A nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting under-resourced students ages six to eighteen with their creative and expository writing skills and to helping teachers inspire their students to write.

826valencia.org

Your Spirit Will Always Guide You is a product of Ms. Heather and Ms. Heran's senior classes at San Francisco International High School (SFIHS). SFI offers a unique program design for recent immigrant students who have attended school in the United States for four years or less. As a part of one of their final writing projects before graduation, students reflected on their own identities and immigration stories and sought to answer the following questions: Where do I come from? Where am I going? What history and identities do I take with me? With the support of tutors from 826 Valencia, students brainstormed, drafted, revised, and edited poems, which were ultimately performed in a spoken-word poetry slam in their classes. Through these poems, students share poignant reflections about the things that make them who they are, the people and events that have changed them, and the dreams they have for the future.
YOUR SPIRIT WILL GUIDE YOU ALWAYS

SAN FRANCISCO INTERNATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

Spring 2020
# CONTENTS

## I – Rain Falls Courageously

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong Heart</td>
<td>Arnoldo Velasquez</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Identity of Now</td>
<td>Yasmenia Espinal Sanchez</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal Life</td>
<td>Qiqian (Chris) He</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take Off</td>
<td>Alan “El Guapo” (Lingxiang) Hu</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History Hometown</td>
<td>Derong Huang</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Place Called Home</td>
<td>Oriana Lopez</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Values</td>
<td>Roxy Rodriguez</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Salvadoran Having a Great Life in the United States</td>
<td>David Salazar</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Name</td>
<td>James Sevilla</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lycoris Radiata</td>
<td>Wendy Wong</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“My Real Home”</td>
<td>Dereck Fernandez</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Way to Make Fun or Hard Things in Guatemala</td>
<td>Oliver Domingo Ramos</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## II – Opportunity is as Important as Water

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The World Traveling</td>
<td>Carlos Huang</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This Is the Story of Ernesto</td>
<td>Ernesto Araujo</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Am Who I Am</td>
<td>Fernando Castillo Najarro</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Love of My Life</td>
<td>Itzel Estanislao</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where I'm From</td>
<td>Vanessa Flores</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You Are Just a Woman</td>
<td>Aziza Chanem</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hug My Family's Hopes</td>
<td>Luz Gutierrez</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Am the Future of My People</td>
<td>Gustavo Magana Espinoza</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Reason Why I Came to the USA!</td>
<td>Otoniel Mejia Castanon.</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Journey as a Chapina</td>
<td>Keyla Miranda</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Here I Am</td>
<td>Nicole Ramirez</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandma's Coffee</td>
<td>Andy Morales</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Identity From Armenia</td>
<td>Ruben Stepanyan</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who I Was and I Want to Be</td>
<td>Jose Zuniga</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Place Where I Can Make Me Stronger</td>
<td>Edwin Diaz Lopez</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III – Like the Mighty Waterfall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Three Angels in Heaven</td>
<td>Brenda Aguilar</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fight to Have a Better Dream</td>
<td>Mariela Aguilar</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Real Life</td>
<td>Osmar Domingo Ramos</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algo Poco de Mi Historia - A Little Something About Me</td>
<td>Saqueo Hernandez</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Souls</td>
<td>Aung Htet</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who Am I?</td>
<td>Selena (Jinying) Li</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Life</td>
<td>Alexis Ortiz</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Spirit Runs Away</td>
<td>Tania Peña</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding Hope</td>
<td>Fernando Ramirez</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave With Hope</td>
<td>Navin Sroeurn</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like A Lion That Defends A Family</td>
<td>Ashley Torres</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow the Dream</td>
<td>Zhenting Wu</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road of Life</td>
<td>Dongliang Yu</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV– I Come and Go Like the Open Sea</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The light for the Future Is on Me</td>
<td>Yonatan Umana Romero</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Life</td>
<td>Jose Benjamin Alvarado Mancia</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poem of Honesty: Like the Mighty Waterfall and the Rain</td>
<td>Murtadha (Leo) Al Tekmachi</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on the Drylands</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion From Where I Am From</td>
<td>Meina Liu</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poem to the New Me</td>
<td>Alexander Blanco</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Flower’s Mission</td>
<td>Analyn Guinto</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me and the Dragon</td>
<td>Winni Weix Hu</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Mysterious Powers from My Life and History</td>
<td>Hanthlah Kassim</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Imagination</td>
<td>Shuchang Li</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting Until the End</td>
<td>Karol Peña</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Humble Dreamer</td>
<td>Angel Ramirez</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not All That Glitters Is Gold</td>
<td>Pablo Tlapa</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Engine of My Family</td>
<td>Heriberto Vargas</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Am</td>
<td>Ru Zhuang</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Myself Up</td>
<td>Marian Delgado</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I

RAIN FALLS COURAGEOUSLY
I’m a person who wants the best
I’m the future for my family
I’m looking for a good way to face the future

I’m from beautiful mountains, big rivers
I’m from a united family that has faced challenges but
doesn’t give up
I’m from a unique and different culture

I’ve walked in good and dangerous ways, around big
rocks, beautiful and impressive mountains
I’ve seen airplanes and different big machines
I’ve held different kinds of plants, and different kinds
of food plants, like el maiz, frijol, calabaza

I’ve tasted special foods of other countries
I’ve heard history of the past, history of my country,
and history of other places in my country
I’ve smelled flowers in my garden in the past in my
home country, and I do it here where I live
I left behind all the bad things I have faced, things that try to stop me
I left behind those people who try to make me weak and don’t try new things
I carry with me all those beautiful memories
I carry with me all my family because they are important to me,
I carry with me the good advice that people give to me
For example, life is hard but I have to rise up, or work for the future, and never forget where I come from
I remember all the people who gave me good advice for life
I remember my grandpa’s voice telling me that life is not easy
But I came from a struggling family that found a way to keep rising

I stand even when I have difficult moments
If something stops me then I find another way to never stop rising in life
I dream of graduating from high school, I dream of having the future I want
I hope to have my complete family with me in the future
I hope to have more strength for life
ARNOLDO VELASQUEZ was born in Guatemala. He immigrated to the United States for better opportunities when he was sixteen years old. He is a SFIHS student, and he wants to graduate this year. He plans to study or start working next year. His poetry is inspired by his past and present.
I left my home country because there were more opportunities to study.
I left because there were many people who were poor.
I left because the violence affected my life,
And I saw people die.

I imagined that this country was rich,
I imagined a lot of opportunity for jobs
To be more successful,
I imagined that life is easy.

I like this country because the government takes care of human beings and makes them feel happy.
And it doesn't destroy the good, which Is the first and only object
Good governance.

So I think a good government Must focus on the care and happiness of the human.

My America is like having a treasure trove of opportunities.
Finding a job in this country is as easy as salir de mi casa y comer baleadas.

You know at the age of sixteen,
My mom is the person who makes me feel safe.
She is like my hero.
She decided to bring me to this country and many difficulties arose.
But with the forces of God and those of my mother,
I was able to reach this destination and this stage of my happy life,
And now I am a project person.
But it was not easy.
Believe me, this was not easy
And if I could, you could too.

YASMENIA ESPINAL SANCHEZ was born in Choluteca, Honduras. She immigrated to the U.S. when she was sixteen in order to get a better future and escape violence. She is a current senior at SFI, where she is a member of International Graduates. Next year, she plans to go to Skyline College. Her poetry is inspired by her mother.
NORMAL LIFE

Qiqian (Chris) He

I am motherland flowers.
I am a weak kangaroo baby.
I am a tunnel Chinese boy.
I am from China.
I am from my mother.
I am from the Cultural Revolution.
I’ve walked to the crematorium.
I’ve seen relatives leave me.
I’ve held "an unhappy family notice."
I’ve tasted mustard potato chips.
I’ve heard some people have only seven seconds of memory.
I’ve smelled the fresh air, and the clear lake water is generally clean.
I left behind some good and bad memories about my life in my second mother, China.
I carry my headphones with me, they’re like my tranquilizer.
I remember sometimes when I stay at home it makes me feel lonely, like I am in a very dark room.
I stood at the foot of the mountain and tried various methods to practice beyond my better friends.
I dream of walking around the earth.
I hope for world peace.
TAKE OFF

Alan "El Guapo" (Lingxiang) Hu

I am from a red rooster and a mighty dragon
From five thousand years of history and fifty-six
colorful flowers
My sister and I were born hurriedly, but our bodies are
still filled with power
We are twins, the new blood of the yellow skins
I am immersed in the knowledge, like the painter
putting pigment on the blank paper
I am the concrete under the ground, but with the
dream to become a skyscraper

Mama told me don’t take no for an answer
Of course, I didn’t
Keep pushing myself hard to get out of my comfort
zone like an advancer
Every time after the tear and fire, my heart will be
braver
Blood and pain can only turn my mind to be like a tiger
I am the one who is leading myself to fly higher

I am from an era full of cheap thrills and fake news
From a boxing ring without seeing the enemy’s fists
People are easy to forget success comes with effort but not “运气” (Luck)
They believe posted photos and comments on social media make success come free
I’ve walked through family misunderstanding and the English barrier
People’s betrayal and the cruel reality make me feel tired

Mama told me don’t take no for an answer
Of course, I didn’t
Open my eyes to see the world and accumulate my wisdom
Every time after the tears and fire, my soul will be stronger
Blood and pain build my will and skills tighter
I am the one who is leading myself to fly higher

Who can heal me, when I am fighting alone? Life is like a struggle
I ask my heart, it says, you need a hero
Where is my hero
I look in the mirror and I found my hero, he is “guapo” (handsome)
He is the one standing on the front lines at Ground Zero
His heart doesn’t skip a beat even when hard times bump the needle

Mama told me don’t be tripping over haters hating
Peace, love, and respect is the motto that I should go chasing
Put down all my honors, saying bye to the bad old days, “我总得向前走” (I have to go forward)
Start a new page, writing down a different story, “我将与我的hero联手” (I will cooperate with my hero)
Staring into the sunlight, raising my hands and letting them reach to the sky
Bossing up! Toward my dream college, I am about to take flight!

ALAN “EL GUAPO” (LINGXIANG) HU was born in Guangdong, China. He immigrated to the U.S. when he was fifteen in order to have a better education and more opportunities in the future. He is a current senior at SFI, where he is a member of College Track, a leader of SFIHS Peace Club and 2020, and the captain of the Boy’s Varsity Basketball Team. Next year, he will attend the University of California, Berkeley. His poem is inspired by how he overcame his difficulties in China and the United States.
HISTORY HOMETOWN

Derong Huang

I am from a beautiful watchtower and old hometown. From happy family and childhood memories. I am a pistachio at home because they are happy when I am at home. What is important to me is the food my mother cooks because I can taste the feeling of happiness in my hometown. It tells me that I was very happy and free before, and I can see the beautiful watchtower. It makes me strong because with the encouragement of my mother, I learned a lot of cooking skills. I am the little monkey. I am the lucky star of my family. I've tasted happiness and sadness. It showed me that when I was young, there were a lot of things that I could do, but I couldn’t grow up. It makes me strong because I could do a lot of wrong things when I was young. I am fighting for a better life and fighting for my goal. I am the weapon that protects my family. They remind me that I have a better direction and know how to go in the future. They make me strong by helping and encouraging me to make it easier for me to realize my dream.
A PLACE CALLED HOME

Oriana Lopez

From a part of South America
A wonderful part of the world
Where the smell of the pachamanca
Involves my soul
Reminds me of home
Brings back memories of a place that I love

But this is not enough

Don’t misunderstand
I love my place, I love Peru
I love every tradition that I used to do
I love the food, as many people do

In other words?
I am the festejo that I used to dance
I am the huaynitos and marinera that make me feel right
I am the Quechua of my grandma
I am el reflejo de mi hermana
But this is not enough
I tried in my side, but I fell down
And barely died...

What is the sense? What is the way?
What is the future for a worker
Who doesn't work for himself?

The monster gave me a chance,
It is my time, **this is your opportunity!**
I crossed the line
The paradise awaits me on the other side

Who is the monster?
Who is the guide?
Who is the person who will help me rise?
He is the promise. He is the light
He is the people that believe I can

As a demon tears me
The monster as an angel helps me
The monster gives me a chance
The monster breaks my heart
Makes work really hard

But that is not enough

I write to free my soul
Even though the night is dark
Even though my opportunities are banned
I write to laugh
Dreaming of the moment I say:
MOM YOU SEE . . . I’M NOT CRAZY
FOR LEAVING HOME AT SEVENTEEN
Dreaming of the moment I see my twin
But you see, writing is not enough

I’m the one. The one apart
Moving forward no matter what
Leaving my fears in the past
Working as hard as I can
To finally go back

**Go back? Is this not your home?**
I answer—this is the place where I work
The place where I finally find hope
Should I call it home? **Why not?**

The memories of my nightmares go off
Well I think that is enough.

---

**ORIANA LOPEZ** was born in Lima, Peru. She immigrated to the U.S. when she turned seventeen in order to find better opportunities and a safe place. She is a current senior at SFI, where she needs to spend one more year. After that, she plans to go to a UC or college. Her poetry is inspired by her twin sister who is far from her.
MY VALUES
Roxy Rodriguez

My family is important because when I look at them, we remember our moments
And I feel like we travel to many places and spend time eating
When I look at my parents, I listen to what they tell me
Because it is my valores to be able to listen to others
I always hug my parents
I always do the right thing
You wanted something that would last, but nobody lasts a lifetime
I always smell nature because I like it
In my country we always celebrate many things
Imagine all the beauty that happens in my country
I imagine in life I already graduated to have my own job
Buy my house and my car
Although it sounds a little strange, I dress in mourning
My hobby is playing a lot of soccer or playing video games and cheerleading, but that doesn't last a lifetime
My values are to not judge anyone before knowing those people
With respect to others so that they respect me
Always honest, never dishonest
A SALVADORAN HAVING A GREAT LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES

David Salazar

I’m from the smaller country in Central America, El Salvador
I come from a little town, called Turin, in El Salvador
I’m from the smell of pupusas that is everywhere in El Salvador
Pupusas son como fuentes de felicidad for Salvadorans
And they taste really yummy with a coca-cola bien helada
In El Salvador everybody loves el ritmo cumbia!
And my people from El Salvador are strings being shaken
When they are dancing el ritmo cumbia!

In El Salvador I used to live with mama and my sister
In the United States I live without mama but still with my sister
There was violence and no opportunity to achieve my dreams and goals in my home country,
But in the United States
At least there is so much opportunity to reach my
dreams and goals
When my sister and I left El Salvador
We made a rain of sad tears saying bye to our mama
But when my sister and I arrived to the United States
We had hugs and a party with our family and our papa

Todavía recuerdo mi first day of school
I felt like a horse joining a new horse herd
I was freaking out, my legs were shaking like guitar
strings
I was destined to come to SFI because here my friends
are so cool
I couldn’t have met funnier, lovelier, politer people
than my friends at SFI
I’m so happy to have met them because they form a big
part of my life
Teachers are like each step of a big ladder that takes
me to higher levels
They have made a great impact in my life by
supporting me and teaching me great skills
And this is my life as a Salvadoran in the United States.
David Salazaar was born in Turin, El Salvador. He immigrated to the United States when he was fifteen years old in 2017 in order to meet his father and reach his dream of being a professional. Right now, he is a senior at San Francisco International High School. He is a member of the school soccer team and volleyball team. Next year he is going to college in order to reach his dream of becoming an engineer. His poetry is inspired by his nostalgia about his home country and his hope of being in the United States.
Ever since I was little, I had this feeling that something was missing
Some days, I wake up crying without knowing why
And whatever I was dreaming about, I can never remember
The only thing that is left . . . is a feeling of grief . . .
And the memory of someone holding my hand,
    but who is this person
I don’t know, yet I can never see their face
However, this person holding my hand makes me feel special and safe
Like a baby in their mother’s womb
I have never experienced such feeling in other places
    but in my dreams
I feel empty, I feel destroyed
I feel hopeless, I feel like something is missing
I come from beautiful places that are almost unbelievable
Big mountains, waterfalls, and beaches
I have smelled and tasted the food of my home country
Baleadas, pollo con tajadas, and catrachas
Yet I still can’t satisfy this feeling . . .
This person who is in my dreams is the only
One who makes me feel happy
But who is it? What is your name?
And why does my sadness go away when you
   hold my hand?
I have so many questions yet very few answers

JAMES SEVILLA was born in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. He was fourteen years old when he moved to the United States, looking for opportunities and to reunite with his family. He is currently a senior at SFIHS for the class of 2020. He is a member of Peace Club and the 2020 Team. He enjoys spending time with his friends, playing volleyball, and dancing. He wants to attend Skyline College, hoping to achieve his dreams and support his family.
I am from somewhere called Hong Kong
Hong Kong is a concrete forest
There are different stories behind the neon lights
Symphony of Lights blooms in the night

I’ve seen an old man scavenger cross the street
I’ve heard a car horn on the street
The smell and smoke of food comes from the food stalls
Curry fish ball, egg waffles are the smells I smell on the street

I am from a bustling place
But some things have been changing
I am a turtle who doesn’t wanna face reality
I escaped from my home
I escaped from my family, friends
It is a huge regret to have escaped my home
Like a drunkard that keeps drinking alcohol to escape reality
People are protesting on the street
People are wearing the same color, grabbing
something to protect themselves
Like water flowing to different places
I saw people walk on the street
I heard people yelling to the government
I smelled tear gas diffusing in the air
Everything became different

I started to hide myself
The door of my heart was closed
My heart was red
My heart became dark

Those memories are curses
Those nightmares made me be strong
Morning alarm reminds me: it is a new day
I need to be strong to face those challenges
The challenge that I don’t wanna face reality

People have sorrows, joys, partings, and reunions
The moon is dark, bright, waxes or wanes
These problems have been this way since
ancient times
You can’t have your cake and eat it too

Friends are like fireflies
They lead me to the sun
Family is a harbor
Their hugs are warm
They give me a space to rest
They give me a place to say my feelings

My home
The most wonderful place ever
The Big Dipper to lead me out of the dark

I have a dream
A dream to go to college
It seems impossible
But I did it
On the way to San Francisco State University
A chance to achieve my dream

WENDY WONG is from Hong Kong. She immigrated to the United States in 2018 because her family is living here and she wants to have a better education. She is a current senior at SFI, where she is a member of Youth Outreach Workers. Next year, she plans to go to San Francisco State University. Her poetry is inspired by her hometown.
I grow between mountains, rivers, and clean air
The rain falls courageously and the sun burns
uncontrollably as if mother nature is alive
I'm from Mexico, full of culture, history, and traditions
Like “El Dia de Los Muertos”

But how should I know that you were the only one with
the sky in blue?
I knew it since I left you and this new sky was covered
with crows
I change mountains for pollution, rivers for quivers,
and clean air for dirty rain

Confusion and dissolution were the only things I found
in this new land
I feel like a stone alone
Feeling weak like glass, I let the time pass

Tired of waiting, I remember the only thing that
motivates me to try my best
The effort of my parents who brought me here
This place of confusion also was full of solutions
and opportunities
I found rivers that guide me to better education and more goals
I found new mountains that guide me to complete my dreams

Oh, Mexico
Green is your riches and nature
White is your purity
Red is the blood of your nation that with pride brings you like me
True is that you are my only home, Mexico.

---------------------------------------------------------------------

DERECK FERNANDEZ was born in Zacatecas, Mexico. He immigrated to the United States to get better education on February 26 of 2016. This poem was inspired by his feelings after he left his country. Now he is waiting to graduate from San Francisco International High School.
THE WAY TO MAKE SFUN OR HARD THINGS IN GUATEMALA

Oliver Domingo Ramos

I am a good student
I am a good player in soccer
I am honest with people
I am from Guatemala
I am from (my family)
I am from a story about a crybaby who scares the person away and there you see takes him to the person in the forest and leaves them lost in the forest
I’ve walked in Mexico
I’ve seen a lot of places
I’ve tasted amazing food in different countries
I’ve heard music
I left behind my grandmother in my country and miss her a lot
I carry with me my dreams, friendships, and memories of my granny and all the things that made me have fun with my friends
I remember when when I learned to do hard work in my country
I stand on to fight for my life and move on
I dream of being an engineer
I hope for my family to keep going and also to have a good job in the future

OLIVER DOMINGO RAMOS Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis aute irure dolor in reprehenderit in voluptate velit esse cillum dolore eu fugiat nulla pariatur.
I am the earth, universe, and world
I am the environment, plants, and wings
I am from the beautiful planet Venezuela,
I saw the cities were pretty cool, a lot of people walking

I’m living in the beautiful city of San Francisco
I am from the special world that makes people feel happy
to live on our earth
I am from the world that I love, my mother like a flower

The world looks like lighting
The universe looks shining
The earth looks amazing

I’ve walked through Caracas, Venezuela, Guangdong,
China, and San Francisco
I’ve seen many people from different cultures and races
I’ve held my family when I, as a baby, saw my brothers
were walking in a city called Puerto la Cruz
There were a lot of people eating chicken, rice, and pasta
every day
They are some of the best foods in Venezuela
I’ve tasted ice cream as a tortilla
I’ve tasted cultures’ food as plants
I’ve tasted environment as nature

I left behind Venezuela to come to the United States to have good dream
I carry with me my brother, mom, and dad
I remember my teacher in my home country,
He says all people from different cultures are wonderful

I stand on the beautiful countries of China, U.S., and Venezuela to present my ethnicities and cultures
I dream of traveling around the world to see people who present their own country
I hope that in the future everyone will be able to travel the world again

CARLOS HUANG was born in Merida, Venezuela. He immigrated to the U.S. when he was fourteen years old because he wanted to get a better education to achieve his goals. He is currently a senior at SFI, where he is a member of Peace Club and the SFI soccer team. Next year, he plans to go to University. His poetry is inspired by a king.
This is the story of Ernesto
The life of an odyssey
A journey wrote on a prophecy
Born on faltas and riquezas
Never knowing about tristezas

Hear the story
There is not a second chance in your life
One time spoken and then, it’s gone
Travel so long to be here
Travel so long to vivir
He came to luchar
He came to arrazar
He came to start de nuevo

Don’t try to imagine what’s on his mind
Don’t get distracted by his kind
Because inside, he is ready to fight
Please! Get me right
He will go for what he wants
He will not hesitate and wait for you to react
A life full of blessedness
A life full of wickedness

Listen to me...
Believe! He is an opportunity seeker
Believe! Opportunity is as important as water
Seek for our Dolorosa Mater
To give to her son before he gives his soul to the father
Raised in a religious family
The holy true under his eyes
But wondering the truth of what he sees

Listen to me...
Believe! America is as exciting as an adventure
But! You don’t get anything without an effort
People don’t see it
People want it
People take it
But! They don’t know how risky is the journey
But! They don’t know how hard is the indenture

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**ERNESTO ARAUJO** is an eighteen-year-old boy. He was born in Sonsonate, El Salvador in 2001. He grew up in San Salvador, El Salvador. He studied in a Salesian school his whole life before he came to San Francisco. He lives with his parents and grandmother in San Francisco, but he is planning to move to Berkeley. Right now, he is a senior at San Francisco International High School. Next year, he will go to UC Berkeley to study astronomy.
I am from beaming mornings and tasty food
From sarcastic siblings and casual talk
I am the smile that lights up the room
I draw strength from where I’ve walked.

I’ve walked through rocky paths
It showed me that not everything is as easy as it seems
It made me acknowledge not to judge things and take
them seriously.

I am from my Nicaraguan tongue and my father’s faith
From my mother’s features and my friend’s logic.

I am brown like maple syrup
I draw strength from what I’ve tasted.

I’ve tasted moments that were a sour candy that ended
up sweet
It showed me that situations have good endings
although they might start bitter.
It makes me strong knowing that there are events that
end up being good
I am like a colorful painting,
A knitting machine sewing my future.

I am who I am,
I am who I am.

I carry memories of sorrows and delighted circumstances,

They remind me that my life's a roller coaster
They make me strong by realizing I'm not a loner
That I am not a taker but more like a donor.

FERNANDO CASTILLO was born in Managua, Nicaragua. He immigrated to the U.S. when he was sixteen years old in order to get a better education and help his family. He is currently a senior at SFI. Next year he is planning to go to a four-year college. His poetry is inspired by his family.
THE LOVE OF MY LIFE

Itzel Estanislao

I am from a lovely grandmother
I am from a traditional and gorgeous family
I am from warm hugs that mean love

I draw strength from the walks that I had with
   my grandmother
I’ve walked holding my granny’s hand through Las Milpas
I’ve played hide-and-seek y la comidita with her
I’ve learned to create crowns with beautiful flowers
   that grow in the field
Her hugs and kisses showed me her love she had
Her happiness made me strong all day long

I am from my grandmother’s corazón de melón
My granny's company for eight years long
I am the warm hugs at night that protect her from
   the cold
I draw strength from what I’ve tasted
I’ve tasted atole y arroz con leche that she made
She showed me that she will always be there
I am stronger by remembering her while drinking them

I am fighting for my beautiful grandmother
I am waiting for the moment to be with her
And dreaming to see her in front of me

I am the other daughter when she called me hija
I draw strength from what I carry
I carry memories of love, laughs, hugs, and smiles
Those memories remind me that I do not need
to be sad
They make me strong every time I hear her happiness

I am from bodas y cumpleanos and the celebration of El Santo del Pueblo
From vamos a ir a hacer los tamales and intercede for your loved ones to do well
I am like my lovely grandmother's right hand

I draw strength from where I stand
I stand on the legacy of a group of native people called Masagua
My ancestors taught me that I do not have to be ashamed of where I come from
My granny’s words made me strong and every night I miss her, I pray for God to protect her
I am from a lovely grandmother
I am from a traditional and gorgeous family
I am from warm hugs that mean love

ITZEL ESTANISLAO was born in San Antonio Enchisi, Mexico. She immigrated to the U.S. when she was eleven years old because she wanted to be reunited with her parents. She is a current senior at SFI and her poetry is inspired by her grandmother.
WHERE I’M FROM

Vanessa Flores

I am a warrior woman
I am like nature that smells good all the time
I will be standing all my life

I am from Honduras, a wonderful place
I am from my mom, who gave birth to me
I am from Europeans when Christopher Columbus
arrived at the Bay Islands

I’ve walked on a beach where the water looks so blue
and clear and is full of fresh air
I’ve seen a beautiful landscape where there were many
animals like butterflies
They are of many colors and fly so high that they reach
the skies
I’ve held interesting story books like the history of
Honduras
I’ve tasted food from other countries, like Mexican tacos
When you try once, the taste stays in your mouth
I’ve heard my mom say never give up on your dreams
I’ve smelled the baleadas my mom makes and it returns me to my childhood

I left behind my childhood, where I had a lot of fun
I carry with me my land catracha, where I have to return
I remember when my grandmother said to me never forget where you are from

I stand on whenever I feel like I'm giving up
I dream of being an immigration lawyer and helping people, especially Latino people
I hope to fulfill my dreams and never give up

VANESSA FLORES was born in Choloma, Honduras. She immigrated to the United States three years ago because she wanted to have a better life, future, and to be able to help her family and have a good life. She is currently a senior at SFI, where she is a member of Samaritan Good Program. Next year, she plans to go to Skyline College. Her poem was inspired by her mom.
YOU ARE JUST A WOMAN

Aziza Ghanem

I am from the original place of Arabs
From Yemen, where coffee was first produced
I am the granddaughter of Queen Balqees

I’m not just a woman as y’all said
’Cause I have heard the bombs dropped
I have seen my lovely land destroyed
And kids being killed

I am from the Yemeni songs and clothes
From Ibb, San Francisco, and Baadan
I am the positivity, the respect, and the dreams

I draw strength from what I’ve tasted
I’ve tasted fear and pain
It showed me the fact of the world
It makes me strong by giving me all the weakness to fight
I am a lawyer who will fight for women
And a woman who everyone will respect
I am religious and I love Quran
I wear the hijab with the pride of a queen
I draw strength from what I carry
I carry a pen to educate
Education is the key for success
With this I will prove the world wrong
I will show them what a woman can do

I am from video editing and photography
From Angham Sanaa and their support
I am the oud and the Kawkabany

I draw strength from where I stand

I stand on the legacy of my lovely mom
She teaches me to love and never blame
She makes me strong because this is who I am

I am not just a woman as y’all said
I am a fighter and a lover
I am a Muslim hijabi woman
So, I am a great woman

AZIZA GHANEM was born in Ibb, Yemen. She immigrated to the U.S. in January 2016 because of the civil war in Yemen and to get better chances for a bright future. She is a current senior at SFI, where she is a member of Arabic Culture Club, International Committee, and was a member of other clubs and teams. Next year, she plans to go to East Bay and enroll in law studies or graphics. Her poetry is inspired by her homeland, religion, and Queen Balqees.
I draw strength from where I’ve walked
I’ve walked through challenges holding my mother’s hand
She did teach me together with my grandmother
To never forget where I come from and
To never see myself as less than others, but without being arrogant
They made me emotionally strong so when I am without them, I’ll be fine

I am from the mountains where people live and buses travel
With beautiful plants and trees that flow with the fresh air
From the ocean that sounds like a relaxing song to sleep
I am from Tepic Nayarit, Mexico
From memories that remind me
Who I am and where I am going
I come from celebrations
Where I wear typical costumes and dance traditional
dances
With a lot of noise and different letters of songs
Where people can feel happy and connected

There are things that people never forget
I can still remember the smell of my mother’s
albóndigas
Every time when I go back home
And her arms hugging me when I was emotional

The laughs with my family and friends after a joke
And the happiness I used to feel at home

Lines on paper that, with the passing of time, turn into
a drawing
A drawing that is clear to me but weird to others
I am from paper and pencil, writing and drawing what
my hands say
To express my dreams and feelings, and my past
and present

I draw strength from what I’ve tasted
I’ve tasted sadness
During the moments where I found myself sad
I hadn’t looked at myself doing anything
No writing, working, or drawing
Nothing, just laying on my bed
But it makes me strong
It showed me that no one's gonna love me or take care of me as I do
It showed me to keep fighting for my dreams no matter what

I and others who are in the U.S. represent the colors green, white, and red
The colors from my country’s flag
I also represent the values that my family taught me
It makes me proud of my nationality
Proud of who I am now and the changes I have made in my life

I am the arms that hug my family’s hopes to protect them
The hopes and dreams of a better future
I am the future of my family
I am the one who is going to help the well-being of my family
I am like a star in the morning, waiting until night to shine
In my victory, when my dreams come true
Looking back and remembering all my moments
I’ll shine like a star, proud of me and my light

I am just a girl who’s trying to follow her dreams
I am grateful, happy, and free
LUZ GUTIERREZ was raised in Tepic Nayarit, Mexico. She immigrated to the U.S. when she was fifteen in order to get a better education and better opportunities for her future. She is a current senior at SFI where she joined different programs and sports. Next year, she is planning to attend San Francisco State University. Her poetry is inspired by her mother and by the different feelings she has gone through since she immigrated.
I AM THE FUTURE OF MY PEOPLE

Gustavo Magana Espinoza

I am from El Salvador and the beautiful Santa Ana From volcanes and beautiful lagos I am the future of my country, I am the future of my family I draw strength from where I’ve walked

I’ve walked through las calles de polvo and los árboles de frutas

It showed me la belleza de la humildad of the people and filled me with la delicia of the apple It made me strong by facing challenges and el dolor of fades

I am from my family and my friends From the love of my girlfriend and the help of my friends I am the respect to old people and la responsabilidad de mis acciones I draw strength from what I’ve tasted
I’ve tasted pupusas, chilate, tamales y tacos y otros más
It showed you can be happy sin muchas complicaciones
It makes me strong by ser orgulloso de mis raíces
I am the fight for my dreams
And la alegría de mis victorias

I am the suffering of my acts and the suffering of the gunshots
I draw strength from what I carry

I carry memories of my family, mis peleas, y mis viajes

They remind me that there is a world
They make me strong by esperar un mejor mañana para mi y mis amigos

I am from El Salvador and sus tradiciones
From Navidades and canciones
I am light brown like chocolate con leche and with the green nature of my eyes
I draw strength from where I stand

I stand on the legacy of the elders, sus dichos y refranes
It teaches me to be brave and usar mi mente
It makes me strong because me pongo de pie y firme para lo que venga
I am la Semana Santa de mi pueblo
I am la alegría de un niño
I am the future of my people

GUSTAVO MAGANA ESPINOZA was born in Santa Ana, El Salvador in 2000. He is nineteen years old. He is living in San Francisco, California and he is a senior in San Francisco International High School.
THE REASON WHY I CAME TO THE USA!

Otoniel Mejia Castanon

I am from Guatemala.
I am a strong person.
I am a quetzal.

I am from Guatemala.
I am from Guatemala where people work hard.
I am from holy week.
My family loves holy week.

I’ve walked where I had to spend the night under mountains
For fear that they could deport me to my country,
Poverty isolated me to challenge things that I did not want to do.
I’ve seen stronger and weak bodies,
I’ve held my dreams on the road to danger because they were in my mind when I was feeling weak.
I’ve tasted dirty water because in the desert, the water ran out, and due to thirst, we had to take dirty water where animals had been dead inside of the puddle.
I’ve heard people crying, people suffering, people
wanting to go back to their house because when they
go back to the home country, many people suffer
from the gangs.
That's why many people immigrate to the United
States.
I’ve smelled bad smells from other people because we
didn't have a chance to take a shower.

I left behind my parents.
My parents cried, I cried, I felt sad.
They said please don't go, but my dreams were
calling me
The poverty that we have was bad.
I carry with me the advice of my parents.
They always say "be strong" in order to achieve
everything that one day I dreamt and said when I
was a child.
I remember my home country
I remember where I grew up.
I remember my boys, my friends, and my family that I
cannot forget.

I stand on my promise.
I promise my family that I will do everything for them.
I promise myself never to give up. No matter the
circumstances in which it is happening.
I dream of being able to become a firefighter.
I like helping people the way firefighters do.
I hope to go back to my home country.
I hope to see my parents again.
I hope to achieve my dreams. And my family can be
proud of my goals.
MY JOURNEY AS A CHAPINA

Keyla Miranda

I am coming from trajes típicos, tortillas de maíz, frijoles, tortillas de maíz that you make with your own hands and you have to grind to make harina and hacer esas tortillas, that to just eat it with sal, you feel that you’re eating el mejor bocadillo.

I am coming to show the beautiful silk colors of my fatherland and what it means for all of us. I am coming from my motherland of two colors, one flag with full dreams floating inside of it.

I am from Guatemala with a bicolor flag that makes you feel honor and purity from mi gente.

We are those who work hard to realize our goals with my grandpa telling me nunca te rindas no más porque sientes que ya no puedas, siempre pa’ delante como andante showing aristocracy with that beautiful smile de maíz llena de honor.
y pureza que tu mija tienes.
I am from el 15 de Septiembre, día de la independencia in Guatemala
a day we sing to our beautiful homeland
a day that doesn’t matter if there is rain or heat
or if it is sunny
means that brings us light to darkness,
brings us the pride of being part of our beautiful Guate.

On September 15 where we swear to you enduring devotion,
perennial loyalty, sacred honor y esperanza.

I’ve walked Tenkun Umam, grandmother’s nation
that welcomes you without asking ¿Quién eres tú?
people that give you food without thinking twice,
people that make food like helado de hielo
to share with everyone, whoever rises or falls, the cost of goodness.

I’ve seen effort and sweat like tears of the sea flying around faces
that have had to sacrifice their souls full of storms, of dreams to be fulfilled,
but there is coming el pero that from people who over-guess or throw bad vibes just to say
that they are more than anyone.
And tries to humiliate those who come from falls and rise
the coast and go up so as not to stop just to discriminate against us
for how we look, people calling us Indians for wearing those beautiful silks from our beloved country…
And identify the race, yeah that race that you used to call useless
but the useless race you call is wisdom and their kindness
can make you be en nuestros zapatos to see, feel, and have a different perspective.

I’ve held memories in some pictures, memories glare, they are my support if I look at them.

I’ve held some pictures of my life because when you need
to feel, you just look at them.

I’ve held the support of some well-known people who had been in mi zapatos rotos and not.

Broken shoes just because of how they look, broken like drawing a heart on the shore of the ocean and the tide comes and bummm desaparece, disappears like taking out a bad feeling.
fear
goes away and with a hug of your favorite person
to the bad memories that take me away from my dreams
or like those bad vibes that made me to turn down to
make me feel the worse,
today te digo no podrás conmigo soy más fuerte que tú
entiendes.
I carry with me those moments that I had been struggling
to make
myself proud and better for my future
even though it has been hard to keep learning new things
and conserve my bad emotions from the past to not get
stuck in my way
to shine and always rise to the top of success and tell my
story to whoever wants.

I remember my friends from Guatemala saying never
forget us
and always put yourself first before anyone else. Why?
It can be a problem in your way to be better and struggle
in life mi amiga del alma, pero nunca te rindas
no solo cumplas tu sueños, trata los de los demás
también.

I stand on today and right now to tell you that you cannot
make us feel less than you just because you look white
and we look brown
like earth where we sembramos comida para cosechar,
those frijoles and maíz to make the tortilla
the color brown as earth that keeps us from it
and we do it for you too as well.
I dream of being a civilian police officer, my goal to give others courage to keep dreaming and let them know that all can be possible no matter what, all of us are able to believe or trust in our dreams…

My dream is to help my family in Guatemala, and others if I can, take out all types of negative thoughts that stick in my way to follow the light of an American dream. I hope for all those that the law of changes in papers and shoes at once, think twice to shoot with just a word that makes me feel you are more than anyone, invite you to be in my papers and shoes those who are hearing these broken words that had been in on the rope of swoon to surrender.
HERE I AM

Nicole Ramirez

No one wants to leave home unless
Home is the mouth of a shark

You only leave home
When home won't let you stay

You have to understand
That no one puts their children in an airplane
Unless the sky is safer than the land

I am from fiestas and carrozas
I am from lakes and mountains
I am from pupusas and cuetes

No one wants to leave their culture
No one wants to come to a strange land among strange people

But here I am
It's not something I ever thought of doing until
The fear is stronger than the desire to be in the place where I was born, El Salvador
Terrible is the intense life I live as an immigrant
People interrogate me
Who are you? Where do you come from?
What are you looking for in this land that already has owners?

Here I am
Fighting for giving my family a better future
Fighting not to forget my values and my roots

Here I am
Seeing photos of me and my grandma eating tortilla con queso
Seeing my mom get older
Seeing my siblings grow

Here I am
Living a new life
Making new friends
Making new memories

NICOLE RAMIREZ was born in San Salvador, El Salvador. She immigrated to the U.S. when she was fifteen years old in order to get a better education and a safe place. She is a current senior at SFI. Next year she plans to attend San Francisco State. Her poetry is inspired by her life before and after the change she had.
I am an immigrant
I am a Guatemalan, but I don't look like one
I am my mom’s son

I am from Malacatamcito, a small town in a beautiful and small country called Guatemala, and San Francisco, which is the opposite, it is a big place and beautiful city in a big country called the U.S.

I am from my family: my grandma, my mom, my sisters, and my dad

I am from watching my baby sister grow up

I’ve walked to the big house of my grandma
I’ve seen her take care of many animals: dogs, cats, chickens, goats
I’ve helped her put the animals in their pen

I’ve tasted my grandma’s coffee with a special flavor, maybe my grandma’s coffee has a secret ingredient or it is the feelings that stay with me, that coffee reminds me of those days that I was with my family together, seeing how the sun hides behind the mountains and
seeing how the stars by the moon start to come out
on those beautiful nights
I’ve been warned to not drink alcohol
I’ve smelled the alcohol of everyone else

I left behind my grandma and my mom
I carry with me memories of the parties
I remember feeling not worried but safe when we were
all together

I stand on the belief that I can do better
I dream of a career as a mechanic
I hope to go to college and achieve my career
MY IDENTITY
FROM ARMENIA

Ruben Stepanyan

I am from Armenia
I moved to the United States when I was fifteen years old
In my life the most important thing I have is my family
Family for me is a big world
Inside my family world, I see my parents, my sister
Family are the people who are always ready to help and understand you
My family for me is a diamond, a white shining diamond
Always shining and always expensive for me
I have good memories: I remember how I moved from Armenia to the U.S.
In my memories highlighting the first day of the United States
For me it was something new
I never met a thing like this new life started up for me
I see for me a new city and country
In my memory another highlight was my first day in school
It looks like the place where I am starting my life in the United States. It is for me a new world where I can find people. It is like a new world for me where you are searching for your new connection and new help. My eyes remember too. My eyes remembering how people out of there chose to leave their countries. Because they did not see equality in their countries. Another memory is listening. Listening to memories, helping to challenge and never give up. Listening to memories, highlighting advice which can navigate you in life. I listen, I never give up life, life will not be easy after giving up. These words I listen to from my grandpa. After these words, I understand I should always go straight in life. If you want success in life, make challenges for you and succeed in your challenges.
WHO I WAS AND
I WANT TO BE

Jose Zuniga

I am Latino from Honduras
I am an immigrant from my little country, I speak Spanish
I am a student, who learns with students that speak a different language
I am from Honduras
I am from my family
I am from Honduran culture, where people celebrate Mother’s Day
I’ve walked the peaceful streets
I’ve seen different cultures, faces, races, ethnicities, and people who work hard for themselves
I’ve held my dream to be a professional person and to graduate from high school
I’ve tasted different types of food from my mother, she cooks baleadas for me and my sisters
My mother makes the baleadas with love and happiness
I’ve heard different languages
I’ve smelled my dream becoming true to be a police officer
I left behind my family, friends, and culture
I carry with me my dad, who I love and who I left behind
I remember the independence day in my country
I stand on my mom’s hand
I dream of graduating, I will be excited, sad, proud of myself
I will miss my classmates, friends, and teachers who help me to make my dream become real
I hope to achieve my goals and dreams
THE PLACE WHERE I CAN MAKE ME STRONGER

Edwin Diaz Lopez

I am a Guatemalan.
I am Aldea Subchal.
I am San Miguel Ixthauhacon San Marcos.
I am from the Mayan people.
I can speak Mam and also Spanish and English.
I speak Mam with my grandmother and my father who taught me.
I speak Spanish with my mother and with my brothers.
I am from the Maya tradition and we used different clothes.
I dance baile por florico and we use marimba with this dance.
I’ve heard marimba music from my culture.
I’ve walked with my sister and my mother.
I’ve smelled tamales that my mother made.
I left behind my family when I moved to the U.S.
I carry with me my phone that I use to talk with my family and friends.
I remember playing soccer with my friends in San Miguel Ixtahuacan San Marcos.
I stand on the ground in my new city San Francisco.
I dream of being a mechanic in San Francisco.
I hope for my family to be with me again.
I’ve seen my sister also move here from Guatemala.
I’ve held tools like jumper cables in my classes to learn to be a mechanic.
I’ve tasted food from Pollo Campero, which is a Guatemalan restaurant.

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EDWIN DIAZ LOPEZ was born in Guatemala. He immigrated to the United States four years ago because he wants to have a good education and achieve his dream. He is a current senior at SFIHS. Next year he is planning to go to Skyline College. His poetry is inspired by his tradition in his country where he came from.
LIKE THE MIGHTY WATERFALL
I am from Guatemala, where I grew up eating tortillas, tamalitos, beans, and my grandmother’s chilmole
Where everything is beautiful and green
From a little town where everyone respects each other,
Where every morning, everyone greets each other
And everyone is a hard worker, especially the leaders of the house, like my grandfathers and my papito
I am the peace and hope for my family
I am strong because I see big heros giving up, in my family, when we lose lovely family members

I draw strength from where I’ve walked
I’ve walked through sadness when my little brother passed away
It showed me how to be strong for my family
It made me strong supporting my dad and mom when they cried every day
But I also cried, alone on the bus and in the corner of my room
I am from daddy’s dimples and humble personality
I am from my mom’s tamales and mole made with chilis and love
I am the light in the darkness who helps people remember wonderful stories of my lovely family members that are in Heaven

I draw strength from what I’ve tasted
I’ve tasted happiness when my papito got out of the jail after five years, accused of being a coyote
It showed me the love and appreciation in my community
It helped me forget and forgive the sadness of seeing my little siblings begging for a Quetzal from my uncles
And my one-year-old brother asking where daddy is and asking my mom to pray to God

I am fighting for my dreams of becoming a professional police officer
And becoming the greatest mom that a little angel can have
I am like an eagle who overcomes big, difficult processes in life
I am like an eagle who has two chances in life, die or face the most challenging process in life
I draw strength from what I carry
I carry memories of my little brother, Kevin, and my two abuelitos
Saying we want to see you with many diplomas in your hands
We want to see a short girl with the biggest heart
having victory in life
They remind me that I have to fight to achieve my dreams
They make me strong by keeping their lovely advice in my mind
And I will never ever forget the greatest advice that I have from my three angels

I am from a humble hard-working family
And everyone shares their happiness, eating tamales de arroz and chocolate
I am from el rancho and grew up playing with my grandmother's animals
I am the shadow of my grandmother, Amalia, helping animals grow up
I draw strength from where I stand

I stand on the legacy of not being ashamed of where I come from and of my native language
I speak Mam and Spanish
It teaches me that no matter where I am, I can keep speaking my language
And show people that speaking Mam does not make you less than others and it does not make you the most indigena person
It makes me strong because I am smart and unique
I can speak Mam and can learn how to speak other languages
I am a short girl with the biggest dreams to achieve
I am a short Guatemalan girl who can show people that
  I am not less than others
Just because I speak Mam
I am strong and powerful, I am thankful for being from Guatemala

BRENDA AGUILAR was born in Guatemala City. She immigrated to the U.S. when she was sixteen years old because she wanted to get a better education and help her family financially. She is currently a senior at SFIHS where she is a member of the Refugee Transition program. Next year, she plans to go to college and spend time with her baby. Her poetry is inspired by her little brother and her two grandfathers.
I am from a place where there are many rivers and mountains
I am indigenous
I am Guatemalan

I am from San Miguel
I am from my family, especially my parents
Soy el 15 de septiembre

I’ve walked from country to country
I’ve seen people fight for their dreams
I’ve held on to hope

I’ve tasted tamales
I’ve heard birds singing
I’ve smelled food made from scratch

I left behind my family
I carry with me my parents’ advice
I remember my little brothers seem small
I stand on being positive
I dream of having a family
I hope for the day I can see my parents again

MARIELA AGUILAR was born in Guatemala. She immigrated to the U.S. in 2016 because her brother inspired her to come to the U.S. She is currently a senior at SFIHS, where she is a member of CYC. Next year she is planning to go to City College. Her poetry is inspired by dreams.
I am a helpful person, I am a happy person,
I am the last son of the family.
I am from Huehuetenango, La Democracia.
The most important people in my life are my girlfriend
and my family.
I am from Guatemala.
I’ve walked through Mexico.
I’ve seen people using violence when people come to
the U.S.
Most of the people who suffer are women when they
rape them.
I’ve held a gun, I’ve tasted many kinds of food, but it
tastes so good.
I’ve heard scary stories, like the chupacabra. I’ve
smelled things so horrible.
I left behind my grandmother, who was the only person
who cared for me and
my brothers when we were in my home country.
I carry with me memories of all the time I have spent
with my grandmother and the people I met in my
country.
I remember that once I fell into a tree and
My vocals hurt when I fell on the ground,
How good nothing bad happened to me.
I stand on my family,
I dream of studying psychology.
I hope to have a good future and achieve what I want.
I am from the early morning fog evaporating over the hills and the cows waiting, 
I am from the smell of tortillas y cafe and running horses with my big brother, Julio Cesar, 
I am from running outside with my primos making barquitos to play when it was raining, and my mom’s screams to come home, “Te va caer rayos!”

I am from Angel Albino Corzo, Chiapas, Mexico, 
I am from Julio Cesar, my older brother, 
I am from El Día de Los Muertos, where your family remembers sus seres queridos.

I’ve walked from the milpa with my machete, pozol de cacao, only to return once the job is done with lena to burn, 
I’ve seen how many people swim in the river during Semana Santa in search of fun times and peace,
I’ve held a memory of my father killing five deer in a night,
He was someone I admired because he never gave up and showed us to learn a la primera.

I’ve tasted handmade tortillas fresh from the comal, and
I’ve heard many stories about my culture from mis abuelitos,
like how El Sombreron braided my horse’s hair at night,
I’ve smelled el viento puro y fresco rumbo al potrero,
where I either worked alone or with my brothers,
Or that place that I swear was dark all day, that still scares me.

I left behind my memories, hard times, when I lost my two most important people, and now I am better than other days,
I carry with me my pride, humility, and a smile for any who want to be friendly with me,
I remember all my old times, when I was a child, and my primos and I would play toka toka in the river,
I stand on my values, abuelos, and to be proud about anything that I do,
I also stand on a State Champion podium, after running caballos en mi rancho back home,
I dream of becoming a veterinarian to help my animals back home,
I hope for a car, house, and in eight years, a family, and to help my mocosos have a good life.
Todos en la cama a las 10:00 y levantando a las 5:00 a.m.
Get changed go to the milpa, y a las 6:00,
No sabia cuando eran mis días de descanso, me ocupe más con el trabajo con mi hermano.
Me dediqué más al campo, ya con el tiempo, se complicaron las cosas, tengo que hacer mi propio.
I am a trilingual student of SFIHS
I am always proud of myself for learning
Being trilingual is good for my future
I can communicate with people
& bring them joy

I come from yellow, green, and red
I come from a small country
I come from the coconut noodle soup my dad would make me
He makes it for me because it’s expensive to buy at a restaurant
He buys noodles, using coconut water and egg

I’ve heard compliments from friends about the soup
I’ve smelled like coconut and egg
I’ve tasted sweet and fresh

I’ve walked to school to English class every day
I’ve seen and learned about a lot of discrimination and prejudice in class
I’ve felt surprised to learn about what I never heard before about discrimination in America
I left behind my school in Burma and old friends
I carry with me memories of playing computer games
I remember some are old, some are gold

I stand in a new school in SFIHS, and I’ve met new friends who speak different languages
I dream of a career as a sneaker designer
I hope to be successful in college

AUNG HTET was born in Yangon, Myanmar. He immigrated to the U.S. four years ago because he wanted to learn with better education and make money. He is a current senior at SFI, where he is a member of the peace class. Next year, he plans to go to San Francisco State University. His poetry is inspired by himself.
WHO AM I?

Selena (Jinying) Li

I am from a small village where everyone knows each other
A place surrounded by rural smells with four distinctive seasons
Abloom Spring, Sweltering Summer, Golden Autumn, Cozy Winter
People would call me “锦莹 Jinying,” and my appearance doesn’t really matter
I am from a big city where everyone has different backgrounds
A place surrounded by the Pacific Ocean, with spring all year around
Foggy morning, balmy afternoon, breezy evening, all at once
People would call me “Selena,” and my skin color would bring different sounds
I only speak 开平话 (Kaipingese) at home, but English becomes a language I speak the most

I am from a place where “yumcha” is a social gathering for brunch
“Dimsum” is not just food on the table, but a symbol representing Guangdong culture
Pu’er tea tastes bitter before sweet, and that has shaped my thinking, “Strive first and enjoy happiness later”
I am from a place where “party” is socialization and connection
Solo cups are not just here to fill with water, but a symbol representing American culture
Soda bubbles are only here when you first open it, and that has led me to “Cherish the present”
My parents think rice is my favorite food, but pineapple pizza has changed my taste

I am a Chinese
Not good at doing math
But good at saying “我很棒” (I am awesome)
I will become an American
Not forgetting my own ethnicity
But knowing this is my other half

I am like a sapling now
Enjoying the sunshine given by parents
Experiencing the rain and wind given by society
Missing the memories given by Kaiping
Carrying the knowledge given by Michigan
Absorbing the diversity given by San Francisco
I want to be like the Great Wall of China
Strong, special, and successful
I want to visit the Statue of Liberty
Find that friendship and freedom
I want to tell people that
Embracing difference feels better than being fooled
by racism.

SELENA (JINYING) LI was born in Kaiping, China. She immigrated to the U.S. when she was thirteen with her parents. In the past few years living in America, she gradually found her own complex identity and decided to fight against racism. Therefore, she plans to go to UC Davis or UC Berkeley to study either International Relations or Political Science. Her poetry is inspired by her seventeen years of life experience.
MY LIFE

Alexis Ortiz

I am Alexis Ortiz and this poem is a true history

I was born in San Francisco, California
But when I was five years old, my mom said to move to
   Mexico to visit my grandparents
We stayed in Mexico for twelve years
I grew up with my grandparents
My grandfather always told me that I needed to be a
good kid to make friends
I was a good kid and I always liked to play baseball
Grandfather always took me to the baseball game
every Sunday
At the games, it was funny to see people playing
   baseball, it was exciting
I loved to stay with my grandfather
Where my grandfather went, I went with him—
To the mountains to take care of the animals
The people who matter a lot to me are my family
That is why they are the people who encourage me to
   continue studying,
I thank them very much
I love my family
I come from a country who is so beautiful
They call it Los lugares de los sauces and it has a lot of history
I walked on the mountains every day with my grandfather
He always likes to walk to be healthy
I see a beautiful landscape, the green trees
The songs of the birds, the smell of wet land
when it rains
I held animals in my hand
Chivas, when they are born, are beautiful
MY SPIRIT RUNS AWAY

Tania Peña

I raised my spirit in a poor country
A place called my Pulgarcito de América
In El Salvador, the brisa calida came to my face every morning
Donde el café is waiting for me with my frijoles y plátanos

I raised mi espíritu hearing people screaming at 6:00 a.m., “el Pan Francés”
Even though they know people are still sleeping at the time
Red, orange, and yellow are the colors of the sunsets in mi Pulgarcito de América
Where the cumbia reaches the bottom of your feet and makes you move until dawn

The streets are like the desert that is cruel
The rain is coming and people are desperate
To go bring their clothes hanging on their patio, but the storm can pass away
Mi Pulgarcito de América shouts aloud
Calma ven ya with tears in hand
The danger is outside, someone said, but Salvadoreños, we don’t care
I come and go like the open sea
In the Fiestas Agostinas, we eat riguas and churros
The beaches have black sand and
People are on the edge of the water
Where people on the beach are selling mango during summer time

I came from el Pulgarcito de América
where people work hard and inspire me
To strengthen my spirit in this country that makes me feel empty
Jugar pelota or playing thief and police
I don't see that in my life anymore,
Having a good time with your friends was everything,
Feeling that emotion of tensión for not letting your friends tocarte la mica
Or hiding from them was the emotion of my previous me

The bracelet reminds me of you, my little half,
I would like to look back on you and not think of seeing you leave and never stop
If I lie to help me since I have to forget you
Like the Puerta del Diablo makes you feel the end of the walk,
Since I have to walk on my own and I left you behind,
But I know at the end, I will have you by my side, looking at beautiful nature
The shadow asks me, Who are you?  
And I say soy una soñadora who wants to be a doctor  
To help people who need it  
But the shadow is still asking who I am

The opportunity is wonderful as oxygen in the air  
But the work can be hard for an immigrant like un arma de doble filo, since it’s harsh and unfair,  
To the north I went, yo pensé ser fuerte, I found myself desperate  
To go and eat some pupusas en las calles or go to La Carretera de Oro and eat some riguas with atol de elote

I realized that many times I cried over low heat, where the flames of pain consumed me little by little  
Where there is no more smell of dirt after a rainstorm during winter  
When you get up by morning and you don't know yourself, who you are, or where you are  
Where the winds of October need me  
This city is very cold and it makes my heart harden little by little

It is the third night that I can’t sleep  
Talking to my window, asking who I want to be  
Where she is answering me, your spirit will guide you always pero tus tierras natales  
You would never forget, like the indígenas made their history in the Pulgarcito de América.
TANIA PEÑA was born in San Salvador, El Salvador. She immigrated to the U.S. when she was fourteen years old because she wanted to find a better opportunity for her education and escape from the danger of her country. She is currently a senior at SFI, where she is a member of the 2020 leaders. Next year, her plans are to go to SF State. Her poetry is inspired by her memories of being an immigrant and how difficult it is to leave her own country behind.
Spring, summer, fall, winter,
The taste of these seasons is once again bitter.
I would like to know myself better,
My emotions are like books in a bookshelf.
They are saved, and I almost never read them,
Those books tell this story.

America, Latin America, Central America, El Salvador,
A tiny choir of my heart song, with which my story
began.
That store that I used to go to now has its blinds
closed,
I wonder if, like that, my memories will fade away
as well.
That nostalgic landscape, my precious place. I wonder,
will it ever change?

An empty street, an empty house,
I have them in my mind.
My childhood painted in that wall,
Are those times ever coming back?
When I hang out with friends en La Colonia,
When going to visit los primos.
Why?
Why are the most beautiful moments the ones that hurt the most?

America, North America, United States,
An unknown place, where no one knows my face.
Who am I?
It’s funny, I still don’t know.
What is identity for anyway?
What really counts is your actions day by day.

I am a simple dreamer, reaching high
So when it’s time to say goodbye,
I can look proudly at my beloved one’s eyes.
In life you gotta learn to love the thorn,
Or you don’t get to accept the roses.

Kimi no yume wa owaranai,
Tu sueño nunca terminará,
Your dream will never end.
Words were from my girlfriend.
Words that emitted hope to me.
Words that encouraged me to keep going when I’d given up everything I had.

From now on, I’ll keep on walking forward,
Taking all what I’ve been through with me.
The joy of happiness, the sadness of crying.
My wrong and right decisions,
They’ve made me what I am today.
When it is hard to make a decision, don’t look too far. Just think about tomorrow. I tell myself to think about what you wanna do tomorrow, And the right answer will be revealed.

Spring, summer, fall, winter, Who knows? Maybe tomorrow those seasons Are not gonna be bitter.

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FERNANDO RAMIREZ was born in San Salvador, El Salvador. He immigrated to the U.S. four years ago because he and his family got the residency and wanted to know the U.S., and if they like it, they will stay forever. If not, they are going to move. Next year he is planning to study economics or business administration, so in the future he can work as a businessman. His poetry is inspired by his expectations for the future.
LEAVE WITH HOPE

Navin Sroeur

I come from a wonderful place, wonderful history, wonderful ancestors, but just the past. I am red, white, blue, and strong as the Angkor Wat temple of Cambodia.

A land that used to be wonderful as Heaven became a hell because of war, unfairness, violation of rights, and a stupid leader of the country. I have seen and heard pain, anger, violence that poor people get from rich people and government losing their own land, no justice for poor people. I never tasted that situation, but I already feel deep in my heart their pain.

Freedom is the idea that gives people a chance to do what they want. I may be free if I leave my land. I may be safe if I find a new home. I may be successful if I find a place that gives me opportunities, And now I leave my land and go to land that people called peace land to find the way to reach the goal.
Carrying many dreams to new land, hopes to become a successful man to make family proud
Day dream, night think
Working with belief, reaching the goal before I leave
Make haters know that I am the Legend

Even though I have not yet reached my goal yet,
everything is going according to plan
Finishing high school is the first step, I almost got it
Finishing college is the second step, working on it
Finding a good career is the big dream, working on my dream, never get tired
Everything goes according to plan
A successful man will come soon

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NAVIN SROEURN is from Cambodia (the wonderful land). He immigrated to the U.S. two-and-a-half years ago because his mom wanted him to get a better life. He is a current senior at SFI. Next year, he plans to go to SF State to learn computer science. This poetry is inspired by the lifestyles that he left in his country to find a place that gives him the opportunity to have a better life.
LIKE A LION THAT DEFENDS A FAMILY

Ashley Torres

I’m Ashley, I’m Salvadorian
I want to be the light for other people
I want to be like a lion that defends a family
I’ve tasted sadness, bitterness, I’ve felt down
But just as a giant, I’ve risen above my shyness
My silence defined me sometimes
But my beauty results in me, just like red roses
Even if I get arrows shot at my heart
I show my brightness, even if the unknown
Wants to get me down, I resist and I shine
I’m like an ear, I listen to whoever wants me to
Bring their sorrows to my feet
I’m like a light that guides other people
In darkness
Even though I’m a storm
Even though I’m an earthquake
But that storm turns into a spring
That brings comfort and beauty
That turns into America
That makes me strong
ASHLEY TORRES was born in San Salvador. She immigrated to the U.S. three years ago because her family wanted a better future. She is a current senior at SFI. Next year, she plans to work to help her mom. Her poetry is inspired by her mom and her grandfather.
FOLLOW THE DREAM

Zhenting Wu

China is the land of the dream, land of liberty,
    land of free
It seems like I am a vigorous, little tree
Because my parents divorced when I was a child
I’ve walked through San Francisco, this is knowledge
    of Heaven
I’ve held a lot of opportunity, responsibility
The chance to be here, the chance to attend University
But language is my disability
The United States showed me a lot of smart people
Everybody wants to be a superhero
It makes me strong by overcoming the challenge:
    language, culture, race

I am the person that wants to achieve a dream
I hope it is as easy as to get an ice cream
How can I get the key to open the door
Without a high school diploma, a college degree
My family reminds me to go to college and focus on education
I try so hard because of my parents, for my family, for myself
I stand on the legacy of Chinese traditional culture
I am like the red envelope that Chinese people give others at Chinese New Year
It means new, auspicious, lucky
I am educated
I am the teacher’s fan
I am the school’s student

ZHENTING WU was born in Jiangmen, China. He immigrated to the U.S. three years ago because he wants to attend a better college and get a better education. He is a current senior at SFI. Next year, he plans to attend San Francisco State University. His poetry is inspired by his family because he wants to make his father proud of him.
ROAD OF LIFE

Dongliang Yu

I came from China, a place of pretty people, beautiful Great Wall, and delicious hot pot
From two sisters and demanding parents
A cleaner who takes care of my family

I draw strength from what I’ve heard.

I’ve heard my mother say, “If you don’t work hard, you will get fired”
It showed me not to be lazy
It made me strong by forcing me to find work & work hard
To succeed in my future

I am from my mom’s hot pot and my sister’s sushi
From Westfield ramen and Yifeng’s fruit tea
I am a foodie who helps anybody

I draw strength from what I’ve tasted.
I’ve tasted despair & failure
It made me try & try until I reached success
It showed me hope is something we can make anytime & family can help you find it
I am achieving my major, making more money, fighting for dreams
I am the ideal person to help the family economy

I draw strength from what I carry.

I carry memories of being hit by middle school classmates in China
They remind me that I need to become stronger
I want to remember that moment
I felt angry & sad
That memory & emotions made me stronger
I started running and lifting dumbbells every day

I am from Tang Dynasty and poems
From 诗 and full of emotion
I am a poet reading poems

I draw strength from where I stand.

I stand on the legacy of Tang Dynasty poems
It teaches me how to read aloud emotionally
It makes me strong because Tang Dynasty is the strongest dynasty

I am handsome
I am humorous
I am alone
DONGLIANG YU was born in Kaiping, China. He immigrated to the U.S. three years ago because he wants to get rich. He is a current senior at SFI, where he is a member of the Huskies. Next year, he plans to buy a car. His poetry is inspired by his parents.
THE LIGHT FOR THE FUTURE IS ON ME

Yonatan Umana Romero

I am from a small country but with nice people
From a place where we grow our own food and we
don’t need to worry about paying somebody

I am a Salvadoreño from Morazan who loves arroz con
leche y pupusas de loroco

I draw strength from where I’ve walked
I’ve walked through a big mountain that looks like a
big brontosaurus
It showed me how much I need to walk to go to school
It made me strong remembering my grandmother’s
words, vaya a la escuela para mejor futuro

I am an electric stair moving from a third floor to
second floor at the wrestling city final
From a double leg and crossface to get the victory
I am a little child trying to run, but he has not learned
how to walk
I draw strength from what I’ve tasted
I’ve tasted my blood, my pain, but at the end of the day, a victory is waiting for me
It showed me to never give up
When you are down, stand up stronger, stay still until the end
It makes me strong to know that my family is proud of me

I am the head of the train, the oldest brother of three
I am the light for my brothers that shows the correct way or the wrong way
And I will be the light for the future of my brothers

I am working to get a nursing degree
I am going to be the first person to have a degree in my family

I draw strength from what I carry
I carry memories of my grandmother’s advice
Being with her twelve years in El Salvador, I learned how to be respectful and work hard
They remind me that I need to find good friends
Because bad friends are not always with you, they only cause problems

I am from El Salvador and the Fiestas Patrias en El Salvador
From El Carnaval de San Miguel y Adentro Cojutepeque
I am that happy teddy boy who all year likes to dance in school
I draw strength from where I stand
I stand on the legacy of my traditional food and dance
It teaches me wherever I go, I always remember where
   I am from
It makes me strong because I remember my
   grandmother who I miss a lot and my old school
   activities in El Salvador

I am El Salvadoreño
I am the light for my family
I am the head of the train

YONATAN UMANA ROMERO was born in San Miguel, El Salvador. He immigrated to the U.S. when he was fourteen years old to get a better education. He is a current senior at SFI. Next year, he plans to go to City College. His poetry is inspired by his family.
MY LIFE

Jose Benjamin Alvarado Mancia

I am funny
I am respectful
I am a good worker

I am from El Salvador
I am from family, friends
I am from when every Sunday me and my family went to buy pupusas

I’ve walked in many places, for example in San Francisco
I’ve seen many types of culture
I’ve come to the United States

I’ve tasted food from other countries
I’ve heard “never give up”
I’ve smelled fragrance

I left behind my other family in my country
I carry with me the teaching my grandfather gave me
I remember when I left my country
I stand on every day to achieve my dream
I dream of creating my family
I hope for each one to have and fulfill their dreams

Jose Benjamin Alvarado Mancia is twenty years old from San Salvador, El Salvador. When he was a child, he always dreamed of living in the United States. Now that he is twenty years old, he has been living in the United States for three years in San Francisco. He studies in the so-called international school, where he has learned a little English. He has only one month left to graduate and then plans to go to college to study to be a chef. Right now he works and studies, which is not easy to do at the same time, but he wants to improve himself. He likes his work because it is cooking, although he has had accidents because it is a dangerous job using fire, hot water, hot oil, and very sharp knives.
POEM OF HONESTY:
LIKE THE MIGHTY
WATERFALL AND THE
RAIN ON THE DRYLANDS

Murtadha (Leo) Al Tekmachi

I am from barren landscapes and ancient architecture
From friendly culture and persevering people

I am the encyclopedia that has random information
I draw strength from where I’ve walked

I’ve walked through wars that traumatize and cultures different from my own
It showed me how to work under pressure and against all odds
It made me strong by showing me how to survive in otherwise unwinnable or difficult situations
I am the period in sentences and the first capital letter in a sentence, ending one life and beginning a new slate
From the sturdiness of the bonito fish and the sharpness of obsidian
I am the unstoppable force against the immovable object, surviving against odds that aren’t in my favor
I draw strength from what I’ve tasted

I’ve tasted defeat
It showed me that not every situation could be won with might, but you have to use your brain
It makes me strong by making me think on my feet under pressure

I am the Golden Gate Bridge, helping people needing to get from point A to point B,
And to some, the light that shines in the darkness for my family in their trying times

I am a hard drive of information
I draw strength from what I carry

I carry memories of my grandfather, who was very intelligent and who was a good leader, and he alone was how my family and I came to the United States
They remind me to always do better in a difficult situation
They make me strong by telling me to use my full potential to be successful

I am from the war in the Middle East that tears people apart, but shows people how to work together to jump over the hurdles that it throws at you
From accepting assistance from people and helping people in need because they will do the same if you need help

I am the rain on the drylands
I draw strength from where I stand
I stand on the legacy of family that overcame trying times with puffed-up chests, without any complaints
It teaches me to be humble because I come from a family of even better people than myself
It makes me strong because I think back to all the sacrifices my family has made, and no choice is as hard as
Leaving our country to go somewhere strange

I am a wanderer
I am a traveller
I am an unraveller
Untangling the knots of my personality and the world around me

MURTADHA (LEO) AL TEKMACHI is an immigrant from a faraway land named Iraq. Leo is surprised he has gotten this far, and he is proud of how far he has come from being just another immigrant boy on really strange soil. Leo hopes to go to college and become the first person in his family to go to college in America. He wants to accomplish things he never thought he’d accomplish against all odds, and through all of the difficult times, he will persevere.
PASSION FROM WHERE I AM FROM

Meina Liu

The land that I am standing on has a history of five thousand years
I can see countless dynasties and emperors
The people there created countless treasures
For future generations
The calligraphy, the Terracotta Army,
    and the Great Wall
We are taught to be a good daughter or a good son
We are taught to be respectful and humbled
The marvelous land is where I am from

In the shade of the longan tree, children’s paradise
The joy also makes the longan tree happy
But it has an “unfriendly” friend: cicada
Buzz ... buzz ... buzz ... is what he likes to sing
The singing always disturbs people’s dreams
It looks like he wants to say, “People! Wake up and start working!”

Back in my hometown, the mud is narrating
    a funny story
The mud is a dirty and sticky ocean, little fish like swimming inside but the little girl doesn’t.

It starts,

―On a sunny day, a girl was planting rice with her family
Suddenly, she fell on me heavily
Then, I was all over on her face, her hands, and her clothes
She cried out loudly, as annoying as the cicada
The way she looks makes everybody laugh
But it’s ok because she brought happiness to the hard-working people on a very bright day”

The mud doesn’t know that one day the little girl will leave her hometown and move to another country
She leaves her friends that she has known for many years
The delicious dumplings that her mom made,
The jubilant firecrackers dancing with their red new clothes,
and Chinese couplets that are written in red papers on New Year’s Day

“人生最大的奢侈就是静坐时间的流逝”
“The greatest waste in life is to sit there and wait for time to pass,” my father had once told me
I practice drawing anime characters
I cook dishes and desserts for my friends and family
I learn new language and practice it every day
My plan is full, I never leave my days empty
In the future, I will be working hard to graduate from college
To chase my dream and create a bright future for my family
After that, I will be near to the edge of success

MEINA LIU was born in Maoming, China. She immigrated to the U.S. three years ago with her family to seek a better future. Something she likes to do is drawing and cooking. Next year, she will be going to college and studying design.
Back in Guatemala, in the land of humble people of beautiful lakes, and trajes típicos, tortillas, and tamales, a new identity was born, a new me was born, carrying memories of my family from my country to America. I am the old wise man, who advises because I care, I am the strong bone against negative forces, which makes me strong enough to raise up and keep going towards my goals, like a top of the hill. I’ve tasted sadness, darkness, hope, hate, and encouragement. It showed me that I shall recognize the terrible sharpness, but it made me strong again. I’ve been told one time: don’t let the external world beat you down, but take this chance to be stronger. And strength had become like my best friend, and that best friend
helped me rise up again,
trying not to break promises
because once trust is lost, it is not easily recaptured.
Trust became a piece of my life, back in my country,
    part of my
abuela’s wisdom.
Then I come back home, awaiting for me,
dancing darling dances.
I am one!
Do not misrepresent me,
because I'm shining like a star in the sky,
hoping to see my family admiring my brightness.

ALEXANDER BLANCO was born in Suchitepéquez, Guatemala. He immigrated to the U.S. five years ago in order to have a better future, although it wasn't in his future plans. He is a current senior at San Francisco International High School, where he is part of Peace Club leadership and is a Bayview Hunters Point Center for Arts and Technology member. Next year, he plans to go to San Francisco State University. His poetry is inspired by a friend who he met in the U.S. and his family back in his country.
THE FLOWER’S MISSION

Analyn Guinto

I am a flower’s seed
That blooms into darkness
Soon adopted a warm place

I am from the motherland
The motherland that is known as poverty-stricken
Poverty-stricken results in family separation
Family separation leads me to depression
Battle-scarred, hoping the sun will rise up
Sunlight is my only hope
That will bloom me into who I am

I am a beautiful living organism
That will bring colors and care to the world
That lights up the darkness in a room

From a seed to a flower in the vase
The opportunity to live
Every living thing will grow to see the beauty and purpose
I am the living thing that has hopes and goals in life
Wants to accomplish things before all the leaves have all gone brown
I will not waste every morning
I will not waste every sunbeam that comes in my life
I am the flower
Mamumulaklak (will bloom) from darkness
Together with my family and friends

ANALYN GUIITO was born in Masantol Pampanga, Philippines. She immigrated to the U.S. six years ago because she was looking for better opportunities and to reunite with her family. She is currently a senior at SFI. Next year, she plans to go to SF State University to reach her dream of being a pediatrician. Her poetry is inspired by her experience in the past.
ME AND THE DRAGON

Winni Weix Hu

Where are you from?
I come from one of the four ancient civilizations
A country with five thousand years of profound culture
What language do you use?
Speaking and writing one of the most difficult languages in the world
People say
It is beautiful, complex, mysterious
It is a challenge for your memory system
It is a new understanding for your cognitive ability
For me
Every character writes about its story
Every pronunciation tells about its feeling
From kindergarten to high school
It helps me show my spirit
It helps me speak out my mind

I am from China
I am Chinese
I am a tree
Having half of my roots in that east land
“艰难困苦 玉汝于成”
Success only comes through hard work
I am here
Having half of my roots in this west land
“In me the tiger sniffs the rose”

I have come with resilience and diligence from my nation
I am learning to be creative and innovative for my future
I wrapped up what I got from the past
My passion, my motivation, my self-discipline
Parent’s words of life lessons, teacher’s words of wisdom
I start building up what I want for the future
My goals, my dream, my pursuit
Less illness and suffering, more wellness and laughing

I swallow the sorrow that comes over at night
I taste the tears that drop in my pillow
I am drowning in deeply homesick depression at the other side of the Pacific Ocean
Like a knife right through me
Like a light raising me up
I am shaking
I am growing

I remember how I grow as a Chinese
I experience how to grow as a Chinese immigrant
I remember both the kindness and malice
The compliments and discriminations
To lift up the veil of darkness
To get across the snare of the obstacles
I am seeing the light
I am building my future

I am proud of who I am
I am proud of what I have
The generation of a great nation
My yellow skin
My black hair and eyes

People say
There was a dragon who fell asleep in the east of the world
When he opens his eyes with all the pain and scars from the past
The world would see it
The world would hear it
The world would admit it

It made it
And
So am I

I am with it
To be seen by the world
I am with it
To be heard by the world
I am with it
To be admitted by the world
I am here
And I am ready
For my bright future
WINNI WEIX HU was born in Guangdong, China. She immigrated to the U.S. four years ago. She is a current senior at SFI, where she is a member of College Track of San Francisco. Next year she plans to start the first year of pursuing her first bachelor’s degree in college. Her poetry is inspired by her identity and her own experience.
MY MYSTERIOUS POWERS FROM MY LIFE AND HISTORY

Hanthlah Kassim

I'm from the Hurt and tears of innocent people
I’m from the Antiquity of places that others envy, thus want to break
I’m from the Nation whose history doesn’t have a normal registry
Inna min the Trees of dragons’ blood that others envy, thus they want to take
Inna min the Hurt and tears of innocent people
Inna min the Land of Saba Kingdom, known as Sheba in the holy bible
Soy de the Area that’s in the center of the world
Soy de the Hurt and tears of innocent people

I’ve smelled the smoke of burned, cut pieces of trees!
Coming out from the chimneys
As a daily smell in our elder villages, just an hour before the people start to eat
Although it’s just a smell of burned wood, it takes me way back to the old centuries
Our antiquated villages are the original copy of human’s life without technologies
Where you see how humans lived before thousands and thousands of years and memories
Houses built of stones and mud next to farm fields along the mountains
All ages of people, with joyous voices filling the air like we are in the heavens
I'm from the hurt and tears of innocent people

The coffee you are drinking! It was first founded in my country
The Covid-19, the Coronavirus, that we are currently witnessing?
It entered all the countries, but hasn't yet entered my country
Not having natural disasters or those diseases doesn’t mean we're living peacefully!!
The temptation and aggression of other nations prevents us from living blissfully
We ain't complaining about the environmental crisis
We’re complaining about human brutality
Inna min the hurt and tears of innocent people

I’ve seen a six-year-old lifting heavy bloques, working to help his family
Many were witnessing, but nobody could do anything other than to watch painfully
We are like our trees of dragons’ blood!
We get hurt like their branches
Bleeding blood and sadness when aggression occurs
Soy de the hurt and tears of innocent people
I came from the bottom of poverty
Climbing up its hierarchy
Using education as my winning card
Carrying with me life’s three toughest lessons
Tasting failure is one
Feeling broken and abandoned is the other
Being broke is the final

I became like the immune system in the body
It suffers from new viruses
I suffer when there are new struggles and defiances
We both learn from our struggles
And never suffer them again
Having such powers in a packet
Would turn an ambition into reality

HANTHLAH KASSIM was born in Yemen in 2002. He immigrated to the U.S. in 2013 when he was eleven years old in order to accomplish his goals of a better education system and environment. He is a current senior at SFI, where he’s a player on the soccer team. Next year, he plans to go to college and learn about business and medicine. His poetry is inspired by his pains and experiences he went through in his life.
I am an ordinary person.
I am a unique person.
I am an upright person.
I am from a beautiful earth but mysterious.
I am from China with a history of more than five thousand years.
I’ve walked with the change of time.
I’ve seen change in the city.
I’ve held everything with optimism.
I’ve tasted the sweets and bitters of life.
I’ve heard the bugle rallying.
I’ve smelled the fragrance of nature.
I left behind a colorful life.
I carry on with my smile.
I remember my youth memory.
I stand on, thinking under the moon.
I dream of being rich.
I hope to be an ordinary person.
FIGHTING UNTIL THE END

Karol Peña

I am a Salvadorian with a coffee in my hands every morning
I am the opposite of people's minds, I am not what they expect me to be
I am proud of who I am going to be
I am a mestiza who works hard for what I want and not for what others may want

I have tasted death like my coffee every day
My friend who always smiled told me, “Tenés que dejar de vivir la vida loca” that we used to live
I knew she was in danger and I couldn't tell her
Because it was part of the rules, I had no choice
If people cheat, they kill them
When I saw the police, I knew, but I couldn’t stay
So I ran away from a place where the sun and moon fade away
Donde yo luche hasta el final y terminé like a walking death
I am a mestiza who fights hard and immigrated to make a new beginning
In a place where you have to give your best face like
the smiling clown
Outside, but dying inside

I am a dreamer
A dreamer who is going to try hard
And give everything hasta el final
Because fear makes us powerless, but stronger
The perfect weapon to defeat our fears of life
Afraid to return to the past and suffer and cry
every night
Without knowing what to do to stop suffering, so much
pain that consumed part of me

My baby, mi pedacito de cielo,
When I saw her, I knew she was my new beginning
When it was just me, I thought if I have to die, I die
But with her, things became different
She could not see what I’d seen
I had to decide to move on to give her a better life

Now, I decide to live every minute
Every second
No matter what or who tries to stop me
Now I'm going to live in the present
I will live the future
Without hesitation,
Without fear,
Without anyone or anything stopping me
Ceasing to be a living dead that I once was
KAROL PEÑA was born in San Salvador, El Salvador. She immigrated to the U.S. four years ago because of gang violence in her country. She is a current senior at SFI, where she is a member of a senior legacy group called 2020. Next year, she plans to go to SF State. Her poetry is inspired by her own experience of life and her daughter, Alisson.
I am from a beautiful country where people are proud to be part of it.
A land of thirty-seven volcanoes and more than twenty languages.
From great people and from beautiful cultures.
Humble people fighting to achieve their dreams.
I am happy like a dog when he sees his owner get home.

I’ve walked through the streets of San Francisco.
It showed me that even though it is a city with a lot of money, there are people suffering in poverty.
I also see in San Francisco that different races live in different places.
It made me strong by motivating me to be successful and stop biases against Latino people.

I am from my mother’s advice and my sister’s laughs.
From Guatemala’s dreams and my father’s love.
I am the protective shield of my family.
I’ve tasted sadness and suffering.
It showed me that I am a strong person, and no matter what, I have to look up.
It makes me strong by being different from what my dad was for me when I was a child

I am flying for dreams, looking for success, and fighting for peace
I am the guardian angel of my family
I carry memories from when I was a kid
I used to play soccer with all my friends
We used to play in the soccer field that was next to my house
They remind me that life is fun if we decide to make it fun
They make me strong by looking at the positive side of life
By knowing how to choose my friends

I am from celebrating the independence day like crazy and bailar el judas in Semana Santa
From saying, Hey patojo, tenés patas de chucho, and saying that I have to be different from my father
I stand on the legacy of Latinos and celebrating everything that is good for the country
It teaches me that it does not matter how small your success is, you still need to celebrate
It makes me strong because I will always feel proud of me
ANGEL RAMIREZ was born in San Marcos, Guatemala. He immigrated to the United States four years ago because he wanted to have a better future and to achieve his dreams. He is a current senior at SFI, where he is a member of the wrestling team. Next year he plans to go to a four-year university. His poetry is inspired by his dad because Angel wants to be the opposite of him.
I am Pablo

I am a student in San Francisco International High School
I am working in a Mexican restaurant
I am dependable

I am from Mexico, beautiful and beloved
I am from family: parents Pablo and Hermelinda,
brother Ricardo, sisters Jenny and Erika
I am from September 30, the festival of the community
where we live, celebrating one big party
Music, dance, convivencia, and everyone lives with their family
So many generations live together

I’ve walked around to look at the beautiful volcano
and around to see hard rocks and tall trees and enormous nature
I’ve walked on the Golden Gate Bridge and looked around:
Ocean, beach, other countries, and look, my most beautiful neighbor city
And don't forget the plants, trees, flowers, shrubbery
I’ve held in my backpack two things for work and school:
Books and notebook, clothes for work in the night

I’ve tasted paella of seafood mix, this tastes really good,
To smell it is to smell the sea of pure seafood and also
I cook this delicious plate really good
I’ve heard my father say, “Don't look for problems”
I’ve smelled the plates of carne asada, ensalada, paellas, breakfast, lunch, dinner in the day
Also we are located in the South Van Ness Street, San Pancho, California and people can eat in the restaurant and try all plates

I left behind my parents when I immigrated to the U.S.
I carry with me the greatest aspiration to be a person who has great strength to be someone in life, in my family, and my community like this because to feel successful, it means you accomplished something that you fought to have your way, and this ensures that your family is very happy with you
Love this, remember nothing in life is easy to have, including everything you want to get, beauty costs and luxuries too

I stand on the love of my parents, who I know that I
will never lack
Always I believed that they will never leave me alone
My bigger dream is to give my title or certificate to my
mother to whom I will fulfill it
I hope for all this is what I have lived, past, and what I
liked to feel
I want to be successful in life because I get my goal,
which is to help my family, brothers, parents, friends

PABLO TLAPA was born in Puebla, Mexico. He
immigrated to the U.S. three years ago because he wanted
a better life for himself and his family. He is a current
senior at SFI. Next year, he plans to go to San Francisco
City College to achieve his dreams. His poetry is inspired
by his crazy life.
THE ENGINE
OF MY FAMILY

Heriberto Vargas

I am from big, beautiful cerros and old houses made out of adobe
From gallos cantando in the morning
I am red, white, and green
I am Mexicano
I’ve walked through fields where my ancestors worked
It showed me all the hard work and sacrifices
It made me strong and confident that I can accomplish my dream and goals

I am from my grandmothers pozole and the corner store’s pizza
From old kitchens and neighborhood restaurants
I am ceviche, fresh from the sea

I draw strength from what I’ve tasted
I’ve tasted sadness, terror, and hope when I came to the U.S. alone
It showed me I could make my family proud
It makes me strong by teaching me how to be independent
I am working to help my family, studying to be someone in life,
And achieving goals and dreams so I can live a nice life with those whom I love
I am the one who keeps this house together
I draw strength from what I carry
I carry memories of my first car repair
Brake pads—small job, but saving lives
On spring break, my cousin brought me to the shop,
Full of luxury cars, my dream cars
Bored, I asked if I could help
He paid me fifty bucks to rearrange the tools:
    trinquetes, dados, llaves, pinzas, desarmadores, martillos
Then let me do an oil change
Then brakes, half shafts, tires
I discovered that fixing cars is my passion

I am the gas, fueling our future
I am the spark plugs, sparking hope
I am a piston, pumping life
I am the band and chains, keeping us synchronized
I am a small bolt, keeping the engine of my family together
HERIBERTO VARGAS grew up in San Rafael de los Moreno, Mexico. He migrated to the U.S. four years ago because he wanted a better education. He is a current senior at SFI, where he was a member of the volleyball team. Next year he plans to become a mechanic.
I AM

Ru Zhuang

I am a young person
I can do anything I want
I am a coward
I am afraid of losing what I have

I am from Guangdong, China, a place where it was noisy
I am from friends who play qiuchang and naicajujidi
I am from immigration to America and smaller apartments

I’ve walked to the streets of San Francisco
I’ve seen diversity
I’ve seen education in school where we can share ideas

I’ve tasted terrible food from school lunch,
Things I do not even know the names of,
like inferior pizza
I’ve heard the Spanish speaking Chinese: “Shabi”
I’ve smelled sweet cooking tangchupai gu
I left behind a photo from my junior graduation
I carry my body to leave my country
I remember we rush to develop better opportunities

I learn to make things better than before
I dream of going to college
I hope that everyone in the community can be strong
like a tiger

RU ZHUANG is an immigrant from China. She has been living in the United States for almost three years. She will go to San Francisco State next year.
This is me,
A mestiza girl,
A Latina girl,
A Peruvian girl.

The young lady who decided to pursue her hard but satisfying goals rather than wait until they chase her
At a glance, I might intimidate you
People always judge and call me pituca for the way I speak or act
Believe me, people are way too far from what I really am

I love my roots, customs, and parties
In the summer, I miss the cevichito con chicha morada o inka kola
I miss the waves of Punta Hermosa beach
In the winter, I miss that caldo de gallina con yuca in Huapaya
And I miss the warmthness of my sala
When I traveled to the U.S.A
I realized that thousands of memories can be carried
in just one heart
That distance is just a number which cannot
change love

I am the tears of my people
I am the pain that my ancestors have faced
I am also the hope of an end

My dear and lovely country, Peru
Just like Micaela Villegas and Micaela Bastidas
I’ll work hard to end the injustice in our country
I’ll show that women are stronger
This time I had to leave you, but I’ll always come back

The barrio I come from might not look nice,
    with its walls covered by graffiti tags
But for me it is a paradise
The place to dance and laugh until night
This is where my soul resides

When I close my eyes
I can feel that delicious salty smell of a carapulcra and
    sopa seca
Made by Mama Vicky
Oh God, you blessed her with those lovely and
    incredible hands
Those hands that can turn four simple ingredients into
    the luxurious dishes
No matter where I go
Memories will drag me back to my hometown
New opportunities might take me to new places
Where I feel like an outsider
But dreams are not fulfilled without effort or without trying

Most of the time, life makes you make hard decisions
And after you make them, you see the results
Results that are like a fresh fruit growing in a tree

In fact, I am the tree
Who grew up strong
Who endured rainy and sunny days
To finally, step by step, get my fruits (dreams)

This tree has founded a garden full of trees
Trees that are looking for the same
Opportunities that help them get to their goals

Thank God, these trees have found good gardeners
Gardeners that support them through this process
Gardeners that understand them and their needs

I am glad for the good and bad fruits that the different gardens I’ve lived in brought me
It is not easy for a tree to leave its home garden
But it is not healthy for a tree to stay in a garden surrounded by pests
MARIAN DELGADO was born in Lima, Peru. She immigrated to the U.S. in 2018 to pursue her dreams. She is a current senior at SFI, where she was part of the 2020 leaders. She is looking forward to becoming a nutritionist by getting a Bachelor’s at SF State University.
Your Spirit Will Always Guide You is a product of Ms. Heather and Ms. Heran’s senior classes at San Francisco International High School (SFIHS). SF International offers a unique program design for recent immigrant students who have attended school in the United States for four years or less. As a part of one of their final writing projects before graduation, students reflected on their own identities and immigration stories and sought to answer the following questions: Where do I come from? Where am I going? What history and identities do I take with me? With the support of tutors from 826 Valencia, students brainstormed, drafted, revised, and edited poems, which were ultimately performed in a spoken-word poetry slam in their classes. Through these poems, students share poignant reflections about the things that make them who they are, the people and events that have changed them, and the dreams they have for the future.

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