



## 2019 Winners

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

The American Immigration Council works to strengthen America by honoring our immigrant history and shaping how America thinks about and acts towards immigrants and immigration. As part of this mission, the Council partners with American Immigration Lawyers Association Chapters to host the Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest, which challenges fifth graders across the country to reflect on and write about the theme “Why I Am Glad America Is a Nation of Immigrants.”

## **About the 2019 Winners**

We are proud to announce that the first-place winner of the American Immigration Council’s 2019 Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest is Kate Jentz, whose poem was submitted by AILA’s Indiana Chapter. In an interview, Kate shared, “This story was inspired by the experience of learning my family’s immigration story. I wanted to capture the hardships of immigration, the hope and determination that go into immigrating, and how important it is to learn your family’s story.”

The second-place winner is Lillian Balet, whose poem was submitted by the Washington State Chapter. Honorable mentions were awarded to Sarah Reinert from the Carolinas Chapter, Boyana Nikolova from the Minnesota/ Dakotas Chapter, and Nola Kra-Caskey from the Northern California Chapter.

**First Place Winner: “Tell Me A Story”**

By Kate Jentz  
Indiana Chapter

The rain splashes down  
It covers the world  
Like a blanket of water  
That’s been gently unfurled  
Drops land on the window  
Knocking to come in  
I open my book  
I’m ready to begin

But the book has no words,  
Not a single at all  
I drop the book  
And watch it fall  
I grab my coat  
And head for the door  
I’m searching for stories  
I’m searching for more

Up the avenue  
Across the street  
Lies an old house  
With people to meet  
Wind in my hair  
Hope in my eyes  
My Abuela steps onto the porch  
Where a story lies

“Tell me a story.”  
That’s what I say  
To my grandmother  
On that rainy day  
She responds with a smile  
And points to a chair  
Abuela begins  
As rain splashes her hair

She tells of festivals,  
Dances and lights,  
Fiestas and siestas  
On warm summer nights  
“This is my story.”  
Abuela starts to explain  
“I was a little girl

Living in Spain.”

“Why did you leave?”  
I wonder aloud  
Her shoulders square  
Tall and proud  
“There was a war  
That broke out  
Our family fled  
And traveled about  
Looking for a home,  
Safe and sound

**America**

Was the land we finally found  
I met new people  
From all different places  
Everyone was unique  
All different races.”

Her smile twinkles  
And a tear slips by  
“America is beautiful”  
Is all I reply

“America **is** beautiful.”  
Abuela says loud and bold  
“Every immigrant has a story  
and every story must get told.”  
I listen as her words fill my heart  
Every culture is beautiful  
Like a piece of art  
I smile to myself  
Knowing that it’s true  
“America is beautiful  
Because of immigrants like you.”  
I look at Abuela  
As I utter these words  
She simply points to the sky  
She points at the birds

The eagles glide  
And soar through the air  
A rustle of wind  
Blows through my hair  
I step off the porch  
To get a better view  
Abuela smiles  
And steps down, too

Our eyes meet  
As Abuela starts to speak  
She grabs my hand  
And the eagles reach their peak  
“You have to stay strong  
Like an eagle with might  
When things get tough  
You have to fight.”

“Thank you!”  
I call as I start to leave  
I know what to do  
I have a story to weave

Down the avenue  
Across the street  
Lies my house  
With people to greet  
Hope in my eyes  
Wind in my hair  
I rush inside  
With lots to share

I dash to my bedroom  
Pick the book off the floor  
And write Abuela’s story  
Until my hand is sore

I think about Abuela,  
America’s glory,  
And immigrants’ impact  
On our country’s story

I’m busy working  
When I hear a knock  
“Come in!” I call  
The only response is a quiet walk  
I set down my pen  
My sister walks in  
She asks for a story  
And so, I begin

## Second Place Winner: "Land of Dreams"

By Lillian Balet

Washington State Chapter

The world is made of dreams  
Towering ones, tiny ones, all different from the other  
Some may even seem impossible  
The dream of immigrants  
A new life in a new country  
Safety, education, equality  
But why am I glad we are a country  
A country of immigrants?  
A small question with big meanings  
Maybe because of the stories  
Maybe the dreams  
Or maybe even the feeling that they are safe  
But then the question circles again  
Maybe it is what unites us together  
Together hand in hand as a community  
Even a country or even a nation  
Together as one

But then I wake up  
Not in the dream country  
But in my own country  
A country of fear  
A country controlled by fear  
I feel as if I need to hide  
Hide and lurk in the shadows  
Keep my head down not to be seen  
Keep my ideas and words to myself

My father's brother is in the country of dreams  
He wants us to follow in his footsteps  
Walk the miles he walked to the border  
The border of the dream country  
Me, mama, and my dear sweet sister want to make the journey  
My papa thinks it is too dangerous  
Until he hears there are hundreds of others  
Making the long dangerous trek  
We leave at sunrise with two heavy bags filled  
Filled with our most precious possessions  
We start the journey to America, the land of dreams

I feel as if the journey will never end  
The blistering sun shining on my back  
The water is running low

My throat hurts  
It feels as if I have swallowed sandpaper  
The days are hot and the nights are cold  
We keep on trudging to America, land of dreams

My dear sweet sister is ill  
My mother thinks we should turn back  
My papa is determined to keep going  
I am too, then my parents  
My very own parents part ways  
I cry, I scream at my mother to stay  
My papa and me keep on heading to America, land of dreams

The journey seems longer since my dear sweet sister and mama left  
There are only a few of us still walking  
I think the border will never come  
Then I wonder, will the dreamland be everything I imagined?  
I told papa about wanting to go back, he said we have come too far  
He also told me to be brave  
Be brave through the hard times  
My papa, my own papa, never loses hope  
Unlike me, through everything, I keep heading towards  
America, land of dreams?

We finally made it to the border  
When I stepped across it was not what I imagined  
I felt sad that my dear sweet sister wasn't there  
Or my mama—could I even call her that anymore?  
Everybody speaks in a mumble jumble language  
I wonder if I will ever get use to this place, America, land of dreams?

## Honorable Mention: “Journey”

By Sarah Reinert  
Carolinas Chapter

My heart is galloping  
Make it stop, make it stop  
I escape finally from North Korea  
On my way to America  
Hopefully  
Across the ocean  
On my little boat  
Land is near  
And so is my fear  
The waves float me to land  
But also could crash me under  
In darkness  
After hours at sea I reach land  
Hopefully they do not hurt me  
Or even kill me  
I step out of the boat and fall  
Covered with sand  
Hungry  
Two men run to me  
Help me  
Give me food and a home  
A new family  
I have a new job  
To tell my story  
I am an immigrant  
But I feel as I am at home  
Safe  
At last  
American

## Honorable Mention: “Little Bogomila”

By Boyana Nikolova  
Minnesota/ Dakotas Chapter

It happened so fast,  
But I remember  
That special letter,  
The letter addressed for me  
Whispering:  
I'm going to America.  
And yet, here I am.  
Goodbye Airplane,  
Goodbye Bulgaria,  
Goodbye Orphanage,  
Goodbye Life,  
I miss you, but I must move on.  
Now that I see it,  
America,  
I'm breathless.  
Finally saying,  
'Goodbye' to that  
Small orphanage.  
Too many feelings.  
I'm excited, but  
I miss you, Bulgaria.  
„Липсваш ми” I whisper.  
But now...  
I think I'll just say goodbye.  
The airport: overflowing.  
Immigrants, everywhere.  
One of them though;  
Is going to be me.  
And I'm going to live  
Like a real American.  
They're coming toward me.  
I see the family.  
But... something is wrong.  
It's missing something.  
Maybe they're missing  
A girl like me.  
Later the family comes  
Surrounded by people:  
Very formal.  
When they sign a paper  
The little child,  
Says “ welcome home.”  
Thankful,

Thankful that somebody  
This kind is here.  
Actually willing  
To claim me.  
I wonder why....  
I was happy, but now?  
Questions surround me,  
“What will they think?”  
“Am I an outcast?”  
Its too many questions.  
How do I answer?  
Weeks later,  
They drive me somewhere.  
Somewhere unfamiliar,  
Overfilled with kids  
Pushing through and I wonder,  
“Is this school?”  
Everything: so different.  
They talk strange,  
A much different language.  
And nobody understands me.  
Yet I’m supposed to be  
In 5th grade.  
“Some much stress” I think,  
“The teacher is always talking  
But I can’t hear...  
Or understand  
She’s always  
Facing me... Why?”  
Then when everyone,  
Hurriedly piles out  
I realize why they’re always staring  
It’s the wheelchair on my feet.  
I’m angry, it’s just helping me.  
How does this matter to them?  
And then I see that  
We all came from somewhere,  
Someplace else.  
And suddenly, I can feel a shot of joy  
Like I’m not the only one.  
But maybe I’m right.  
And this may not be  
My true home  
But I know,  
I still belong  
And that’s really  
All that matters to me.  
I feel so proud,

I've gone so far,  
I've inspired many people,  
I've learned about many other cultures,  
I'm just thankful,  
That I could see it all happen.  
My friends,  
My family,  
My education,  
My life,  
Thank you, America  
For helping them.  
And it warms my heart  
To hear others  
Who could also share;  
Share their struggles  
And remind themselves  
Just how far they had went.  
Other countries,  
Other people  
Other stories,  
Other traditions,  
They're in another world  
But here, they can be together  
I see it  
But differently.  
It's unique.  
It's America.  
Това е живота ми.  
Това е иммиграция.

## Honorable Mention: “Eleanor Traube”

By Nola Kra-Caskey

Northern California Chapter

Poland, 1941  
War is raging.  
Children dying.  
Little girl, Little Hope.  
One Brave woman,  
And her newborn  
Daughter,  
Eleanor Traube.  
Jews in danger.  
They resist,  
Yet stay out of trouble.

Poland, 1945  
They struggled through,  
And when light shines again,  
The women and her little  
Four-year-old  
Run to  
America.  
Away, they say,  
Only Hardship and  
Trouble in Poland.

America, 1949  
Finally, in America.  
Brave mummy,  
Fast growing girl.  
8 now, little Eleanor Traube.  
With a supporting  
Cousin,  
Mother and  
Daughter  
Face a new world.  
Eleanor goes to school  
The next day.  
Kind teacher  
Gives thick paper  
And pretty, colorful sticks.  
Eleanor draws, while  
other kids speak  
Sharply.

2 years later, America  
World,  
Whirring world.  
Eleanor’s world.  
She speaks with them now,  
Plays with them now.  
Knows their foods now.  
Toast!  
Cream cheese!  
Jelly!  
Peanut butter. Ew.  
All new,  
But still  
Her world.  
Eleanor, and brave mummy.  
And Baby Rosely.  
Soon enough,  
They will be citizens  
Of this strange new place.

America, 2019  
Eleanor has lived  
Long.  
Sons and  
Daughters of  
Her own  
Growing old.  
Even grandchildren.  
In each one,  
She sees brave mummy,  
Wishing to  
Thank her for  
Her protection.  
But  
Brave mummy is no more.  
But she’s in Eleanor’s memories  
And Eleanor’s children.  
And because of mummy,  
Eleanor’s children,  
And children’s children  
Live in America today.

Irwin

Wandering in the  
World,  
Danger  
At every turn.  
Escaping Hitler.  
Crossing borders.  
Never time to rest.  
Or catch  
your breath.  
But with a change  
In laws,  
And a Lucky  
Turn,  
Irwin  
Finds himself  
In America.  
After  
Setbacks,  
An Accidental  
Trip to Cuba,  
And  
A  
Displaced person camp,  
A burning desire  
Leads them.  
To their  
New home.  
Friends,  
Relatives in Jersey,  
And support  
All along the way.  
Bring Irwin  
And his family  
To a new place.

Eventually Irwin will  
Marry, and  
Have children,  
But not then.  
Back then,  
He was just a child,

Trying to make sense  
Of his new life.