, I did track and field. I was a shotput and a discus thrower, but right now I do not do sports. I am a freshman in college, and my goal is to become a registered nurse. After I reach my goal, I want to go back to Africa, especially to Burundi, because I have never been there.

## Marriage in Burundi

Can you imagine having to pay a bride price just to marry someone's daughter? Well in Burundi, traditionally, it was the father's duty to find a wife for his son back in the days when polygamy was practiced. In Burundian culture, we consider marriage as one of the main life events, and we celebrate it for two days. There are two main parts in celebrating the marriage: *gusaba* or bride price and the wedding ceremony.

The first traditional event of the whole marriage is *Gusaba*, which translates to pre-dowry. The groom's father visits the bride's father and announces his son's intention. If the bride's family accepts, the next step is *Gukwa*, the dowry process. The dowry used to consist of cattle, goats and hoes, but today it can include cash, clothing, and furniture. For the pre-dowry the groom's family goes to the bride's home with gifts, and then they start planning their wedding day.

Next comes the payment of the dowry. It might sound like selling your daughter to someone, but it's not really selling her because traditionally, it has always been a must for the groom to pay for his bride. It's not a bride price but a way to show the bride's family that you value and love their daughter. If a man marries an educated bride, the dowry can be \$1,400 or more while, on the other hand, if a man marries a less educated woman who might not have made it to high school, the dowry can begin at \$500.

Last but not least, after everything is settled and the wedding date is set, the groom and bride make the announcement to whoever they would like to see at their wedding. The groom must prepare the whole wedding and find a team that will help him through the wedding. On the wedding day, the groom and his family and friends drive to the bride's house to pick her up. Women attending the wedding dress in our traditional three-piece outfit, called *Imvutano*, while men wear suits. The bride is responsible for choosing the color of the day, and she wears a long white wedding dress. The wedding includes traditional Burundi-an drumming, and groups performing cultural dances with the traditional music playing. Many toasts followed with *Ijambo* (meaning wise words) are made and the joyous day goes on as planned.

In conclusion, back in the day, it was hard to marry someone because of the bride price and finding a team to help the bride and groom. We still consider marriage as a big life event, but the groom's father doesn't have to find a wife for his son. Today, a lot has changed, and people still do weddings by following in the footsteps of our ancestors. Even though we follow in their footsteps of our ancestors, we do things differently, and some cultural rules have changed as well.

#### How to Cook my Favorite Dish, *Fufu*

My favorite dish is *fufu* or *foo foo*. I love *fufu* because it is very easy to cook, and whenever I am hungry, and I cannot wait to eat, I just make *fufu*. *Fufu* is very popular to many Africans, and we do not cook it the same way. There are so many different types of *fufu*, and they are made with different types of flours. Normally, at my house, we like to cook cassava *fufu* or the one with olla olla flour. The cassava flour is made from cassava root, and you can make soup from cassava leaves. Unlike other flours, cassava flour is soft and powdery, and it has a mild and neutral flavor. All you need to make *fufu* is a clean pot, water, flour of your choice and a long handmade wooden spoon that you will use to mix the *fufu*. You take your clean pot, pour in some water, wait for the water to boil, then pour in the cassava flour little by little and use the long wooden spoon to mix the flour with the water. It will start to get sticky, and when it is getting too thick, you add a bit of water and keep going until it is nice and smooth. Also, you should be able to form a ball. To eat it, you take a small piece of the *fufu* and dip it in the soup. Then you put it in your mouth and swallow it without chewing.

# Kpantukyo Napala



My name is Kpantukyo Napala. I was born in Kande in the north of Togo, West Africa. I completed my secondary school in French in 1992. I attended the University of Lomé, Togo, and I studied economics. Five years later, I obtained my master's degree. In 1998, I started a position as a risk manager in a bank. The following year, I was sent to the Central Bank of West African States School in Senegal, West Africa for studies in finance and banking. When I was back in Togo in 2002, I was promoted to be the head of the Risk Management Department. I used to analyze the risks of loan applications from small, medium, and large corporations. It was an exciting job, but one that involves enormous risks. I was approving and rejecting loans applications for 10 years. I obtained a PHD in Economics in 2021, from the University of Lomé. Today, I live in Moline with my lovely wife and our three kids. My wish is to find a job in an international organization after my ESL studies.

## **The Ingenious and Secure *Somba* Castles of Northern Togo**

In general, a man's habitat is the reflection of his knowledge, beliefs, and relationships with minerals, plants, animals, and the humans in his environment. One illustration of these facts are the *Somba* castles built by the *Tammari* or *Somba* people. The *Somba* people are in the northeastern part of Togo about a 5-to-6-hour drive from the capital Lomé. They can also be found in the northwestern part of Benin and are recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as one of the world heritages. The *Somba* castles are among the most ingenious and secure traditional habitats in West Africa.

Based on local materials, traditional *Somba* castles have a creative architecture. First, the building's materials are taken from the immediate environment, and they promote a comfortable indoor climate. For instance, they are constructed of clay soil and animal dung that allows them to maintain a moderate temperature in the local tropical climate. The roof is made of wood and straw, which is said to keep out heat and rain. The wood used for the roof is also locally sourced and is very solid to support the whole building. Second, the traditional *Somba* castles are circular assemblies of small contiguous towers built on two levels with only one small entrance and without windows. A *Somba* castle houses its inhabitants and all their belongings. The ground floor usually consists of the kitchen, animal shelters and a dressing room. On the upper floor are the bedrooms and the granaries.

The aim of such architecture is to guarantee the security of the inhabitants against the wild animals of



the savannah and enemies in case of conflicts. Indeed, the *Somba* castles are physical and spiritual fortresses. They are physical fortresses for several reasons. The building has a single small entrance door with several small ventilation holes for security. From the outside, visitors do not have a view of the interior of the house; on the contrary, they are seen from afar by inhabitants, thanks to the ventilation holes. In addition, inhabitants keep all their belongings safe in these small castles (animals, food, etc.). A distance equivalent to that of an arrow when it is thrown is kept between the castles, also for safety reasons. The traditional castles are also spiritual fortresses because altars of spiritual protection are erected at the entrance of each castle. Furthermore, as the west symbolizes “life” for this people, all the entrances of the *Somba* castles are oriented towards this direction.

In conclusion, the *Somba* castles are a masterpiece of human creativity. Treat yourself to a visit of this special architecture, and you will live an unforgettable experience. This world heritage site attracts thousands of tourists every year; however, it has been observed that over the years, the inhabitants started to experiment with other forms of foreign housing that are relatively less secure.



#### Celebration of the Harvest Festival among the *Lamba* in Togo

Every second Saturday of February of the year, the native *Lamba* people, no matter where they live, gather in the Keran region for a harvest festival called *Tislm*. The *Lamba* people live mainly in the Keran region, located north of Lomé, the capital of Togo, a 5 hour drive away. *Tislm* is a festival of homage to God and to the manes of their ancestors for having allowed them to realize various harvests during the past year. Among the various activities organized, the most outstanding are the symbolic presentation of the fruits of the first harvest and the popular celebrations. Indeed, before consuming the first harvest of the fields, the *Lamba* present them to God and their ancestors to show their gratitude and receive their blessing for the coming season. One of these crops that characterizes the *Lamba* is *fonio*, a kind of cereal similar in form to couscous, whose therapeutic virtues against diabetes and the elimination of excess fat are recognized; a meal based on *fonio* can be preserved at room temperature for more than a month. The popular celebrations take place in the afternoon to the sound of drums and songs and dances. The most popular dance is the *slintou*, which requires flexibility, elegance, and endurance. It is a complex dance because it forces the dancer to follow the collective rhythm and produce his own dance steps. Thus, while dancing, one must be skilled enough to constantly keep the harmony between his own rhythm and that of the group. Also, the dancer’s costume includes both obligatory and optional ornaments. Each *Tislm* festival in *Lamba* country is always a unique, unforgettable event full of shared joy.

# Bienvenue Panla



My name is Bienvenue Panla. I am from the north of Togo especially the north. I grew up in Lomé, the capital city of my country. I got my high school diploma in 2015. I studied sociology for one and half years, and when we were about to start the final exams in 2017, I took the plane for the USA. Once in the United States, I lived in Vernon, Connecticut for a couple of months before moving to Illinois. I am a married woman, and now I live in Moline. Before starting at Black Hawk College last year, I was going to the Outreach Center. My goal is to find a better job with great payments and benefits. This year, I am going to have my ESL certificate, and start taking my career courses.

## Process of Making Palm Oil

Palm nuts come from palm tree, and we can see like three to five bunches of palm nuts on one palm tree. They usually grow in the south of Togo, especially on agricultural farms. To harvest palm oil fruit, we need to identify it by its bright red-orange color. After that, we need to cut bunches off from the tree. If you see that the tree is too high, you are going to need clusters or a ladder with a machete. There are different ways to make palm oil, but I am going to explain the easiest way.

First of all, we need red palm nuts, a big pot, and jars full of water. To start our oil, we are going to cook the palm nuts; after they are cooked, we need to strain the water from it, and let them get cold. Later, we must crush the palm nuts by taking out the palm skin from the nuts with a big mortar. Afterward, we need to add water (not too cold or hot) to clean out the palm nuts from the mortar, and then mix everything and take out the nuts and the zest. We pour the palm sauce in the pot and turn on the heat.

Secondly, before extracting the palm oil, we need to let the palm sauce boil. When we see that there is much oil in the sauce, we are going to take out that oil from it, and let it cool for a while. Afterwards, we are going to strain the oil from the zest on the top of the oil and cook it until there is no more water in the oil. At this point, we must add some salt, and when we start smelling the oil, it means our oil is ready.

Finally our palm oil is used for a lot of things including food. In my country, some people use it as an ordinary cooking oil. It is used in different soups, for example, okra soup, banga soup, ademe, gboma, eghousi soup, and others use it to eat with yams, cassava, beans, etc. Bread, shampoo, cookies, soaps, make-up, lip-

stick are some examples of palm oil used in products in our daily life. In the health domain, it is used to prevent a person who ate or drank poisoned food from dying. Palm oil is the cheapest oil among the vegetable oils in my country.

In conclusion, even though I did not list all the things that palm oil is used for, I know that it has been very popular in West Africa: Benin, Ghana, Nigeria and my country, Togo, and nowadays it is used all over the world. Therefore, palm oil is one ingredient that we can longer more avoid or deny that we use it.



I am going to talk about how to make our local beverage, called *Toukouchou*, and how it is served. To start our beverage, we need red millet. On Saturday evening around 4 p.m., pour the millet into water and leave it in until the morning. On Sunday morning around 9 a.m., take it out of the water and pour it into a strainer and wait until the water stops. Later, pour it into a big bowl, cover it and leave it until the morning. On Monday morning, when you open it, you will see that it has germinated, so you will pour water to clean it. After straining it, put a piece of plastic on the floor and spread out the cleaned millet on it. Make sure that the millet is together in one place, cover it, and leave it there until Wednesday. Around 5 p.m., open it up and spread out the germinated millet so that it can dry. On Thursday morning, take the dry germinated millet to the mill, then mixed the powdered millet with water in a pot around 7 a.m. and let it cool down for one and a half hours. Then take the water from the pot and pour it into another bowl; after that, add water and put the pot over heat. While it is on the heat, try to stir until it is boiling. Afterwards, turn the heat off and take some cups of the first water that we put into another bowl and let it cool down. Later, when you see that it is not hot anymore, strain the cooked millet and mix the water from it to the first water that you put aside into a pot, and cover it until Friday. In the morning, you will see that it is fermented, so you will put it on the stove and let it boil. Later, you turn off the heat and let it sit there until the evening. Before going to bed on Friday, you must fill the beverage into bottles. On Saturday morning around 9 a.m., your *Toukouchou* is ready to serve. It tastes very good when you drink it from a calabash.



# Alondra Paredes



My name is Tatiana, but most all my friends call me Tatis, I am from Mexico City, and I am in the United States since 2006. I am 37 years old, and I am the mother of two beautiful children. My oldest is a girl, who is 17 years old and in high school in 12th grade, and my little one is a boy, who is starting second grade in the elementary school. I work in a Mexican restaurant named Mezcal in DeWitt, Iowa as a waitress. I work 6 days a week, and I am a mom 24/7 as many are, but I also work hard to improve my English knowledge. That way, I will be a better speaker with more fluency and accuracy. I am enrolled in two more classes that will give me in the future the tools to get my degree and a better career with a better income.

## Misinterpreted Holidays in the USA

It is true that the United States is a country that was built by migrants from all over the world who sought a better life, and that is why it is also true that there is a diversity of cultures and traditions, which consequently have merged to create a melting pot of different cultures, where we all belong because we have all contributed with a small part, which in turn we have also adopted as our own. However, we cannot forget the roots that made this land fertile. Colonization influenced the traditional customs of indigenous people, transforming them into its own, creating the modern customs that we use today in America. Today, we will only focus on Mexican culture and three traditions that we have brought with us in our dream of a better future and that are commonly misinterpreted by those who are not native Mexicans. Nevertheless, we want our children to inherit the following cultural treasures: Day of the Holy Kings, War of Puebla and Day of the Dead (Day of the Dead).

All holidays are celebrated on very specific dates not because they have greater or lesser importance, but because they all deserve the same respect and we will begin in cardinal order. Christmas and New Year's are by far the most important holidays in the United States, not only for religious reasons, but many of us wait for the moment when we can open our gifts. In this country, the event is attributed to the famous Pope Noe or Santa Claus. For those who do not have Hispanic roots, they do not know the hope we have on January 6 since it is the turn of the Mexican children to give an account of their actions throughout the year while waiting for the Holy Kings to bring them gifts as they did at the end of their search following the star of Bethlehem and finding the Child Jesus. Americans have accepted the tradition in this country partially with many only waiting for the ROSCA, which is a kind of large donut that is shared with family and friends.

They do not have the knowledge of the meaning that the act is supposed to represent to symbolically celebrate the meeting of the Holy Kings, Melchior, Gaspar and Baltazar, with the baby Jesus.

Secondly, we have May 5, which is celebrated in almost all of the United States almost like St. Patrick's Day, but instead of beer margaritas are consumed. Many only look for one more excuse to drink and get drunk; others perhaps love Mexican food and culture, and it is only their way of demonstrating friendship and fraternity, but on the other wing, there are those who believe that it is the Independence Day of Mexico, an event that is actually celebrated on September 15 and 16. That does not take away the merit of being a day commemorated in the Mexican calendar as May 5, 1862, when the Mexican army fought and won against the French army in the state of Puebla, an event that to this day in Mexico is only remembered as something less significant.



To finish, the most misunderstood holiday is the Day of the Dead. The English translation is already confusing for some people because they misunderstand the actual meaning of the name. Although Disney has made a film about the holiday, it still does not give the whole picture. The first day of November is the day of the deceased children; November 2 is for adults, and November 3 is for all those who suffered a premature death. This is a small explanation of why it is three days and not only one. For the most part, it is a Catholic tra-

dition adapted and remastered from ancient traditions of pre-Hispanic cultures such as the Aztec; They already celebrated it long before the arrival of the Spaniards to America, but how is it properly celebrated and why? First, you remember those people who are no longer by our side, maybe children, family members or friends, how old they were and how they died. With the answers to these questions, you set up a table in some selected place, and then place the photograph or photographs of those people, and whatever they liked the most when they were alive, liquor, tobacco, some favorite dish, some particular drink, some dessert, or maybe a toy. You can never forget bread or water because it represents the bread that Jesus distributed to his disciples during the last supper and the water is the giver of life. There also have to be candles, one per person, so that the light illuminates their way back home and towards the afterlife. Generally, all this is known as an offering and is almost always placed on the table of the house demonstrating courtesy to our guests. After the date has passed, the offering is removed enjoying the leftovers of the family members. It should be noted that nothing should ever be thrown away, but on the contrary, it should be consumed by the family.



In conclusion, this country is multicultural, and as a result, there are several traditions combined with many others that over time lose the essential idea and change their meaning over time due mass commercialization. It is probably why most people misinterpret these traditions, but without a doubt, we can keep them alive with a little research and teaching our children the real meaning of our traditions as the Day of Kings, May 5, and November 2.

Today children and adults around the world can thank the indigenous tribes of Mexico for the cultivation of cocoa, the most beloved substance in the world. The advantage of Mexicans is that we have enjoyed chocolate longer than the rest of the world. It is because chocolate has its origin in Mexico, where the myth says that the god Quetzalcoatl gave the cocoa tree to men, which years later would be named with the scientific name *Theobroma Cacao*, which in Greek means “food of the gods.” Cacao was a food of great importance in Aztec society and was also used as a bargaining chip. They would consume it as a liquid or mixed with numerous spices, and the result was a very good, energetic, dark, thick and frothy drink that they called “tchocolatl”, a name that differs little from our “chocolate.” But how was it distributed? The story goes that when Hernán Cortés landed on the coast of Mexico in 1519, the Aztecs, led by Emperor Moctezuma II, believed that he was the reincarnation of the god Quetzalcoatl and entertained him by offering him “tchocolatl.” Hernán Cortés thus discovered chocolate and introduced this drink, now sweetened and hot, in Spain. It was offered to the Kings, and they in turn delighted their guests to enjoy such an unparalleled food, which began to be marketed throughout the European continent until reaching Africa and Asia. Also, the base product began to be modified in various ways and with more ingredients for consumption, as well as vanilla, cinnamon, etc.

# Eh Paw



I was born in Burma, but when my parents moved to Thailand, I was only a few months old. If my parents did not have to face any of the torturing from the Burmese military, I would not be here today. I grew up in Thailand, and I have so many good and bad memories. Most of my childhood memories are something I can never forget. When I was in Thailand, I made it to high school, which starts in fifth grade. Fifth grade to tenth grade are consider high school in Thailand. My family and I found out that we can come to the U.S. when I was 12 years. I was really happy because I wanted to see a big country so I can learn about other languages and culture. When I got here, they put me in sixth grade for the last two months of school. I felt so nervous on my first day of school, but I also got a lot of support from my friends, family and teachers. I made it through each year of school, and I finally graduated from high school in 2020. It was the worst and saddest time for me because of the pandemic. Then I applied to Black Hawk College, and this is my second year here. I am going to get my ESL certificate and then transfer to Western Illinois University and get my bachelor's degree. My major is education, and I would like to teach kids in elementary school. The subject that I have been interested in since I was in high school was math, so that will be the subject I will be teaching in the future.

## Childhood in Thailand

When I was in Thailand, I made a lot of memories, especially as a child. The best part of my childhood life is that I never missed out on having fun. I lived in a very small town called Mae Ra Moe in Thailand. My friends would always come and call me to go play with them. My friend's house was very close to mine, and it would only take a minute or so for me to get to their house. The town was so small that you could walk around it within three or four hours from the first section to the last section. I lived in Mae Ra Moe, Thailand, for eleven and a half years. Growing up in a very small town is the best; you get the opportunity to make so many memories, such as studying, going on trips, and swimming in a small river.

Firstly, studying with my friends was the most memorable time. I made a lot of friends, and every night, we would call each other to go over to our teacher's house to study. When I was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, my friends and I always planned to study at our teacher's house. We may not have learned as much as we should, but we had so much fun seeing each other late at night. I also went to study at my best friend's house at night. At that time, it was only two of us, and we were working on our assignments from six until nine o'clock. By the time it got dark, she would walk me home halfway and then go back. Then I had to run to my house. Our houses were not that far apart, plus she lived close to a dorm, so I had no problem with walking alone. Studying with your childhood friends is much better than studying alone.

Secondly, walking on a long trip with my friends and family brought me a lot of joy. I went on so many trips with my friends and family when I was in Thailand. One time, my mom, my friends and I went on



a long trip that took five or six hours. We had to walk through a dangerous forest and river, and I didn't even realize that I was tired or anything. The forest was far away from my town, so we had to watch out for creepy people and wild animals. We were just walking, laughing, singing and enjoying our trip together. When I was in first grade, I went on a picnic with my friends and teacher from school. All students had to donate something, for example, oil, yellow beans or rice. We didn't get any help from our principal or anyone, so we had to help each other in order to have enough food for everyone. Nobody ever complained because we all enjoyed our best day of the year. Going on a trip or picnic with family or friends is a lot more enjoyable than staying home.

Lastly, I was almost always swimming in the river with my friends. Swimming in the river is so much fun, but to be honest with you all, it was dirty. During the spring season, we had a lot of rain, and the river would fill up very quickly. The next evening, my friends and I would call each other to go swimming together. The water was very warm, but it smelled very fishy and stinky. When I was twelve years old, before I came here, my parents asked me to go on a camping trip with them. We went to find leaves and bamboo to build our house. When I got there, I met so many friends and new people. In the morning, we would go in the forest to find leaves for the roof and some frogs to cook for our dinner. When we got back to our place, my brother and I went in the river to swim together. The water may have been very dirty, but I enjoyed it more than here in the U.S.

To summarize, I grew up in Thailand for eleven and a half years, and I made so many memories with my friends and family. We may have been poor, but growing up with the right people at the right place was a blessing. You may grow up in a better country and be very wealthy, but if you do not have such happy childhood memories as I did, then you are definitely missing the best part of your life. Studying with friends, going on a trip, and swimming in the dirty river were the best moments of my childhood.



#### Rice Noodle Soup

Rice noodle soup is one of the most popular dishes in our Karen community. For every event we may have, we are most likely to include rice noodle soup because it always runs out quickly. Another way to say the name correctly is *Kaw Naw*. First of all, I would like to give you some instructions on how to make the noodles. You can go to any Asian store in the Quad Cities to find the dried noodles. When you got them, fill a big pot half full with water and wait for it to boil. After the water boils, put your noodles in and make sure to stir it every two minutes, so it does not stick to your pot. Do not overcook your noodles, or they will get too sticky and stick together. After your noodles are well cooked, put them in cold water and stir it. Pour the water out and refill the cold water again three times, and you will get the perfect rice noodles you have been looking for. For the next step, you will need to find all the ingredients for the soup. The ingredients I used for the soup are Asian dried fish, 1 cup of split yellow mung beans, 2 table spoons of salt, ½ tablespoon of MSG, 2 lemongrass, 1 huge onion, 1 garlic, ½ of ginger and 3 horseradish roots. Lastly, you need fish sauce, boiled egg, and dried garlic mixed with oil, and these are the side ingredients to add in your noodle soup. Trust me, you will enjoy our rice noodle soup if you try it and follow the instructions carefully.

# Hicham Saam



My name is Hicham Saam, but I go by Sam. I come from a West African country called Togo. I was born and grew up in the capital of Lomé. I spent all my childhood playing in the sand and walking around the town to make new friends. Growing up, I fell in love with the game called soccer. I used to spend all my day playing soccer. When I was not at home, the only place my mom could come to find me was on the soccer field. My dream was to become a professional soccer player, but my dad wanted me to graduate high school before I could pursue my dream. By that time, I had started focusing more on my studies. Two years after graduating from high school, I joined my mom here in the U.S. I was so excited to come live here in the U.S. till I realized that their English accent is completely different from what I have taught in my country. When I arrived here in the U.S., I then felt the need to go back to school to improve my English, one of the reasons I am in this class today. Having been here for three years already, I can say that I am very satisfied with my improvement in listening, speaking and understanding the American accent.

## **The Power and Strength of Immigrants**

Many people usually ask: how do immigrants make it in a country in which they are strangers? They often have no family, no friends, and they barely speak the country's language. Where do they get this power to accomplish so much in a few years, which many native people are not able to? As I am also an immigrant, I can say that this strength or power comes from being the hope of a whole family, having a strong mindset and relying on our hometown education.

Let's start with the fact of being the hope of a whole family. Most immigrant's lifestyle back in their countries is usually less comfortable than their lifestyle here in the US. Some of us come from countries in which there are no opportunities, poor education and often no freedom of expression. Coming here to the US is an opportunity to give ourselves and our families a better life. Once we get here, we first find a job. I know finding a job may seem hard for some American people but not for most immigrants because we do not choose between jobs. We just do whatever we find in that moment even if we don't like it. That's why you will find immigrants struggling with hard jobs that don't even pay well. We are doing the hardest jobs by keeping in mind that this will change later, but for the moment, we just want to make money to start helping our people in our hometown. We also have no right to make mistakes. When a whole family counts on you, you have no other choice than to succeed and make them proud. Some cousins count on you to pay off their school fees, and some uncle will expect you to pay their rent. All these responsibilities push us to work hard and achieve our goals.

Second, immigrants do everything to avoid trouble and respect the law. Before coming here to the U.S., I was told many things about U.S. laws and the behavior of American people. Things are completely different compared to where I come from. For example, I was told that here in the U.S., for just a little problem, people call the police. Someone can call the police on you because you look scary or because you are a stranger in a neighborhood. I was also told that almost all Americans have a gun. All that makes me pay attention when I am out, and I try to avoid trouble. To continue, the main goal of most immigrants is to make money and invest it back into their hometown. Commonly, they buy land and build houses. Some people rent their houses and others make their family live in them. To finish, immigrants take their work very seriously. They make their work their best friend. Even if it is snowing or they are feeling sick, they do everything to show up at work. They are usually hard-working people. They are so focused that they do not even have time to go to the club and have fun.

Finally, immigrants get their strength from their hometown education. Most immigrants have been educated in a religious way, which makes them respectful and polite. It is very hard to find an immigrant arguing or fighting because someone disrespected them. Even if they are right, they rarely call the police to avoid more problems. Also, they have been taught to not forget where they come from. Even though immigrants have to adapt to a new society and environment, they do not throw away the culture and values of their country. For example, here in the U.S., once you turn eighteen you are considered as an adult and will be able to leave your parents' house. That makes some of the teenagers feel independent and start disrespecting their parents. However, in my country even if you are 25 or older, you can still live with your parents and get more knowledge from them before you leave. Even if one day you leave, it is your responsibility to come check on them and help them financially. In my country, it is a shame for people to leave their parents alone without taking care of them.

To conclude, most immigrants usually make it in a country where they are strangers because they represent the hope of a whole family, they have a strong mindset, and they are often able to handle two cultures. Feeling too comfortable sometimes is dangerous. If we want to achieve many goals, I think we should all start acting as strangers in our environments by not counting on anyone but ourselves, just like an immigrant.

#### *Ayimolou* Recipe

I would like to describe how one of my favorite recipes is made. Often called *ayimolou* in the south of my country, it is just a mix of beans and rice. First, we cook the beans by putting water and beans in a pot and then putting them together on the stove. We let the water boil for a few minutes. As the beans always take a long time to get cooked, we need to come check it to make sure there is still water in the pot. In case there is no more water, we can add more. While the beans are cooking, we can add a little salt and baking soda. After the beans are cooked, we can now put the rice in. Before putting the rice in the pot that already contains the cooked beans, we need to check the level of the water in the pot. If the level of the water is too low, we need to add more water before putting the rice in. After putting the rice in, we need to use a spoon to mix the rice and the beans together so that they will look really mixed. After that, we can leave it on the stove for thirty minutes. This is what I do to make *ayimolou*.

# Yawavi Toko



My name is Yawavi Judith Toko. My nickname is Tina; I like it. I am from Togo (West Africa). I speak French, and Ewe is my native language. I was born in Lomé, the capital of Togo, and I have four sisters. I am the oldest, and I am married. I lived and grew up in Lomé. After graduating from high school in 2013, I studied law at the University of Lomé, but I did not graduate before moving to the United States in 2018. I wanted to be a lawyer when I was in my country, but once in the USA, I changed my dream from being a lawyer to technology engineer, but to achieve my goal I have to improve my English first, and I know that I will succeed. I am a phlebotomist, I got my Phlebotomy Certificate in 2019 at Black Hawk College.

## The Most Visited Town in Togo

Tourism is a practice of traveling somewhere for fun or vacation. People usually go on vacation to visit a place or country they do not know to make memories or discover new places. In my country, Togo (West Africa), Kpalime is the most popular tourist destination, and the most beautiful town because of its natural environment and tropical climate. It feels very good to live in or visit Kpalime.

First, Kpalime has favorable land for the production of coffee and cocoa. The climate allows the cultivation of many fruits and vegetables, some of which grow naturally in the wild on the surrounding hills: mangoes, bananas, guavas,

papayas, eggplants, tomatoes, peppers, ginger, corn, potatoes, yams. Kpalime is the largest avocado producing town in Togo; the avocados are excellent. The most common food in Kpalime is Fufu; it is made with yams, so yams are also cultivated there. Every tourist wants to try the locals' favorite food when they see the women pounding the yams. They just like it once they have tried it.

Second, Kpalime is the most important craft center in Togo. Many artisans and artists have settled there and have opened their workshops and shops all over the town. There is batik, wood sculpture, weaving and calabash work. The Kloto Handicraft Center is a production center of a variety of handicrafts, such as woodcarvings, pottery, batiks and macramé. It is also a school where people can learn handicraft. The variety





and the quality of the sculptures are amazing. There are statues, boxes, armchairs, and sculpted animals, such as elephants, giraffes, and others. Another specialty is the pottery. Hand-dyed batiks, made using the wax process, are also among the items that can be found there. Women weave the brightly colored textiles that represent traditional African motifs. White tourists often admire the handicraft when they visit the Kloto Handicraft Center, and they fall in love with the place and decide to live there.

Next, there is a castle located on the hills north of Kpalime, in the prefecture of Kloto. It is called Château Viale and consists of a main building and a tower. The castle was built during World War II. Construction started in 1940, and was completed in 1944. In 1979, Château Viale became a presidential residence where African ministers and presidents stayed. Since 1982, Château Viale has been abandoned and has become a place for the tourists to walk around, a historical and cultural heritage. Schools and universities organize excursions during holidays to show and talk about the castle to their students, and they take pictures of the castle as a memory. The tourists and other people do the same. It is a beautiful place to visit.



Also, Kpalime is full of waterfalls, but the most visited is the waterfall of Kpime. It has an elevation of 611 meters and springs from a cliff, which gives a superb view from more than a kilometer away. The waterfall serves as the main source of potable water for people who live in Kpalime. There is a hydroelectric dam upstream of the waterfall, which no longer allows it to flow in the dry season. Nevertheless, it remains natural with a pleasant climate. Tourists and visitors still have picnics at the site in the dry season. Tourists swim in the waterfall in the rainy season because it flows in abundance. It provides a beautiful view.

After that, there is a forest in Kpalime to visit. The Missahohe Forest Reserve consists of steep hillsides supporting semi-deciduous forest dominated by iroko trees. The forest offers remarkable biodiversity. You can see many species such as iroko, mahogany, frake, cordia, giant yucca and many other tropical trees while walking there. It is the only site in Togo where this many species have been recorded. There are also numerous birds including bulbul, Senegalese coucal, king hunters, parrots, and others. People visit the forest because it has many species.

Finally, Mount Agou is a natural heritage. It is the highest mountain in Togo at 986 meters and is located between a small village called Amoussoukope and Kpalime. It is covered by dense forest dotted with small villages. The summit of Mount Agou is a rock formation. To get there you will have to go up a winding road, which finally leads to a splendid landscape. It is not easy to get there, but once at the top you will see the spectacular panorama of the valleys and plains below. It looks very natural.



In conclusion, Kpalime remains a popular tourist destination in Togo for its natural beauty and amazing tropical climate. Kpalime is the most charming city in Togo. I find that there is a sweetness of life in Kpalime. People who live in Kpalime have nothing to envy others for because life is beautiful and natural there. Living in Kpalime is living the good life.



#### A Recipe for a Special Dish: *Djenkoume* (Tomato Corn Flour Cake)

*Djenkoume* is a special dish in West Africa, especially in Togo. It is usually eaten at lunch or dinner time. *Djenkoume* is made with chicken or any meat, corn flour, tomatoes, tomato paste, ginger, garlic, onion, pepper, salt, stock cubes, and oil, any oil. First season and boil the chicken with ginger, onion and garlic all crushed, salt and stock cube, and cook the chicken in oil. Put the corn flour in a pot and stir it consistently until it is browned and allow it to cool. Cook the garlic, onion, and ginger in oil until softened. Add the crushed tomatoes, tomato paste, and mix them a few minutes to have a sauce form. Then add water and chicken broth, and let it boil together. In a bowl, put a small amount of corn flour mixed with a little water. When the tomato sauce is boiling, pour the cold brown corn flour into the tomato sauce by mixing everything with a spatula. Mix it quickly to avoid lumps. Stir the mixture over the heat for about 15 minutes, and the *djenkoume* is ready to eat with the fried chicken and the pepper on the side.



No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. Legal citation: Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and its implementing regulation at 34 C.F.R. Part 106 (Title IX). Students should direct inquiries to Title IX Coordinator Jana Koch, Black Hawk College, Building 1, Room 377, 6600 34th Ave., Moline, IL 61265. Phone 309-796-5177 or email [kochj@bhc.edu](mailto:kochj@bhc.edu). Faculty and staff should direct inquiries to Deputy Title IX Coordinator Stacey Cary at Black Hawk College, Building 1, Human Resources, 6600 34th Ave., Moline, IL 61265, phone 309-796-5225 or email [carys@bhc.edu](mailto:carys@bhc.edu).

Students, faculty and staff at Black Hawk College participate in a variety of activities designed to assess and improve student learning and to bring about institutional change. Examples of such activities may include placement testing, surveys, collecting random samples of student work, exit testing, and portfolio evaluation.

Should you need accommodations or this information in an alternative format, please contact Disability Services at 309-796-5900.

# OUR SIDE OF THE STORY



English as a Second Language Program

6600 34th Avenue • Moline, IL 61265

[www.bhc.edu](http://www.bhc.edu) • 309-796-5000