



Summer 2009

Voices

Language and Culture Center
University of Houston

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Director's Message

by Joy Tesh

We teach English here at the Language and Culture Center, but we know that a lot more is going on than the writing of essays and the practice of the past perfect tense. For one thing, we know that English is not the only language you learn here. I am certain of that when a student from Saudi Arabia enters our office in the afternoon and says in Spanish, "Hola, ¿qué pasa?" Later, someone from Venezuela will greet me in Chinese. LCC students are enjoying the company of friends from all over the world.

Each of you has a very particular story. We watch you as you enter this very new culture in the United States (in some cases, we meet you at the airport), and we are prepared to help you through the inevitable experience of culture shock. The Language and Culture Center is a bridge for you -- a bridge between the language and customs and traditions of your country and the language and customs and traditions of the United States. Our job is not only to teach you English, but also to help you understand and prepare for the "newness" and "strangeness" of this country, its educational system, and its people. This is not boring work.

Teaching English as a Second Language is interesting work because you are interesting students. You help us to look at the world in a different way and you help us to look at ourselves in a different way. Perhaps you give to us more knowledge than we give to you. We know that you are wonderful students to teach, and we believe that you are important students to teach.

Perhaps you did not come to be educated in this country with the idea of returning to your country to be a great world leader -- though some of you might well achieve important positions of leadership in your countries. In most cases, I expect you simply recognize the value of this experience in the United States as well as the value of speaking and writing in a world language. I suppose the opportunity came to you in the form of a government scholarship, a business contract, your family's resources, or your own personal sacrifice. Whatever your reason, you are here, and you will now decide what to do with the knowledge you have gained in this process of entering a new culture and living in a new country. I am sure that you have learned much more about the United States, and I am also sure that you have learned much more about yourself. I don't suppose that you can become a leader in the world simply by wishing to be, but I do know this. You can make a difference in the world. You can use your knowledge and understanding to work for peace and prosperity on this planet.

I congratulate you on your decision to study in the Language and Culture Center this summer. You can be sure that you have chosen a dynamic Intensive English Program with an excellent history and tradition of service to students. You can also be sure that you have chosen a dynamic university, which celebrates and welcomes international students. I wish you the best as you complete the summer term of 2009, and I look forward to seeing many of you again as you return in September for fall in the Language and Culture Center.



Saravuth Keo, Boubacar Samassekou, Hyo Jung Kim, and Toudamanagda Pierre Zoungrana Receive LCC Scholarships

by Sandy Hartmann, Associate Director

The Language and Culture Center awards four scholarships each term to returning students who best combine academic excellence and leadership with international awareness and cross-cultural understanding. Traditionally, one full scholarship honors Joyce Merrill Valdes, the founder and first director of the Language and Culture Center. A second full scholarship honors Joseph O. Davidson, who served as Director of the LCC for 22 years before retiring in 2006. These two full scholarships cover the cost of tuition, fees, and medical insurance for one term of study in the Intensive English Program. In addition, the LCC awards merit scholarships of \$1500 each for one term of study in the Intensive English Program. At the fall graduation ceremony on Thursday, April 23, 2009, the LCC awarded the Valdes scholarship to **Saravuth Keo**, the Davidson scholarship to **Boubacar Samassekou**, and the two merit scholarships to **Hyo Jung Kim** and **Toudamanagda Pierre Zoungrana**



Saravuth Keo was awarded the Valdes scholarship. **Mr. Keo**, who is from Cambodia and whose language is Khmer, is currently studying in level six. This is his second term at the LCC. After he completes his study of English, he plans to pursue a master's degree in business administration. **Mr. Keo** said of receiving the scholarship, "It is a valuable scholarship for my academic life as well as for my country. LCC students who can demonstrate their

leadership will be considered by the committee. The scholarship is meritorious, fair, and equitable."



Boubacar Samassekou was awarded the Davidson scholarship. **Mr. Samassekou** is from Mali and speaks French. After beginning in level two, his academic achievement allowed him to skip to level four where he is now studying. After he completes his English studies, he plans to pursue an undergraduate degree in petroleum and chemical engineering. **Mr. Samassekou** remarked, "Receiving the LCC scholarship has been a great honor for me. It made my family and friends proud of me. I'm grateful to LCC administrators and especially my teachers for their best teaching, which is helping me in all areas. I invite LCC students to keep up the great job because at the LCC a great job is rewarded."



Hyo Jung Kim was a recipient of a merit scholarship. **Ms. Kim** is from Korea and has been a student at the LCC

for two terms. This term, she is studying in level four and is planning to return to her country and finish her studies at the university. **Ms. Kim** said, "I was very happy when I received the scholarship and it was one of the proudest experiences that I have ever had. I really appreciate the LCC staff and my teachers, who encouraged me to improve my English and inspired me to achieve my goals. I am deeply grateful for their great teaching."



Toudamanagda Pierre Zoungrana was also a recipient of a merit scholarship. **Mr. Zoungrana**, who is from Burkina Faso and speaks French, has been at the LCC for two terms. He is currently studying in level four. After he completes his study of English, he plans to major in chemical engineering. Upon receiving the scholarship **Mr. Zoungrana** commented, "It was an honor and huge pleasure to be the winner of the LCC scholarship. It is also a sign of encouragement to work more."

We congratulate **Saravuth Keo**, **Boubacar Samassekou**, **Hyo Jung Kim**, and **Toudamanagda Pierre Zoungrana** on their outstanding records in the Intensive English Program at the Language and Culture Center, and we wish them great success as they continue to study in the United States. We all look forward to learning who will be the next LCC scholarship recipients at the spring graduation ceremony.

The Hidden Fate

Suha Salameh, 5B

When your life is about to change without your deciding that on your own, usually you'll be the last one to know. When you don't know when, how, and what it is that will change your life forever, this is fate. That's exactly what happened to me. I woke up one day to find a new destiny was chosen for me – whether I liked it or not. Everything has changed since my family and I were forced to leave our house, which we had lived in for thirteen years. However, painful experiences can give you a strange strength that you can't acquire in any other way. It shows you the hidden person that lived inside you and whom you had never met. It shows you the other face of yourself. I've learned a lot since I left my old life, even though it was against my will and beyond my control. In fact, suffering an unexpected loss and facing it with all my strength has made me the person I am today.

Four years ago, two weeks before my last semester in the university, which was my graduation semester, my sister decided to register in my school. That night, we slept, planning to go the next day to do so. Unusually, I woke up to the sound of my mother's voice. She was whispering to me, saying, "Suha dear, I think you should wake up now!" I was bothered because I needed to sleep more, so I asked her, complaining, "What for mom? It's too early." At the same time I was worried, because she looked very tired; it was obvious that she hadn't slept all night long. She answered me, "I've been calling your father for two days, with no answer. And he hasn't called me back." Here, there was a silent moment. I was completely awake, but I didn't say a word. She continued, "That's why I sent your cousin to check on him, and I'm waiting to hear from him any second."

My father was working in Saudi

Arabia, visiting us every three or four months. We didn't want our life to be like this, in particular for my mother, but that's the way it was. Anyway, when I saw my mother's face, and heard her words, I couldn't close my eyes anymore. My mind was blocked and I didn't move. I was avoiding even thinking about it. But I was afraid, with a hidden shiver in my heart while I was waiting for that phone to ring. It finally rang. My mother answered quickly, and then said after a while, "What do you mean he's not opening the door?" At this point, I sat alert on my bed. She continued, "Could you please break the door down? Maybe he's tired; maybe he needs help!" and she hung up. Silence again. No one was talking. No one was moving. I felt that no one was even breathing. I heard our hearts beating with nothing but silence and fear, waiting for the last call. The expected ring broke the silence. My mother answered, but she didn't say a word. After a while, she just started to cry. She was holding her voice inside, calling my father's name "My love Saeed.... My love Saeed" Yes, he was dead, alone for two days on his own couch, dressed up, ready for work, ready to struggle with life for another day. His coffee was cold on the table. His apartment was clean. He sat down that morning and never stood up again!

Two weeks later, my school began. I had to be strong enough to start my graduation project. At the same time, we were thinking about the serious situation we were about to face, the fact that we would be broke soon. Luckily, my fees were paid, but we had no other money. We were skirting around that issue – selling the house – but finally we didn't have any other choice, so, we decided to sell it. From that moment on, every day when I got back from the university I had to watch a lot of strangers in our house, looking around to see the house. I hated that scene. I wanted to explode sometimes, yelling at them to get out, because they would never know how much it was

worth; it was priceless to us; it was our whole life in good times and bad.

Two months later, the house was sold. We started to put our life, memories, feelings, and everything in big stupid boxes. We were sitting every night together, talking and laughing beside these boxes on the ground. We were hiding those tears to support each other, but we were dying slowly inside. Then finally, after a long, exhausting, and painful moving week, we threw our worn out bodies along with all our pains in a place that should be called "home" again. Trading thirteen years – with all that it holds: happiness, sadness, laughter, and all of the things in between – for an empty home was not what any one of us wanted or had even imagined.

My tears haven't stopped since then, for all the things we've lost, for all that we had to sacrifice. However, all these difficulties have made me stronger. I had to stop my grief, stepping in and carrying my head on my shoulders to take care of my family. This experience helped shape my personality and made me ready to face anything and cope with life's cruelties. Nevertheless, I still miss that house, which disappeared with my father, because leaving that house was like giving up everything that holds his presence.

Living Away from Family

Fahad Alotaibi, 2A

Everyone, once in a while, has to live his own adventure in life and to learn from it. Traveling abroad is good for touring, but it is really bad to stay longer for studying alone. It is hard to stay away from the people we love -- family and friends. Also, it is hard to learn the language of the country you are staying in. It is very hard for a beginner to practice the new language quickly enough to make talking easy. Being away from family is painful. Even if we meet new people, they are nothing like the people we have lived

with ever since we were born. We can meet new people and make relationships with them and spend time with them, but the space between us and family is still very far. However, we have to get over these problems and try to adapt quickly so we can return home as soon as possible to be with the people we love. We should always remember the reason we are away from family and realize that what we are doing now also affects those in contact with us. We want to make them proud of us. Never forget your dream and never forget your family. They are counting the days until you come back to them, proud and happy that you have had this experience that taught you who you really miss and love.

Responsibilities

Mamdouh Alotaibi, 2B

Every person in this world has a lot of responsibilities. At home, I have to look after my little sister and help another sister with her homework. I help my father with the shopping list and my mother with shopping and cooking. But I don't have to wash the dishes or clean the garden. In my opinion, it's good to have responsibilities because they will help me in the future when I have my own house and kids. I don't always fulfill my responsibilities because I sometimes have lots of homework to do. When this happens, my mother shouts at me.

How I Got My Driver's License

Milena Alvarado Molina, 2A

I went to the Department of Public Safety with my friend Nancy. First, I took the Written Test using the computer. My score was only 65%, so I didn't pass, but I tried again on the same day. I passed, not with a high score, but it was ok: 72%. My appointment for the Driving Test was two days later. I waited for almost two hours but was driving for only ten or

twelve minutes. The instructor marked my papers for obtaining my license. Then I waited for the license to come in the mail. My plan is to buy a car to drive all around this beautiful city.

Cooking at Home

Justine Lee, 4C

Everything has been so fresh since I came to America – for example, eating, shopping, driving, and housing. Eating in America is especially different from eating in my country. There, it's very convenient to eat out because restaurants and food stands are near our neighborhoods in my country, meaning I didn't have to learn how to cook at home. But now that I am in America, it is high time to learn to cook at home! Although I am not a cooking expert so far, I really enjoy cooking and recommend people cook at home instead of eating out. As far as I'm concerned, there are three advantages of cooking at home. It is more healthy, creative, and economical.

Nowadays, it is a fast-paced world. People choose shortcuts, eating food that can lead to nutritional deficiency and weight change. For example, fast food and instant noodles contain too much salt and oil, which can cause dystrophy and obesity. On the other hand, people who use many different ingredients cooking at home can acquire various nutrients such as vitamins, proteins, or even fibers.

Cooking is a creative art. If people have culinary equipment, a functional kitchen, and the most important thing – the spirit of trial and error – cooking at home will be imaginative. There are dozens of cooking methods such as frying, roasting, baking, steaming, and so on. How to create a gourmet meal is the creativity of science.

What's more, cooking at home is surprisingly economical. In a comparison of eating out and cooking at home, people save more money on living expenses by cooking at home.

Moreover, thousands of home cooking recipes are available on websites. It's convenient for people learning how to cook, and it's also a time saver!

Without a doubt, it is a good idea to cook at home. People will feel healthy and vigorous. I enjoy cooking, and I am satisfied with my talented gourmet cuisine at home.

Living by Myself

Dong Hyun Kim, 2A

Living away from my family has certain advantages. Here I can enjoy being out late at night, but when I was living at home, my father always said to come back home early. If I live alone, I can drink alcohol and enjoy late nights with my friends. Second, I can have free time. My parents always told me to study. I need free time. If I live alone, I can choose to study, watch TV, work on the computer, or sleep. Finally, I can eat what I want to eat. So, sometimes living away from family is good for me.



Glimpses into My Culture

Family Relationships in Afghanistan

Khalida Mirzaman Shah, 6A

In Afghanistan, we always treasure family relationships. This is because in Afghanistan, we always believe that good family relationships give rise to good happiness and prosperity of the whole family.

First, there is always mutual respect between the elders and the youth in the family. Second, as the father is the head of the family, he is always respected and his orders are always followed by all the other members in the family. Even the relationship between brothers and sisters has a special meaning, too, to such an extent that they are willing to die for each other. In Afghan families, members always try their best not to get separated. They love staying together and living together forever.

The relationship between husbands and wives is also special in my country. Between the husband and the wife, there is always understanding, patience, and compromise. For this reason, divorce is rare and marriages tend to be very stable and long-lasting. Another interesting point about Afghan family relationships is that children in the family have to stay within a certain limit in their behaviors towards their elders. There are things they are expected to do and things they are not allowed to do in their relationship with their elders.

Respect in My Culture

Sinan B. Razzaq, 5C

Respect is one of the most distinctive aspects in Iraqi culture. Generally speaking, we respect everybody around us. However, our greatest respect is always for our parents, teachers, and old people.

In Iraq, children are taught to respect their parents. There are many ways in which they can show this respect for their parents. One way is they always

have to obey their instructions without ever questioning the validity or the logic of the instructions. This is particularly true if the children are under twenty years old. Another way to show respect to our parents is that we must not smoke in their presence. In fact, smoking in front of the parents is considered the worst case of disrespect. Iraqi culture also teaches children to love their parents and to try in every possible way to make them happy. In America, old people sometimes have to go to live in nursing homes. In Iraq, this is never the case and children always insist that their parents come to live with them.

In Iraq, teachers receive the same respect that parents do. Thus, in Iraq, when a teacher gets on the bus, all the passengers who are his former students must stand up to welcome the teacher and to show their respect to him. In the classroom, students can never say their opinion without first asking the teacher to permit them to say it. Nor can students ever eat in the class when the teacher is lecturing. In the street, if students see their teacher, they must go straight to him to say “hello” and to offer him help in whatever he is doing. If the teacher reports to the parents that the children do not show him enough respect on any occasion, the children will be severely punished by the parents.

Old people are the third group that receives the most respect in Iraq. Ever since the beginning of time, we have respected old people. Thus, when we see an old man or woman carrying a bag or groceries, we must directly go to them and ask them if they need help. They can say “yes” or they can say “no,” but in the end we must help them carry the bag and never leave them without having helped them. Another way to show respect to old people is to always listen to their advice and try to accept their advice even when we believe that their advice is not good. Likewise, even when we believe that the old people have treated us unfairly,

or that they have done something wrong, we are not expected to argue with them or blame them. All that we can do is to tolerate them.

To sum up, the Iraqis’ great respect for parents, teachers, and old people may seem strange to people from other cultures. However, that is our way. It was good for our fathers, so it is also good for us.

A Wedding Feast in Mali

Mama (Papis) Koita, 2D

The most important meal which I shared in my country was when my sister got married. It was a very big wedding. All of my relatives and some of my friends were there. It was the first time when all of my relatives were together. We had a lot of different kinds of food and drinks. There were some traditional foods and drinks, such as *djindjimbre*, and some other kinds of food as well. The feast was held in my house, and it was a lot of fun. This meal showed me that in my culture only a wedding can bring all the relatives together for the same occasion. It was a very happy day, an unforgettable day, to see them together. I’ll never forget my sister’s wedding feast because before that day, we hadn’t ever had such a meal in our family. I hope the next occasion for such a feast will be mine.

Greetings in Burkina Faso

Soumaila Kabre, 3A

One thing that Americans should know about my country is how we greet each other. First, if you want to show that you respect someone, you must first shake his or her hands. Next, you must ask about his or her health and job. You should then ask about any news from his or her family (including more distant relatives). Finally, you should shake hands before continuing the conversation. Even though greetings like this can take up to five minutes, you must do it; otherwise, you will be considered disrespectful.

Do Not Wear Shoes Inside the House!

Yuko Nagata, 5C

In Japan, most people take off their shoes before they enter the house. Because I'm from Japan, I have learned this habit, too, and so though I'm now living in the U.S., I always take off my shoes and leave them in front of the door before I go into my house. I absolutely believe that taking off our shoes before entering the house is a reasonable habit.

First, leaving shoes outside helps keep our house clean. In Japan, we need to keep the floor clean because we have the habit of sleeping on the floor. Although in the U.S. floors are often covered with carpets and we therefore don't sleep on the floor, it is also a good idea not to wear shoes in the house because this way we can keep our expensive carpet clean for a longer time, and we can save more money.

Second, leaving shoes outside the house helps protect us and our babies from diseases. Dirty shoes bring a lot of germs into the house, where babies and children play, crawl, and sometimes eat something dropped on the floor. I have a daughter who is only one year old. I don't want my daughter to get sick, so I always require that my guests take off their shoes before entering my house.

Third, not wearing shoes in the house makes us feel more comfortable. The reason for this is that shoes are sometimes tight and so when we take off our shoes after a long day of hard work, we always feel really relaxed. My daughter goes to a day care center during the day. One day, I came to pick her up and saw that all the babies were taking a nap with their shoes on. I was very surprised when I saw this.



Khmer New Year's Celebration in Cambodia

Sochenda Tonn, 5A

Generally, most of the countries in the world have only one day to celebrate their New Year; however, Cambodian people celebrate three days for their new year. The celebration is held on the 13th, 14th, and 15th of April, but sometimes it starts on the 14th because it depends on the solar calendar. The reason why Cambodian people have decided to celebrate their New Year on these three days is because the majority of the Cambodian population are farmers. They reap and harvest their crops from the rice fields all year long, except during April, and especially during that month it is hot and there are many kinds of fresh fruits like mangos, watermelons, and bananas. Therefore, they can celebrate this wonderful festival easily. Because of this, we always follow this habit from one generation to another generation.

A few days before New Year, most Cambodian people are very busy with their preparation. Some people clean their house very carefully, some decorate their homes with beautiful flowers and colorful lamps of different sizes, and some people cut the grass in their gardens. It is common for people to buy some new clothes, furniture, shoes, and so on in anticipation of the new year. In addition, most women like to cook some traditional foods before the holiday because it takes much time to prepare well those special foods for the festival. As a result, when the New Year comes, they do not need to do anything besides participating and enjoying New Year's days.

On the first day, Khmer people prepare something such as five candles, five incenses, a tray of cigarettes, some flowers, some fruits, and some foods to offer to the monks in order to pray for their families or their ancestors who passed away, and especially we pray for happiness and best wishes from Heaven. It is a tradition in my country that everyone should go to the temple at least one time during the festival.

After this, they come back home and eat the special foods together in their families. In the early morning, they gather the sand to build up a sand mountain around the temple.

On the second day, some families go to visit their relatives because it is a good opportunity to be together and talk with each other. In addition, the older children give some new clothes and money to their parents and grandparents. They also give some gifts to their maids and poor people. However, some families consider New Year's days as a good time to travel together with their children. Consequently, some of them travel to the other provinces, the resorts, or the mountains or sea.

In the morning of the third day, they also invite the monks to chant at home in order to bring happiness for their families, and in the evening the children bathe their parents to apologize for any mistakes that they have made and to gratify them. Additionally, some people clean the statue of Buddha to get a blessing of happiness and peace in their families. During the third day, the people also play some traditional games such as the hand-scarf-throwing game, the tug-of-war game, and trot dancing. Furthermore, they also dance some traditional dances like Rorm Vong, Rorm Khbach, Savarann, etc.

When the three days finish, Cambodian people clean their house properly because during the New Year's days they are busy with the celebration, so they just eat, enjoy, play games, and dance. Some people go back to work and some continue to relax with their families. However, most people spend at least one week enjoying this big traditional festival. Khmer New Year is not just a great traditional festival, but also a generation passing on traditions that everyone enjoys.

Cultural Difference: Japan and the United States

Teruhiko Toda, 5B

Traveling to other countries is always fun. We can see different cultures and meet many people. In addition, travelling brings us new knowledge and pleasure. Sometimes, we may be confused by a gap of cultural differences, especially when we stay in another country for a while. When I visited the United States for the first time as a tourist, I had a wonderful time seeing different sights, people, and lifestyles. People were very kind and friendly to me. Seeing a big sky and grand nature gave me pleasure and relief, since I could not see such things in Tokyo. After staying in the U.S. as an overseas student, I have had more chances to learn about cultural differences through exchanging ideas with the people I meet. I have found three main cultural differences between Japan and the U.S. in terms of lifestyle, religion, and art.

First, one of the main differences between Japan and the U.S. is the space in which one lives. For the Japanese, it is important to use space functionally in their homes, and the rooms are very organized since they do not have much space and people live close to each other. As a result, Japanese room space is very simple to use. Moreover, the Japanese are very connected with their homes, sitting on the floor. Sometimes the Japanese feel a soul or God in their possessions. This makes most Japanese prefer new possessions rather than antiques, not knowing the history of used items. In contrast, since America has a lot of space, Americans seem to collect many kinds of furniture and objects for use and display in their homes.

The transportation system, which influences lifestyle in some ways, is different in Japan than in the U.S. Using the train system for transportation is very common in Japan, whereas people use their cars in the U.S. Japanese make their city convenient for walking, but Americans design their cities for their convenience

using their cars, based on their independence.

Second, religious differences are significant between Japan and the U.S. There are mainly three religions in Japan: Buddhism, Shinto, and Jukyo. Buddhism is one of the three largest religions in the world. Shinto is a Japanese ethnic and pantheistic religion. Jukyo is a religion originating in China that prescribes a strict hierarchy of respect relating to age, gender, and social position. Despite the fact that all three of these influence the Japanese, they often do not feel that they belong to any particular religion. Although daily prayer for their ancestors is a common practice, they go to Buddhist temples or Shinto shrines whenever they want without feeling a need to join a specific religion. In contrast, Christianity is the main religion in the U.S., though there are many other religions since America has a diversity of races and religions. Also, it is not important for Japanese to choose a religion, whereas it seems important for Americans to either choose their religion or no religion.

Third, there is a difference in art between Japan and the U.S. Japanese expressions of art are usually connected with nature, including *Ikebana* and *Bonsai*, flower arranging and plant arranging. Even musical instruments, for example, *Shakuhachi*, express natural sounds such as wind. On the other hand, movies and musicals are popular expressions of art in America. These express many kinds of stories, emotions, and nature themes.

Also, different ideas among people affect the style of art between these two cultures. Since Japanese already have a shared common sense with which to understand each other because of a single race, they do not need to have so many big written rules in society. Therefore, Japanese start to think about details first, and they believe that details express a holistic concept. On the other hand, many rules are needed in the U.S. to organize society and maintain order, due to the racial and cultural diversity. As a result,

Americans tend to think of the big picture first and then work toward the details.

These three areas show some of the significant cultural differences between Japan and the U.S. It is interesting and exciting to learn about the cultural differences between countries, even though we sometimes receive a shock from it. I think it is very important to understand each other deeply. We need to accept the differences we discover and allow the diversity to enrich our lives.

Chinese Traditions

Hong Li, 3B

Every country has its own culture, and it's a good idea for us to know about these cultures. In China, it is important to know how to eat, invite people to go out, and celebrate holidays. First, people use chopsticks instead of a fork and spoon. The Chinese like noodles, rice, and soup. Therefore, when they have dinner, they prepare many dishes and put them all on the table, even though they know they can't eat everything. Next, the Chinese are very shy, so they often say "no" if someone invites them to do anything, even if it's something small like eating dinner together or going to a party. They will go only if someone asks them at least twice. The Chinese celebrate New Year's in a way that is different from people in other countries because the whole family gets together to enjoy the day. They also give their best wishes to each other. In sum, the Chinese have some traditions that are unlike those in other countries.



Differences Between My School and the LCC

Jinho Kim, 3A

Schools in Korea are different from the LCC. First, classes in Korea last 50 minutes and then there is a ten-minute break. In contrast, classes at the LCC last two hours, and the teacher decides when to take a break. Second, I go to school from Monday to Saturday in my country whereas we only go to class from Monday to Friday at the LCC. Finally, I don't buy textbooks in my country because the school gives books to us. However, if I attend a class at the LCC, I have to buy expensive books. There are many differences between my high school in Korea and the LCC. I think that the LCC might be more similar to our colleges and universities.

Traveling to Thailand

Suparat Phokapan, 3B

You should know a few things about the Thai culture before you go to Thailand. First, Thai people never kiss or hug in public, and rarely do husbands and wives do those things in their bedroom. Second, if they see someone they don't know, they don't say, "Hello! How are you?" because it confuses the other person and they will think you are crazy. Third, when you invite a Thai person to your home, he or she will not bring a beverage or a dish because you are supposed to provide everything. Fourth, some restaurants don't have toilet paper, but they do have water that you can use to clean yourself. Fifth, when a Thai person gets on the bus, he or she sits down and doesn't pay anything until the conductor comes by. Finally, when crossing a street, Thai people are very careful because there aren't pedestrian signals that allow people to cross, so cars don't stop for them. If you understand these things, it will be easier for you to travel in Thailand.

Kings in Burkina Faso

Juste Ki, 3B

The government in Burkina Faso is different from the government in the United States. American people need to know that in addition to the president, there are also numerous kings in my country. There are many tribes, and each tribe has a king with mysterious power. For example, the king can see what will happen to you in the future, and he can often prevent bad things from happening. The most powerful king of all is called *Moogho Naaba*, and he is the king of *Mosse Tribu*. He is respected by all throughout the country and can have more than 200 wives. My tribe is called *Samo*, and my grandfather is the king. He is also respected and well known throughout the country. When a king dies, his son takes his place. Therefore, someday my father will be a king, and then later my brother will be king.

Customs and Traditions in Saudi Arabia

Dhiyaa Alwayel, 3B

In my country there are customs that are a little different from those in other countries and which a tourist should understand. The first is that women are separated from men both in school and at work. We also wear different styles of clothing. Men wear long, white dresses, and women wear black dresses outside the home. My country is also famous for its hospitality. Saudi

Arabians like guests who come from other places, and they often invite them to stay in their home for three days. I was shocked when I visited an American friend because she asked me to come to her house at 4 p.m. and leave at 10 p.m. In my country we never tell a guest when to leave. These are three important things that you should know about if you ever decide to visit my country.

Wearing Scarves in My Country

Fatimah Alhaddad, 3A

It is difficult to understand why Americans don't know about the Saudi Arabian culture and about why women wear scarves. They think that we aren't pretty or that we don't have any hair. Some Americans think that we wear scarves even when we are with only women. When we are with other women, we take off our scarves. One time an American asked me, "Do you wear a scarf when you take a shower?!" I said, "Are you serious?!" It's hard to believe that some Americans think like this, so I try to tell them about my religion and the scarf. I tell them that we wear the scarf because the Koran tells us to show our beauty only to family members and other women, so when we are with men who are not close relatives, we wear the veil. We don't wear scarves in our home when we are with family. I think that Americans should find out more about another culture before they say anything.



The Festival of the Masks (Waong kibsa)

Walbeogo Rib-Goama Severin, 6A

Image from www.markspark.com



Any country or city has something very special that is different from the others in terms of language, culture, religion, or lifestyle. The most special thing about the culture of my country, Burkina Faso, is perhaps the Festival of the Masks.

Among the sixty-two ethnic clans in Burkina Faso, statistics show that mine is the most powerful because it has the greatest population. We are called *Mossi*; our language is *Morre*; and our main city is the capital, Ouagadougou. For many years, masks have been a symbolic heritage from our ancestors and they depict the various aspects of the spiritual experience of humans. Thus, some masks represent messengers of good and bad news; others, peacemakers and troublemakers; still others healers and cursers. There are also masks made to look like lions embodying kings and masks made to look like a woman holding a baby to represent the renaissance of life. Different as they are in their spiritual representations, they are alike in that they usually perform actions on behalf of humans, and for this reason, they are feared and respected and are believed to be the bridge between God and humans.

Masks, called *waongo* and made of *argil*, wood, or iron, are worn by skillful dancers who also wear uniforms made from long strings of different colors that come from nobody-knows-where, and that are woven together by the elders and the wise men of the clan. There are different masks and uniforms for different occasions. The most important occasion is perhaps the demise of the old king and

the enthronement of the new king. Thus, when a king dies, masked dancers (often referred to simply as “the masks”), accompanied by musicians, go around to announce the news. The next day is the funeral day. On this day, the masks are seen dancing barefooted, jumping high, jumping low, doing acrobatics, and kicking up and spreading the dust so that they can camouflage themselves and make you think one moment they are there and the next moment they are gone! Or they can be seen moving their heads in ways that make you think their necks are going to break and they themselves are becoming crazy! For those of you who like to stand close to have a good look, you’d better be careful because they are also equipped with sticks, and because they represent the demised king and are therefore vested with his power, they are entitled to beat those around them with their sticks!

Despite the beating – which never hurts – occasions like the one described above are always filled with fun. People from other countries often ask why there is dancing and merry-making when someone dies. Well, our culture believes that when people die, their souls still linger in the family for three days and so during these days, they should be made to feel happy with the festival of the masks so that when it’s time for them to depart this world, they will do so in peace and high spirits.



A Traditional Korean Holiday Bonchun Koo, 5B

Seollal (Lunar New Year's Day) is one of the favorite traditional Korean holidays. The days before and after *Seollal* are designated holidays. In celebration of *Seollal*, most Korean people go back to their hometowns to perform ancestral rites in order to give their respect to their ancestors. *Seollal* is the day when all family members get together in one place at the same time.

Most families are very busy preparing for the rites during the week before *Seollal*. Most people go shopping to buy a variety of ritual food and some gifts for their parents and friends. There are some popular required items as part of the rites such as meat, fish, fruits, the Korean traditional snack *Hangwa*, *tteokguk* (rice cake soup), and various kinds of wild vegetables, which must have nice shapes and colors and must be fresh. Money is a favorite item that Korean people would like to receive as a gift. Other gift items include beef, fish, fruits, liquor, healthful food, and gift coupons.

Another necessary preparation for *Seollal* is to reserve tickets for trains and buses. At this time of the year before and after *Seollal*, the highways are very congested because millions of people travel mostly at the same time to their hometowns. To secure a seat, most people reserve their train tickets at least a month in advance. Of course, those who decide to drive their cars know that it takes more than two or three times longer than usual to get to their hometowns. During *Seollal*

holidays, all radio stations broadcast special live traffic updates because of this massive exodus of cars.

The last preparation for *Seollal* is to make the holiday food the day before *Seollal*. Family members gather together to prepare food for the ancestral rites with care so that they taste good and look nice. The most important food of *Seollal* is *tteokguk*; however, 20 other dishes such as wild vegetables, Korean style pancakes, various types of fish, *galbijjim* (rib stew), *japchae* (noodles with meat and vegetables), and more are also specially prepared for the ancestral rites. Unlike the male members of the family, the women work all day long preparing holiday food, so they suffer from headaches, backaches, and other physical pains. This phenomenon is called "holiday syndrome" in Korea.

On the morning of *Seollal*, people rise early and put on their *Seolbim* (new clothes prepared for *Seollal*). Many people wear *Hanboks*, which are traditional Korean costumes. Then the families gather to perform ancestral rites, showing their respects and appreciation to late ancestors, at the same time praying for a happy new year by offering food which their ancestors return to enjoy during the rites. The ritual food is placed on the ritual table. After the rites, everyone shares the holiday food together. They eat *tteokguk*, which, according to tradition, means one year is added to their age.

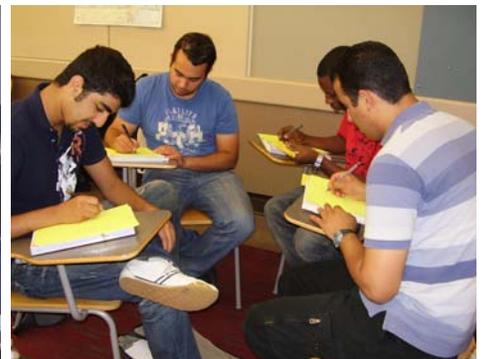
After their meal, the young people bow to the elders of the family to express their respects. The elders offer well-

wishing remarks such as "Have a healthy year" or "Meet someone nice" as they give the younger people New Year's money. Children especially like *Seollal* because they receive money.

After that, Korean families play a traditional game, *yutnori*, which is the most common and a fun, easy-to-learn game that requires a certain degree of teamwork. Another game is "flower cards" (*hwat'u*). Players sometimes make bets with the New Year's money they received while playing *yutnori* and *hwat'u*. They often order pizza or fried chicken to eat after the games. Some Korean people enjoy playing other traditional folk games or kite flying at a nearby palace or park. Also, some Korean families go to movie theaters.

On the day after *Seollal*, when finishing the traditional *Seollal* activities, Korean men usually go to see their parents-in-law. It has become a general practice to visit the wife's parents and to pay respects to them on the day after *Seollal*. This is a kind of compensation for the wife's hard labor in preparing the holiday food. After that, people come back to their homes, mostly at the same time in order to go to work on the day after the end of *Seollal* holidays. The traffic is still almost the same as the day before *Seollal*. To avoid these traffic jams and relax, some people take more vacation in some quiet place.

The practice of *Seollal* in Korea has changed somewhat through the years; however, the love of family and respect of ancestors still play an important role in the lives of the people of Korea.



New Year's Holiday in Vietnam

Kim Nguyen, 5A

Tet is the name of the New Year's holiday in my country, Vietnam. *Tet* is an occasion for family reunions, which usually take place during the first three days of the first month, according to the lunar calendar. It marks the beginning of the new year and welcomes the arrival of spring. *Tet* can be divided into three periods: the preparation before *Tet*, the days during *Tet*, and the days after *Tet*.

The preparation before *Tet* is the most important part to welcome the new year. It begins one or two weeks before the actual celebration. During this time, people enjoy the jubilant atmosphere leading up to *Tet*. It is the bustle of going shopping, decorating the houses, and waiting for relatives to return home. The streets and markets are full of people. They make the best of their time to go shopping for clothes and go to the market to get food. They buy a lot of food before *Tet* because all of the markets and the restaurants will close. Children are eager for their parents to buy new clothes for them, which they will wear early in the new year. In addition, people try to pay off debt before *Tet* because they want to wash away all the bad luck of the old year.

To welcome the new year, people clean up their house, decorate their house with flowers, and display a special kind of tree in the middle of their house, where everyone who comes to visit can easily see it. The most important thing that people must decorate in their house is the ancestral altar. People clean up the altar nice and neat and prepare a tray of five kinds of fruit such as sour sop, coconut, papaya, mango, and fig for decoration. It means a wish for a new year that will be full of happiness and food. Moreover, people cook a lot of traditional food that is only reserved for the *Tet* holiday, especially; every family has to

have rice cake – a special and important kind of cake for *Tet*.

The days during *Tet* are anticipated the most. The first day of the year is reserved for family. Children wear the new clothes and give the elders greetings such as “Live up to 100 years,” “Plenty of health,” and so on, before receiving a red envelope that contains lucky money. Every family holds parties to celebrate New Year's. They create lots of fun by playing gambling games and taking a bunch of pictures for memories.

During the following days, people visit their relatives and their friends. People in my country believe that the first visitor who comes to their house on the first day will determine their fortune for the entire year. As a result, people rarely come to their friends' houses and their relatives' houses on the first day. In order to get more luck, people can also go to the Buddhist temples to pray or donate in order to get fortune in the new year.

The *Tet* celebration lasts until the fifth day. After the fifth day, people start returning to life as usual: students go back to school; employees go back to work; stores, markets, as well as restaurants are reopened. People seem to be filled with enthusiasm to get ready for a new year. They are so happy and brimful of hope that luck and fortune will come to them; as a result, they will have a peaceful and happy life in the coming year.

I have lived away from my family and my country for a year and a half. Nevertheless, the memories of the *Tet* holiday have stayed in my mind and they are the memories of the greatest days in my life.



Turkish Weddings

Emel Akbaba, 4B

Weddings, which are an important event in Turkish society, have several traditions associated with them. One of the traditions is on the day when the groom's father asks for the girl's hand on his son's behalf. First, the bride makes Turkish coffee and serves it to her parents and the groom's parents. Next, the groom's father states, “By the order of Allah and utterance of prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), I ask for your daughter's hand for my son.” After that, the bride's father asks his daughter whether she wants to marry. If she says “yes,” her father says, “If *kismet* (fate) so decrees, it will be.” This means that the father will allow them to marry, and the bride and groom kiss their parents' hands.

On the day before the wedding ceremony, the bride's female friends write their names on the soles of the bride's shoes. The name of the friend whose name is erased first will supposedly become the next bride.

On the night before the wedding ceremony, *kina gecesi* (henna night) occurs. The bride's fingers are dyed with henna, special songs are sung, and the bride wears unusual clothes: purple velvet embroidered with silver thread.

After the bride and groom get in their car to drive away after the wedding, somebody gives the bride a baby, and she holds it for a while. Then, when the newlyweds drive away, anyone who sees their car must give them some money. If people in another car try to pass without giving them money, the couple may try to block their path until they do. This is often a funny event.



Guayaquil Independence Day

Carlos Jacome Sánchez, 2C

My favorite holiday in Ecuador is the celebration of the Independence of Guayaquil. We celebrate it on October 9. In fact, we often call this holiday “Guayaquil Independence Day.”

Guayaquil is the most important city in my country. Guayaquil is also called "The Pearl of the Pacific." In Guayaquil live people from the different regions of the country and immigrants from Asia, Europe, Africa, and other parts of South America.

In the morning, the Army, Marines, and Air Force have a parade on Avenida 9 de Octubre. The people go to see the parade from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. In the afternoon, people visit wonderful places like *Malecón 2000*, *Las Peñas*, *Malecón del Salado*, and *Centro Cívico*, where people can see concerts, sport events, regattas, and many artistic shows. Finally, at night, people usually go to the Guayas River to see the fireworks.

Schools, banks, businesses, and governmental offices are always closed on October 9. In all the restaurants of the city, there are many dishes of Ecuadorian food: *ceviches* (seafood), *encebollados* (fish), *fritada* (pork meat), *hornado* (pork meat), *seco de gallina* (chicken), *patacón* (green banana), and several kinds of soups. Ecuadorian food is quite varied and delicious. I love this holiday.

Peking Opera

Yufang Xie, 5C

Different countries have different cultures. Some cultures are unique. Peking Opera, which is the most popularized among the many different forms of Chinese opera, is one such unique culture.

First, Peking Opera is unique because it allows you to understand the history of China. Peking Opera started a long time ago during the time of the ancient dynasties of China. The theme of Peking Opera is often about loyalty, dedication, and patriotism and is based on historical events that happened hundreds of years ago.



Second, Peking Opera is unique because it offers you an opportunity to understand more about Chinese culture, which reveals itself not only through the story being told, but also through the way the characters perform on the stage, through their unique theatrical costumes and through the use of make-up of different colors to represent different kinds of people and virtues. Even the songs and the peculiar way in which the songs are sung in the opera tell the audience a lot about ancient Chinese culture.

Finally, Peking Opera is unique because it helps encourage communication and friendship among strangers. Thus, while watching a Peking Opera, you, together with those sitting around you, will applaud for the performance of the actors and actresses, and you, together with those sitting around you, will exchange comments on what you see on the stage. When friends meet, Peking Opera is what they like to talk about as a conversation starter. This is true even with strangers who meet each other for the first time.

Peking Opera is so typically Chinese that it has won the attention of an increasing number of people around the world. If you go to Beijing in China someday, there are two things that you should never miss: The Great Wall of China and Peking Opera.

A Key Person

My Wonderful Friendship

Kaier Liang, 4B

I have gradually come to understand the true meaning of friendship, especially since I said “goodbye” to my truest friend.

When I was in high school, the classmate I appreciated most was a girl named May. She not only got high scores on most exams, but she also took an active part in school activities. However, she was a little weak in English because she spent most of her time studying math, which was her favorite subject. She often turned to me for help with her English. As a result, we became close friends.

I consider her one of the greatest treasures in my life. We could express our feelings, share happiness as well as sorrow, and solve problems together. I was not afraid of difficulties because she encouraged me to be brave and realize my dreams.

When I felt lonely and confused, she cared about me and comforted me. I expressed my gratitude to her, but she said, “A true friend is someone you can lean on.” I was deeply touched by her words. Tears rolled down my cheek.

Now that I am in the United States and we can’t communicate with each other face to face, I am even more convinced that our friendship is based on sincerity and mutual understanding. I hope that the friendship between us will last my entire life.

Neslihan and I

Dan Lee, 4A

Neslihan is a girl who comes from Turkey, and I am a girl who comes from China. I always call her Nesli for short. We are classmates. I met her earlier than my other classmates. Not for one year, not for one month, only for one day, but now we are close friends.

The first day we met was on the

museum field trip; both of us like art. I looked over the art and then stopped in front of a painting. It was a famous picture by Picasso; but in fact, I didn’t understand what he had drawn. I was standing there for a short while, and then I found a beautiful girl in a kerchief beside me, staring at this painting. When she saw what I was looking at, she smiled and said, “What’s this? I don’t know.” We each made a face, then walked away. Five minutes later, we saw each other again in front of another painting. That work of art seemed very simple. We could see only two colors on the picture. I named it “Dark Blue and Light Blue.” She nodded her head and said, “I do agree with you!” From then on, we spent the afternoon together, and talked about the puzzle of art. It was a nice day!

The day after that was interview day between the teachers and the students. Very fortunately, both of us are in level 4. The difference between us is she is one of the best students in our class, but I am not good at studying. If there are some problems I don’t understand, she’ll explain them to me and is very patient.

Her major is special education. Mine is photography. Maybe one day she will be a famous professor in her domain, and I will travel the world to take a lot of pictures. However, we also can be close friends.

Number One

Amadou Sidibe, 2A

There are many women in my heart, but she is Number One. She has taken care of me since I was a baby. My mother does everything she can for my brothers and me and also for other people. She doesn’t want anything in return. Here in Houston, I close my eyes and remember the delicious salads my mother makes with tomatoes, onions, oil, and vinegar. I try to make

such a salad but it’s never like my mother’s. It’s not a problem with the ingredients; my mother’s hands are the best, I think. There’s also the fact of our family environment. Our meals together take about two hours. Each person talks about his day or the news on TV. We eat together, my father, my brothers, and I, and sometimes with male visitors. Mother eats next to us with the girls who help her cook every day. Rarely in our culture do the men and women eat together. My homesickness now is to be home with my family, eating my mother’s salad, but this time with everybody together, including my mother. We call her “Tanty,” and my brothers and I love her so much.

Mother’s Kitchen

Tahirou Tamboura, 2A

When I rise, I find my mother near the small house beside the principal door of our house. This small house with a door and one window is my mother’s kitchen. Inside, she has a cookie cutter, a cookie sheet, and a refrigerator where she puts her vegetables. This kitchen is very important for my mother. Every morning, she cleans the inside of the kitchen before she prepares our breakfast. After dinner, she washes the instruments of cooking before she goes to sleep. My mother cooks delicious food, but I think that she is wrong to cook with wood. It is difficult to light a fire with wood. When I have the money, I want to help my mother to cook without using wood because she has sacrificed much for her family. I want to build another kitchen for my mother.

My Grandmother

Diakaridia Sidibe, 2B

My grandmother is one of the oldest women in our village. She is about 96 years old. Her hair is white. Her skin is wrinkled. She is tall and slim, but she can’t walk a lot. She plays an important

role in our society. She is listened to by everyone in the village because of her kindness and good behavior. Many grand personalities in the village come to her for advice. She enjoys children and young people. She loves everybody. She tells good stories which help us to learn respect and good behavior. She intervenes between villagers who are having problems with each other. She is admired by all the villagers and welcomes every visitor to her home. I love her.

Grandparents

Omar Ahmad, 2B

Grandparents are the most important members of our family. They have a lot of experience in life. They lived through difficult times and worked hard. They walked or rode animals instead of using cars or buses. It was

hard for them to go to school. When they were kids, my grandparents got jobs to help support their families. One of my grandparents worked in the desert for an oil company; sometimes, he was away from home for a month. Another grandfather had a private business, but he worked in a factory as well. We must take care of our grandparents and help them when they need help. I hope God will bless them with good health.

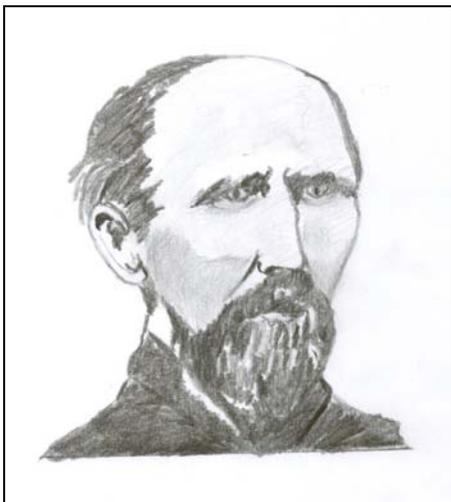
The Star Has Vanished

Joo Yeon (Joanne) Kim, 4B

This summer we lost a brilliant singer: Michael Jackson. He was a world-famous musician who had been singing since he was a child. Because he didn't have a normal childhood, he had

emotional problems, and his life was extremely different from most people's. For example, he had plastic surgery several times. The first time was after his hair had caught on fire while he was filming a Pepsi commercial in Japan. After that, he got a skin disease. He had several more surgeries after that, and rumors followed him throughout his life. On the other hand, he helped so many children and poor people that he is in the Guinness Book of World Records for being the most generous benefactor.

We are not sure why he died, and speculation about his death continues. We are not sure how he lived as a father and human either. However, one thing is certain. He was a genius and great artist. We should be sad because we lost a star.



Artwork by LCC student
José Francisco, 2B



The Library

Chia-Hsin Liao, 2B

I like the quiet atmosphere of a library, which makes me deeply absorbed in my study. The diligence of other people studying in the library helps me to work harder. Besides, there are reference books in the library which provide guidance to help me solve my problems. At home, people come and go, sometimes talking while others are working. Noises around the house make me too nervous to concentrate on my study. For these reasons, I like to study in the library. Most students like to study in the library especially before examinations. It is difficult to imagine what student life would be like without the library: a source of knowledge and a source of inspiration.

The level one teachers asked their students to share their reflections on the Culture Festival. The following are their responses.

Tawfiq Alseebaa, 1B

I brought my sons and my wife with me. We brought *kabsa*, a Saudi Arabian food. We took pictures with the teachers and students. I tasted some food from the different cultures. The smell of food on the table was very good. It was a beautiful celebration of the gathering of people from different countries.

Tatiana Litvin, 1B

The LCC students went in their national clothes and brought their foods. My classmate, Mahamadou Tano from Mali, and his friends cooked their national food, beans. They prepared drinks called *djinibere* and *dableni*. Some of the students and I cooked Russian pancakes with caviar, *bublik*s, cakes, and *kvas*. I was very happy to celebrate that day.

Alou Maiga, 1B

Before we went to the Culture Festival, I made a traditional drink called *djinibere*. At 11:45 a.m. we went to the school and helped organize tables. At 12:00 p.m. the Culture Festival began. I saw a lot of people wearing traditional costumes. I ate different foods from different countries. I took a lot of pictures. When they played my country's music, I danced a lot. It was very amazing. One thing that I liked was that people loved my drink. I brought two bottles of my drink and both of them were finished. The Culture Festival was a very good experience for me.

Koumba Toure, 1B

Most students wore traditional clothes. I wore the traditional dress of Bamako because I came from Bamako. My dress was white and gold. My teacher said, "Koumba, your dress is beautiful, so cute." I was very happy because I saw people were interested in other cultures. At 1:00 p.m., the Malian students danced the *Balani*. This is a traditional dance in my country.

Pinar Sahin, 1B

I brought Turkish food. Its name is *lahmacun*. I think it was very delicious. I also made *ayran*. Ayran is made of yogurt and water. Ayran is the most important beverage for Turkish people.

Haeje Song, 1B

On Friday morning, I cooked *bulgogi* with my mother, and I went to school. The LCC Culture Festival was very interesting. I saw the traditions of each country and the dances. I ate good food and took pictures with my friends. It was fun, but the weather was very, very hot, so I came home because I couldn't handle the heat. Anyway, it was a very exciting day.

Abdoul Sawadogo, 1A

The LCC Culture Festival was very exciting. Most people wore traditional clothing. I ate delicious foods. I also danced, sang, and told stories with my friends. I also saw white, black, and yellow people who danced to African music. I tasted the corn beef, Coca-Cola, sandwiches, and Chinese food. The Culture Festival of the LCC was very interesting and exciting because there were many things to see.

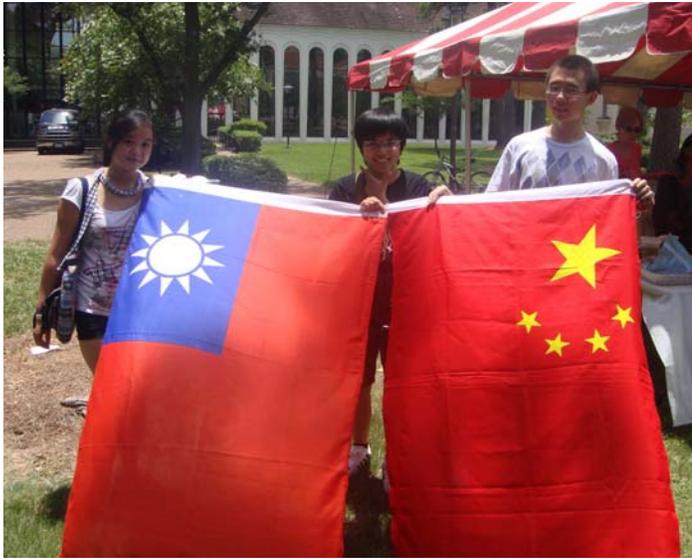
Jun Shi, 1A

There were many delicious foods from different countries on the table. These delicious foods were cooked by the students themselves. I cooked chicken fried rice, but I didn't eat it myself. I tasted delicious food from Korea, Mali, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, and Angola. One of my favorites was some Korean food. In addition to eating delicious food, many students danced. The students were very happy. I liked the LCC Culture Festival.









Culture Festival

Harry Hernández, 4A

Few places in the world join and interact with as many cultures, traditions, and histories at one site like the Culture Festival, which is celebrated by the Language and Culture Center at the University of Houston.

Every academic period is organized by the Language and Culture Center (LCC), and one of the most amazing and interesting events is the Culture Festival. The institution makes accurate plans for this party. Enthusiastic LCC teachers and students participate by organizing and giving information to other LCC students before the party. Many people consider this one of the most enjoyable events during classes. The LCC students come from different countries around the world to show their authentic, fashionable, and traditional clothes, meals, music, games, and pictures. These things proudly reflect their particular cultures to others students.

On the day of the event, the teachers and students are ready to enjoy the party. The party takes place outside the LCC building, where everyone begins eating traditional and delicious meals, desserts, and drinks, which are displayed on well organized tables. After that, activities such as playing games and music, showing pictures, telling each other about their countries' history, and giving trophies are part of the show. There are people from everywhere: Arabs, Africans, Asians, and Americans, wearing traditional, colorful, and fancy clothes. People listen to traditional music, dancing with synchronized movements in fun and very active groups as if countries' borders do not exist. Finally, during these few hours, many people feel happy from learning about every unknown culture, and they enjoy talking and laughing with friends.

All in all, the Culture Festival is an excellent event that tries to show and teach every student in the LCC the heritage of every country and also to transcend the limits of the countries and unify them in one place.

Impressions of the Language and Cultural Center

Diana Soldatova, 4A

After studying at the Language and Cultural Center for one month, I can say that I definitely enjoy it. First of all, my teachers are awesome. I like the way they teach and the way that they make me feel good about myself. I love our lessons because we do various activities, and this is always interesting. In the LCC, I can improve my English not only by studying hard, but also by having fun.

I like my classmates too. I study with people from different countries, and I like all of them. Everyone has been friendly and made new classmates feel welcome. This was a pleasant surprise because sometimes it is difficult for new students to join a new group. I especially appreciate their willingness to help each other.

I like studying in the LCC, and I wish I could stay here longer, but unfortunately, I need to return to my country. Nevertheless, I am glad to be here now, and I hope to see my teachers and my classmates again someday.

Dreams

Cherif Ouedraogo, 4B

What can keep you alive even better than medicine can? What can be an unbreakable bridge to the future? For me, it is dreams. As life becomes more challenging, dreams become the best reasons to continue living. What do I consider a dream? It is not a duty; a dream is a strong belief in a plan to achieve a goal. It is a vision of your future that you would make any sacrifice for. A dream is a renewable power source that makes you climb mountains, or a bright lightning against the darkness. Dreams are the only things that can move men forward toward success and over feelings of giving up.

Never stop dreaming so that you will accomplish amazing things in your life.

My Home

Tourist Sites in Cambodia

Saravuth Keo, 6A

Though Cambodia is one of the developing countries in Southeast Asia, it is well-known for its rich cultural heritage and magnificent natural wonders that have attracted millions of tourists from around the world.

Most representative of the country's rich cultural heritage are the various ancient temples constructed by famous Cambodian kings in Siem Reap province in the northwestern part of the country. Of these, the most unforgettable, most well-known, and most admirable is Angkor Wat, which was built in the early 12th century by King Suryavarman II and was completed by King Jaryavarman VII. The secret skill of the ancient Cambodians in constructing huge temples without using cement and their great skill in sculpting the rocks to look like smiles have made the temple the seventh wonder of the world.

Besides its rich cultural heritage as represented by its ancient temples, Cambodia is also proud of its various natural wonders. Thus, tourists coming to Ratanakiri province in the northeastern part of the country should not miss the opportunity to view the huge waterfall pouring its water into the deep green forest below. The beauty of the waterfall and the forest is accentuated by the colorful existence of the various indigenous groups, and together they exert a fascination nobody can resist.

For those who have a natural love for the sea, Sihanouk Ville in the southwestern part of the country is the place for them. Here, tourists can enjoy blue waters, white beaches, fresh air, and wonderful weather. Here also, they can enjoy delicious and reasonably priced seafood. After a few days, some tourists may feel restless from the nutritious seafood and the calm blue waters and may need some more vigorous exercise. For these, there is

the neighboring Kompot province, somewhat to the south, where there is Bokor Mountain. Standing on top of the mountain, with hands touching the clouds that float by, and with eyes traveling over the wide panoramic view far below, tourists always feel they are in the midst of the heaven!

The Countryside of Vietnam

Trinh Nguyen, 2B

The countryside of Vietnam is very beautiful. My father was born and grew up there. Every summer, he took my brother, my sister, and me to visit our grandfather and grandmother in the countryside. My grandfather grew mango, guava, lemons, and chilies. He had a lotus lake with beautiful pink and white lotuses. I saw immense, green fields. I smelled the rice fields. I saw storks taking a long flight. A small river was opposite my grandparents' house. I felt very comfortable. I'll never forget the fresh atmosphere of the countryside.

The people in the countryside are poor, rice farmers. They wake up early to go to the rice fields. They sow grain and transplant seedlings in the hot, afternoon sun. I can see the sweat on their bodies. I respect their labor as much as the rice. The children in the countryside don't have toys such as robots or dolls. They play games like hide-and-seek, throw-the-milk-can, grab-crabs, and catch-the-screw-in-the-bag. Everybody goes to the countryside market to sell mice, amphibians, chicken, vegetables, and so on. They get there by walking or by rickshaw.

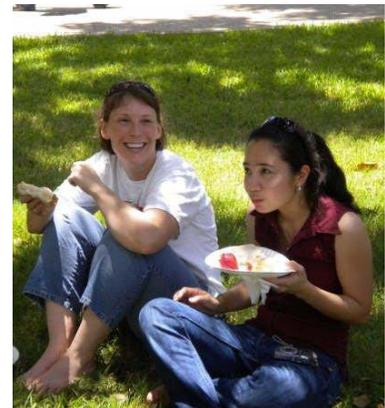
My Native Village

Thi Pham, 2C

My country is Vietnam. It's an agricultural country which is located in Southeast Asia and has a population of more than 86 million. I'm from My Tho, Tiền Giang. Tiền Giang is one of 58 provinces in Vietnam. My Tho is

the capital city and municipality of Tiền Giang Province, located in the Mekong Delta region of Southern Vietnam. The population of my city is approximately 1,700,000.

The area of my city is 2.5 square kilometers. It isn't large, but it's very interesting. It has lakes, rivers, a large market, and hills. My Tho is famous for its noodle soup, Hu Tieu My Tho. The weather in My Tho is good all year. It has two seasons, the rainy season and the sunny season. People always like the sunny season. The rainy season usually begins in April or May and ends in October or November. The summer is hot; the average temperature is 27 degrees Celsius. It is very rainy then. The winter is mild and cloudy, but it doesn't snow. Right now, it's summer, my favorite season. The days are rainy and mild, and the nights are a little cold and windy. My Tho's people are hardworking and friendly.



The Effects of Globalization on Korea

Junhee Lee, 5A

Since the 1990s, Korean students have been educated about globalization. I have heard the word “globalization” everywhere. Also, we were forced to learn English, computers, and internet in order to prepare for globalization; however, I could not expect that the globalized world would come so fast and change every part of life. For example, I did not think about studying in another country, like I am doing right now. Globalization has changed almost everything in Korean life. No one could even imagine 20 years ago that almost everyone would carry a cell phone and send e-mail to a person who lives on the opposite side of the earth in just one second. I think that globalization has processed faster than the speed of thinking. This fast globalization has had two magnificent effects on Korea: a dramatic change in the lifestyle and a radical change in the economy.

Globalization has changed the lifestyle of the Koreans dramatically. First of all, the use of the internet has increased rapidly. Most of the people can easily access the internet and get all kinds of information from all over the world in front of a monitor. It has extended the range of information and interest. For instance, today there are many fans of foreign singers and actors, and also there are TV shows like *Heroes*, *Prison Break*, and *House*. Furthermore, almost everyone who lives in Korea knew about the death of Michael Jackson and watched his memorial video on the internet.

Globalization has also changed the foods. 10 to 20 years ago, it was very natural to eat rice at three meals every day. These days, on the contrary, there is almost no one who eats rice at every meal. The style of the meal has been totally changed. Now we have cereal, bread, and coffee as breakfast, and we eat hamburger, pizza, and Chinese food as lunch. Of course, there are so many food chains from other countries. We can see McDonald’s, KFC, and Burger

King everywhere in Korea.

In addition, the language has changed in many parts. For example, we accept many words from English and use the same pronunciation, such as *bus*, *taxi*, *banana*, and *computer*. Even though we write in Korean, foreign languages affect our language system and general conversation. As a result, nowadays almost everyone studies English, Chinese, and the other foreign languages. This trend has caused an increase in traveling to other countries and an increase in studying abroad.

Another great effect of globalization on Korea is the radical changing of the economic circumstances. First of all, trade has rapidly increased. According to the National Statistical Office of Korea, the total amount of trade in 1995 was approximately 100 billion dollars, but it was more than 300 billion dollars in 2007. This statistic shows the big difference and the great effect of globalization in 12 years. Second, globalization has helped the economic growth of Korea. Even though Korea had big economic potential, the market size was limited because the population of Korea is only less than 50 million, and the land is even smaller than half of Texas. However, globalization extended the market to all over the world. For example, we can see that many people around the world use Samsung TV, cell phones from Korea, and Hyundai cars, even though they do not know that these brands are from Korea. At the same time, Koreans import a great deal of stuff from other countries, such as Apple, Dell, Sony, and Nokia. As a result, this situation makes the Korean economy move together with the world economy. We should admit that globalization helped to develop the economy of Korea, but it also can be a weak point like during these days of the world economic depression.

As you can see, globalization affects Koreans’ lifestyle and economy significantly. In my opinion, it has had more positive effects than negative effects so far. Globalization has helped

Korea to develop. From now on, the important point of globalization is how we can get more advantages from it. There are so many strong and rich countries in the world. Unfortunately, Korea is not one of them. However, I think that globalization gives Korea a chance to be one of them. In a globalized world, the size of the country and the population is less important than before. I think that Korea, which is small but has huge potential, is still progressing with globalization.



Brazil: Just Jungles and Bikinis?

Camilo Duarte, 3A

Many people have different images of Brazil. I find it interesting when I hear what people know or think about my country. They believe that in Brazil there are only jungles and women in bikinis. Actually there are jungles, but there are also big cities like São Paulo, which has a population of 19 million and the largest economy in Latin America. You might see movies with beautiful girls in bikinis doing the samba, but this happens on just two days during the year and only in three cities. These women participate in a contest for the best costume of the carnival. In my city, Salvador, there is a carnival, but it is very different. The carnival lasts six days instead of two, and the girls don't go around in bikinis. Approximately five million people visit Salvador and spend more than 300 million dollars. The carnival in my city is considered to be one of the biggest cultural events in the world. Anyway, it is very interesting to hear what people think they know about my country because in most cases they just don't know much.

Venezuela Is a Beautiful Country

Karla Gourmetts, 6A

My country, Venezuela, is truly blessed by nature. There are few places in the world where you can find such a vast variety of natural attractions so close to each other.

First of all, the northern states of Venezuela have access to the coastline of the Caribbean Sea, providing us with

beautiful beaches that are always good to visit because of the warm weather throughout the entire year. The variety of landscapes in the north goes beyond the beaches because Venezuela is one of the countries that belong to the Andean Cordillera. Therefore, Venezuela has a lot of huge mountains and rivers in this beautiful region. This region also has *médanos* – dunes that result from the arid climate and the erosion.

Second, the west of Venezuela is remarkable for wonderful places like the Gulf of Venezuela and the lake of Maracaibo. This lake is located in Maracaibo, a city that has some of the hottest temperatures in the country, but at the same time this area also has the coldest places in Venezuela; during the winter months, it can snow and we can find alpine vegetation. The wildlife there is very different from what you find in the rest of the country. This area is located around the huge mountains of the Venezuelan Andes. It contains the Bolívar Peak, which is the highest mountain in the country and has the highest and longest cable car in the world.

Third, around the center of the country, bordering Colombia are the *llanos*, vast areas of land where the climate can vary drastically. This land is known for its agriculture and cattle ranching. Despite the fact that this land is vulnerable when the wet season starts because the risk of flooding is very high, the scenery offers the beauty of the immense plains combined with rivers that cross the land and provide water to the cattle, horses, jaguars, and other typical animals. The streams provide habitat for crocodiles, turtles, piranhas, and serpents, which add

more excitement and danger to these plains.

Last, the south of Venezuela is characterized by the rainforest located between the Orinoco River and Brazil. This area, called Guayana, is crossed by important rivers, the Orinoco and the Caroní. Both are huge rivers which give shelter to wild species. It is amazing to see the place where the light brown Orinoco and the black Caroní merge because they never seem to mix with each other. Other main attractions are the spectacular Canaima National Park and La Gran Sábana. They are places where we can find dense vegetation, a lot of waterfalls, and majestic *tepuyes* – table-top mountains created by nature. In this region we can see the Angel Falls, the tallest waterfall in the world.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that Venezuela has been favored by nature. The variety of astonishing natural landscapes makes this country the perfect place to travel any time of the year.

Tarout Island

Mahdi Alabdrabalnabi, 2B

I live on Tarout Island in the Persian Gulf. It belongs to Qatif City, in the eastern area of Saudi Arabia, and is joined to Qatif by two bridges. It has been inhabited since 5000 B.C.E. There are many ancient sites and buildings such as a Portuguese castle built 600 years ago. This castle is in the center of Tarout Island near a natural source of water from under the ground. I live in a place that was occupied in the past by many different countries.



The Three Istanbuls

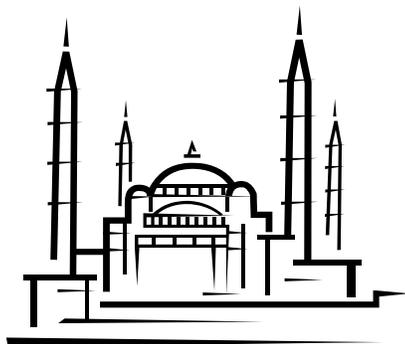
Göktuğ Kalayci, 4B

Istanbul, the center of civilizations and the capital of the empires, has three parts: the past, today, and the future. The past of Istanbul is Historical Island, which was established in 667 B.C. Visiting there is like living in history. Every part of Historical Island is more than one hundred years old. This island is the site of the Topkapi Palace, which at one time ruled Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. Sultan Ahmed Square is the site of this palace, as well as the site of Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque, the most beautiful constructions of two religions.

Anatolia is the present part of Istanbul. In addition to offering an amazing view of the sea, it has unique streets where you can walk, shop, or stop to drink Turkish tea. You can also visit Camlica Hill, the highest place in Istanbul. From there, it looks like you are viewing Istanbul from an airplane.

The future of Istanbul is Golden Horn, the financial and banking center of Turkey. The headquarters of all major Turkish companies are here. However, I do not consider this to be the future of Istanbul because of the companies or their skyscrapers. It is the future because everything enjoyable that you can imagine is there. My favorite example of this is an open-air nightclub that faces Bosphorus.

Is that all about Istanbul? Of course not. There are a million choices for entertainment. In fact, if you live in Istanbul, you do not want to do anything twice because there are a million other options.



The History of Angola

Delcio Silva, 6A

Angola is a country that was colonized by the Portuguese. Before the Portuguese arrived in Angola, Angola had been an independent country with many values, customs, and traditions. Before the colonization, Angola had no president, no minister, and no government, but it did have a *soba*, who was the head leader of a tribe, and his advisors.

Angola was a very happy and united country. Some of our tribes were very similar to tribes in other south African nations. My country used to be called Ngola, named after a famous Angolan queen who fought against the Portuguese guerillas when they first came to Angola.

Our queen, who at the time was known as “Ngola Mbandi,” died during war trying to free our country from slavery. Many other great leaders also tried to defeat the Portuguese military, but no leader fought like Ngola Mbandi.

After losing many battles against the Portuguese, Angolans had no other choice at the time but to surrender in order to stop getting killed. After that, the Angolans lived through many years of slavery until an Angolan studying in Cuba created a democratic organization to fight against the Portuguese in the early 60s. At this time, Dr. Agostinho Neto, the president of the organization, had Fidel Castro as an ally.

In the early 70s, we won the war against the Portuguese with the help of the Cubans, and Dr. Agostinho Neto became the first president of Angola, but not for long. Years later, after the president’s death, the first election occurred although at the time there weren’t many parties. On the Election Day, the Democratic Party won, but there was another party that didn’t agree; this led to another war. Our country fought against the rivals for approximately 10 years. In 2002, the leader of our enemies was finally killed, thus ending the war.

My Country: Mali

Demba Niang, 2C

My country’s name is Mali. It’s in West Africa near Burkina Faso, the Ivory Coast, and Togo. In my country, there are seven main cities: Kayes, Koulikoro, Sikasso, Segou, Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu. The capital is Bamako.

Mali gained its independence on September 22, 1960. The first president was Modibo Keita. He was president for eight years, from 1960 to 1968. The second president was Moussa Traore. He was in the army when he became president. He was president from 1968 to 1991. He also served for eight years because he got into trouble. He was arrested for bad governing and he was condemned.

Then, Amadou Toumani Toure was temporarily president before new elections were held. After one year, Alpha Oumar Konare was elected. He served as President for ten years, from 1992 to 2002. He came to the United States in 2001 for a meeting with George Bush. He was president of Mali and president of the African United Commission as well. Mr. Konare was a great man. After him, Amadou Toumani Toure came back into power in 2002 and is still the president. He should complete his term in office in 2012. In fact, Mali has had four presidents.

In Mali, there are only three airports. The biggest is the International Airport of Bamako. In addition, there are many other kinds of transportation in my country, such as buses, trains, taxis, and horses.

Mali is a very big country, but there aren’t a lot of people. However, there are many tourist places such as the Museum of Bamako, the zoo, the mountain of Badiangara, the city of Timbuktu, and the famous castle of Kangaba. There are also many cultural traditions and places in Mali, including the first mosque in Djenné, the traditional masks, etc. I love my country, and I hope you’ll go to visit it one day.

Looking at China's Population

Vicky Jie, 6A

As most people know, China has the biggest population in the world. However, not everyone thinks about the reason why China has such a big population.

First of all, China has about a 5000-thousand-year old history and is one of the "Four Great Ancient Civilizations." For this reason, China has more people than many countries that have a shorter history with just a few hundred years.

Second, there are two Chinese proverbs: "The more sons, the more blessings" and "There are three ways to disappoint your parents, the worst of which is by not having offspring." These proverbs show that in old China, people cared a lot about having children.

Third, 40 percent of the Chinese population lives in the city and 60 percent lives in the countryside. In the countryside, they need a large number of workers, so the people who live in the countryside raise many children. It is one of China's most difficult problems to solve.

Fourth, medical technology in China has developed rapidly, thereby reducing the death rate. In old China, there were many incurable diseases, so many people died when they were very young. But these days, people live long lives, which in turn greatly increases the population.

Last but not least, there were many royal battles before in China. In order to protect our country, the leader of China asked Chinese families to have more children because there is a

Chinese proverb, "more people, more power." People called a mother with five or more children an "honorable mom." For this reason, many families had more than five children.

As you can see, there are many reasons why China has such a big population.

My Ethnic Identity

Yoann Undoum, 5B

My name is Yoann Undoum. I was born in Cameroon, in a city called Douala, which is the economic capital of my country. I am really proud to be a Cameroonian. Usually, it is difficult for a foreigner to understand my culture because of the variety of tribes and dialects.

In Cameroon, people speak English and French, depending on the region where they live. I live in the French part. However, there are many tongues, depending on the tribe. For example, my mother is *Douala*, like the name of the city mentioned above. This tribe is special because they were the first people to welcome the colonization. As a result, it is the only tribe which has a particular day in the year, which is called *Ngondo*.

On *Ngondo*, we have a ceremony in which the chief of each village of the tribe talks to our ancestors to know what the year will bring. To do that, he goes inside the sea until he disappears, and he stays there for 15 minutes or more. After that, he comes out with a message from our ancestors to the head of the country, and for the country. This ceremony is always at the beginning of the year, precisely at the beginning of February. Only two tribes

still carefully respect the ancient customs; they are Douala and Bamileke. Due to my mother's lineage, I am part Douala.

My father, on the other hand, is not Douala. He is *Banen*, the fifth most important tribe in Cameroon. The Banen are the best in investment and agriculture in the country. They produce a lot of products throughout the year, according to the season. Furthermore, there are thirty-seven tribes and more in Cameroon, such as Douala, Banen, Bassa, Bamileke, Eton, Ewondo, Bulu, Aboo, Yambassa, and many more. That is why it is not easy to talk about all of them. Nonetheless, we must notice that inside the Bamileke we can find many other tribes, and only they can explain why it is like that.

My parents' tribes have one particular difference. All the Doualas are Christian Protestants, and the majority of Banens are Catholics. This is due to the colonization when the city of Douala was colonized by the English and German Christians, who were Protestants. In the center of the country, where the Banens live, the cities were occupied by the Catholic colonists.

As far as I am concerned, I just like to say that I am a citizen of the world because it is also difficult for me to understand all the rules of my culture. And sometimes I just do not care. There are many parts of it that I do not know yet, and I think that I will never understand it more than I do so now. Nevertheless, if someone would like to learn more about our culture, it is essential to make a stop there, even if for just one week.



Art Appreciation

Art or Mathematics?

Yu-Liang Lin, 4D

During our trip to the Menil Collection, I saw Max Ernst's works, Plates I-VIII from "*Fiat modes pereat ars*" ("Let There Be Fashion, Down with Art"), a 1919 lithograph that was reprinted in 1970. These creations interested me the most. Most artists use much color and lots of irregular shapes to show their ideas, but in this art, Max Ernst only used geometric figures to make it complete. Otherwise, he used black lines to express shadow and space. These works looked like blueprints when I first saw them. That was why I thought they were unusual.

When I was in high school, mathematics was my favorite class, so I was interested in geometric figures. Therefore, when I saw these pictures, I was attracted by them. These works didn't show any movement; however, they looked very balanced. The geometric figures in the drawings are regular lines and shapes which make the pictures look very regular. A regular picture always looks balanced.

The feeling that these works gave me was "nothing." Actually, I am a person who does not have lots of sense of art. I did not understand the artist's idea very well, and I did not feel any beautiful element. I thought he might want to show some situations by lines and shapes. I could not discover any cultural things; it just looked like one of my math exam papers.

Most art makes me feel bored, so I do not like it, including these works. I only thought they were unusual but not beautiful. In my opinion, real things are beautiful. The visual arts are the artists' points of view of real things. I do not think everyone can understand their feelings completely. People have many definitions of art. However, can we really know the meaning? I do not think so. Only the artists absolutely know their own art's meaning.

"The Origins of Language"

Huyen Nguyen, 4D

I went to the Menil Collection with my teachers and friends, and this is the first time I saw the exhibition and preservation of a private art collection. After taking a tour of many art collection rooms, there was one piece of art which impressed me best. The title is "The Origins of Language," and it was painted by René Magritte in 1955.

My first impression is the usage of color and line. There is blue and white; blue is the color of the deep sea and white is the color of the many clouds. Besides that, on the central bottom part of this picture is a stone with a grey color. The three main colors are harmonious. The artist used curves and lines to draw this picture. The sea was drawn by very small curves which shape a rippled sea. The clouds were drawn in bigger curves which form big floating clouds in the sky. Furthermore, the stone was drawn with lines in the shape of a column stone, like a pyramid without a top.

The second impression is the single grey stone in this piece of art. The position from which the artist stands to

draw is high above the top of the stone. From there, you are looking at a big blue sky, and under the sky is a deep blue sea. A lonely feeling invaded my mind. I remembered I had had this feeling when I stood on the top of a mountain looking down to the sea and sky at sunset, and below there were tiny houses and a few small boats. The lonely feeling had just appeared when I was far from familiar things, and I was in another world.

The third impression of this painting is the depth of infinite space. The artist was very talented to draw like this. I felt the opening for the answer to all questions. There are many floating clouds, so I felt nothing is everlasting, and everything can shape and scatter like a cloud. Furthermore, I felt that I'm small in the world. The things which I have worked on shall remain for a time and shall vanish when I'm no longer alive.

Actually, the title of this painting and my feelings are different. Maybe I don't have enough art knowledge to understand what message the artist wants to send to people, but it is the most impressive work of art that I've ever seen at the Menil.



“Golconde”

Hae-na Yim, 4D

I visited an exhibition which is called The Menil Collection. There are several areas such as sculpture, abstract painting, and so on. Actually, I prefer a landscape picture to others because it is easy to understand, and I can preserve the beauty of the landscape for a long time with a good feeling. This time, however, the most memorable piece was a surrealistic painting called “Golconde,” and it was drawn using oil by René Magritte. It was weird and wonderful.

It was so weird when I first saw it, for the men, who are wearing black suits and hats and have serious faces in the picture, are coming down like rain. While I was going near to the picture from afar, I thought that it was just black rain, but I was wrong. My eyes first went to a man who was drawn in the front, and I looked around at the other people in the picture; after that, I noticed that each of the men has a different expression, but all leave a similar impression. The artist has not used brilliant colors for a dark and gloomy atmosphere. The meaning of *golconde* is a winter rain which feels deep and heavy; that is a quite fitting reason why the artist used dark colors.

Then I backed off a little bit to look at the composition of the painting overall, and I could see the circle line which is combined of several men. The circle line was perfectly formed; it resembled a chemical hydrator form. Moreover, the artist gave perspective to the painting very well. A man drawn in the front, who is bigger than the others, gives the entire picture perspective, and the picture focuses only on the front to make the man clear, while the men in the background were drawn to be more blurred. Some parts of the painting have movement; men who were located high in the frame seem to be coming down like rain.

Why did the artist choose men to represent rain? What is the artist’s aim in the painting? Nobody knows the purpose except René Magritte. I do

know the picture gave me a desolate feeling because of the serious expressions of the men. I don’t know why exactly, but my view has changed from when I first saw this picture. I thought that this art was very strange, but the more I see the painting, the more I understand that it is wrong to try to find the aim. For some sad people, a winter rain might remind them of the very thing that made them sad in the first place, but this painting is not real. It is just a painting to express an artist’s mind, but it really gave me an impression.

“Starry Night”

Qianyi (Nikki) Xu, 4E

Have you ever heard that some artists were called lunatics? Have you ever been attracted by some abstract paintings which were drawn by them? Have you found that it is really hard to understand the meaning or the expression that the author is trying to tell us?

There is one artist whose name is Vincent van Gogh. He is a great artist who was accepted by people after he had died. However, some of his paintings are now among the world’s best known, and they are called the most popular and expensive works of art. “Starry Night” is one of the most well-known images in modern culture. The same as his other creations, it is full of imagination. There are actually several main aspects that intrigue those who view this image, and each person will have his own individual opinions.

This picture is not so big in scale but an amazing rectangular oil painting. It is a night sky filled with swirling clouds, stars ablaze with their own luminescence, and a bright crescent moon. For the most part, the artist used cold colors like blue, black, and white. You can also see some yellow, which represents the stars, mixed up in it. There is not a clear texture in the picture; in addition, it looks like an integrated mass which cannot be separated into an independent part.

Consequently, there are no blank spaces in the picture; they are full of light blinking from the stars.

The focal point of this picture is the stars in the night. They represent promises of the present or future. This sky keeps the viewer’s eyes moving about the painting, following the curves and creating a visual dot to dot with the stars. This movement also keeps the onlooker involved in the painting. It seems like the painting will bring you to some mysterious, beautiful, bright places. Below the sky and the rolling hills lies a small town. It is a peaceful town. Perhaps the sky and the village spark memories of our own warm childhood. They may cause us to imagine a silent hometown and a starry night. The center point of the town is the tall church, much larger than the other buildings. I think it might represent some wishes for this town. To the left of the painting, there is a massive dark structure that develops a greater sense of isolation. This structure also allows the viewer to interpret what it is. The analysis of this formation is wide and full of variety. For example, it looks like blackness, black magic, or flames.

When I saw this picture, I was shocked. How could this become a famous picture? The structure is simple, the lines are messy, and the colors are simple. However, it can only be drawn by Van Gogh. It uses the simple things to show us a lot of imagination. Van Gogh was creating beauty, showing us some kind of memory or hope, mirroring our society or culture, protecting something in modern society, or telling something about himself. No one knows what the truth is, so we can associate the picture with anything we like.

The painting could be a hope for my hometown. I hope that the sky of my hometown will always have brightness and the town will always be peaceful like that. Finally, I hope more and more people can be moved by Van Gogh’s pictures like me.

“La Clef du Langue”

Aras Bulut, 4E

“La Clef du Langue” (“The Origins of Language”), a painting by René Magritte, is a beautiful representation of the sea and an extraordinary stone column. The colors in the painting are brilliant and extremely appealing to the eye. This piece seems to all fit together well from the beautiful sky all the way down to the astonishing ocean floor and a lonely stone column which is in the center of the view.

The texture in this painting gives us a silky sense. The painting has not got shape, except a cornered column which rises from the ground to the blue cloudy sky at the center of the view. Also, sunlight was used in the composition, so the painting is generally bright, except one side of the column.

Darkness was used as shadow on only this part of the painting. The painter preferred to use a smaller scale. One third of the space was used for the column and the other part was shared half and half by the sky and the sea.

I think because it looks alone in the whole view, the focal point is the column. Stone, the element used to build a column like this, is especially prominent in this art. The composition is balanced, and there is no movement represented in the work. The artist used a sharp line between the column and the other objects although he used soft lines between the clouds, the sky, and the sea.

As you look at this painting, you get a sense of peacefulness but, on the other hand, loneliness. Many aspects of this painting bring out its rare beauty; however, the lonely column is the first thing to catch the viewer’s eye. So the main feeling is based on the lonely column, which reminds us of an isolated person that sometimes makes us feel unhappy. If I look at the painting’s name, I can say that the artist tried to explain to us that all languages were born in their own nature, and when they were born, they were as alone as an isolated man.

I liked this artwork. It gave me a message about loneliness more than an idea about the origins of language, and it also made me tend to think about my own lifestyle and my relationships.

“Double Mona Lisa”

Toudamanagda (Pierre) Zoungrana, 4E

Made in 1963 by an American painter, who is called Andy Warhol, “Double Mona Lisa” is the double of one of the most famous and mysterious paintings that human beings have ever seen.

“Double Mona Lisa” is the one I have chosen because of its design, its perfection, and also its messages.

Born in 1928, Andy Warhol made the “Double Mona Lisa” based on the real one made 500 years ago by Leonardo da Vinci. First, the “Double Mona Lisa” is a beautiful painting in which we can see two of the same face of a beautiful lady. In this painting, Andy Warhol has used black and white as the major colors. The texture of the painting is silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas. In addition, there are some perfect curves which describe the body of that beautiful lady. The light is used because the body of the lady is mostly in black and the landscape is mostly in white. Moreover, the space is fully used because two thirds of the painting is occupied by the lady and the other third by an indiscernible landscape, but we can see that in the one made by da Vinci there is a wonderful landscape behind the lady.

Second, “Double Mona Lisa” is also famous for its perfection. As we can see, the painter has paid attention to the details such as the lady’s clothes, her hair, and the shadow of some parts of her

body, and we can also see the impact of time and the difficult situation which this painting has had to go through by the trace of breaks on the nose. Third, the face of the lady is the focal point, but I am baffled, admiring, and confused. Furthermore, the particular thing which comes to my mind right away is the beauty and the mystery. Nobody to this day can say her real feeling because there are different interpretations of this painting; mine is that she has a kind of smile on her face based on her mouth and her cheek, but I also think that there is no feeling of joy in her eyes. All of that is to say that the lady in this painting is not honest. She is smiling in order to hide another feeling. I think the painter wanted to show us that beauty can sometimes hide something very negative, and that is mirroring our society, where beauty, especially a woman’s beauty, is used to attract and take advantage of honest people. In addition, the painter is trying to raise social consciousness about beauty today, which most of the time hides a trick. People should be able to distinguish the real and healthy beauty from the fake beauty.

To summarize, “Double Mona Lisa” is a masterpiece which contrasts between a smile and no feeling, sadness, perfect curves, beauty, and the hidden feeling that this painting will always be a mystery. For instance, I got into a discussion with two other people who were visiting the museum about their feelings, and the first person told me that she felt joy, and the other one said a kind of sadness. My real feeling about this painting is that the smile of Mona Lisa is hiding a kind of nonsense mockery.



The following are some of the level six students' responses to questions posed on their teacher's blog.

Do grades encourage students to learn?

Jean Baptiste Koffi, 6C

I agree with the statement that grades encourage students to learn for two reasons.

First, students do not like to have bad grades. As a matter of fact, some students are ashamed of having bad grades; others are just not used to getting them. Consequently, these students work hard in order to do very well in their examinations. Moreover, students are proud of themselves by getting good grades. This is the case of straight-*A* students who hate having a *B*, let alone a *C* or a *D*. The more they have *As*, the more they feel good and work to keep on having them.

Second, an important reason why grades make students learn is the requirements of schools. Indeed, students have to have specific scores in order to pass courses in universities. For example, undergraduate students must pass their courses with a *C* at least; otherwise, they have to take the course again. This condition imposed by universities puts students under pressure. As a result, the latter are obliged to study in order to receive their degree.

In conclusion, grades encourage students to learn because they do not like having bad grades and because of the requirements of certain schools in terms of grades.

Yan (Yolanda) Hu, 6B

Personally, I do not think that grades really encourage students to learn. On the surface, grades may encourage some students to learn, but the most important thing that encourages students to learn is their interest or desire. The best example is from the movie, based on a true story, *Stand and Deliver*. Before those “unteachable” students met their teacher, they were

not interested in learning math, no matter how high their scores were on their tests. And later, when they had desire, they were willing to learn. In my opinion, grades cannot encourage students to learn for a long time but can encourage them to memorize knowledge rather than to understand it.

Besides, the purpose of studying is not only to obtain high grades. Students should know why they want to obtain good grades. Is it for teachers, parents, or themselves? I think an education is an investment in students' selves and their future. When a student has the opportunity to attend a school, he should enrich his life with more knowledge and obtain more opportunities for integrated development and advancement. If a student studies hard only to obtain high grades, he may misunderstand the purpose of studying.

To sum up, I think that grades cannot encourage all of the students to study, but it is a mirror of students' performance. Through grades, teachers can understand the status of students, foster students' study habits, and intelligently lead students to learn. Meanwhile, grades are also a way to know about students' understanding of the material, but not a way to encourage students to learn.

Does the end justify the means?

Braulio Assis, 6C

By the statement “the end justifies the means,” I was able to understand that it does not matter what you do to achieve your goals. You can step on other people without caring about it because you are only focused on your goal, and you will do whatever it takes to attain it. It is very hard for me to say either I agree or disagree with it. Let me explain to you why.

First off all, I am going to pretend that

I agree with it. Sometimes you will be confronted with a very difficult situation, so you will be asked to take a very difficult decision. Imagine that you live in a country in war and the biggest problem is the leader (the president) and the only solution to stop this war is to kill him. So you will be confronted with a difficult situation: kill one to save 1,000 or not do it because you will be doing a bad thing, killing him – because it is unethical to kill a person. What are you going to do? If it was me, I would kill him because I would not want to continue to watch my family and the people of my country suffering because of him. I know that it is bad to kill a person, whether this person is bad or good, but I would try my best to kill him in order to stop this stupid war. That is for me when “the end justifies the means.”

In the case of parents faced with their children taking drugs, I would say that I would do everything that I was capable of to save my children. However, I would not be stepping on people's toes to make my children stop doing drugs because it is not their fault, and certainly I would try my best to make my children stop doing drugs, but with limits; I would not kill people because of this. I would try to find other ways to make them stop. Killing drug dealers would not solve my children's problem at all.

Secondly, I am opposed to using any means to reach a goal. I don't agree with it because I think that this is not the best way to solve problems. Of course there will be some times that you will have to hurt people to obtain your goals. But you have to be very careful when you have to do it.

To conclude, the end never really justifies the means because when you are hurting others to achieve your goals, you are doing a bad thing. You can succeed, that's true, but it won't last because someone will do the same to you.

Ana Carolina Paiva, 6C

The big question here is: Is it acceptable to do anything you need to do in order to reach the result that you desire, even if you are hurting people, breaking the law, cheating, or just not being morally correct or virtuous? My answer is: sometimes. It depends on what your goal is and how far you need to go to reach it. It's something really simple to me.

Of course it is not right to do that kind of thing if the result you are seeking is not fair or noble or even when it's based on a selfish feeling, but I think it's justified when the result you want is based on love and other good feelings.

For example, if my child were doing drugs, I would do anything possible to save him. I would definitely confine him in a hospital for treatment if it were necessary, even if it might not be the best solution.

But, we must never forget that all our decisions and actions must be very well analyzed in order to avoid committing huge mistakes. There is a very good Brazilian movie called *Bicho de Sete Cabeças* (English title: *Brainstorm*), based on a true story. It's the story of a teenager who was sent for treatment in a mental institution because his parents found a single marijuana cigarette in his pocket. This wrong decision made the teenager become depressed and paranoid, which almost killed him.

Excluding that kind of excess, can we judge parents that lock their children at home in order to save their lives? I don't think so. I would be able to cheat, to search for drugs in their bags, or to listen to their conversations. It is not the kind of behavior that I would be proud of, but I would do it if it were necessary to save my child's life, and I'm not ashamed to say that. On the other hand, I wouldn't be able to cheat or act dishonestly in order to reach a higher position in my job.

What are your beliefs about déjà vu?

Fatma Kaplan, 6B

The experience of déjà vu really raises my curiosity, so I have investigated this topic a little, and I want to share my findings with you. Déjà vu is a combination of two French words, *déjà* (before) and *vu* (seen), meaning already seen or already lived.

According to research, it happens to 50 percent of the people at least once in their life. Others say it happens to 70 percent of the people once during their lifetime. Anyway, I think at least most of us have experienced déjà vu. It has often happened to me.

According to reincarnation, since people might be having their second life, the feeling of déjà vu is normal, as that moment may resemble their previous life. According to Islam, it is stated in our holy book that human beings are not just flesh. Each person was created with a soul. The souls were created before our bodies. So all the souls once met each other. So when people feel very close to someone whom they have never met before or feel like they have known each other for lots of years, what I mentioned above is the reason.

In Islam we also believe that our souls are taken out of our body when we sleep and brought back when we wake up. Sometimes what we dream feels so real, as if we are really living it, or sometimes the places or the people we see are so clear as if we really see them. You might have witnessed the feeling of flying and coming back to the ground again in your sleep, which has happened to me several times. We also feel so tired sometimes when we wake up, as if we have gone somewhere or done something. When we are sleeping, our souls travel places and meet with people. Our brain perceives those places, people, or events. So when we run into a person that we think we have seen somewhere, our spirit actually saw him/her before.

The déjà vu function of the brain has also been proved by a test that was implemented at Leeds University in Britain. Eighteen test subjects were hypnotized after 24 different words were shown to them. During the hypnotism, they were told that the words in red frames would give them the feeling of familiarity and the words in green frames would make them feel that they had seen them before. The test subjects were awakened and were shown some different words in different colors that weren't in the original list at all. Some of them said that the words in red and green frames made them feel déjà vu. The explanation for this was that after coming across a similar object or situation, the brain first seeks traces of that scene in the memory archive. If there are some traces related to it, the brain identifies it as a known thing, and this makes a person feel déjà vu.

There are also some other research studies saying that due to fatigue or some other reasons, the brain cannot perceive the input at that time. When the brain does perceive the input, this results in déjà vu. Also it may result from the difference in the brain's right and left lobe functions. One side perceives after the other side, and the second side that perceives leads to the feeling of déjà vu.

Nassi Kanazoe, 6B

I have experienced déjà vu so often that I thought that it was something natural even if I could not explain why I had the feeling. So many times in my country or during a trip, I have met people that I did not know, but I had the feeling that I had already seen them somewhere. I also have been witness to some events that I am almost sure that I have already experienced. I cannot give an example of what I have experienced because I cannot explain this feeling.

I do believe in reincarnation, and I think that déjà vu is a proof for people who are still skeptical about reincarnation. Reincarnation is the rebirth of the soul in another body;

therefore, that could explain the fact that we remember some events, places, or people that we saw during our past life. For me, reincarnation is an explanation for déjà vu. On the other hand, some people attribute this phenomenon to a dream that we have had and that coincides with the events that we experience.

The phenomenon of déjà vu is a common thing, and it can happen to everybody. Scientists think that it is an anomaly of memory that gives an impression of déjà vu. Despite all the experiences and the explanations given by scientists, they did not convince me. Déjà vu is too complex and strange to be explained by science, so reincarnation is still the most logical explanation.

To what extent are people personally responsible for their actions?

Romain Septfons, 6B

When we have all the necessary information about a topic, we may or may not be able to make responsible choices. The problem is often that we don't have this crucial information.

For example, a few years ago, smokers probably knew that smoking was bad for their health, but they did not have tangible information. What they needed were figures, testimonies, results of surveys, or public health experts' opinions. Now that the problem of smoking has been studied for years, we know that it can cause many cancers, diminish your physical performance, and reduce your sense of taste, and it has many negative consequences on your body. Moreover, now tobacco companies have to write on cigarettes packs several dangers linked to smoking. Unfortunately, even when people are aware that there is cyanide in cigarette smoke, they don't necessarily quit; it is their right to make such a choice. However, they can no longer say, "We didn't know!" It is

their responsibility to make healthy choices or not.

Talking about obesity, the problem is more complicated. In fact, you can more easily get a Big Mac than a pack of cigarettes. Furthermore, many families think that going to fast food places is a reward for their kids, so from when they're young, people may see junk food places as a reward after a hard day.

The fact is that a cigarette doesn't taste good at first. I asked friends who smoke if they immediately liked smoking, and the answer was: "At first we didn't like it, but then you get used to it." People who go to fast food places can't say that because the food is so sweet that the body accepts it immediately.

In the USA, you have so many fast food places that sometimes you don't have the choice but to eat there. Moreover, as we saw in the movie "Supersize Me," kids see so many commercials on TV about candies, sweets, or fast food that when they are old enough to make "responsible choices," they just go where they have been told to go: to McDonald's, Wendy's, Burger King, Pizza Hut, etc. I know that many people choose a healthy lifestyle, but I think that temptation is too big here. In less than three weeks in Houston, I've been to fast food places more often than what I do in France in one year. Why? Because they are everywhere! So yes, people should be responsible for their behavior, but I think they just need a little help and not see "Mc Devil" tempting them everywhere.

Fabiana Manzo, 6C

In my opinion, obesity and smoking are decisions people make by themselves because it has been known for a long time how harmful fast food and tobacco are, so blaming those companies is unfair. Although it is true that companies spend huge quantities of money on publicity for marketing their products in which they attract and

gain consumers, the final decision should be made based on what people want for their lives. It is obvious that companies want to sell their product, but what would happen if they did not have enough customers?

In my personal view, sometimes I get mad when I see overweight people because I think they are neglecting themselves, considering there are many reasons for not being like that. First of all, health: it is hard for me to think that those people do not realize how being overweight affects their performance in their lives – for example, walking, breathing, blood pressure, diseases, and so on. Second, beauty: although it could sound fanciful, beauty affects self-esteem. Third, economy: I suppose fat people spend big amounts of money eating as they do.

On the other hand, smokers know the consequences tobacco has even though they still smoke. For example, in Venezuela, cigarette boxes have images referring to lung cancer, mouth cancer, or cirrhosis of the liver, but it has not influenced smokers' minds to give cigarettes up. Once again, we cannot blame the tobacco industry.

I agree with putting taxes on alcohol and cigarettes as a policy for preventing illnesses and accidents because then they become expensive and consumers reduce the intake of those products. In the case of food, the campaign should be made in favor of good health.



Culture Shock

Adjusting to a New Country

Dragan Stojanovski, 3B

Moving to another place is always stressful, but if you move to another country, it can be even more stressful because you have to change. When I first came to the U.S., I experienced culture shock. Everything was bigger and different from my native country, Macedonia. Everything made me angry for the first six months. For example, I couldn't understand how people could spend more than three hours in the car for the daily commute. I only saw my wife for about two or three hours a day, which was completely different from the life we had in Macedonia. I thought that I would never accept this lifestyle. However, step by step and with a lot of support from my wife, I found a way to accept the culture and integrate myself

into it. Now I have many friends and a job that makes me happy. I'm continuing my education, and I no longer feel stressed. In fact, now I sing in the car whenever I drive.

learn about the foreign culture and respect it. If you approach your new country with a positive attitude, you can feel comfortable there and enjoy your new life.

Culture Shock

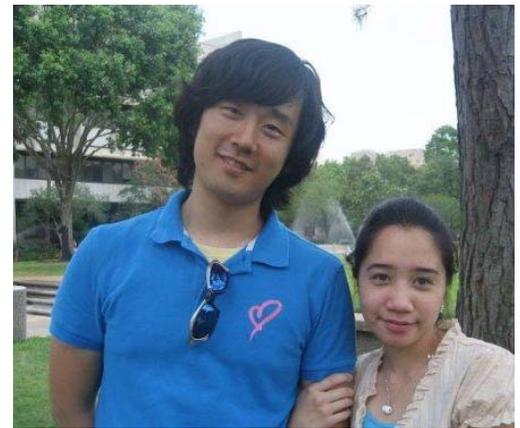
Yongjun (Jun) Yeo, 4B

Have you ever been to a foreign country? How did you feel there? Usually when someone stays in a foreign country, they feel uncomfortable and uneasy. Because so many things are different from their own country, most people in a foreign country feel confused; this is culture shock. When you are experiencing culture shock, you should try to resolve your difficulties quickly. The best way to make it through this challenge is to

Automobiles in the United States

ZhuYue (Annie) Zhao, 4A

Just as fish can't live without water, Americans can't live without cars. Unlike in my country, there are not many buses here, bicycles are used only for exercise, and there is no subway. Instead of using these forms of transportation, almost everyone in the United States owns a car. Although the automobile industry has been affected by the economic recession, Americans will still buy them because they are not a luxury here; they are a necessity.





NOTES FROM THE STUDENT ADVISOR

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

New students from summer and continuing students from spring went on the first trip of the semester during registration week. This was a time to get to know one another and make new friends. We went to the Rothko Chapel and then to the nearby Menil Collection, a very impressive art museum. Next, we went to the Galleria, where students and teachers shopped and had lunch. The trip ended with a stop at the Waterwall and then home to UH.

In June, we had the LCC class photo and sports tournament. Although it was very hot under the sun, we took some good photos. After the photos, many students went to the UC Game Room to participate in billiards, table tennis, and bowling. The winners were as follows: **Bowling:** 1st – JinHo Kim, 2nd – Shih-Chieh (Peter) Wu, and 3rd – Aras Bulut; **Billiards:** 1st – Zafer Alrimawi and 2nd – Sung Ha Lee; **Table Tennis:** 1st – Dragan Stojanovski and 2nd – Mohammed Al Shubbar.

At midterm we welcomed a large number of new students who joined us for the Summer II session. Among the new students is a group of Russian students who are here just for the Summer II term and will return home in August. One of these students, Valeriy Bagrintsev, tells me that when he finishes his university in Russia, he hopes to return to UH to study in the graduate program in Law.

The next event was the LCC Culture Festival. We shared each other's cultures as we tasted dishes from around the world prepared by our own students and staff. We had so much good food. Many students wore clothes from their countries. A variety of music was played and students learned new dances and also demonstrated and taught their own dances to others. Thanks to everyone for helping make the Culture Festival a big success.

As this is being written, we are getting ready for our final field trip of the term. We are going to Six Flags Fiesta Texas in San Antonio! There are many rides and attractions there, as well as swimming. I hope everyone has a good time.

The day after the trip, the semester comes to an end with the graduation ceremony and a reception. We wish good luck to those students who will be leaving us. For those who will be returning, start planning for the fall and for welcoming the new students who will be joining us.

SOCCER TEAM

The LCC soccer team, the Falcons, was honored at the Culture Festival with a trophy and recognition of their great success this summer. Our team won the UH intramural soccer championship! Servando Hernández Vargas was the very able captain and coach. Sultan Alanazi also gave valuable coaching advice and helped lead the team to victory. We had many excellent players, among whom was Abdulmajeed Aldakhil, who saved us in both the spring and summer games with essential last-minute goals.



LCC Field Trips around Houston



Voices Editors: Judy Kleeman and Geneva Tesh

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