

ISSUE #2  
SPRING 2024

# MERIDIANS

Sidwell Friends School  
International Magazine

Cover Art: Tamer Htihet '25 (ALA)

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# Editor's Note

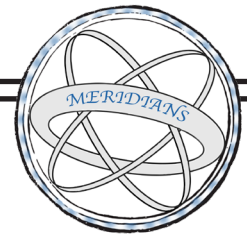
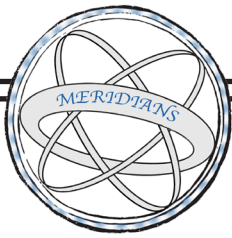
I am delighted to share with you Issue # 2 of *Meridians*. In line with the global outreach of the magazine, this issue combines local pieces by Sidwell Friends School students with contributions from other areas of the US and of the world, in particular the African continent.

Make sure to check out the special interview with Mamadou Guèye, our beloved Sidwell Upper School principal, to see what amazing plans his future holds. The coexistence of remarkably diverse voices and visions on the pages of *Meridians* highlights the richness of cultural differences and personal histories, but it also reminds us of the many experiences and aspirations that we all share as human beings—across languages and geographies.

My warmest thanks to all the people who made this project possible—authors, editorial team members, teachers, our faculty advisor Xuan Wang, and Emily Klein for her pivotal role in helping get *Meridians* overseas!

Happy summer, everyone!

**Ilaria Luna, '25 (Founder and Editor-in-Chief)**



## Editorial Board & Contributors

### Founder/Editor-in-Chief:

Ilaria Luna '25 (SFS)

### Language Editors:

Haohan SiMa '25 (SFS)

### Layout Editors:

Ilaria Luna '25 (SFS)

Daniel Lea '25 (SFS)

### Writing Contributors:

Yasmin Basharu '24 (ALA)

Luciana Castano '25 (BB&N)

Galen Kabwe '24 (SFS)

Ilaria Luna '25 (SFS)

Nicole Makanaka Nyamakanga '25 (ALA)

Giovanni Nelson Nkomane Nyembe '24 (ALA)

Shannon Shen '26 (UHS)

Iteoluwakinshi Tomomewo '24 (ALA)

Dylan Verma '26 (SFS)

### Art Contributors:

Tamer Htihet '25 (ALA)

Lorenzo Niat '25 (ALA)

Kazaina Senanu '25 (ALA)



INSTAGRAM

[@meridians.international](https://www.instagram.com/meridians.international)

For inquiries and submissions,  
contact Ilaria Luna

[meridians.magazine@gmail.com](mailto:meridians.magazine@gmail.com)

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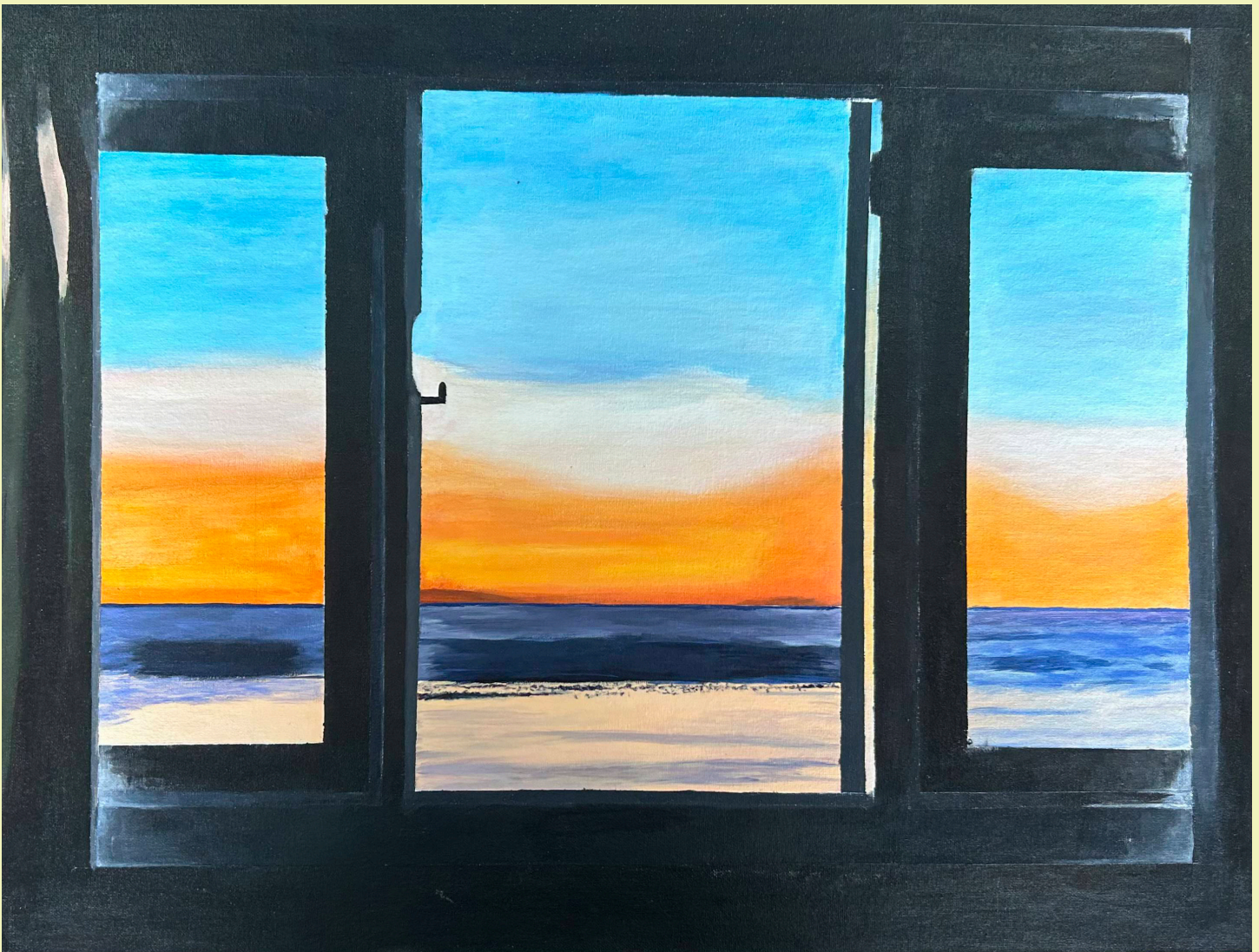
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# *Inter* *Views*

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*Conversations with global citizens on a topic of interest in any language*



***Art Credit:*** Lorenzo Niat ('25),  
African Leadership Academy (Johannesburg, South Africa)

*My name is Lorenzo Niat, from Cameroon and Canada. This artwork, a literal window, symbolizes escape from darkness to a beautiful sunset. It depicts a duality of dark and light, with the window as the portal between worlds.*



## *Mamadou Guèye: Un Homme, Plusieurs Mondes*

Ilaria Luna ('25) Sidwell Friends School (Washington, DC, USA)

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** *I am a junior at Sidwell Friends School passionate about creating intercultural connections through Meridians. I hope to use my study of languages to foster global dialogues between people of all backgrounds.*

Après 35 ans à Sidwell Friends à différents titres, de professeur de langue française à chef du département de langues étrangères et directeur d'école secondaire, Mamadou Guèye prend sa retraite et va s'installer au Sénégal où il lancera une nouvelle école.

La fondatrice et rédactrice en chef de *Meridians*, Ilaria Luna, a réussi à s'asseoir avec lui et à lui poser quelques questions.



Mamadou Guèye, **IMAGE CREDITS:** Sidwell Friends School

**ILARIA:**

Comment votre appartenance à plusieurs géographies et cultures vous a-t-elle aidé dans votre travail d'éducateur et d'administrateur?

**MAMADOU:**

*J'ai eu la chance d'être né dans un pays multiculturel où il y a un pluralisme ethnique, linguistique et religieux dans le contexte d'un esprit communautaire exemplaire... Il y a aussi au Sénégal un grand respect pour les religions qu'on pratique dans le pays.*

*L'animisme, l'islam, et le christianisme ont cohabité pendant des siècles sans conflits religieux. C'est dans cette ambiance que j'ai grandi et cette culture a beaucoup influencé mon aptitude à être directeur du lycée à Sidwell.*

*(continued on p. 6)*

**ILARIA:** Quelles sont les différences les plus marquées que vous constatez entre la culture du Sénégal et celle des États-Unis?

**MAMADOU:** *Le Sénégal est un pays dont la culture est essentiellement communautaire et collectiviste—La vie sociale très avancée. La famille large inclusive est prioritaire et il y a beaucoup d'entraide et de partages des biens....*

*Aux États Unis: le capitalisme et l'individualisme dominant. On est facilement défini par ce qu'on a, pas ce qu'on fait pour aider les démunis. La famille nucléaire—papa, maman, et le chien...*

**ILARIA:** Comment le Sénégal a-t-il changé depuis que vous l'avez quitté?

**MAMADOU:** *Malheureusement, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, et autres plateformes ont mondialisé de mauvaises habitudes qui ont imprégné la jeunesse Sénégalaise. Nos jeunes perdent nos valeurs traditionnelles les plus chères à cause d'une mauvaise influence des médias...*

**ILARIA:** Dans un moment de forte polarisation comme le nôtre, comment est-il possible, selon vous, de s'ouvrir aux autres, d'établir un dialogue productif qui permet de négocier entre ses propres convictions ou valeurs et des perspectives différentes?

**MAMADOU:** *La meilleure façon de supprimer la polarisation c'est de focaliser l'éducation à partir de l'école primaire sur le pluralisme social-culturel et linguistique. Il faudrait faire tout dans ce pays pour combattre l'ignorance et l'esprit insulaire. S'efforcer à apprendre et comprendre différentes perspectives...Organiser des échanges culturels pour les élèves, etc...*

**ILARIA:** Qu'est-ce qui vous passionne le plus dans votre nouvelle aventure professionnelle au Sénégal?

**MAMADOU:** *Mon plus grand objectif est de revigorer les valeurs traditionnelles. Le respect de la hiérarchie de l'âge, respect de la vie et de l'humanité, respect de la nature et de l'environnement dont nous faisons partie...*

**ILARIA:** Quels aspects de votre expérience aux États-Unis seront, selon vous, les plus déterminants pour ce projet?

**MAMADOU:** *J'ai appris aux États-Unis la discipline pour le travail, la motivation pour se faire ouvrir des portes qui ont été fermées pour certaines races et groupes ethniques. Il y a beaucoup d'opportunités quand on est travailleur aux États-Unis. Il faut en profiter...*

**ILARIA:** Que pensez-vous avoir pu réaliser grâce à la connaissance des langues?

**MAMADOU:** *La connaissance profonde de quatre langues (sereer, wolof, français, anglais) a ouvert beaucoup de portes pour moi aux États-Unis.*

*J'ai été le premier homme noir, africain de surcroît, à être chef de département des langues étrangères, le premier à être Directeur du programme académique, et pour les dernières dix années, le premier noir à être principal dans l'histoire de Sidwell Friends fondée en 1883. J'ai pu occuper ces trois postes grâce à mes compétences linguistiques et culturelles.*

(continued on p. 7)

**ILARIA:** En trois adjectifs, comment aimeriez-vous que les étudiants de Sidwell se souviennent de vous après votre départ?

**MAMADOU:** *Je suis un homme reconnaissant, empathique, généreux.*

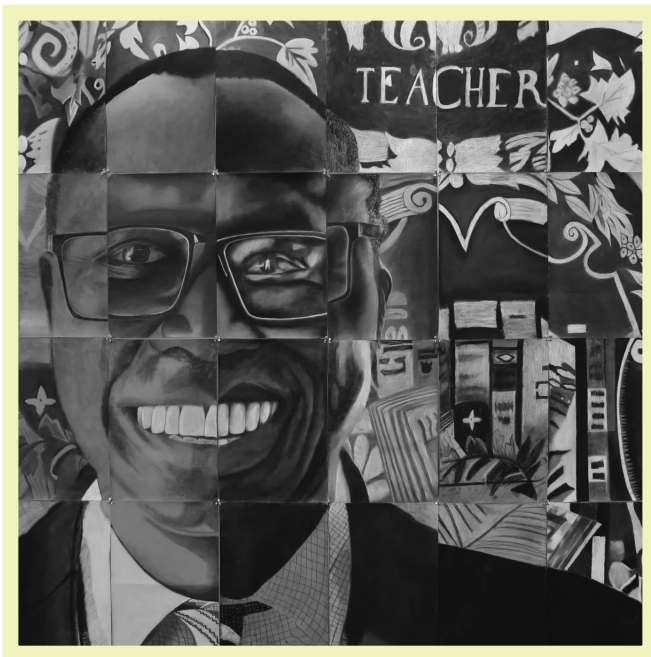
Au nom de *Meridians*, notre plus profonde gratitude à Mamadou pour son héritage inspirant et nos vœux les plus chaleureux pour le projet passionnant qui l'attend!

*English Translation:*

## *Mamadou Guèye: One Man, Many Worlds*

After 35 years at Sidwell Friends in a variety of roles, from French language teacher to Head of Foreign Languages and Upper School Principal, Mamadou Guèye is retiring and moving to Senegal where he will launch a new school.

*Meridians*'s Founder and Editor-in-Chief Ilaria Luna managed to sit down with him and ask him a few questions.



2019/2020 Student Collective Drawing of Mamadou Guèye,

**IMAGE CREDITS:** Sidwell Friends School

**ILARIA:** How has your belonging to multiple geographies and cultures helped you in your work as an educator and administrator?

**MAMADOU:** *I was lucky enough to be born in a multicultural country with an ethnic, linguistic, and religious pluralism in the context of an exemplary communitarian spirit... In Senegal, there is also great respect for any religion that is practiced in the country.*

*Animism, Islam, and Christianity have co-existed for centuries without religious conflicts. It is in this atmosphere that I grew up, and this culture has greatly influenced my ability as high-school principal at Sidwell.*

**ILARIA:** At a moment of strong polarization like the one we are living right now, how is it possible, in your view, to open up to others, to create a productive dialogue that can allow people to negotiate between their own ideas or values and different perspectives?

**MAMADOU:** *The best way to suppress polarization is to focus education upon socio-cultural and linguistic pluralism, starting from the primary school. We should do all we can in this country to fight ignorance and the spirit of insularity. We need to make efforts to learn and understand different perspectives... To organize cultural exchanges for students, etc...*

*(continued on p. 8)*



**ILARIA:** What are the most marked differences that strike you between the culture of Senegal and that of the United States?

**MAMADOU:** *Senegal is a country with a culture that is essentially communitarian and collectivist—Social life is very developed. The large, inclusive family has priority, and there is a lot of reciprocal aid and sharing of goods...*

*In the United States, by contrast, capitalism and individualism dominate. We are easily defined by what we have, not by what we do to help those in need. The nuclear family—father, mother, and the dog...*

**ILARIA:** How has Senegal changed since you left it?

**MAMADOU:** *Unfortunately, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and other platforms have globalized bad habits that have pervaded Senegalese youth. Our young generations are losing our most treasured traditional values because of the bad influence of the media...*

**ILARIA:** What captivates you the most in your new professional adventure in Senegal?

**MAMADOU:** *My greatest objective is to reinvigorate traditional values. Respect for age hierarchies, respect for life and humankind, respect for nature and the environment to which we are a part...*

**ILARIA:** What aspects of your experience in the United States will be, in your view, the most relevant for your project?

**MAMADOU:** *In the United States I have learned work discipline and the motivation to get doors opened that had been closed for certain races and ethnic groups. There are numerous opportunities when we work in the United States. We should take advantage of them...*

**ILARIA:** What do you think you have been able to accomplish thanks to the knowledge of languages?

**MAMADOU:** *My deep knowledge of four languages (Sereer, Wolof, French, English) has opened many doors to me in the United States.*

*I was the first black man—African, in addition—to become head of foreign languages, the first director of academic programs, and, for the last ten years, the first black principal in the history of Sidwell Friends, founded in 1883. I was able to be appointed for those three positions thanks to my linguistic and cultural competencies.*

**ILARIA:** In three adjectives, how would you like Sidwell students to remember you after your departure?

**MAMADOU:** *As a **grateful**, **empathetic**, and **generous** man.*

**O**n behalf of *Meridians*, our deepest gratitude to Mamadou for his inspiring legacy and warmest wishes for the fascinating project awaiting him!



# UniVerses

\* \* \*

*Poems written in various languages and/or  
about cultural experience*



# ¿Hay Vida Después de la Muerte?

Luciana Castano (‘25) Buckingham Browne and Nichols School (Cambridge, MA, USA)

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** *My name is Luciana Castano and I am from Boston, Massachusetts. My family is from Colombia and that is a big part of who I am. I have always prided myself in being Latina and in coming from a Hispanic household. Another big part of my identity is my belief in God and that is what my poem is about.*

**H**ay un dicho y dice, que lo único irremediable es la muerte.  
Nadie está preparado para morir;  
Y sin embargo, es el propósito de la vida.

You always hear people saying,  
“You only live once...”  
Never taking into account that we are all living for the same thing.  
We are all going to the same place whether we accept it, or not.

Hay gente que cree en la reencarnación...  
Y gente que cree en el mundo paralelo.  
Yo? Yo creo en el paraíso.  
En que cuando morimos;  
Nuestro espíritu se encuentra con un camino de flores.  
En que mientras estoy caminando por este camino de flores,  
Me encontraré con mis seres queridos.

Our loved ones, the ones we pray to for guidance; strength; and hope.  
I believe that when we cross those gates, and walk that path,  
We will find those loved ones waiting.  
Waiting to hold our hand through the new process that is heaven.  
Solo Dios sabe si hay vida después de la muerte; pero según sus enseñanzas, hay algo en el más allá.  
Puede ser que simplemente sea un vacío o un hogar para el alma,  
Pero seguramente es donde sentiremos eterna paz.

We hear stories and see movies about heaven.  
About how there, in the clouds, we are worry free.  
We are the best versions of ourselves,  
But what if heaven is on earth?

¿Qué tal si Dios nos puso estas vidas como una prueba?  
¿Qué tal si la prueba es luchar contra las dificultades de la vida para llegar al paraíso?  
¿Qué tal si el paraíso realmente es el mundo en el que vivimos?

What happens when we fail this test?  
Where will we go if we do the wrong thing or get the wrong answers?  
Will we be allowed in heaven?  
Will we stay in paradise?

Crees que la vida nos perdonará?

¿Crees que nuestras vidas cambiarán?  
¿Crees que habrá vida después de la muerte?





*English Translation:**Is There Life After Death?*

There is a saying which says that the only irremediable thing is death.  
 Nobody is prepared to die;  
 And yet it is the purpose of life.

You always hear people saying,  
 "You only live once..."  
 Never taking into account that we are all living for the same thing.  
 We are all going to the same place whether we accept it, or not.

There are people who believe in reincarnation...  
 People who believe in the parallel world.  
 Me? I believe in paradise.  
 In that when we die;  
 Our spirit meets a path of flowers.  
 That while we're walking down this path of flowers,  
 We will meet our loved ones.

Our loved ones, the ones we pray for guidance; strength; and hope.  
 I believe that when we cross those gates, and walk that path,  
 We will find those loved ones waiting.  
 Waiting to hold our hand through the new process that is heaven.  
 Only God knows if there is life after death, but according to his teachings, there is something after death.  
 It may be that it is simply a void or a home for the soul,  
 But surely it is where we will feel eternal peace.

We hear stories and see movies about heaven.  
 About how there, in the clouds, we are worry free.  
 We are the best versions of ourselves,  
 But what if heaven is on earth?

What if God put these lives for us as a test?  
 What if the test is to fight against the difficulties of life to reach paradise?  
 What if paradise is really the world we live in?

What happens when we fail this test?  
 Where will we go if we do the wrong thing or get the wrong answers?  
 Will we be allowed in heaven?  
 Will we stay in paradise?

Do you think life will forgive us?

Do you think our lives will change?  
 Do you think there will be life after death?



# *Stories Across Borders*

\* \* \*

*Personal narratives—experiences or reflections—and creative writing in various languages or about culture, or retellings of traditional cultural stories*



***Art Credit:*** Kazaina Senanu ('25),  
African Leadership Academy (Johannesburg, South Africa)

*My name is Kazaina Senanu, from Kenya and Ghana. We feel as though we are submerging ourselves in our own inner darkness, swallowed by a dark hole that resides in us. Our light is engulfed, but we have the choice: fighting against our own darkness or letting it capture us?*



# *Between Ambition and Acceptance: Navigating the Paradox of Unexceptional Excellence*

Nicole Makanaka Nyamakanga (‘25)

African Leadership Academy (Johannesburg, South Africa)



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** *My name is Nicole Makanaka Nyamakanga, and I am from Zimbabwe. I am a full-time student at the African Leadership Academy, a part-time writer, and a footballer with an obsession with Dan Brown and all things theological.*

**I** sometimes just fall into a trance and, more often than not, I like to mull over this line by Fyodor Dostoevsky: “There is nothing so annoying as to be fairly rich, of a good family, pleasing presence, average education, to be “not stupid,” kind-hearted, and yet to have no talent at all, no originality, not a single idea of one’s own—to be, in fact ‘just like everyone else.’” Story of my life and arguably that of many other folks out there.

I find it reasonably saddening that one might have to relate to this text. When you’re ambitious, passionate about something, but time and time again circumstances prove that you just don’t make the cut. It’s a painful feeling that one—to not feel stupid but to live with the constant reminder that you’re just not special. In other words, being in the middle of the bell curve sucks. The world we live in pushes us to look around and view ourselves as the ugly duckling, except in this reality, you’re not actually a swan. It always seems like everyone else has something going on for them, everyone is just so exceptional and you’re just there, wishing you had a mind that worked that well. I think if I was in a movie I’d be one of those random people in a busy street scene. Not too important, but also not irrelevant. But then again, I think to myself, what if I had been built differently? What if I had been built to be one of those people who would gratify being an extra? Oh, how beautiful my life would have been if I was content with being average. I’d go after a simple life, dye my hair white, wear loads of jewelry, and convince myself I’m wise, maybe even psychic. I’d spend the rest of my days living that cottagecore life somewhere in Kenya where I’d never have a permanent lover because “I don’t want to be held by the shackles of marriage.” I’d pride myself in reading books, walking in dense forests, and making self-approved, often lethal healing potions. Do something I really want to, uncontaminated by worldly standards of greatness.

I’ve come to notice that most of us believe that to be called successful or exceptional, we ought to grab life by the horns, take the steepest roads, fight the hardest battles, compete with the greats, and maybe one day end up in the hall of fame. But these are those worldly standards—at least for the vast majority of us. And that’s where we’ve got it all wrong. “Genius is not only achieving unbelievable odds or developing yourself into a shining literary or whatever light. It can be the opposite. The simple ability to be completely, unflinchingly honest with yourself—especially the worst parts of yourself—and to share your failings without hesitation or doubt” (Manson, 6-7). It is important to take time out and redefine what success means to YOU. It is equally important to be very honest with yourself and maybe redefine the metric by which you define success. And once you do that, life does not have to be this painful, daily struggle of seeking abnormal academic validation or trying to run an abnormal 5km a day when you’ve never done it before. You will find that sometimes it is genuinely all right to “be just like everyone else,” to not be “special”—trust me, nobody feels “special” anyway. We’re human and no matter how much we achieve we are still going to want more. But the few who do feel fulfilled in life are those who find joy in the simplicity of life and live that cottagecore life somewhere in Kenya—essentially those who are true to themselves. It is not unlikely that you’re going to feel a desire for the posh things in life, but the question comes down to: do YOU really want it? Will it really make YOU happy? Overall, I would advise that you be kind to yourself. This means being very honest with yourself and redefining success for yourself then having the courage to be what you genuinely want to be. If you want to be a movie extra, then so be it. It’s all cliché and we’ve all heard it before but seriously, be yourself and follow your dreams (your true dreams).



## *Let Us Pray*

Iteoluwakinshi Tomomewo ('24)

African Leadership Academy (Johannesburg, South Africa)



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** *My name is Iteoluwakinshi Tomomewo. I am a Nigerian storyteller interested in the theme of home and what that feels like.*

**P**salms 69 verse 3:

“I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God.”  
(King James version)

I have so much to say but I do not have the words so—

Let us pray,

Father, forgive me for I have sinned, or rather, cannot stop myself from this particular “sin.”

Your word says ‘be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good,’

What must I do father, if this “evil” is relentless and stubborn?

I ran from you Lord only to get lost in my moment of doubt.

I wondered if you had turned your face from me.

I wish I prayed before every meal unfailingly,

I wish I unfailingly committed my day and life into your hands, instead of drowning in a well of anxiety.

For I should be certain that I am just like the bird in the parable of your word, not worrying about what would happen to me and trusting you will take care of whatever concerns I may have.

I found my religion again 2 years ago. Before then, I had attended various church services condemning homosexuality, where we “prayed away” the appearance of the evil. In those moments, I would close my eyes and chew on my words, seeming to be “overtaken by the spirit.”

I liked my first girl before I was 14. Before “the internet corrupted young minds” and before being Queer was even a common conversation—from sexuality itself, to the concept of pronouns. And I liked her before any of this. So, no, I am not a product of a “corrupted society,” and, yes, I have read the book of Revelations. I have read Leviticus 18:22, and I have read the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, for those of you looking to give me a verse about the end of the world, and the “abnormalities” that come with it.

The sacrament of penance made me feel less burdened, so I would do it willingly. I would confess to the Priest about the swear words I said in school behind my mother’s back, and I would tell him about exchanging my Lays Crisps for a different flavour, because I did not have the heart to tell my mother what I liked... I still don’t. To know one’s heart is a brave thing, and I am a coward.

I met my summer’s day in August; we were just two private school girls with free dreams unlike that of our mothers. I learnt many things in our time together; how to steady my breathing every time her hand rested on my bare back, my vagueness as opposed to her completely open nature. She was always wilder than I was, it was clear in her dangerously passionate “Temp levé’s” during performances, the same passion which she channelled to loving me for years. A love too heavy for me to embrace at that time and too light for me to forget now.

I was told that the contemplation of an act was not a sin, but the real sin occurred when you took a step of action. The priest assured me that the “ungodly feelings” I had for my fellow girl were completely fine. He likened it to the urge he had to smoke. A habit he had cultivated for many years that refused to leave his side even in priesthood, a shame really. A shame for the both of us. Fewer than one in ten adult cigarette smokers succeed in quitting each year. This habit in most cases appears as a cultivated choice, but

*(continued on p. 16)*



being gay is an identity. So, riddle me this: if actual dangerous habits are almost impossible to break free from, how possible is it to break free from the matters of the heart, an identity?

I haven't had the pleasure of openly being with a girl. This is because of the shame I feel as a Christian living in a "sin" that I cannot help. I know that love is real because I exist and I'm full of it, but oh how I want to love straightforwardly without pride and complexities. Oh, how deeply I wanted to love her, but my spirit and flesh were in conflict. My quest to follow wholeheartedly the word of the Lord has turned me into a destructive lover—a partner who hides and lies. I feel forced to choose between being gay and being Christian. Never both. There is no middle ground, at least for me.

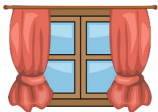
The hate against the LGBTQ community is passive and subtle on the African Leadership Academy grounds. I saw firsthand the different looks on people's faces each time Niru's pieces were posted right in front of the LCs. I have heard comments ranging from the infamous "I don't hate them, I just don't support," the giggles and shushes that come after a holy water comment and my personal favourite; "we have heard enough about this please." The personal religious conflict within many religious gay people is similar to spiritual warfare. Not one where the devil plants a seed and causes turmoil, but one where your mind plays the devil's advocate and spins webs. A battle we will most likely spend the entirety of our lives fighting. Constantly questioning if we are worthy of God's love.

I leave you with this: the hate in your heart for those who have "lost their way" is nothing compared to the strength of finding one's religion again despite all the controversies. God makes no mistakes.

"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful,  
I know that full well."

Psalm 139 : 14

## *The Sanctum of Memories*



Giovanni Nelson Nkomane Nyembe ('24)



African Leadership Academy (Johannesburg, South Africa)

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** *My name is Giovanni Nelson Nkomane Nyembe. I am a second-year student at the African Leadership Academy. I am the founder of Racines d'Afrique Cosmetic and a social activist advocating for mental health in Africa. I have also published two novels.*

**W**hen I enter my mother's room, a flood of memories takes hold of me. This room, which has witnessed my life, is filled with everything that has marked my existence, from the happiest moments to the most painful ones.

As I stand before the threshold of this door, a torrent of emotions floods through me. I hesitate every time. Yet, as I take a deep breath and summon the courage to turn the knob, I am greeted by the familiar sights and scents of a cherished past. This room, once a haven of warmth and love, is a treasure trove of memories, each one etched deeply in my heart. Traces of my mother's touch linger here as if she has just stepped out for a moment. I am reminded of the times she used to take me by the waist and lead me through this very door, her gentle touch was comfort to my soul.

As I step further into the room, my heart races, and my senses are overwhelmed with the nostalgia that hangs heavy in the air. The drawings on the wall, once considered works of art, now serve as a reminder of the discipline my mother instilled in me. The chest of drawers, always tidy, holds within it the remnants of my childhood, from my spy games to my love for cooking books.

I am drawn to the bed. As I lie down, I feel her arms around me, her sweet scent surrounding me. As I look up, I am struck by the holes in the ceiling, a testament to the several nights we spent snuggling

*(continued on p. 17)*

together. But it is also the place where I lost her, where the beeping of the machine that measured her heart rate stopped, leaving behind a great void in the room and in my life.

This room is a witness to everything that has built me, my fears, my joys, and my passions. It is here that I understood what true maternal love was, and where I could feel safe, away from the outside world. And now that my mother is gone, this room has become a place of worship, a refuge where I can remember the happy moments and funny stories that we shared.

These memories remind me that our existence is filled with ephemeral moments, and make me reflect on the fragility of life and the importance of cherishing the moments we spent with our loved ones. My mother's room is more than just a place. It is a sanctuary of memories that have shaped my life. For memories are a window into our past and a compass for our future. My mother is no longer here, but she still lives through the memories present in every corner of this room.



## *Home*



Yasmin Basharu (‘24) African Leadership Academy (Johannesburg, South Africa)

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** *My name is Yasmin Basharu, and I am a seventeen-year-old Nigerian writer. Having spent most of my life in Nigeria and a shorter fraction in South Africa, I use my words as a way to fully encapsulate my varying experiences in the different spaces I find myself in.*

**T**oday, we are a family of six. The kind of family that has no choice but to opt for the minivan over the Avenis when doing school drop-offs. The kind of family that has to buy four tins of milk rather than two, because the house is full of rumbling bellies and a multitude of mouths to feed. But back then, when we were citizens of the world and not just of Nigeria, when we settled temporarily in the scorching heat of Accra, we were small. Mother, father, and two restless children.

Our time in that house was brief—a mere footnote. Its beaming orange walls were only meant to serve as a centre for swift rejuvenation before we continued exploring the country that we would reside in for the next two years. However, this ephemeral lodging spot quickly opened its arms to us and enveloped us completely.

Before our impulsive move to Ghana, we lived in a quaint apartment in Nigeria. Cosy but claustrophobic. Contrastingly, our home in Ghana was expansive; at least it felt inexhaustible at the time. Every time we returned from the oppressive heat, I would behold the ceiling and turn around, attempting to get a panoramic view of what felt like a palatial paradise. Starry-eyed, I would then gaze at the carpeted stairs that my sister and I would take turns sliding on, feeling the friction against our behinds before bursting into raucous laughter. The pain was instant but negligible. We had stairs *INSIDE* the house! Our rooms were a pale salmon shade—a colour I ostensibly despised at the time because I was in my ‘tom-boy’ phase. I recall the light-headedness I would revel in every time I stepped into my bedroom, whether attributed to the fervent smell of the freshly painted pink shelves or the fact that I was constantly buzzing with excitement is unknown.

We spent copious amounts of time together—my mother, father, sister, and I. We had moved to a much larger house, yet before fully assimilating into the generous space, we all cramped ourselves together like sardines in a tin. My sister and I annexed our parents’ velvety khaki-shaded carpeted floor, and would swing our feet while gleefully analysing the printed pictures of our daily adventures. At night, we would forsake our dream room for our parents’ haven, our intertwined fingers hidden by the inky darkness and our engulfing blankets. ‘The ghosts are back,’ we would meekly whisper to our dad, as an excuse to squeeze ourselves onto the queen-sized bed—a ritual that would always leave my father’s leg swinging off the bedside. We treasured this not despite its incredible discomfort, but because of it.

The four of us, bound by blood and a mutual love of adventure. We were smaller. Yet, we were closer than ever, in our home away from home.



## Untitled



Dylan Verma ('26) Sidwell Friends School (Washington, DC, USA)



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** *I am a sophomore at Sidwell Friends School in Washington, DC.*

After never leaving the country my entire life, my family decided to move to India. I was seven then and had only been on one plane ride to Disney World. I remember when my mom told us in the car-pool line on the way to school, probably so she could avoid dealing with our impending breakdowns. I didn't think much of it—my only question was if the dog was coming.

Nine years later, I realize that I will probably not live through another two and a half years as pivotal as those.

Even though my father and most of my extended family are Indian, I didn't hear much about India growing up. My only impressions of it were from Bollywood music videos that would play on a loop at my grandparent's house and stories I'm pretty sure were made up, like how my grandmother lost her big toe because a baby elephant stomped on it. When we touched down in New Delhi, I had two pictures of what it would look like in my mind. Either I would walk out into a vast jungle and travel around in a jeep like they did in Tarzan, or it would look exactly like Agrabah from Aladdin: one long street that every house was on, and at the end the Taj Mahal (I didn't know back then that that was in a completely different city).

What I saw was completely different. The second I walked out of the airport into the January New Delhi air, I noticed the sky was completely yellow and smelled like a campfire. I had no idea what this meant, but I was so overwhelmed by the sounds of all the cars honking that I could barely pay attention to the smog. I was so confused about what this place was that I landed in.

On the one hand, the airport was completely modern and nicer than the one I flew out of in the US. Everybody I saw had a phone, and most were wearing Western-style clothing, not the Indian clothes that I had to put on for family events occasionally. On the other hand, almost immediately after leaving the airport, I saw my first slum, a sight that 7-year-old me would see every day from that point on. A slum is a massive homeless encampment of thousands of people made of scrap metal and blankets strung about to replicate houses. I was so confused at what I was looking at, I didn't even know what to think of it. We stopped at a red light in front of it, and children my age and younger started to come up to the windows, tapping on the glass and pointing to their mouths. This was not the India I thought I was going to; elephants, tigers, and monkeys, spicy food, Bollywood movies, and the jungle.

So why do I say all of these things? Why do I make it seem as though New Delhi is one of the worst cities on earth? On the contrary, it's not. I love New Delhi more than any other place in the world. The people are so warm and nice, the sounds of the city that once were overwhelming are now calming to me, and the parakeets and monkeys that live in the lush trees always make you happy. But those first couple weeks living there, when I didn't know what to think of anything around me, were the most important weeks of my life.

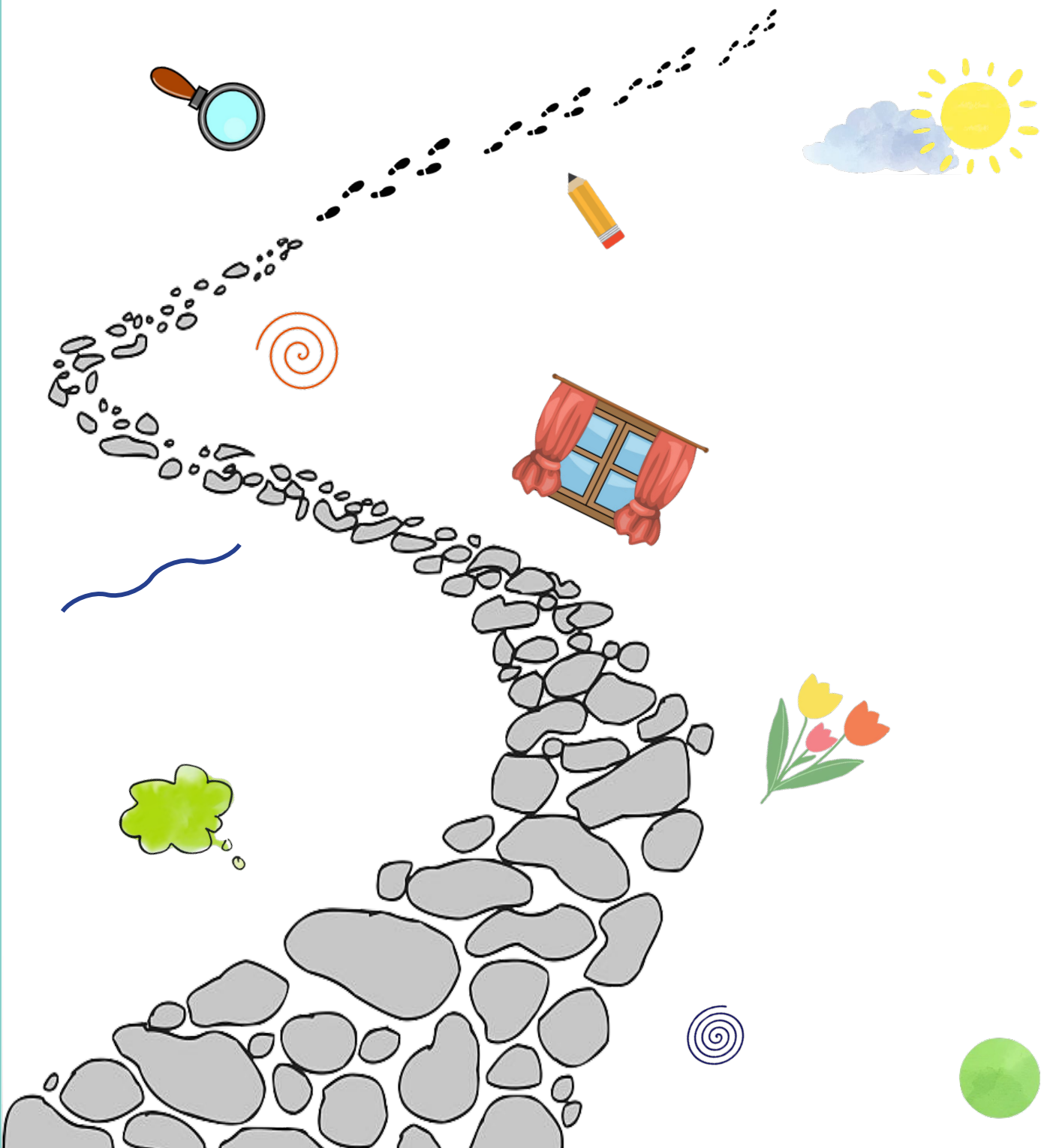
At such a young age, I learned how life worked outside my cushy, suburban Maryland ecosystem. I learned how child exploitation and gangs worked—that if you gave one kid money, twenty more would crowd your car begging for rupees, which they would eventually turn in to their slum lord for protection and a couple of cents. I learned how to haggle in a market: don't seem American because they will take advantage of you, and walk away if you don't get the price you want—chances are the sellers will probably come running after you to give in. I learned how to normalize the various guard checkpoints, searching our cars for bombs, or going through metal detectors, even if we just want to go to the mall.

Most importantly, I learned how not to take things for granted. I remember the first summer back in the United States visiting my aunt. I asked her where the water bottles were for brushing my teeth, and she was so confused—I completely forgot that it was okay to brush your teeth with tap water here. I know it sounds

*(continued on p. 19)*

super cringeworthy, but I drank every glass of water from that tap differently after that.

I'm telling this story not to make myself seem more in touch or appreciative than other people and not just to share a glimpse of the beauties and horrors of India. I wanted to write this because I truly believe that experiencing a foreign culture at such a young age, no matter if it's a first- or third-world place, will be the best thing anyone will ever do. I want to encourage people to explore every possibility they can to discover the world before it's too late—whether that's school years abroad, summer programs, or even witnessing different cultures from your own home. I know it's super cliché, but it's true: getting out of your comfort zone and seeing how differently kids your age live will provide you with the lessons of a lifetime.





# *On the Global Stage*

\* \* \*

*Commentary on global books, movies, shows, exhibits, etc. in any language*



## *Les pensées d'un homme mort*

Galen Kabwe ('24) Sidwell Friends School (Washington, DC, USA)

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** *I am a senior at Sidwell Friends School, and I have taken French for all of my high school career. My mother's family speaks French, so in learning the language I have tried to get closer to her culture. This essay was in response to a prompt asking to write a letter from the perspective of Meursault, the main character in L'Étranger by Albert Camus.*

**B**onjour, les gens d'Algérie et tous ceux qui vont lire ce journal. Je m'appelle Meursault, mais vous me connaissez peut-être déjà. Oui, j'ai tué un homme à la plage il y a quelques mois. Et pour cela j'ai été condamné à mort. Mais la justice est aveugle. Je suis condamné à mort, pas pour le meurtre d'un homme, mais pour ce que je suis.

Pendant l'enquête, qui a posé des questions sur la famille de l'algérien? Qui a demandé si elle va bien? Personne? C'est vrai, parce que vous n'êtes pas concernés par la mort d'un algérien. Vous êtes concernés par le fait qu'un homme blanc a fait cela. Mais je ne regrette rien. Si je suis algérien, si j'étais un algérien, l'affaire serait plus simple. Je pourrais dire toutes les bonnes choses et encore être condamné à mort. Mais parce que je suis un pied-noir, je devais juste dire les bonnes choses et je serais libre maintenant. Mais je n'aime pas mentir. Le juge m'a demandé si je suis un chrétien. Si j'avais répondu oui, serais-je libre aujourd'hui? Décidez-vous.

Aussi, beaucoup de monde parle du fait que je n'ai pas pleuré à la mort de ma mère. Mais vous ne connaissez pas mes émotions. Et cela veut dire quoi pour le meurtre? Si j'avais pleuré à l'enterrement, un homme serait encore mort. Cela ne veut rien dire. Pourquoi êtes-vous concernés par tout sauf le meurtre? J'ai tué un homme, oui, et vous pouvez me juger pour cela. Mais ne me jugez pas pour les larmes.

Finalement, je ne pense pas que je sois innocent. J'ai commis le crime dont je suis accusé. Mais la société ne va pas me tuer pour ce crime. Ne me tuez pas pour une mauvaise raison. Tuez-moi pour la mort d'un homme algérien. Tuez-moi en justice pour eux. Pas parce que mon avis vous fait peur.

*English Translation:*

## *Thoughts of a Dead Man*

**H**ello, people of Algeria and all those who will read this journal. My name is Meursault, but you know me already. Yes, I killed a man at the beach some months ago. And for that I have been sentenced to death. But the justice system is blind. I have been sentenced to death, not for the murder of a man, but for who I am.

During the investigation, who asked about the family of the Algerian man? Who asked if they were doing alright? Nobody? Nobody did, because you are not concerned by the death of an Algerian. You are concerned by the fact that it was a white man who killed him. But I regret nothing. If I were Algerian, this case would be closed easily. I could say all the right things and still be sentenced to death. But because I am French, all I had to do was say the right words and I would be free. But I don't like lying. The judge asked me if I was a Christian. If I responded yes, would I be free today? Decide for yourself.

Also, many people talk about the fact I did not cry at the death of my mother. But you don't know my emotions. And what does that mean about the murder case? If I had cried at the funeral, a man would still be dead. That fact means nothing. Why are you concerned by everything but the murder. I killed a man, yes, and you can judge me for that. But don't judge me for my lack of tears.

Finally, I don't think that I am innocent. I committed the crime that I'm accused of. But society doesn't want me killed for that crime. Don't kill me for a bad reason. Kill me for the murder of an Algerian man. Kill me for justice for him. Not because my mind scares you.





# *NewsRoom Intl.*

\* \* \*

*Short essays; global/local news (current events or curious facts); can be fact-based or opinion-based, in any language*

# 美國移民的故事

Shannon Shen ('26) Urbana High School (Ijamsville, Maryland, USA)

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** *My name is Shannon Shen, and I am a sophomore at Urbana High School. My favorite subjects in school are math and English. In my free time, I like to play piano or crochet. I also like to swim with my sister.*

*English Translation:*

## Stories of US Immigrants

**H**ello, everyone! Today I would like to talk to you about the story of immigrants in the United States. Every U.S. immigrant has their own story. My mom and dad came from Taiwan to study in this new continent, and I was a bit unfamiliar with the English language and the American way of speaking, but there were a lot of international students at school, so I didn't feel too isolated. When I started working, I began to realize the differences between different ethnic groups, the different cultures and ways of expressing oneself, so sometimes it was difficult to communicate. I felt like I was not understood, and there was no one else to consult or help me. However, my parents did not give up. They believed that, like a Chinese proverb states, "If you lean against a hill, it will collapse. If you lean against others, they will run away. Leaning on yourself is the most reliable option." Therefore, they kept learning English to increase their ability to express themselves, and to understand each other's cultures in order to improve their communication.

My mom and dad's story reminds me of an incident at school that is still fresh in my mind. COVID-19 had just started spreading, and everyone wondered if they would have to study at home if they were infected. One student asked the teacher, "If Shannon gets the virus, will we all have to study at home?" The teacher then asked, "Why do you say that Shannon has the virus?" The student answered, "Because she's Asian, and the virus came from Asia." I believe this is just an isolated incident, as I have many good friends who are Americans and we are all very friendly and help each other at school. The United States is a free and open country, and many say it is a melting pot of nationalities. Although cultural differences between ethnic groups are unavoidable, we all try to understand each other, respect each other, and slowly accept each other's differences. These are the strengths that make every new immigrant who comes to the United States to pursue his or her dream feel welcome and make the United States better and better. Thank you!

大家好!今天要和大家談的題目是美國移民的故事。每個移民來美國的人都有自己的故事,我的爸爸媽媽是從台灣漂洋過海來到這片新大陸求學,人生地不熟的,有點聽不懂英文也不習慣美國人講話的方式,但是在學校有很多國際學生,所以不太會感覺到孤立。開始工作的時候就慢慢感覺到不同族群之間的差異,彼此之間相處的文化和表達方式不同,所以有些時候很難溝通,感覺自己不被了解,當時也沒有其他人可以諮詢和幫忙。但是我的爸媽沒有放棄,他們認為靠山,山倒,靠人,人跑,唯有靠自己努力才能解決問題,所以他們不斷地學習英文增加自己表達的能力,並了解對方的文化以增進彼此的溝通。

爸爸媽媽的故事讓我想起有一次在學校發生的事,現在仍然記憶猶新。新冠病毒剛開始,大家都好奇被感染的時候會不會要在家學習。有一位女同學就問老師:「如果沈睿筠得到病毒,那大家都要在家學習嗎?」老師就問:「為什麼要說睿筠得到病毒?」有同學回答「因為她是亞裔,而且病毒是從亞洲傳來的。」我相信這只是一件偶發事件,因為我有許多好朋友是美國人,大家都很友善,而且在學校互相幫助。美國是一個自由開放的國家,許多人說這裡是一個民族的大融爐。族群之間的文化差異雖然無法避免,但大家都有試著互相了解,互相尊重,慢慢接受彼此的不同點。這些優點都會使每個來美國追逐夢想的新移民覺得被受歡迎,也讓美國的發展越來越進步。謝謝大家!





**Art Credit:** Tamer Huihet ('25), African Leadership Academy (Johannesburg, South Africa)

*This is an inspirational Moroccan artwork that captures the diverse cultural and social landscape of a typical Moroccan childhood, embodying the richness and diversity of circumstances that shaped me.*