Bridges ESL

SPRING 2021
STUDENT ANTHOLOGY

FEATURING WORKS BY OUR STUDENTS

“Reflections on Bridges Term Spring 2021”

By Alsu Ramazanova

Tutor: Anne Northrup

Hi there! My name is Alsu. I have been in the USA for 8 months. I never thought I would live abroad. But life is so unpredictable. I had to move to New Haven because my husband have got a great opportunity to work at Yale. Could you imagine how hard it is to leave your almost 9 years career as gastroenterologist in Russia and start to learn English from scratch and to become a household wife? But I am a mom of two pretty daughters and that encourages me to become better and not be depressed!

I have enrolled in an excellent Bridges ESL at Yale program and have gotten a lot of benefit from that! My tutor Anne Northrup, despite her young age is brilliant tutor! She is so polite and kind, but at the same time she knows how to motivate and make a student who is much older than her work hard. Each of our classes consists of different topics from grammar, reading and listening to funny advertisements short movies and serious discussion in different fields. Anne knows Russian perfectly and this makes my study much easier, however I try not to use any Russian words during our class. Anne helps me not hesitate to talk to people and become more confident. She shows me my grammar mistakes and I love it a lot! I would like to continue to learn more about American culture and English grammar, of course, with Anne! I appreciate that Anne helped me to correct my cover letter even if it was outside of her tutoring responsibilities.

I am so grateful to Bridges ESL, especially to Anne Northrup!

Thank you very much for providing such a wonderful opportunity to study at home by the laptop screen.
My name is Bruna. I am from Brazil and I have a degree in Administration. I decided to come to America as an au pair to improve my English skills and explore the country. Moving to the country has been a great challenge. I had to learn a new language and make new friends, while adjusting to another culture and climate. I decided to start classes with Bridges ESL to improve my vocabulary and pronunciation. I am learning and having a great time every Saturday morning with my tutor Sophie Lai, who is very dedicated and kind in sharing new knowledge. I would like to say thank you to Bridges for the opportunity. I am very happy to be learning and having a new experience in these classes despite the pandemic.
“Best ESL teacher that I ever had”

By Emily Yang

Tutor: Andreea Ciobanu

This is the second year that Andreea has been teaching me ESL. Her enthusiasm for teaching, dedication to her students, positive attitude towards the world and outstanding language skills have really impressed me. Her patience is evident in our class discussions about news and events related to America and Yale. For example, she often comments on articles we are reading and corrects our pronunciation and grammar mistakes—which really highlights her wonderful personality and dedication. She is always willing to help us despite her busy schedule. For instance, she helped me edit my essay for graduate school applications during her final exams. She has also introduced many useful resources to us, such as TOEFL web practices and Daily Chatter. Under her influence, I started to regularly read the New York Times, enjoy listening to TED talks, and began discussing politics and news with my friends and family.

I am very grateful that I have such a fantastic teacher like Andreea!
The Bridges program has been so important to me, especially during this pandemic. Our class helps me to continue learning, keeps me in contact with classmates who I met before this chaos, and now introduces me to new people in other countries. It is amazing how technology can be so helpful during this difficult time because we can reach any place to continue our activities in some important ways. Meeting people from other countries who join Bridges lets us share some information about our cultures, weather and seasonal changes that are different in different places, different kinds of foods and meals - all while sharing the same goal, improving our English abilities. I don’t know when we can take regular classes after all the restrictions end, but I’m so happy and proud to be part of Bridges which gave us the opportunity to continue our progress.
“Reflections on Bridges Term Spring 2021”

By Eunyeong Lee

Tutor: Pia Gorme

First, I’m so glad I joined the Bridges ESL program and appreciate Bridges for the opportunity to have this great experience.

It was my first semester in the program. From the beginning of this program, as I submitted an application form, attended an interview, and scheduled our class, it all made me very excited. I was actually very nervous at first because it was my first English class in a very long time and this time with a smart Yale student!

I have learned English before but with little confidence, and after a long time without practice, I felt even less confident in my English. For this reason, I hesitated to talk during the first class. However, my tutor tried to understand what I said even though it was not perfect. She also made an effort to inform us of commonly used phrases, and it helped me a lot to express what I wanted to say more fluently. It encourages me to talk more, and now I’m excited when I talk with her!

We are in a very sad situation now due to the pandemic. However, in accordance with the present situation, it was not awkward for us to conduct class through video calls and shared Docs. Also, the class materials my tutor prepared, especially some videos, allowed me to take a high quality class even though we cannot meet in person.

I hope that I’m able to have more confidence with English at the end of this semester. I would like to thank Bridges ESL again for letting me learn English with such a good tutor and hope to participate in this program next semester as well.
“About My Time at Bridges ESL”

By Guang Fei

Tutor: Johnny Gross

I learned about the Bridges ESL program from a friend who is also a visiting student at the Yale School of Medicine. She told me that studying at Bridges is an incredible opportunity to gain more knowledge about the United States and to improve my oral English skills. Although I missed registration in the fall semester of 2020, thanks to Johnny, I seized the opportunity to join Bridges in the spring semester of 2021.

First, I must show my appreciation to my tutor, Johnny, who had made a great effort to help us improve our English this semester. We were able to get to know one another and share our experiences even though we are in the middle of a pandemic. During this unusual time, we had to adapt ourselves to the changes of life and styles of study. Working at home, learning at home, doing everything at home allows us to share more time with family, friends, and roommates. Additionally, mental health is becoming more and more important for everyone because our social gatherings have been limited. So, the Bridges ESL program is not only a useful way to improve our English but also a precious space for us to reduce the stress and depression caused by the pandemic.

In addition, I have gained a lot of knowledge about the history of the United States and Jewish history during my time at Bridges, which has been very interesting. As the most powerful and developed country in the world, the United States attracts elite talent from all over the world. In the United States, there are a great deal of immigrants and everyone has the opportunity to realize their dreams if they put forth the effort. However, differences in people’s cultural and economic backgrounds have amplified conflict, especially during this tough time. George Floyd was murdered by an aggressive policeman, and there wasn’t another Martin Luther King Jr who showed up and led the oppressed groups afterwards. Instead, more and more violence and conflict occurred. The Capitol was even attacked by rebels. I hope the pandemic will end and our life will go back to normal soon.

The story of the Jewish people is much more complicated than the history of America. During World War II, many Jews were discriminated against and persecuted by the Nazis and millions of Jewish people were murdered. Now museums have been built in Berlin, Shanghai and other cities around the world to commemorate this tragic history. Chinese people also endured dark times when facing the Japanese invasion during World War II. So, Chinese people exhibited empathy towards the Jewish people and received thousands of refugees during the Holocaust. Although Chinese and Jewish people do not believe in the same God and religion, both of these two historic nations have experienced periods of tremendous suffering, and I firmly believe that both of them can achieve renewal and regain their strength in the future.

Thank you again to everyone at Bridges ESL. I hope we can meet in person next semester!
Here is my story. I came to the United States ten years ago as an au pair, but I had to go back to Brazil because my dad had cancer. So, I went back to take care of him.

Even though I went back home, there was not one day that I did not think about coming back to the U.S.

So here I am now, following my dreams and trying to be happy. Some days are really hard because all of my family and best friends are in Brazil. What makes me feel comfortable, though, is that I feel at home and I love this country. Brazil is just for me to visit now.

Whenever I feel homesick, I call my family or go through the pictures I have with them. This helps me feel “closer” to them.

The U.S. is definitely my new home, and this country makes me feel safe and happy. What makes me want to stay here is the good quality of life. I plan to live in this country for the rest of my life.

When my tutor sends back corrections to my homework in the middle of the night, I definitely know she is burning the midnight oil to make my ESL experience the best possible.
Participating in the Bridges ESL Program has been a real pleasure for me, since Andreea Ciobanu is an even better tutor than I could possibly imagine. I am thrilled by the opportunity to be her student for another semester. She possesses the qualities that make her an amazing teacher.

First of all, Andreea is doing her best to build confidence in her students, which is positively correlated with our academic performance. While answering any question, she always encourages us to expand our answers, boosting our motivation and learning outcomes. Moreover, she listens to our needs, understands our struggles, and always ensures that she is there for us.

Secondly, Andreea manages our meetings very effectively by bringing up interesting learning materials, maximizing the efficiency of teaching and learning. What I really enjoy about her as a teacher is that she is very knowledgeable, truly well-prepared, and she doesn’t set any limits on her students, always challenging us to do our best. She is a caring professional who teaches students to believe in themselves.

Last but not least, the way she corrects our homework is incredible. Each week she provides detailed, specific, and full-of-complements feedback, which makes me feel that she supports me in my efforts to master materials but also sets high expectations toward my performance. As a result, my enormous progress happened in the blink of an eye, making me hungry for even better results.

To wrap it all up, Andreea, thank you for everything that you are doing, including your willingness to go the extra mile while helping your students achieve their goals. I have a gut feeling that you chose the right career path for yourself, and without doubt, enormous success is waiting for you!
“Reflections on Bridges Term Spring 2021”

By Laura Orrico

Tutor: Julia Arancio

I’ve always lived in Brazil, but I’ve been learning English since I was about eleven. My parents always encouraged me to study it. At first it was only another subject, just like any other from school but as the years were passing by, I realized how important it would be for my life. Therefore, I started to incorporate it in my daily routine: listening and reading it as much as I could.

When I was 14 my brother went to study at Oregon, and that made me think about what I really wanted for my life. I’m still not sure about that part, but I know that I do not want to continue living in Brazil. He is always encouraging me to study there as well. He was the one that found out about Bridgers and told me to sign for it, I feel like these sessions have been helping me a lot.

Last year I found out about my love for photography, which made me realize I want to be a photographer or work in something related to that. At the moment I’m studying it and by July of 2022 I’ll be graduating. I hope that until there I can improve my English and maybe then try studying something else related to visual arts or film abroad.

Learning English became a key that opened the door to my future. I don’t know which path life is taking me, I just know that if I continue walking in the right direction I can go far, knowing that at least 50% of that is because of how much I dedicated myself to study this language.
“Reflections on Spring Term Bridges 2021”

By Lynn Guo

Tutor: Sophie Lai

This is my first time signing up for classes with Bridges ESL despite the fact that I have been living in New Haven for almost five years. So, my first impression is that I wish I had taken classes here earlier! Even though I had worked as an English teacher for one and a half years in China before I came to the U.S., I didn’t feel very confident speaking in English when I first arrived. I had attended other English conversation groups, where ESL learners mainly had casual talks and the instructors rarely corrected our pronunciation regularly. Those practice sessions made me speak English frequently and bravely, which is a great start for mastering a language. But, I needed some instructions that could help me communicate in English, both in terms of speaking and writing, in a more accurate and professional way. And this is where Bridges ESL came in.

After finishing my second master’s degree and being trapped at home because of COVID-19, I tried to find ways to further improve my English to prepare for future jobs. Because of this, I think the class size and instruction at Bridges ESL work best for me. With a small class of three students who are at a similar language level, the learning materials that our instructor, Sophie, prepared fit us all. Each of us has adequate time to express ourselves and respond to others in English. In short, the two-hour class duration and small size guarantees that we have an immersive environment to cultivate our language skills. In addition, our instructor, Sophie, is very dedicated and responsible. Even though she has a tight schedule with her school work, she always selects the reading assignments carefully and sends them to us on time. During class, she would correct our pronunciations, which we may have been unaware of for years, and patiently guides us in how to utter the right sound. This is particularly useful because each ESL learner from a different country may have certain challenging sounds to pronounce accurately. In addition, she designed flexible prompts for our writing assignments, which pushes us to write a short paragraph each week while giving us a lot of freedom in choosing the topic. Last but not least, the leisurely but informative class atmosphere always inspires me to invest more time in learning and pursuing what I want in a persistent way. I am very grateful for meeting my instructor, Sophie, and two classmates, Bruna and Flavio, at Bridges ESL.

Undoubtedly, I will sign up for next semester and continue this joyful journey of learning, making friends, understanding both the outside and inside of our world, and becoming a better me.
“Spiritual Voyage”

By Magda Hertha

Tutor: Andreea Ciobanu

When one season ends and another begins, there are always a few thoughts. What will this winter be like? The tree for Christmas won’t be felled until next year: what will have changed by then? Will the colors this spring astonish us more than usual? What about summer; will there be enough sunshine to make us smile?

The weather has been spoiling us these past few days. The sun is giving my skin a glow, and me? I do a lot of thinking. I think about life; I think about myself; and I think about my family. I think about the future; I reminisce about the past.

But who am I? I am a twenty-something year old woman pursuing my dreams. When I was in high school, I dreamed of becoming a journalist. I worked in television for eighteen months. Later, I dreamed of expanding my horizons. I wanted to complete my master’s degree abroad. Today, having lived in the United States for twenty months, I am working on my college application. I aim to attend one of several universities in New York City or Connecticut. Do I miss home? Yes. Am I proud of myself? Yes. Do I think that I made a mistake in abandoning my “old” life and setting my sights on achievement? Definitely not; I think my last few months show that betting on yourself is a quick win for a young woman.

I am an open person. Open to people, to the world, to life. I treat my life as one great journey. And the smaller ones, with a backpack over my shoulders and a map in my hands, broaden my horizons and allow me to look inside myself. Orange rocks in Arizona; hot springs in Yellowstone; skydiving in Colorado; a helicopter flight over New York City; coffee at the world’s first Starbucks in Seattle; a baseball game in Boston; dinner with the cowboys in South Dakota; breakfast in a real Cuban house; or swimming in the ocean on Long Island... When someone asks me what my favorite place or memory is, I can’t honestly answer. The past twenty months have been a beautiful collection that will stay with me for a lifetime. I’m learning about the world, language, and cultures. I’m stepping out of my comfort zone, making my dreams come true, and being brave.

I don’t know what my destiny on Earth is, but I’m definitely on a journey in search of myself. While it is not easy, and my language level is still in its infancy, I am happy to be working on my spiritual voyage. I hope that this plan will bear fruit in the future. Life is but one, and I am glad that part of my life story is an English-speaking chapter in the “big apple.”
“Reflections on Bridges Term Spring 2021”

By: Maria Julia Ricci

Tutor: Melina Joseph

My name is Maria. I am from Brazil and I participate in an exchange program as an au pair. My experience learning English was always a challenge. I never had the American Dream that we usually see in the movies. My dream was not to come to the US and simply take a lot of pictures of tourist places, which is cool. However, my dream was just to learn English. When I was a child, I was delighted when my English teacher from Brazil walked into the classroom giving greetings in English. I said to myself that one day I also want to talk like that.

As a matter of fact, in Brazil we only speak Portuguese. Public schools teach basic English and private schools teach intermediate English and Spanish. Therefore, Brazil is a country rich in cultural diversity due to miscegenation, but only 5% of the population speak or understand English. Two important factors are the low quantity of language teaching and non-mandatory teaching in the old days. Consequently, we don’t have free English classes like Bridges ESL. English classes in Brazil are expensive. However, even though I didn’t speak English, I was brave enough to follow my dreams and one day learn this second language. With this in mind, when I found out about the Bridge ESL classes, I was extremely happy, it was free and with Yale tutors. This university is very well regarded by my country. This is my second time taking my English classes with Bridge ESL, because I loved my first experience, and having another chance to participate is amazing, I will always value classes. It’s a great opportunity to improve my English.

I want to say thank you to my teacher Melina, for being attentive and working hard to always be able to offer the greatest knowledge of the language to me and my classmate.

In summary, it’s magical to talk with a native speaker and with people around the world, sharing our experiences and accents. Learning another language is not easy, but the most important thing is the first step we take. This has made me a better person and I hope one day to help other people from my country learn English for free, so they can spread their wings around the world just like me.
“My Favorite Noodles”

By Peiwen Lu

Tutor: Jessica Kong

When I visited the Asian market downtown recently, I saw a familiar product with a smiley face logo wrap in the fridge: the Yaki Soba, which is a classic Japanese stir fry noodle. It is also tasty in my memory. In my childhood, I always looked forward to visiting and shopping in the huge grocery store on the weekends. If we saw Yaki Soba noodles on the rack (we also called them smile noodles due to the smiling face logo), my sister and I asked our mom to purchase one bag and cook for us. Mom would stir fry the Yaki Soba with shredded cabbage and carrots, and scrambled egg to make the noodle look colorful and taste nourishing. The fried noodles were seasoned with the Japanese yaki sauce to make it salty with a little tinge of sweetness like Worcestershire sauce. Because these semi-finished noodles are already steamed, they have a short expiration date. It is a pressure for agents to sell out these products in time. Thus, this noodle gradually disappeared off the shelf in my home country and my life. When I saw this familiar smile logo in the US, I could hardly stop myself from screaming in the store and grabbed a bag for my basket immediately. Last Saturday, I cooked my own version of Yaki Soba at home. Even though the side dish was different from mom’s style, it still made me cry when I tasted the flavor from my childhood memory. Later, I posted the pictures of the noodles on Facebook and got many replies from my classmates in high school. In that moment, Yaki Soba represented not only a food but also was reminiscent of my memories of the grocery store, my family and the era of my childhood.
The Yale ESL Bridges program opened its doors even in the midst of the pandemic. Even though we were not able to meet in person like we used to, we used technology to connect, meet each other, share, learn, and grow. Despite not having taken a zoom class before in my life, I enjoyed them! It was exciting to use this new way of communication, and I was grateful to have access to the technology with the help of my daughter.

My teacher, Pia Gorme, prepared a very creative and engaging program. Every week we selected a topic to study. Each topic was very useful for daily use. Some topics we talked about and shared were about our own cultures. We shared how to make some of our favorite traditional foods and places we have visited and travelled. These conversations brought a lot of comfort for me and made me feel a sense of belonging and acceptance. I especially loved listening to the experiences that each of our class members had to share. While we conversed, we looked at the powerpoint shared digitally online and watched relevant videos to our different topics of conversation. Pia helped Eunyeong and me to build up our phrasal verb skills to create sentences together about our trips. It made my sentences clearer and more understandable! I enjoyed our class very much and how inviting and open our conversations were. It was a great balance of learning grammar and phrases while learning about different cultures and their unique beauty.

I have lived in different countries and have come to the realization that language is culture, a form of expression of the lives that we live. Tone, accent, body language, facial expression all play an intricate role in expressing and bridging what we want to communicate and express to each other. Learning English through Bridges has been a great gift for me, it has helped me understand the world more deeply. I am very grateful for this wonderful program that has enriched my life in ways that are not visible or measurable but so rewarding in intangible ways.
“Bridges”

By Santiago Sosa Vercellone

Tutor: Charlie Mayock-Bradley

Sometimes I know how to learn, but yet I don’t know how, these things that filled my brain, have turned into small towns.

Some of them will become cities, other ones just disappear, but with every step I take, I overcome my fears.

I was lucky to meet Charlie, Sharon, and Erika and share our Saturday mornings, even if they were in Connecticut, and some of us were yawning.

I know that English will be a city, with beautiful parks and beaches, and Charlie helped a lot, because he built the Bridges.
“Reflections on Bridges Term Spring 2021”

By Shengming Yang

Tutor: Nakeshia Diop

My name is Shengming Yang and I am 78 years old. I am from China. 5 years ago I moved from China to the U.S to take care of my granddaughter.

I currently live with my wife. She likes planting and music. During the weekend, I like to go hiking or biking. I really enjoy the fresh air and beautiful nature in New Haven.

My biggest challenge living here is language. Due to my limited English, I can’t communicate with other people. I am very happy to have found the Bridges ESL program and have already continually studied in this program for 3 years.

All the teachers are very friendly and dedicated to teaching.

My current teacher Nakeshia Diop is teaching me and taught my wife. One year ago, she studied abroad. After she returned, she took the initiative to contact us and was willing to continue to teach us. She worked very hard to understand our needs and is well prepared each class. She is extremely patient with us, explains everything so clearly, and all errors are thoughtfully corrected.

I was particularly touched by Nakeshia. Even though she’s on leave from school, she is still patiently and persistently teaching me. Because of my old age, poor foundation in English, poor memory, and slow reaction, while doing simple listening exercises, we have to go over them several times. If I still don’t understand, then the teacher will go over each word until I understand. I have great respect for my teacher Nakeshia Diop!

Under all my teachers, my English level has improved. I am thankful for every teacher and Yale University’s Bridges ESL leaders!
My name is Sooeon Lee and it’s almost 3 months since I came here from South Korea.

Since my husband and I came here for his studies, he’s been really busy. In contrast, I couldn’t have enough free time.

For me, this free time was a pleasure because I had a lot of busy days in Korea working at a company. So, I enjoyed this time by taking naps and watching my favorite movies.

However, as time passed, I felt lonely and wanted to communicate with others. So I searched for some classes to make some relationships and improve my English.

After testing, I could participate in Bridges ESL classes.

Even though we only could have a virtual class because of the Covid Virus, I met a good tutor and friends through this program.

Our tutor prepared a specific topic and related questions for every class so I could speak more English sentences to answer them.

And then, we have studied each part of English in each class. We have listened to some dialogues or watched some videos and then answered questions.

Sometimes we read the scripts and our tutor corrects the wrong pronunciation. Regarding grammar, we learned about some topics and practiced by checking some quizzes.

Also, we have been given the English material for review which is very useful for studying by myself.

I think Bridges ESL is the best option for newcomers who want to learn English and to make some relationships in New Haven.

Through this program, I could have my own schedule and make some friends. And it becomes my motivation to start a routine life.

These days, I am not just staying at home and I have started some exercises and studies for my new life.

I think this kind of small step can change your life happier. So I'd like to recommend you to start this course without hesitating.
My name is Taynara, and I am from southwestern Brazil, where I was born and raised and where I live to this day. I graduated from a Biomedicine course in 2019. However, due to this pandemic, it’s been really hard to find a job in the area, so I decided to search for other ways to improve myself, and that’s how I came to know about Bridges.

I did about 7 years of English classes when I was younger, but it’s been a while since I last practiced anything related to it (that is except for movies, series, and songs). As I was chatting with a friend who is now living in Connecticut, she told me about a course she did in order to improve her understanding of the language and how much she liked it. I asked if I could join next semester and what I could do in order to enroll. Luckily, the next class was about to open for enrollment.

To tell the truth, I was both nervous and excited since it would be a new experience and since I had not practiced in a long time. But now that some weeks have passed, I can say for sure how glad I am that I decided to participate in this class. I have learned so much not only about English but also about other cultures, and that is priceless!

I can’t thank my friend enough, as well as Bridges for this amazing opportunity and my tutor Flora and classmate Ning for giving me this opportunity and teaching me so much more than I could have ever expected.
“Reflections on Bridges Term Spring 2021”

By Yonghyun Ha

Tutor: Yoyo Ocho

My name is Yonghyun and I am from South Korea. I came to New Haven approximately two years ago. In the beginning, I felt that my English was improved somehow since I spoke English every day. However, due to the pandemic, I work at home and speak only Korean with my family. For those reasons, my English became even worse than before. After taking the Bridges ESL class, I am sure that my English is getting better again thanks to Yoyo. Unfortunately, during this period, we didn’t meet each other in person but virtually. Nevertheless, it was amazing because we could easily share the screen and watch each other. For each of the lessons, Yoyo’s class was covered with speaking, listening, grammar and vocabulary. Among them, I personally like speaking more than others. She always prepares general questions for us. Those questions were not only for English speaking but also making me rethink my precious things. I really enjoyed learning English with Yoyo!

Thank you so much Yoyo and Bridges ESL!!
“My English Journey”

By Zeynep Ayşenur Yılmaz

Tutor: Jessica Kong

I remember the first time I spoke English with my sister. I was 11 and she was 16. At that time, she had just started to watch foreign TV series like Supernatural and The Vampire Diaries. Because of that her interest in the English language grew rapidly. One day after she finished an episode she looked at me and said, “We should improve our English. Let’s stop speaking in Turkish and start speaking in English.” Even though I didn’t know much English back then, I wanted to help her speak. Today, thanks to my sister, I want to be an English teacher.

To be honest, when I first started to learn English I hated it. In my opinion, it was just too difficult to understand. I used to get low marks from my exams, and my sister used to do my homeworks for me because I didn’t know how to do them. That day she told me to speak in English, I really didn’t know what to do. For the first few months, it took me minutes to say only a simple sentence like, “We have chicken for dinner.”

Over time, I started to like speaking English with my sister, especially when we needed to hide something from our parents like my dad’s credit card information, and gossiping about our relatives that we don’t like. All we need to do is just switch the language because they don’t know English. Now it has come to a point that I want to be an English teacher. Why? I guess it’s because English is not just a language that I try to improve. It’s a language that I share my feelings and thoughts just as Turkish. All I can say is that it is just my life as a foreigner as I started to teach English to my friends. I even started to dream in English. It is crazy to think about my English journey. At first I hated it so much, but now I study hard to make it my future. That is when I realized: you can do anything with a little effort.