BRIDGES ESL

Fall 2014 Student Anthology

Yale University, New Haven, CT

Featuring works by our students:
Tarik Arrafi • Kamir Cartagena • Jian Chen • Toda Chitoku • Steve Gerard • Iuana Islas
• Eunjoo Kim • Laura Kimbala Kasongo • Fernanda Lemos • Chunfang Lou • Shida Miao • María Angélica Murcia Orjuela • Jheiros Arias Rios • Fernanda Rodrigues •
Younsoo Shim • Haibin Wang • Yan Wang • Jinki Yeom • Fanhua (Flora) Zeng • Yaling Zhou • Yinjun (Abby) Zhao
First Impression of Middle School Education in New Haven, By Yaling Zhou
Tutor: Cameron Biondi

My daughter has been studying in a public middle school in New Haven for 3 months. Education is the most important reason that pushed my family to make the final decision, moving to the US.

We happened to live in Haidian District, Beijing City, where the best schools in China from kindergarten to college accumulate and in the meantime the most fierce competition starts from the kids’ early age.

The middle schools in Beijing generally dismiss at 4:00 in the afternoon, which sounds fair, however, afterwards students will go to expensive science or English after-class trainings for 2-3 more hours daily plus the whole weekend. Such after-class parallel education generally starts from Grade 3 to end of high school, and the time pressure and anxiety hit the climax during the last two high school years before college entrance examination.

The intensive education my daughter has received in Beijing makes her feel like New Haven is heaven. In the first month, she was very surprised by two things: less homework and all kinds of relaxing sitting positions her classmates adopt during class.

The school provides ESL training for non-native students, and the teacher also invites the non-native students to her after-school program for reviewing the lessons slowly, answering questions, and helping with homework, especially, providing snacks and drinks. In the past three months, my daughter made significant progress in vocabulary, listening and speaking in English.

Reading education here seems extremely important. Within nearly three months, the class has finished two novels, each of which was followed a written paper to be filed and a list of questions in different levels for students to think. Getting lots of spare time, my daughter also started to read books from the library. New Haven City library separates a dozen of racks illustrating “TEEN” books for teenagers. We use the library a lot.

The school uses lots of encouragement to help students’ confidence. The school programs and band welcome all students without thresholds, and the teachers praise any progress the students make, with rewards of stickers, candies, snacks even homemade baked goods. My daughter hasn’t received candies as rewards since kindergarten, and as a teenager she feels a little shy to work hard for a candy or sticker and in the meantime she secretly enjoys the compliments. With help of oral praise and candies, she practices flute from the very beginning and finally caught the band in two months. The encouragement system works for her.
Age Should Not Be the Obstacle in Studying English, By Jian Chen
Tutor: Yifu Dong

My wife came to America as a visiting scholar at Yale University in January 2013, and then Lucy, my lovely daughter, came to the US in December 2013. When they came to New Haven, they loved this beautiful town, and wanted me to spend one happy year with them in the United States. I was so eager to live with my family, but on the other hand, I also felt very scared. Because of my poor English, I was afraid I would not be able to communicate with others. My wife told me, “Don’t worry about that. You can study English in the Bridges ESL program at Yale.” My 6-year-old daughter also told me, “Daddy, I go to the English class every Saturday, and I can speak English now.” Oh, it sounds so good!

I came to US in February, 2014, I was so happy because my family reunited, but for me, there was a big obstacle in communication. I can’t go to shopping alone, can’t answer the phone, and can’t see a doctor. I must master English as soon as I can, but how can I study it? After all, I am 40 years old; it seems too late for me to learn English.

I came to Bridges with my daughter and studied English with Yifu. I knew many people in Bridges ESL, and they encountered the same language problem just like me, but they are young and made great progress after two or three months. As for my daughter, after several months of study, she could easily understand what the teacher said. Unfortunately, I seemed not to have made any progress in English. I almost wanted to give up. Yifu told me that I should not give up, that if I insisted on reading, listening and speaking, I should make great progress. He told me that his father, a journalist, was in the same situation like me when he studied English in his 40’s: he always forgot the words, sentences, but he insisted on studying and reviewing. After that, he could communicate with others freely. Yifu’s story encouraged me. In Bridges ESL, I also met an elderly woman who came from Russia to live with her daughter in New Haven. She was already 70 years old, but she studied hard to master English. She is such a good example for me to study English. A few days ago, I read a report about Wang Shi, a famous enterpriser in China. When he was 60 years old, he came to Harvard University. After one year of hard study, he could communicate with others by English fluently. From these examples, I believe that age should not be the obstacle in my study of English. I can master it if I insist on reading, speaking and writing, just like my English teacher Yifu suggested.

Follow Your Heart, By Yinjun (Abby) Zhao
Tutor: Christopher Fu

Ten years ago, as a freshman that had just entered college for two months, I participated in a college-wide English oratorical contest. It was my first time competing in such a large competition. I
cannot exactly remember what I had talked about, but I do recall that my message was “to follow your heart.” Probably because the judges could relate to my topic, I unexpectedly won third place among more than twenty contestants. Even I myself was moved by my own topic. Since then I have been thinking and asking myself, “What is in your heart? Are you following your heart?”

I have always been fascinated in statistics, and I majored in it as an undergraduate and a graduate student. I began to wonder if I could use statistical tools to help people lead healthier lives. Most of my classmates left to work in financial companies after their graduate studies. I joined the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as a statistician instead because it offered me opportunities to use my knowledge to achieve my goal of improving people’s lives.

Earlier this year, I was fortunate enough to be invited to join a research group at the Yale School of Public Health. It was my first time travelling to the U.S. Before I came here, I was a little concerned about whether or not I could adapt to the new work environment. My concerns were quickly dispelled after I settled down. The friendly atmosphere of the research group allowed me to quickly get comfortable with my new job responsibilities. I began to feel that I was needed and even indispensable in the group, but I also felt that sometimes my training was not enough to deal with the tough work. Soon afterwards, there seemed to be another thought coming from my heart. I asked myself again what I wanted to do, and I decided to further study in the U.S. so that I could contribute more to public health research. I plan to apply for the Ph.D. program in public health at Yale or elsewhere. Although I know that completing the Ph.D. study will call for much more commitment, which others might think is unnecessary, I will continue to struggle because I will follow my heart.

**Untitled, By Tarik Arrafi**

Tutor: George Gemelas

When I was six or seven years old, I woke up at 8:00 AM, and I went outside and saw my father next to his car. He asked me, “Do you want to drive my car?” I said, “Yes, of course.” He said to me, “Can you try to start it?” I said “Sure,” and I started the car. He said to me, “If you want to move up, what do you do?” I thought he said, “Move up the car,” so I started to move. Suddenly, I lost control. I was trying to push the break, but I put my feet on both the accelerator and break. At that moment, I shut my eyes. I thought I was dreaming. I heard the car crash into the corner of my house. When I opened my eyes, my father told me, “Get out.” Then I saw the damage on the car and the crack in the wall. I ran to my mom.

That same day, my father took the car to a mechanic. Around 6:00 PM, I heard the
door open. I thought my father came home. I ran to my bed and pretended I was sleeping because I did not want to see him. I hid all night. The next morning, I woke up early, but I stayed in bed until I heard the door close because only then I knew my father had left home.

For two days, I did this. On the third day my father came early. When I saw him, I couldn’t do anything. I just hugged him and was afraid. I said, “I’m sorry”. He socked me with an answer. He said, “It's okay. Don’t worry. Just the car is broken. I don’t care as much about the car as I care about you.” When I heard that, I was so happy. Then I went to play.

Autumn, By Haibin Wang
Tutor: Vincent Huang

I have been in New Haven for more than two months. This is my first time staying for such a long time in the northeastern part of the United States. Every day, when I walk to and from my apartment and campus, I really enjoy seeing the seasons change, the leaves turning yellow or red. There is often a very clear sky, a fresh smell after an unexpected shower, and a cold but not chilly wind. It reminds me of my commute between school and home back when I was a kid. New Haven’s fall is beautiful and makes me more homesick.

There is a saying in my hometown: “it gets colder with every rainfall in the autumn, and after ten rains is winter.” My hometown, Nanjing, is the capital city of Jiangsu Province, located in the central-eastern part of China, which is close in latitude and longitude and has very similar weather as New Haven. (my hometown is located at 40 N and 116 E. New Haven is 41 N and 120 E). It is a fertile region, not only an area that makes a big contribution to the national economy, but also an agreeable place to live in. Nanjing has four distinct seasons. Summer is so hot that the city got the nickname “stove”. But in winter, we have to wear cotton-padded jackets in sub-zero temperatures, almost like we’re living in hibernation. Spring is beautiful but very short. Autumn has very agreeable weather and is profoundly nostalgic for me. Nanjing’s fall goes from the end of September to November, with changes similar to New Haven’s fall. The golden leaves cover the streets, and the air gets colder after every rain. I didn’t expect that New Haven’s fall would be so beautiful and similar to that of my hometown. I am very lucky to be in a place 10,000 miles away from my hometown with such beautiful and similar fall views. Fall is the harvest season for reaping fruits and vegetables, for making good wishes for the future. But this fall has also brought me many memories of my hometown.

Hangry, By Toda Chitoku
Tutor: Grace Lee

I’m Toda, a postdoc in School of Medicine. My hobby is practicing Kendo. Kendo is a Japanese martial art which is originally derived from Japanese warrior in the 1600’s. Basically, we practice how to hit the opponent by using bamboo sword. Of course, the opponent also tries to hit me and protect against my attacks. Given that the ancient Kendo is how to kill warriors, it is not surprising that the way we
compete is very aggressive. Even though we spar as if we are suffocating each other, the principal of Kendo is respecting each other. The opponent will tell you what is good and what is bad about your Kendo.

As I mentioned before, I’m a researcher focusing on glucose metabolism. Now I have started a new project about “aggression”. It is easy to guess that you get irritated or angry when you are hungry. My American friend told me it’s called “Hangry” (Hungry + angry). I’m not sure if it’s real or her joke though. In fact, at least Japanese guys have the common sense that if your girlfriend looks angry and doesn’t speak a lot without any reason, you should give her yummy food and hot (probably chocolate) drinks. After that, your girlfriend will be nicer. I’m wondering what is the mechanism of “hangry”. It is known that there are neurons which can sense glucose concentration in our brain, especially in the hypothalamus. Simultaneously, the neuron which regulates anger exists very similar place in the hypothalamus. My hypothesis is that the same neuron regulates glucose sensing and anger, then regulates “hangry”. Maybe, if you modulate these neurons, you will be more aggressive and better in Kendo.

FYI, the Yale kendo club meets Monday 8-10pm, Friday 6:30-8pm in Payne Whitney Gym (5th floor).

Being a Foreigner, By Fernanda Lemos

Tutor: Grace Lee

Everybody knows that the world doesn’t have walls. It is open for everybody who has the courage and wants to explore it. I wrote courage because it is really hard to leave the comfortable life style, where close friends, family and routines fill our minds in such a friendly way! We can’t imagine our life without it! So, it is a big challenge to leave the comfort zone! Besides this, it is necessary to deal with everything different and concomitantly be accepted in a new job, school or home! It is too much change! However, in courageous people, the curiosity about the vastness of the world and the necessity to be challenged always shouts in their hearts and claims for a different experience. And the vastness of world beyond our routine is really real! It is full of people with different stories, customs and perspectives! It is plenty of food, hobbies and routines that we have never thought about! Usual actions like going to the supermarket or to a drugstore become a complex event, worthy of hours in the Skype to tell somebody the incredible adventure! Ordering in a restaurant, calling somebody or asking the direction makes us almost like a child that is learning the first words! But for courageous people, being embarrassed doesn’t matter! Because no day is like another! There is no routine and not enough time to explore everything that is opened, just waiting for our courage!

USA, Here I Go, By Fernanda Rodrigues

Tutor: Grace Lee

About 2 months ago, I was about to get in an airplane for the first time, heading to the USA.
I knew that being in a different country would be a big challenge, but all that I was thinking about was: Please, make these 10 hours flight seem to me like 10 minutes. Thank God time went by so fast that in one moment I realized: I made it. What now? What should I do?

Looking around, everything seemed to be so new. A piece of Brazil was still with me, few people from my country made me not forget about my language meanwhile anywhere I looked, people were talking a language I am not used to hearing every day.

English at the Hotel, English at the restaurant, English at the store, English in the streets and at my new home, all I could hear was English.

The family that I am living with welcomed me so well, therefore my first impression about Americans was positive, a little bit unexpected to be honest.

Now I only have to keep seeking good experiences in this new country and I have to make this time I am spending here worthwhile and become more self-reliant.

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**My Experience In United States, By María Angélica Murcia Orjuela**

Tutor: Sonia Helen Pascale.

Hi! My name is María Angélica, I am 18 years old. I’m from Colombia; I was born in Bogotá, but I have lived most of my life in Villleta. When I started studying at my University, I moved back to Bogotá. I completed 2 years of a Physical Therapy program, but I need to pass an English exam to continue.

I arrived in the United States in August. I came to New Haven because Martha (my aunt’s friend) lives here. I started taking classes at New Haven Adult Education, an administrator at this school recommended Bridges ESL to me. I like this program because the tutors are very patient and nice; also, Bridges gives me the opportunity to improve my understanding of the confusing concepts from my classes and learn new things. I am very glad that they have this program because it is a good opportunity for everyone.

When I first arrived in the United States I spent my time sightseeing with my aunt in New York; later I started living in New Haven and adapting to the American lifestyle. One thing is I miss Colombian food and buying the ingredients from a fresh market. One reason for this is that groceries are more expensive and processed here. However, there are things that I like here; I have enjoyed experiencing the seasons, I like the landscapes especially during the fall, and I love the colors of the leaves and the sunsets. I want to see snow.
Also I like the variety of cultures and religions, because of this I think the people here are more respectful and more open to other customs and mentalities. I have enjoyed my time in New Haven, and I hope that I can come back one day.

Coming to the U.S., By Steve Gerard

Tutor: Eric Phung

My reason for leaving my country is a very long cheesy story, but I will try to make it shorter. It all started in 2010 with this young American girl who participated in a study abroad program called SIT (School International for Training). I got a job as her translator, and after spending a few weeks doing research together, we realized we went well together and started a relationship.

Then a little over a year ago, we decided to get married, and we chose to do it here in the U.S to make the administrative paperwork easier.

I was very excited because that was the first time I had ever left Madagascar to go to another country, and it was my first time flying too. It had always been my dream to travel by plane one day, and I was spoiled because it took 5 planes to arrive here. It was a good thing that I made the trip with my wife because everything was in English and so complicated. I was even scared to go to the airport toilet because it was complicated for me to turn on the valve.

When we arrived in Oregon, my fiancé's family welcomed me very warmly. And they taught me some basic life skills for living in the U.S like how to go to the supermarket and pay or how to navigate the traffic here. It’s very different from home because there are never more than two lanes for traffic in my country, but here it’s really complicated.

My wife is studying at Yale University, but she still has time to share with me. Sometime we ride our bikes around New Haven, or we rent a car when we want to be more adventurous. It’s good practice for me to get familiar with the traffic by riding my bike because I’m planning to get my driver’s license and as I hear, it’s a very important document for identification.

I like it here in the U.S. because I am now starting to understand what is going on around me and how some things work. For example, I’m starting to understand this magic machine that washes your clothes or how when you feel too lazy to cook you can just order food by phone. But I still don’t understand the concept of credit cards because I used to pay for everything by cash in Madagascar. Giving tips when you pay your bill at the restaurant is also strange to me. My wife told me that it’s impolite to not give tips in a restaurant, so I will try to get used to this custom.
I’m here taking this class every Saturday morning because I want to better communicate, to understand what’s going on around me, to share my opinion with people, and to learn more about American culture. I’m not a shy person. I like talking, kidding, having fun with friends, but I can’t do that if I don’t understand what they are talking about. And I don’t like to be like that. Thankfully there is this English class, because I can see my own improvement. Now I don’t need help from my wife anymore to order in a restaurant, and I have started talking with people around me. I think my English is still not perfect, but it’s a start. Thanks to all the Bridges volunteers. I hope that this class will stay forever to help more people like me.

A Flying Bird in Air, By Shida Miao

Tutor: Eric Phung

While I was doing my Ph.D. program in China, I got a chance to come to the U.S. in 2007 as a visiting scholar for several months, and that was my first time visiting the country. Frankly, I never thought I would come to the U.S. before, and the only thing I still remember is the feeling I had on the flight to the U.S. That was my first time on an airplane, and I felt like I was a bird full of ambition on my wings.

I enjoyed collaborating with the professors in the U.S., and I learned a lot. Then I went back to China to complete my Ph.D. degree. My lifelong goal was to be a professor. However, I felt I did not have enough knowledge to be a professor and to allow me to work around the world, so I went to Ohio in 2012 to take a post-doc position. I came to the U.S. again, and I thought everything would be good in the future and that I would get to work internationally as I had expected. I worked in a chemical engineering lab. My colleagues and I made significant progress on a very difficult research topic. I also had a lot of fun while staying in Ohio. I traveled a lot and tried food from various parts of the county and from other countries such as Mexico, Cuba, and Thailand.

After my Ohio project was successfully completed, I came to Yale as a research associate to further my knowledge and skills. I started a new project that was challenging but interesting. The lab had a strong international community with people from the U.S., Asia, and Europe all working together. Now we have all become good friends. Besides working hard in the lab, we always hang out together to have dinner, to travel, or to just chat. We have learned from each other’s cultures and languages. I never thought I could have so many friends who come all over the world. Since I moved to the east coast of the U.S., I’ve visited a lot of places. Among the eight Ivy League universities, I have visited five of my dream schools, and I hope that I will visit the remaining three in the near future.

I’ve been in the U.S. for more than three years in total, but I always felt my English was not good enough, especially in a formal environment. Sometimes even when I was with my friends, I had to make myself understood through repetition or clarification. I learned about this English course, Bridges, from a good friend, and he said it was very helpful, so here I am. My tutor is excellent. He has helped me correct my pronunciation and better express myself. He has also helped explain American culture to me. And in particular, I like the stories he brings to our classes very much.
My dream is still nearly the same: to be a professor or a researcher in a company. I have to continue improving my English. I have spent many years pursuing my dream and learning English, but I am still far from achieving my goals. However, I don’t regret anything because I know I have tried. Looking back over those years, it seems that I haven’t achieved much. Nevertheless, I don’t know why I still have the kind of feeling of being on an airplane. My life is still unstable and my wings feel the coming of a cold winter, but I have to continue flying to my next stop.

**Untitled, By Juana Islas**

Tutor: Daisy Ramos

I was twenty-seven years old when I came to this country. I followed the American dream. We, my husband and I, wanted a better life for our daughters. When I left Mexico, my mom gave me some advice because I was sad to leave to her. On a Sunday afternoon, I was in the kitchen in my house with my mom. She told me that I cannot have 2 stars in my life, and I had to leave one in Mexico. Now I am in this nice country with my husband, my daughters, and my son. They are following their dreams too.

Everything is very different. The weather is very cold here in the winter and very hot in the summer, but we are very happy.

**Untitled, By Jheiros Arias Rios**

Tutor: Fiona Riebling

Hi, my name is Jheiros Arias Rios. I am from Colombia; I came to the United States three months ago. This country is awesome; there are a lot of things that I never imagined. I’m waiting to see the snow. It is amazing meet people from different countries; I like to share people’s stories because we don’t know we could help someone. I feel good when a person take the time to remember and share their experiences with me.

My life in Colombia was very different. I was studying philosophy at Universidad de Antioquia, I used to write reviews of philosophy books; I represented my town in an important contest and I won the second place of twenty-five competitors. I felt proud of myself. And now I’m working and studying English, and my goal is to know proper English to start studying a career.

In Colombia I studied English by myself. I learned a little bit of pronunciation and grammar; I’ve never trained my listening because there was no one to practice with. I really like American ballads and
because of this, my vocabulary is still getting better. Sometimes I confuse words that I use in Spanish because sometimes it sounds like it doesn’t make sense.

My favorite music is Rock and Roll. I play the guitar, but now I don’t have the time that I used to have when I was in Colombia. I’m going to buy a new guitar and I’m going to spend more time to practice and start to improvise, and finally get my own songs. I like to learn things in an independent way because I feel that this make things easier when someone can teach me.

I want to share some ideas that I’ve thinking about these three months. Every opinion is subjective.

We are people to act in the revenge’s name and we call it justice, but when we call our revenge ‘justice,’ there will be more revenge that will unchain the first step to a negative feeling called hatred. This is something that I thought when I was in Colombia. While he is drowning in his memories, while he’s going into the past, with a single image, with a few signs, a chain of moments comes to him as he loses the idea of himself, he feels excited between fantasy, Falling into the delirium and the confusion of reality, Looking for the solution of his problems, he leaves everything which is outside of him and then he goes into his deep inside and his deepest thoughts, arriving to an eternal world as well, full of fantasy, imagination, a world where he doesn’t exist.

**Untitled, By Kamir Cartagena**

Tutor: Kate Rosenberg

"Life isn't about having; it's about being."

Sometimes we don’t have the strength to say: "I could do everything that I want." My thoughts on that changed, when I started to read the book, *Life without Limits*, by Nick Vujicic. How could you imagine that one person without limbs could inspire me? Yes, it inspired me to write something about believing God’s love, love, strength and so many positive things.

When you feel your soul is empty, without anything, you start to think about your purpose in this life. Sometimes life doesn’t look positive. No one came to this world with an instructions book. Something that I always say is "the best college is life." Life is going to be good or bad; it just depends on the way that you are going to look at it. Nothing in this life is worse; you have to be positive and throw the negative things out the window. Every day, you are going to learn something. However your purpose is to be yourself, find your talent and the good things in yourself.
The worst enemy of you is yourself. Why? You always put something between you and your goals, too many excuses. Why? If a person without limbs managed to go around the world inspiring so many people, why do you put too many excuses in front of your goals? You can do everything that you wish! Why? Because you have the strength, the desire, you have the faith in yourself and the faith in God!

God always has a purpose for each one. God doesn’t create you without purpose. God loves you just the way you are.

**Kids’ Favorite Holiday In My Home Country, By Eunjoo Kim**  
Tutor: Audrey Storm

I think the favorite holiday for kids in South Korea is ‘Seol Nal’. It is similar to New Year’s Day, but the exact date is different each year, because we follow the lunar calendar (January 1st in the lunar calendar) for this holiday. Therefore, the date of this holiday is usually in the end of January or beginning of February. We celebrate this holiday for three days, including the day before it and the day after it. There are several reasons why ‘Seol Nal’ is popular to kids.

First, kids can get new outfits from their parents. We usually wear traditional Korean dress (‘Han Bok’) on ‘Seol Nal’. While wearing new dresses or outfits, people go to their relatives’ houses for greeting and expressing their respect to their elders. I think getting new clothes are always good and exciting experiences for everyone.

Second, kids can get pocket money from elder people. On ‘Seol Nal’, we bow to elder people, and we call it ‘Sae-bae’. After ‘Sae-bae’, elder people give some money to young people. If kids have many relatives, especially, grown-ups, they usually can get a lot of money on this holiday. With this money, kids buy what they really want, like toys, books, games and so on.

Third, kids love to become one year older after ‘Seol Nal’. Counting ages in Korea is different from that in the U.S. People in Korea count their ages not based on their birthday, but rather on the calendar year. For example, in Korea, new born babies are 1 year old, and babies born in December become 2 years old just 1~2 months later. Kids want to grow quickly, and they want to be grown-ups as soon as they can. ‘Seol Nal’ is a happy day for those kind of kids.

For adults, preparing for a holiday could be stressful, but I think for kids, ‘Seol Nal’ is definitely a favorite holiday in South Korea.

**Winter, New England, By Younsoo Shim**  
Tutor: Pamela Torola

My second winter here, in New Haven, is just around the corner. A chilly wind and leafless bare branches which loses their leaves remind me of what I was feeling last year. Darkness certainly came to the whole city at 4:30 every evening, and people on the street just seemed to move their steps as quickly as possible in order to escape from that cold and desolate downtown. It was hard to hear the cheerful and resonant voice of ‘the flower lady’ on York Street through the summer and fall season. Everything
completely had changed. Every color, sound, atmosphere, smell, and face in town were gradually turning gloomy and wearing grey appearances. Before enough appreciating the beauty of the foliage trip in Vermont, the winter was in. And I still remember what a professor of the class I had audited last semester said: “You can go and adjust anywhere in US, if you could survive here, New England.” Yes, this is New England I have been in now.

Although it’s severe snowy and dreary cold weather (I know some people from Alaska or Minnesota or Northern Michigan are now laughing at me), I can say that now I am attracted by the lure of New England. For recognizing the essence of New England there are beloved states well known for their own natural and historical heritages. I got to understand how Robert Frost could write the thoughtful poems such as ‘The road not taken’ and how Scott and Helen Nearing had stuck to their belief and life of resistance about the modern society only after I visited a path through forests and farms in Vermont. There is a great aura of the nature untamed, and it seemed to embrace all human beings’ fragile and silly mistakes. Massachusetts, the place of first immigrants, is famous for its world-class universities. However, the city I am captivated is Concord, so-called Athens of U.S. When I walked along a shore of Walden Pond, it was likely that Henry David Thoreau was swimming there catching fishes. Just imagine that promising young scholars and activists such as Luisa Alcott and Emerson gathered and discussed about the future of their country in the small town of Concord. There is no place I could imagine where this great movement could be done like Concord. Of course, I love the rocky coastline in Arcadia and fantastic-tasting lobsters in Main, and the small ice cream shop nearby the riverside in Essex town, Connecticut.

Yes, winter of New England is yet to come. I probably will struggle with this gloomy and desolate season for 3 months. Hopefully, I could be doing well with my proud memories of the last good days. Furthermore, I could find out the hidden but precious beauty of winter rather than the pleasure of holiday vacation. Because it is enough as itself.

My First American Friend, By Yan Wang

Tutor: Jon Victor

When I first met Sarah, she was a student in the Honors College at the University of Texas at San Antonio with a high GPA and worked at the UTSA information center, as a manager. One morning, I
went to the information center to send a letter back to China. But no one knew how much the postage was. I was told that I needed to go to the delivery place to find it out first. I was new to UTSA and missed the orientation meeting, so I didn’t know how to get to there. The even worse thing was that I didn’t really speak English. Sarah was on duty and seemed to know I had difficulty doing it alone. She offered help by walking with me to and from the delivery place and found out how much I should pay for the postage. When I submitted the stamped mail and said thanks to her, she said thanks to me back. She thanked me for having had the chance to know the cost of postage from the States to China because of me. I was a little surprised by what she said and thought she was a nice person.

To express my gratitude, the next day I stopped by the information center and gave her a tiny mascot of the 2008 Beijing Olympics as a gift. I didn’t expect her to like it and never thought it would be the beginning of our long-term friendship, since it is a very normal way to express thanks in China.

It was my first time in the States, as an exchange student studying at the University of Texas at San Antonio for one year with financial support from the Chinese Scholarship Council and my university in China. One of my goals for the visit other than learning was to improve my English and learn American culture. I thought making American friends was the best way to realize them. However, I soon found out that it was not easy. It seemed like Asians always stay with Asians and Americans make American friends. People from different races were closer to their native culture. It is hard to get into the different culture, even in the States, an immigrant country.

Sarah is a very smart, sweet and nice American girl. With her help, I finally got everything settled down after I had been in San Antonio for two months. I moved into a new apartment one block away from hers, opened accounts for utilities, purchased insurance, past my driver’s license test, and got a used car. She helped out not only in my life, but also gave me some advice in my studies, which is really helping me adapt to the U.S. educational system relatively quickly.

During my one-year stay, we spent a lot of time together. We studied together for sociology class and discussed how to complete group work. We also watched NBA games, movies, and went to Sea World together. I met Sarah’s mother, when she visited her, and Sarah met and hugged my mother too, when my mum came to see me. We shared a lot of things, feelings, and problems we faced. We had a lot of wonderful memories and lots of my first American experiences were experienced with her.

Usually it is very hard to keep a long distance friendship, and Sarah and I have an age gap between us, living in different stages of life. However, we have still been sharing things and feelings of our own lives with each other, although it has been a little more than six years since we first met. It’s unbelievable, isn’t
it? Even now, I still have the note she wrote down with kind words and left in my car window, when she happened to park her car next to mine in the parking lot. At that time, I was a little sad about returning to China. She showed me that small thank-you gift in her new apartment when I stopped by Houston during my business trip three years ago. She writes to me every time when she gets back to UTSA. I sent her a pair of traditional Chinese red embroidered shoes as a wedding gift, when she got married in 2012. We are great friends and I appreciate having such a precious friendship in my life.

**Untitled, By Jinki Yeom**
Tutor: Stella Woo

I went to Quebec City in Canada today. It was really exciting because I went across the borderline with a car between countries. In South Korea, I never crossed other countries with a car, because three of our borders have oceans and our country has been separated at the Northern border for 50 years. So, I imagined if our countries reunited, then I could go to China and Europe with a car. If it happened, I would have went to a world trip with my car for 1~2 months when I was a university student. It would have been a really exiting experience. Also, Korean society would be open to foreigners and other countries' cultures. I know our situation is not hopeful for reunion, due to complicated interactions with our neighbors. But I hope it will be happen in the near future, because this situation makes a lot of problems in our countries. Under the beautiful sunset at Quebec, I thought about my countries and our sadness.

**Untitled, By Chunfang Lou**
Tutor: Emily Xiao

My name is Chunfang Lou. I am from Beijing, China, and I am followed my husband, who is a visiting scholar at Yale University, to New Haven. I came here last March and will return to China this December. Time flies!

I have a five-year-old daughter who is attending kindergarten at Hooker Primary School. Her name is Luoxuan, and she is a little bit shy. The main purpose of bringing her here with us is to learn English. I know childhood is the critical stage for language-learning. I majored in developmental psychology, and I am now working in the area of child education. My job in China focused on disadvantaged children, for example, migrant children in big cities and children of ethnic minorities in rural areas. We talked a lot about the importance of early childhood as the foundation of future learning, and as the most rapid stage for learning and growth.

Now, as our return is approaching, I find that, although her English is not as good as I expected, she really benefits a lot in other areas. For example, when she was in China, she worried a lot about painting because she could not draw the exact same picture that her teacher drew, and this was what her teacher required. But here, she can draw whatever she wants to draw, and in any way. And the teacher always says, “Good job!” This is what I love about here: encouragement and diversity.
I really like the English program here. I met my tutor Emily Xiao. She is very responsible. Sometimes, I will communicate my learning needs to her. She can always do the lesson based on my needs, and exceeds my expectations. Thank you, Emily.

I will be back in China very soon, and I may not have opportunities to come back in the near future. I really hope you can all enjoy your life here. Thank you.

**Reflections on the USA and the Congo, By Laura Kimbala Kasongo**

Tutor: Shannon Zhang

The most beautiful thing I like to do is tourism. I think many people like it. When people travel, they can see new places, learn the culture of other countries and they may also have new friends. However, it’s difficult to choose where to go when you travel. I come from Republic Democratic of Congo and it's been a while since I have arrived in the USA. Many things in the USA are different from the country and the culture is very impressive.

First, as everybody knows, many countries in Africa are underdeveloped like my country. Many public buildings in my country are old and not maintained as well as public universities. I’m impressed by the architecture in USA; there are a lot of beautiful buildings at the great universities such as Yale University and Harvard University. There are historical monuments too, such as the Lincoln Memorial and the Statue of Liberty, which is the symbol of freedom and democracy.

Finally the cuisine is also a very important element I would like to highlight: a large number of immigrants is an opportunity to experience a very diverse cuisine in the USA. There are a number of foods that are commonly identified as American, such as hamburgers, hot dogs, potato chips, cheese and meat. The Congo cuisine remains traditional but sometimes influenced by European cuisine: the casava leaves, peanuts, fufu and chili are foods that you can find in all regions, but each region has its own food preferences.

I like the US in general and hope to have the opportunity to visit some places where I have not been, to learn more about their culture, such as social relationships, art, politics, and religion.

**Opinions on the Quality of Education in the USA and China,**

**By Fanhua (Flora) Zeng**

Tutor: Shannon Zhang

When it comes to the quality of education in the USA and China, there are some different opinions. Some think that the education quality of the USA is better, as America leads in scientific
research and produces so many creative achievements, while others argue that the basic education in China is more stronger, and the system in USA is unfair for females as girls have less chances to do math and gifted girls usually camouflage their talent to gain achievements in that area.

As a whole, in my opinion, whether in primary, middle and high school, the fundamental education in the USA is more valuable for students than that in China. During the periods of primary and middle school lives, although there is less knowledge taught in class, students participate in the teaching and learning actions positively and establish their habits of active thinking and behavior. This active thinking mode can break through the constraint of habitual thinking and leading to the core elements of scientific research, namely initiative and originality. More important, the educational system in USA is reasonable in that the students are less materialistic and happiness-focused. They take part in all kinds of social activities and lead an enjoyable and colorful life in school so as to build a positive personality and healthy body.

In contrast, the examination-oriented education system in China deviates from the original intention of education. It's based on a lot more traditional rote learning. Students are burdened with heavy homework and too much tests, accompanied with less active thinking training during the important stage of building habits. They have little time to do exercise, and have less energy to be engaged in social activities as well. It is harmful for them to lose the intellectual pursuits and pay attention to the gains and utilities. It is urgent to reform the education system in China.
Meet the 2014 – 2015 Bridges Tutors!

Cameron Bioni, ’16 is a literature major from Greenwich, Connecticut studying Spanish and Italian. This is his third year with Bridges ESL, and he loves meeting all the kind, dedicated people who come and go as Bridges students and tutors. His favorite part of Bridges is the conversation with students from all over the world, especially when their questions point out how weird the English language can be. Thanks to the rest of the Bridges board!

Grace Lee, ’16, calls the great state of New York her home. Even though she is an English major, she learns something new about the English language each week through her students’ insightful questions and comments. Over her past two years with Bridges, she has also enjoyed learning about Finnish saunas, Japanese kendo, Chinese politics, and the Brazilian football mania. She only hopes to teach her students half as much as they teach her

Shannon Zhang, ’16, is from sunny Southern California and is interested in a career in medicine. She loves seeing both past and current students out and about on campus and is extremely grateful to all of the students and tutors of Bridges for giving so much of their time and effort to the program. Personally, she enjoys learning from her students (who know far more than she does about life!) and teaching English idioms, as she frequently does not understand them as well as she should.

Quyen Do, ’16, is in Trumbull College majoring in Psychology. She has been tutoring with Bridges since January 2014, and she has thoroughly enjoyed being able to give back to others what her parents were given when they first immigrated to the United States: an opportunity to learn English at a comfortable pace with tutors who care. Outside of Bridges, Quyen is a Master’s Aide for Trumbull College, a production and design editor for The Yale Globalist, and an undergraduate research assistant for the Yale Center for Anxiety and Mood Disorders and the Affect Regulation and Cognition Lab at Yale. During her free time, Quyen likes to wander around while chatting endlessly with others, sip on milk tea, and share jokes that are so bad, they’re good.

Yifu Dong, ’17, hails from Beijing, China. I like playing the game of Go, write articles and read history books. In addition, I volunteer at Bridges ESL as an English tutor and work at Yale as a Chinese tutor. An ESL speaker myself, I enjoy working with people in their language learning and experimenting with various learning methods.
Christopher Pu, ’18, is interested in biomedical engineering and computer science. He hails from Fremont, CA and enjoys tinkering with electronics and messing around with friends in his free time. He hopes to continue working with Bridges in the future!

Vincent Huang, ’18, was born and raised in the Los Angeles area. A freshman in Silliman College, he is pretty undecided about what his major will be, although he is considering computer science. In addition to Bridges, Vincent is involved in Bulldogs Racing and the Yale Economic Review.

Alyssa Patterson, ’18, is in Jonathan Edwards College. She is a perspective literature major, but also wants to dabble in Anthropology and Psychology. She plans on taking two languages while at Yale, one being German, which she is currently enrolled in, and the other being Korean. In her spare time, she’s on the Step team, Steppin’ Out.

My name is Eric Phung, ’17, and I am from Oakland, California. I have always enjoyed writing and the ability to communicate with people in different languages. I love being a tutor for Bridges ESL because this experience has given me a unique perspective on teaching and on language.

Daisy Ramos, ’18, originally from McFarland, California, is in Ezra Stiles College. She has really enjoyed her time as a Bridges tutor, and hopes to continue participating in the program in the future. It has been a true pleasure to interact with all the students.

Hi, my name is Fiona Riebeling, ’18. I love learning languages and helping other people, so I thought Bridges ESL would be a great way for me to combine my passion for teaching and my interest in other cultures and languages. I have loved the opportunity to tutor for Bridges and hope I have been able to change some lives, even if in very small ways.
Kate Rosenberg, ’18, is in Ezra Stiles College at Yale. Originally from Chappaqua, NY she has had a wonderful experience at Bridges this semester and looks forward to the next one.

My name is Simon Serrano, ’17, and I’m in Trumbull College. I’m interested in math and physics. In my spare time, I enjoy listening to music and running. My experiences with the Bridges Program have been excellent. I look forward to working with my student, Jose, in the semesters to come!

Pamela Torola, ’18, is an avid apple eater from Northern Michigan. Her favorite part of Bridges is the part where she and her student compare their cultural backgrounds and talk about life (aka every week!).

Jon Victor, ’18, is in Pierson College and from Montreal, Canada. He is a hopeful English major in the Writing Concentration, and also speaks French and Spanish. In his free time, Jon is a staff reporter for the Yale Daily News and tutors for Bridges ESL.

Hi! My name is Emily Xiao, ’18. I grew up in Houston, TX (average temperature = boiling) and Chicago, IL (average temperature = freezing). While I’m not a fan of the usual Chicago staples like baseball or snow, I am a fan of Kevin Spacey movies, my family, and drinking obscene amounts of tea.

Tutor descriptions not available: Audrey Storm, Daniela Dilarza, Brin Song, George Gemelas, Stella Woo, Sydney Wade, Woojeong Song, Zara Contractor