



The
Future
of
Who
We
Are

WRITTEN
& DRAWN BY

MS. YORRA'S
2ND PERIOD 12TH GRADE CLASS
OF FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

The Future of Who We Are

RAT MOHIGUL REBEKA BAO YING FERUZA IBODULLO MOHAMED AROOJ ERELI
JENNIFER KEVI RICARDO YOUSEPH MUJTABA UGILOY RICARDO MIAO NOURAN VARIZA
SABRINA KEVIN KALPET TASNIM TEMUR SAVLAT JASON ERIKA EDISON ISRAT MOHIGUL
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Behind the Book / New York



Behind the Book

Behind the Book's mission is to develop engaged readers and writers in underserved NYC public schools by designing and delivering programs that are multi-disciplinary, culturally responsive, and promote deeper connections to books and their authors.

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In the interest of honoring student voice, Behind the Book presents students' work as received from the teacher.

This book was made possible by a generous grant from The Korein Foundation.

THIS IS FOR IMMIGRANTS AND FOR THE STUDENTS WHO COME AFTER US

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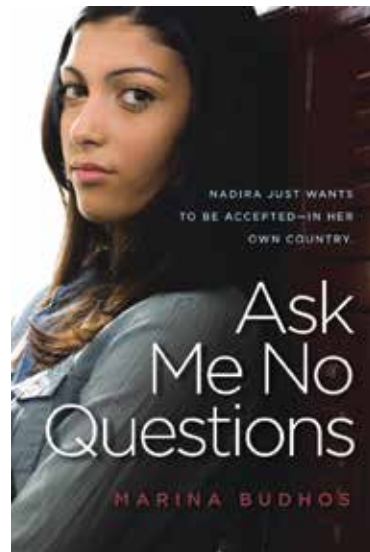
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About the Program

Do people judge us fairly? Do they only see certain parts of us? The seniors in Ms. Yorra's class explored these issues during their program with Marina Budhos, author of *Ask Me No Questions*.



Ask Me No Questions follows the story of an immigrant Muslim family who has lived in the U.S. for many years on expired visas. After the September 11th terrorist attacks, they seek asylum at the Canadian border. When their father is arrested, the two teenage daughters struggle to find a way to bring their parents home.

The class attended a panel discussion at the FDR campus. Advocates from local Muslim communities talked about their lives post 9/11.



During the author visit, Marina Budhos (shown below, front left) led the students in an activity that explored their own experiences where they felt judged, stood up for what they believed in, and connected with those who are different.



Students drafted narratives about feeling targeted in society. They wrote deeply personal stories and shared them in the pages of this book.

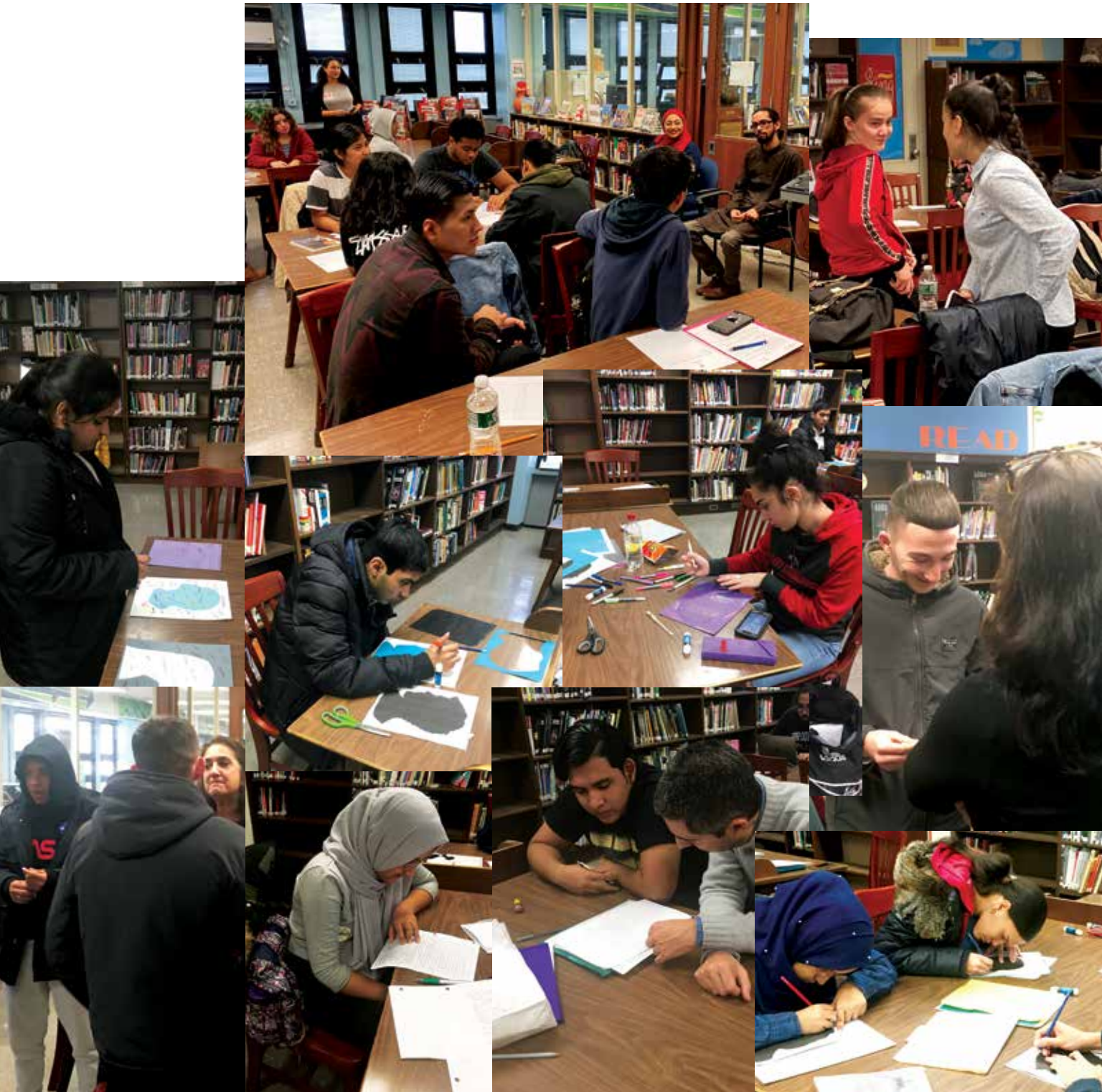


Behind the Book teaching artist Candice Humphries led students in an art workshop where students labeled silhouettes with words or phrases they associated with their own identities.

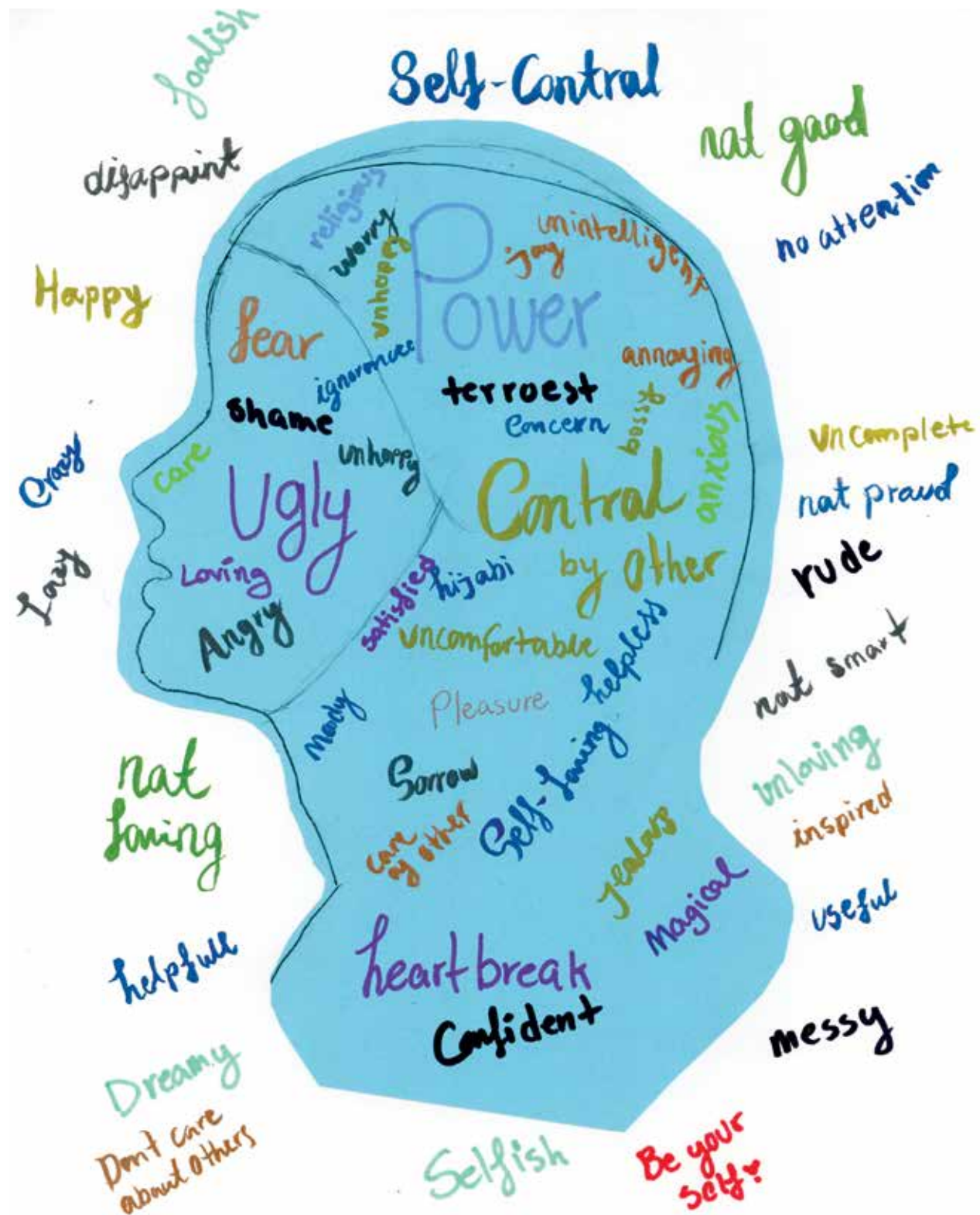


Over the course of this program, students explored how vulnerable people can feel when ostracized by society. This book shows the ways that we are striving to make the world a more empathetic and inclusive place. We hope it helps you to see the potential we all have to live together harmoniously.

The Narratives and the Art



The Interview



It was about eight in the morning when we reached the American Embassy on December 10th, 2013. The sky was bright and shiny. As the cold dry air hit my face, I started to shiver as I came out of the car. My grandmother was worried that my parents might need help in the Embassy, so she told my cousin and my uncle to come with us. My uncle had been helping us with the application since the beginning. The noise of the traffic was making my head ache and my anxiety caused me stomach pain. After my brother parked the car, we walked for about five minutes until we reached the Embassy.

My stomach started making growling sounds caused by my nervousness. Many people like us were entering for an interview or coming to collect their visas. As we were walking up to the Embassy, my mother grabbed my hand tight in her cold and sweaty hand. She looked at my face over and over, and I knew she wanted to tell me something. Finally, she said, "Your uncle called me yesterday, and he told me that they might take you to the different room to

ask you some questions." She paused for a few seconds. "Don't worry too much. You remember your uncle told us that your

WRITTEN BY

SABRINA

brothers' names were switched with the paperwork? They might ask you questions about their real names."

When my uncle applied for us to come to the United States he put my cousin with us because his father passed away and put him as my sibling because he lost his chance to come to America. My uncle planned to add him as part of my family, so he could come to the USA. But when the Embassy started requiring DNA tests, my uncle tried to remove my cousin's name, but he couldn't change the name. In the application, my younger brother's name was deleted and he was named as my oldest brother and my oldest brother was named as my cousin's even their age difference from their real ages. When I heard my mother at that moment, my mind was filled with questions, but I couldn't answer them.

My uncle went up to the security guard outside the building to ask him what to do. The security guard was slim and had dark skin with a gray beard. He looked at my uncle with evil eyes and told him to wait in line with other people in the rude voice. We waited in the line for about fifteen minutes. My legs felt like I have no energy in them. My oldest brother Rubel Bihar's face also looked worried. Back in Sandwip, our home village, when Abbu used to come from work, Bihar would sit next to him, and Abbu used look worried and said, "Don't tell anyone about our America application. We can't trust anyone in the village, even our own people."

Finally, we got inside the Embassy. It was warmer and the hallway was long and quiet. Before going into the waiting room, one of the middle-aged white men wearing a suit checked our passports and took the whole file. But he didn't take the yellow envelope where we had brought our family picture to show them that we are family. We waited there for an hour. While waiting, we met a family who also felt the same way as we did. At first, I thought it was only us who were not feeling confident, but most of the people in the waiting room had a worried face.

All of a sudden, I heard someone calling for us. My heart beat even faster now. One of the women at the counter with frizzy hair looked up our ID, and took my parents' and my brother's fingerprints, but not mine since I was 11. My younger brother, Maheraz, his fingerprint didn't come out. They tried again and then one man noticed that my brother has a skin problem. They told my brother and me to wait. They took my parents, my brothers, and me to the different rooms.

One of the Asian girls with her sweet voice greeted me. Then she asked me in Bangla, with an English accent, "Are those two your brothers?"

I said, "Yes."

She asked again, "Tell me, is some forcing you to say this? Don't worry. If you tell me, we can handle it secretly."

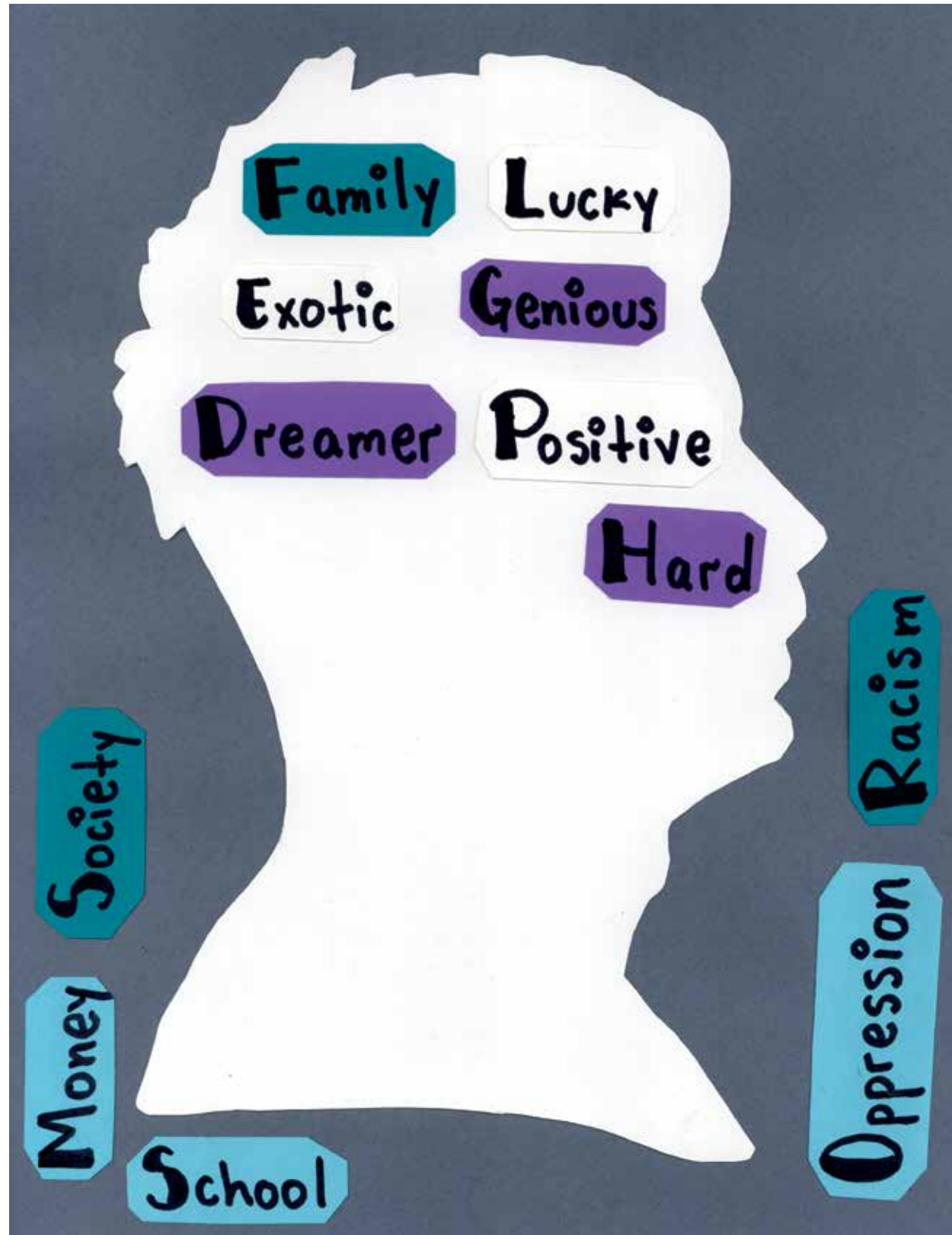
I told her that they are my real brothers. Then she asked me if I had any other siblings. I nodded.

Then she took us to our parents. When I saw my parents' faces, they looked tired and worried. With a cracking voice, my mother told my father, "If Maheraz doesn't get the visa, tell them to cancel

my visa too." Thankfully, the Asian woman returned with a happy face and told us that we will get the visa, but they still needed the fingerprint of my brother. They told us to send him to a dermatologist. We were relieved but Ammu still couldn't believe them.

This day was the scariest day of my life. I felt the deep fear of leaving my loved ones. Now, when I hear about other people who have come to the USA but have left their loved ones behind, it makes me wonder: what would happen if I or my siblings had stayed behind? And it gives me a shock.

The First Day



I woke up early that morning, a little bit annoyed at being awakened by my mom screaming “Kevin! Buenos Dias, ya es hora!” But I was excited because was my first day of school. When I was eating breakfast, I was happy because I was in New York, one of the most beautiful cities around the world. I remembered the words that a lot of people from my country say, “Where your dreams come true.” I was ready to leave home after giving a kiss on the cheek to my mom and after hearing her say, “Buena suerte, hijo.”

Finally, I was walking in the middle of the hallway to try to find my first class when a security guard tell me “Go to your class.” At that moment, I knew I was too far away from home because I didn’t know English very well.

After 15 minutes, I found my history class in Spanish and my expectations changed when I saw a lot of classmates from different countries. One of the first traditions in that class was to introduce yourself, stating your name, where are you from, and to talk about

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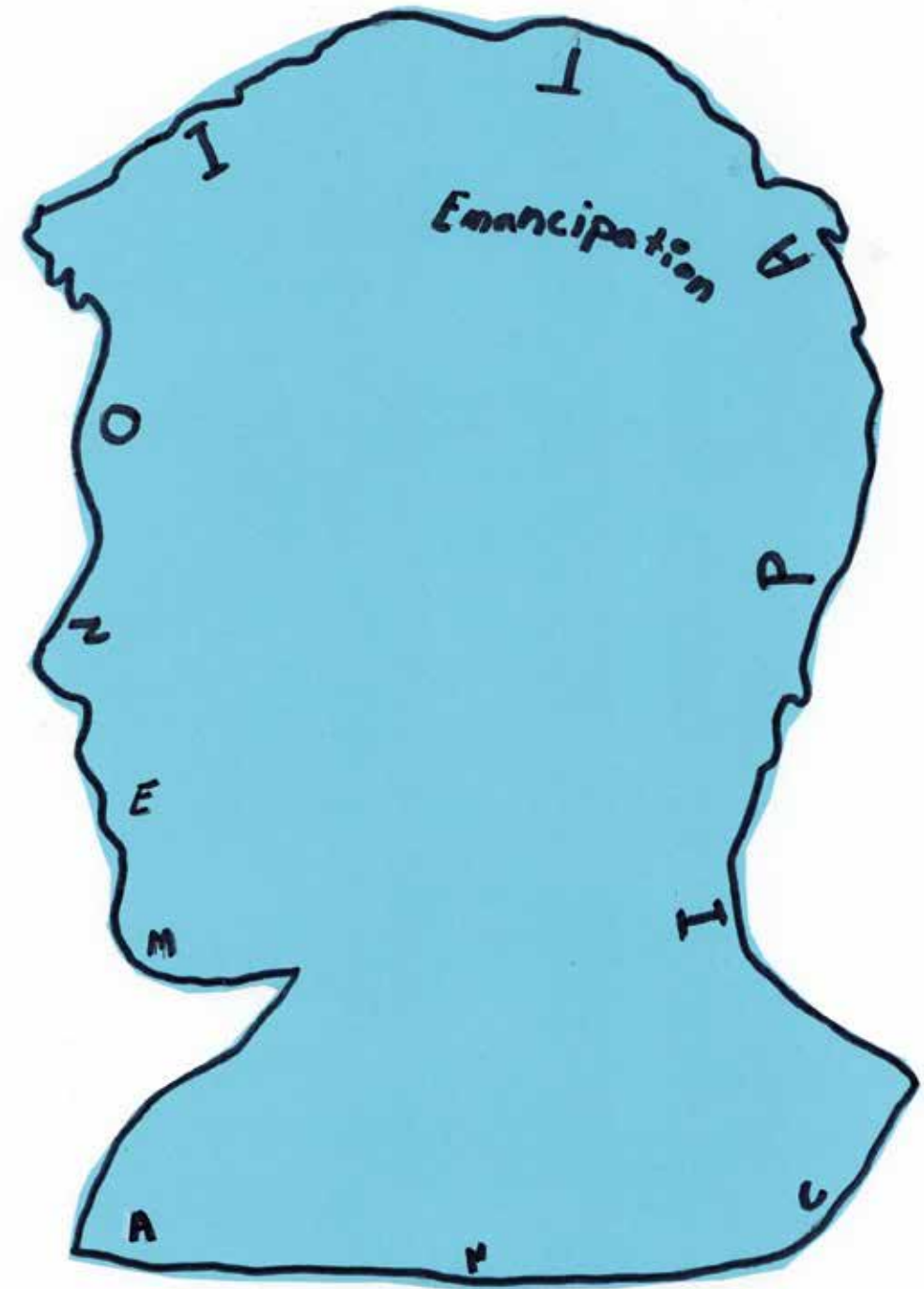
KEVIN

one of the most important things about your country, like sports, food or anything else. After I heard from a lot of classmates from different countries, like Venezuela, Mexico and Guatemala, finally, it was my turn. I heard the teacher call my name, and I start walking slowly going to the front of the classroom. My body was shaking and the classroom was starting to feel like 20 degrees. When I finished talking about my country, my classmates were looking confused, so I started to talk about one of the issues that affect my country: the violence. The next day a lot of classmates did not want to talk with me because they were thinking I was a gang member or a bad person.

Two years later, I was in eleventh grade. One day, when I was walking to my lunch period, I saw a girl in the middle of the hallway, looking confused. She looked like she was in the middle of a strange city, lost, and trying to find the closest train station to go

back home. This girl reminded me of my first day of school, so I walked through the middle of the crowd to reach her and help her.

I asked her, "Where are you from?" and she told me, "Mexico." Then I asked her for her first class and she answered, "History," in classroom 455. I was surprised because it was the same classroom where my adventure began.



"THE WORLD IS A COLORFUL
DARK PLACE THAT WE LIVE IN."

ART BY KEVI

Solitariness



ART BY TASNIM

“So, why do you want to be a student ambassador?” asked Ms. Turturro. And there I am, sitting in the center of the room on a chair, trembling in nervousness and feeling goosebumps on my hands. Being surrounded by her and other ambassadors was a nightmare for me on those days. I got inspired for this position when I saw the student ambassadors wearing red polo shirts, giving tours to parents, and taking part in extracurricular and academic events.

Little did I know how easily that day would go! Ever since I passed the first two rounds of interviews, my head used to spin while thinking: what would happen in the actual interview? Will I be able to answer all the questions? Finally, the day came and left me like a happy wind, saying to me that the interview was really good. A few days later, I got a letter in my second-period class and it made me feel I was on cloud nine because the first word of that letter was: “Congratulations!” My heart was dancing, knowing no bounds where to stop, with the inner thrilling feeling of I did it! It was the

WRITTEN BY

TASNIM

first success for me, surpassing 40 applicants and gaining the position of student ambassador. So, of course, that was one of the overwhelming

moments I have ever had.

And there the real struggle began. Every morning, we are required to come to school before 7 o'clock, have to attend a school fair at least once a week, and many more responsibilities. Everything was going pretty well. I began to like the program except for the fellow ambassadors there. I thought even though I am a new ambassador, it will not take much time for me to get mixed in with them.

But the way they started to behave with me was not like my expectations. Hearing commands of “Do this, do that” made me feel low self-esteem. I wondered if they were behaving with me in this way because I am a Muslim who wears hijab. It seemed like the other new ambassadors got easily blended with them. Then I thought,

maybe it's my fault that I cannot talk in English that much. At the college fair too, I stayed on my own, having no company, feeling completely isolated. I would see the other ambassadors together, gossiping. Even when our coordinators took our individual pictures to put them up in the hallway, I did not find my picture there. I lost my temper so badly that I confronted one of the ambassadors

"You were responsible for sticking pictures up in the hallway, right? Do you know where mine is?"

"Oh, I am sorry! A couple of pictures were lost when we printed them," she said.

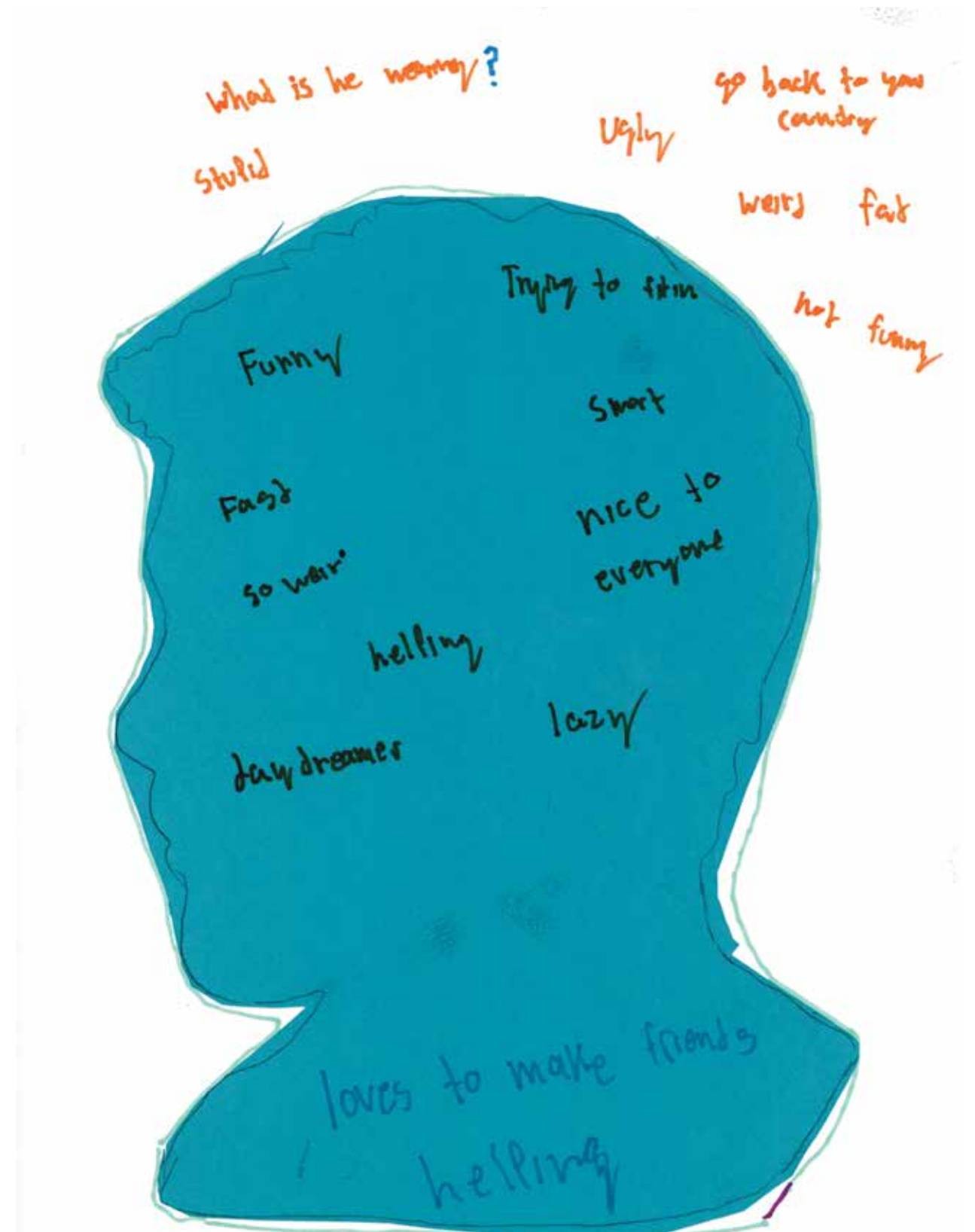
"How can that be? I saw all of your pictures there."

"Okay okay, don't overreact over such a petty thing. I will look for it."

I did not know what to say then. After a couple of events, I found my interest in this ambassadorship was going down and down gradually. I didn't even go to many events because I was so depressed, all the time thinking about my friends and family back in Bangladesh.

My mom said, "If you really want to do something in your life, then nothing should stop you." These words somehow cast a spell on me. I decided if I can get selected by my own qualification, who are they to stop me from doing my duties as an ambassador? I can do my work without their help and being their friend. These will not matter at all. I am who I am and I will participate in every event even if I am alone. Nothing can stop me.

Now I am a fully responsible ambassador doing all the events in my school. Not only these, but I also do many extracurricular activities outside of school and have made many friends here. I am glad I came so far from a newcomer to an enthusiastic volunteer and community worker. I am looking forward to going further with extracurricular activities in my life.



ART BY MUJTABA

I Am Different

I can relate to a lot of students who feel like they are different. Of course, everyone is not the same, but students, especially in a public school in New York City, all have different stories. An example would be how people assume where we are from based on our appearance. Like when you are on the street, people come up to you and speak a different language based on your appearance.

This year, my government teacher asked, "Where are you from?"

I said, "Hungary."

She said, "Wow! You can't be Hungarian; you look Spanish!" She didn't ask in a mean way, and it seemed she was just curious, so I explained, "Our culture is kind of different. We have a different language, too." I said.

But there is more to it. I was born in Hungary, but I am also Roma, or Gypsy, so that will make me a Hungarian-Gypsy. I know it sounds complicated, and in a way, it is.

When we lived in Tatabanya, our streets were named after seasons. My family lived where the train tracks were on the hill. The tracks were abandoned, so the criminals used the old tracks to escape from

the police. Their presence made us distrust anyone. There is a lot of discrimination in my country against anyone different, especially with the Roma. The government doesn't really give jobs to my people, and then they call us thieves because we need to provide to our families, even if the government doesn't help. Every country has good and bad people. I have learned that you can't assume about somebody that they are criminals. The experience of growing up in Hungary makes me think about stereotypes and first impressions of people.

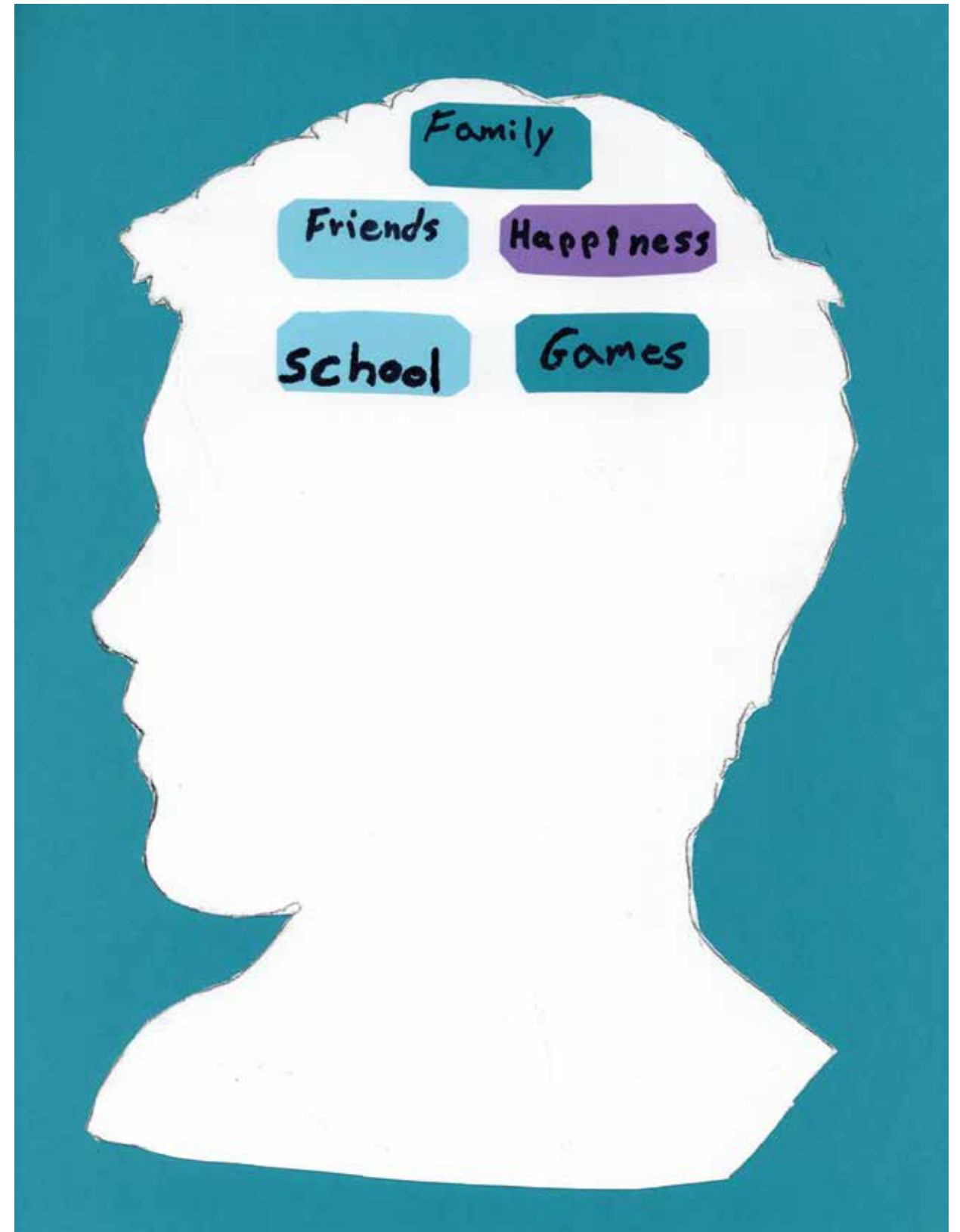
I am different in many ways. Another example is how my family is really protective of me, especially my mother. My mom called the school one time because I didn't answer my phone when I was



ART BY REBEKA

at my friend's birthday party. Because I forgot to answer her, she warned me that if this happens again she will call the police on me. She is very strict: I can only hang out with girls, and she needs to know who the person is, and I can't hang out at night. I cook and clean and do everything if my mom is at work. I have had many jobs, working really hard for little money. I was a cleaning lady and a babysitter. I got paid \$13 per hour and I had to clean basements, which was scary because I was all alone .

Being different has taught me that at the end of the day, people may judge or turn against you or talk behind your back, but you have to keep fighting no matter what. Sometimes to get to success, you have to cut negative people off. Keep your family close, but care about yourself first, because nobody else will.



Appearances

No matter who you are or what you do, it seems like people will always find an excuse to judge you. As a nine-year-old boy, I was judged by people in Venezuela because of my appearance. When I was in school or went somewhere else, people would say “Saludame a tu hermano, Jacky Chan.” At this moment, I wasn’t sure if I should be happy or mad because Jacky Chan is a famous actor from martial arts movies. I didn’t know if people were saying that because they are a fan of Jacky Chan or they just trying to bother me. When I was 10 years old, I went to China with my mom because she wanted me to meet my huge family that I never knew, since I had always lived in Venezuela. When I was fifteen, I came to the United States.

My ancestry is Chinese, but my nationality is Venezuelan. In my country, many people discriminate against Chinese people. I remember one instance when I was in my school. I was talking about Power Rangers with my friends in Chinese, arguing about who is stronger. Then our teacher told us to shut up. In a lower

WRITTEN BY

BAO YING

voice, making eye contact, she said, “Si hablan en Chino otra vez, no tendrá sus receso por un mes.”

I remember another time when I was having fun with my friends during recess playing Chinese cards games on the floor. At that moment, I could hear a guy trying to flirt with a girl in the corner, laughter, and the sound of running steps on the floor from kids playing “la ere.” But suddenly five guys came slowly to us and told tell us to get out of their way. My friends and I looked at each other. In our minds, we were saying, *What is wrong with these guys?* like we’re using telepathy.

As we looked back, the group of boys begin to insult us, saying that the meat from Chinese restaurants is made of rats. They also said that we look like we’re sleeping because of our eyes’ shape. My



friends looked at me again, and I tried to read the movement of one of my friend's lips: "Do you wanna punch his face? Because I do."

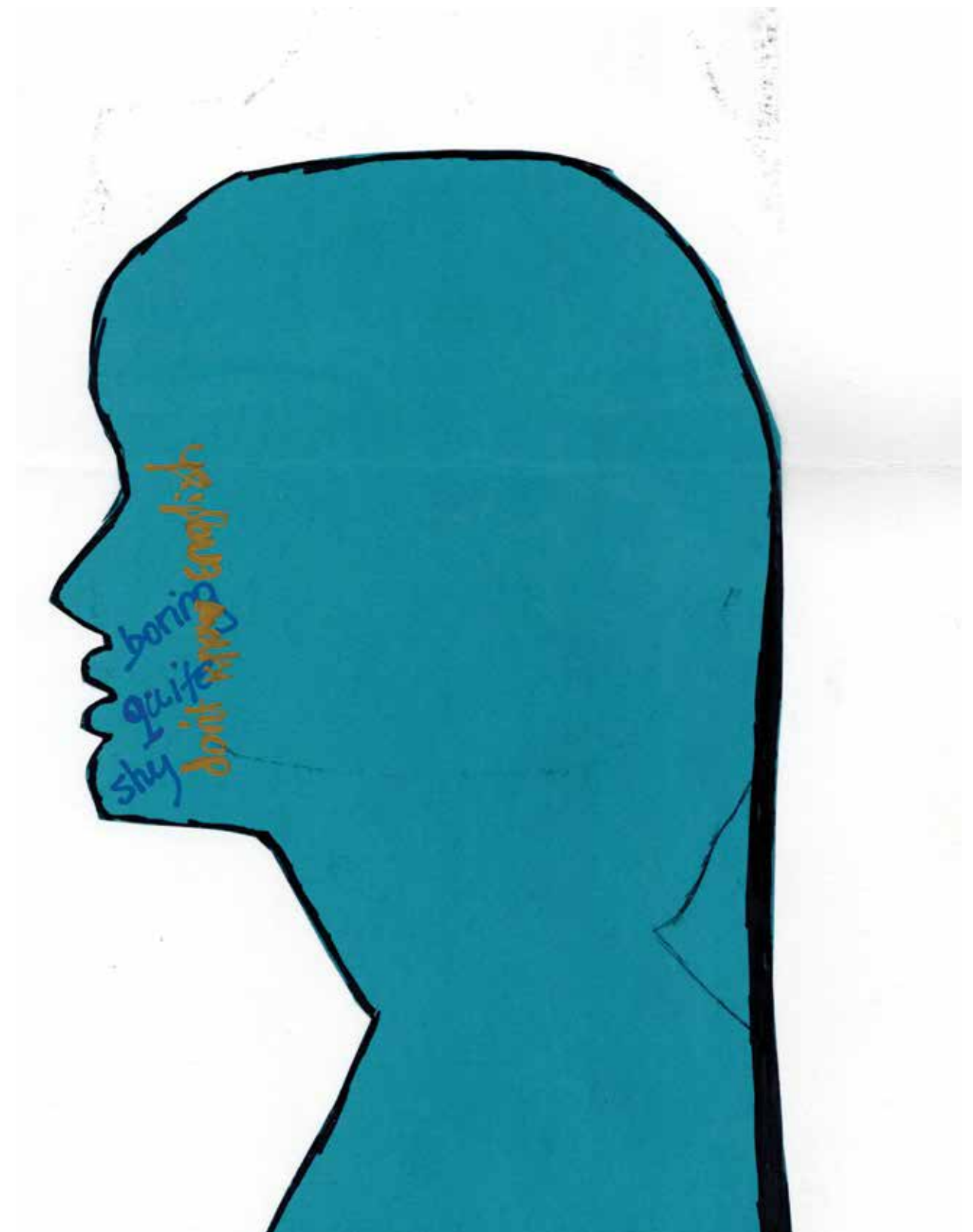
"Yes, me too," I replied quietly, and my other friend just stood up ready to fight those guys. "What are you waiting for? I'm ready" he said. Then we ended up fighting them.

I went to China with my mom when I was 10 years old. When I first came to China, the smell of the air is different compared to Venezuela, perhaps from the contamination from the industry. A couple weeks after I arrived in China, the neighbors got to know me and where I came from, and they started calling me "South American boy." They said that I'm different from them because I was born in Venezuela. They say that I would not like China and that I don't deserve the blood of my ancestors when they saw me walking alone on the path. They also said I only eat these unhealthy foods like hamburgers, french fries, KFC chicken, and other fast foods.

At this moment, I felt that people will always judge me with any excuse. I told my mom and my auntie about what happened, and they told me to ignore the neighbors and not to let these people influence me. Except maybe about the food. They told me don't eat that much unhealthy food and I agreed.

Finally, when I was 15 years old, I came to the United States. Here in Brooklyn, I saw a lot of mixtures of people from many different cultures. When I entered high school here and got to know other students, I heard many different stories from my classmates who have been in similar situations like me but with different experiences.

Now I think that no matter who we are, what we are doing, or where we are, we need to be proud of ourselves because our differences are what make us unique and the person who we are right now. After all of the situations that I've been through where I felt judged, I try not to judge other people because maybe they have had the same experiences.



My New Life in the United States



I arrived on September 1st, 2016, around 12:30pm at JFK airport with my mom, dad, sister, and brother. We were coming for the first time to America from Uzbekistan and we are immigrants.

I was really happy because I always wished to come to America when I was in my country, and finally my wish came true.

When we got off the plane, I saw the huge airport, with a lot of different kinds of people. Some of them were dark-skinned, some speaking Italian, Uzbek, or Russian and from many different countries. And everyone was speaking English or other languages. For us, it sounded like they were speaking so fast. I looked at my sister and I said to her, "Look, how are they speaking so fast! What are they talking about? Maybe they are saying something about us because we don't know English".

I was feeling happy, but on the other hand, I was shaking too

WRITTEN BY

FERUZA

because I never saw before so many different people in real life. I had seen different people on TV, but it's different when you see it in front of you.

In Uzbekistan, the people are mostly the same. In my home city, Samarkand, the people all know each other and they gossip about you. If you do anything, there are three ladies who will see you on the street and they will say, "Look at that girl! She is going every day outside. Maybe she has a boyfriend." Or if you turn eighteen, they say "Why is she not getting married?" Or they always talk about what is going in everyone's family. When they see me on outside on the street they look at me like I did something wrong. I really don't like it, but it happens to everyone.

We got our luggage and went to registration, but we didn't know what to do. Then we saw other Uzbek people, and we felt happy because my sister asked for help and then they helped us.

After that, with almost everything finished, I was feeling happy and like everything was going to be great. I think that situation happens to everyone who comes to a new country.

When I was in my home country, I always wished to come to America because I was watching the movie *Home Alone*, and in that movie, the little boy is going everywhere. Also my sister were living in New York City already and they sent us pictures of big buildings, Times Square, the Statue of Liberty, Central Park, the zoo, and museums. When I saw those pictures, I always said to my mom, "I really want to go because look at them and how they go everywhere! I want to go too."

My mom always said, "Don't worry, we will go some day. Just pray to God." After that I wished everyday and finally my wish came true.

After all of our registration was done, we went outside and there were my brothers and sister waiting for us outside. We went to my sister's home where everybody was waiting for us there. On the way, I saw the big ocean. I thought it was a very beautiful landscape with a lot of buildings, trees, and houses.

After that time, I learned, and now I say to myself, it doesn't matter who people are, never think they are bad or that they are laughing at you. Maybe they are looking to you for help because they think you know English and you know what to do. Maybe they are new too. So if you don't know a person, never assume they are bad.

When I think about that moment, it always makes me laugh. I'm happy because living in the United States has taught me many things.



The Bus

The faint chirping of birds on a cloudy day are my joy in the morning. The shining morning always arrives daily after a dark gloomy night, but this day was a cloudy day of winter vacation. I woke up at 6 am and offered salah; my body tells me its salah time even when I'm sleeping; it works like an alarm clock. That time is my most favorite and peaceful time. I went back to sleep, and when I woke up, I received a call from my doctor with a reminder for my regular checkup.

After I took a shower, I walked into the kitchen and smelled something very tasty. Mom calls it omelette with potatoes and spices but it's more than that, like Fresh Heaven Omelette. Our mother always makes sure the family has a homey, hearty meal on the table. Whatever she makes, it carries a certain taste of memory. After eating breakfast, I put on my outfit for the day, and a matching hijab and coat.

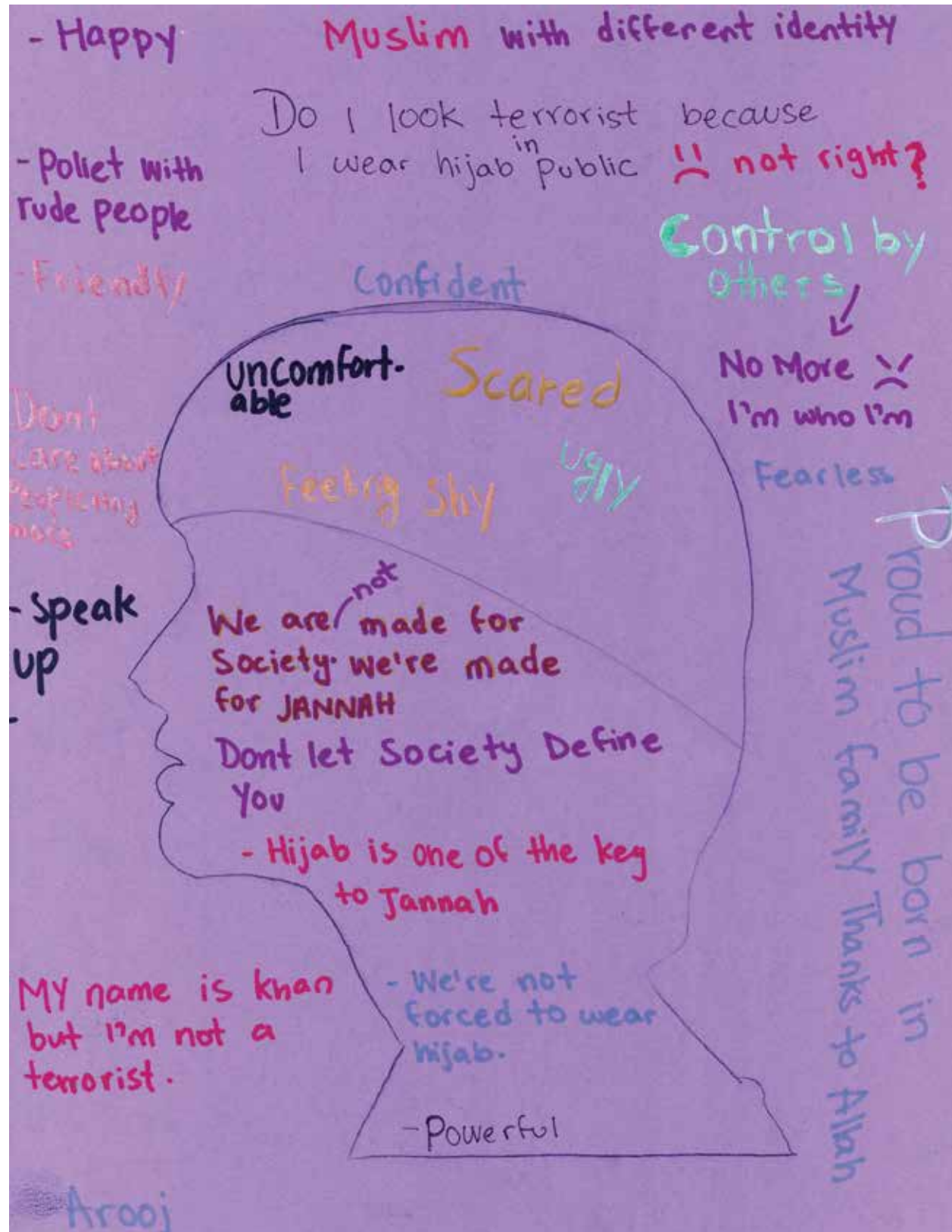
As soon as I opened the door, the cold heavy wind slapped my face. I started to shiver and my teeth started to talk to each other. My breath was making tiny clouds in the air, which I love about winter. I was walking through the street thinking about how I hate getting the flu shot because it always gives me so much pain.

I stood at the bus stop. It was a long wait for the bus and there were four other people including me, getting impatient. Finally, I saw the bus coming stopped with the sound of a thunderstorm. I swiped my card and I felt much better in the heat. I sat back on the window side.

My eyes were on the trees with no leaves. The bus was moving side to side as we traveled these familiar roads. Some people were in a rush and worrying themselves on their arrival stops. Some looked like me, like they could barely open their eyes because who wants to leave their comfy and warm blanket and wake up in winter,

WRITTEN BY

AROOJ



even on a beautiful, cold morning. I put my headphones in my ears and started to listen to music.

The bus pulled over to the next stop. When I looked up, I saw a strong, tall, fat lady wearing a coat. She had big eyes and red hair beads and was starting to yell. For a second or two, I thought she was talking to her son who came and sat right next to me, so I didn't really pay attention. She moved toward me, saying, "She is a terrorist. Get up, son."

She also told me to move aside, but I didn't understand what was actually happening. Her voice was so loud that everyone started to look at me with scary rude eyes.

She said, "These people cover their head and they got no mind."

I said "Excuse me, Ma'am?"

"Shut up!" she said in a very loud voice.

The bus conductor asked us to stay quiet, but she said, "You don't belong in this country, as well as other Muslims because we are scared of you people. We never know when you guys are going to harm us."

My heart broke into millions of pieces, but I did not disrespect her. I told her, "I may not be born and raised here, but I respect this country more than you and I know more about this country's laws than you."

She replied started to say "This girl is so disrespectful. No one told her how to talk to other people."

I said, "You started this. I didn't say anything to you, and Muslim women, like all people in the United States have the right to practice their religion. They also have the right to be treated equally and the right not to be discriminated against or harassed because of their religion, their gender, their color."

I was polite to her all this time, but when she tried to pull my hijab, I said, "You should stop—you are being racist and this is wrong." I could not control myself, and I could feel my face turn red.

I told the bus conductor to stop the bus and I called the cops and told them what happened.

They took her and the little boy with them. I didn't want to do that but when she pulled my hijab, I knew I had to teach her a lesson.

I wanted to show her and the other people on the bus that Muslims are not weak, and we will speak up if you disrespect us. When she targeted me, I tried to stay as calm as I could, but I felt an energy in me and confidence to be able to speak up for myself. This incident showed me that I'm confident and I can overcome my fear of not speaking and I have the power to control my emotions even the person is hurting my feelings.

I got off at my stop, then walked to the doctor's office and got my flu shot. That day, I didn't feel pain because I was in a bad mood.

I'm From Where Yelling Is Our Way to Speak.

"We must reject not only the stereotypes that others have of us but also those that we have of ourselves" —Shirley Chisholm.

Noise, crowds, and diversity took my attention for a while. Now, I have an awareness of society, confidence to learn, speak a new language and meet new people. I was just 16 years old when I began to experience strange feelings about myself and my identity changed. Nervousness and self doubt were in my mind.

"Do you speak Spanish?" asked the girl. She looked surprised when she saw me sitting in the Hispanic group at English 3 class. It was my first day of school in the United States at FDR High School.

"Yes," I answered, also surprised like she was. I wondered why she asked me that.

She continued, "I thought you don't speak Spanish because you

WRITTEN BY

ERELI

look like a Russian girl, but your hair is not like theirs," she told me and I was literally shocked.

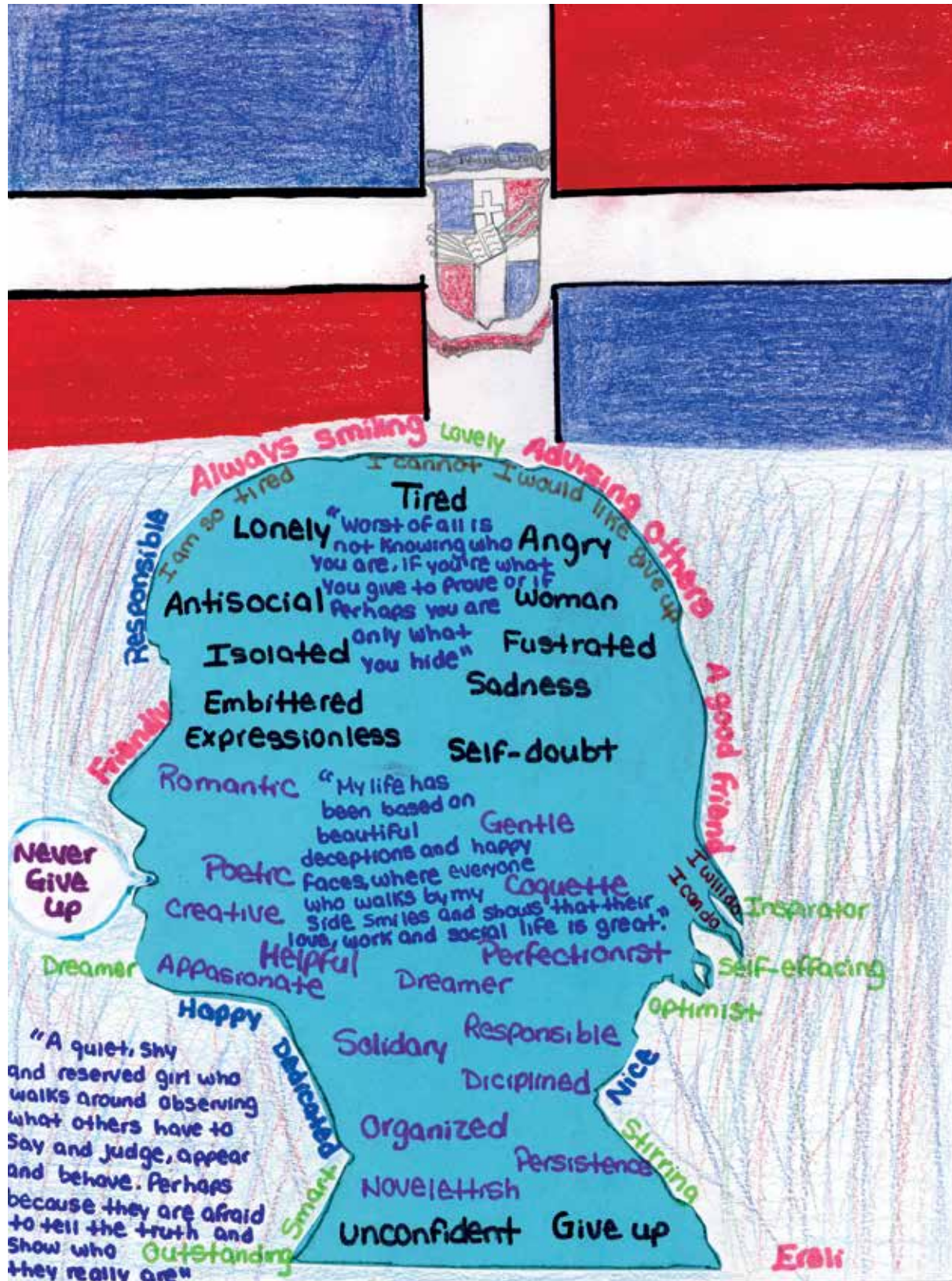
My hair is brown colored, curly and heaped.

The Russian girls I met seemed mostly to have

blond hair, straight and perfect hair.

Until I came to the United States, I saw a lot of people from different Spanish-speaking countries with different characteristics and personalities. "Latino" we are known as. It feels so weird when you had never heard the term Latino used to describe you because I started to hear it when I came to NYC. In the Dominican Republic, the term Latino is not used at all. All Dominicans are called "hermanos," unless you are speaking with someone who is not Dominican, but who lives in the Dominican Republic, such as Venezuelans or Chinese immigrants; they call us "Dominicans."

"No, I am not Russian. I am Dominican." I said, returning back from my thoughts.



I am one of those weird people who don't look like they are "supposed" to look or how others think they should look. I have light skin, brown, curly hair, and I'm of medium height. Many Dominicans have brown or black skin. The stereotype is that the Dominican accent is likely yelling at each other. Expressions like "KLK, Manin," are what they say.

But not all Dominican people are the same; in the Dominican Republic, there are people with white, black and brown colored skin, curly and straight hair. Our physical characteristics are not what others expect; it's more than that. Being Dominican is to speak out loud, to laugh with a sense of humor, to speak with everyone as if you know them for life, even if you met them once, to dance wildly, to have white, brown and black skin, to have curly and straight hair, to be fat, tall, short and skinny. Just to be you, and only you.

FDR High school at lunch period: a crowd of with many mixtures of people from different countries, religions, cultures and accents. But there they were too: my siblings, not blood siblings, but cultural, language, and red-white-and-blue-colors-flag siblings from our origin. I was attending my first year of school in a place where everyone around me was so different and unique. My friend Leandro approached me and introduced me to a friend named Brinny (who is Dominican as I am and Leandro).

"KLK, Manin," she greeted me with a huge smile on her face, something that gave me comfort and security when talking to her.

"Hello, my name is Erelis," I responded. She was so friendly, someone who makes you feel as if you were in your home country, someone who treats you as if she had known you for a long time.

Being in this environment around people from different countries with different languages has taught me a lot and now I can perceive the society better. Stereotypes are not only what others expect from us; it's even worse because we also expect some characteristics, behavior and ways of speaking to show our identity to society.

Brooklyn, NY. 2017. Franklin Delano Roosevelt High School. There were a thousand of students are from different countries and me, I'm another one. When I came to the United States, the first day was so strange and relaxing at the same time.

I began to see society's expectations when I was 16 years old, attending sophomore year. That's began when I was in my English class with Ms. Wohland and Mr. Weber. That was the first time when I realized that society always expects something from us. To get a good grade, to say the right thing, to have the right answer. Character vs Society conflict maybe it was, even it's because expectations from others to you never stops, never say goodbye.

Growing up I heard from friends' parents and relatives how they always expect something good from my friends. A good grade, but they never say congratulations to them. A good behavior, do not meet with bad influencers, do not do what others tell you to do, do not do what others do. A good son, a good student and friend. But what about what we think? What about how we feel and we like to behave, to decide who we are hanging out with? Sometimes society just wants us to be perfect, but our parents are not perfect at all.

Those expectations make me feel strange about myself. If I hide my identity from society, perhaps I am not the perfect daughter, sister, friend and person. But I know I am me.

I speak up when some Dominicans and others from different countries expect from me a "Dominican behavior." Because I'm not just the person who always say "KLK" and "Manin." I am just a person who is so proud of herself because I am from a wonderful country which, despite having problems like delinquency, environmental pollution, and corruption, the country still arises and walks, our people still work and study. I'm so proud of being Dominican, even though I don't always behave like "them." I'm Dominican and I will always be proud to say it to everyone.

The Subway

It was a cloudy day, and we were heading towards the C train station. It was in December.

“Hurry up, man” my little brother said. We began walking faster towards the train station. I swiped my card at the turnstile and heard the loud “bEeEEp” noise it made and passed through.

It was pretty cold outside, so it was nice being inside, although it smelled a little funny, the usual weird smell you get when you enter any subway: the mix of the trains’ fumes and garbage on the tracks. We ended up missing the train as I heard the loud noise of the train tracks get quiet in the distance. I looked at my brother, “Dang, this sucks,” I whispered.

The next train was about 6–7 minutes away, so we had some time to chill and walk around. My brother and I are generally quiet in public and only joke around with each other, so we don’t really bother anyone else. I was pacing back and forth. I got bored and played on my phone while we waited for the train, and my brother did

the same. After a couple of minutes, I heard the train tracks get loud again, the wheels screech against the tracks and I saw the

train’s lights in the distance. “The train’s here, come on,” I told my brother as he raised his head. I put my phone in my pocket, and the wind that hit us as the train zoomed past us made me flinch a little. The doors opened and we entered and found some seats.

There were a few people inside, so we sat down and got on our phones. My brother ended up spotting a friend from school, so they talked and laughed for a bit. I said hi and I ended up joking with them too. Eventually, his friend had to get off as we got to his stop, so we said bye. My brother and I were joking around, and we started showing each other funny photos on our phones. “Dude, look at this one—” I said but was immediately cut off by an angry voice.

I turned and glanced over at the woman, who had on a black coat, with a white beanie on her head. A few wrinkles showed on her face as she made that angry face. It wasn’t an intimidating face, it was one of those squinting expressions you make when you can’t believe something. She looked back at us and told us, “Shut up! People like you are always so loud.”

At first, I didn’t say or think anything. Then I thought about it and realized we were being targeted just because of how old we are. I told her, “Don’t talk to us like that. It’s not my fault you’re old.” She frowned and looked at us with anger, and my brother was trying not to laugh.

“Be quiet, you’re being the loudest, and it’s annoying me!” she rudely told him. That got me angry and I had to stand up for him. I looked at her and frowned a little, No one talks to my brother like that, I thought. I rudely told her off when I realized being polite was not going to cut it. I felt good since I don’t like it when people are rude for no reason. We went back and forth and my brother was sitting there, looking at the both of us. After a few stops, she eventually got off the train.

“I can’t stand people like that! It’s a subway, it’s supposed to be loud, I’m surprised she didn’t yell at the train tracks too” I whispered quietly to my brother. “I know, man” my brother replied. He eventually let out a silent laugh, and I did the same, as we just realized what had happened.

This whole incident made me feel good about myself because I felt like I stood up for myself and my brother. My brother also was happy because he was offended by her too but didn’t tell me until a couple days later. “That lady was annoying” he said. He seemed happy that the lady got a rude response after acting rude herself. I told him that he shouldn’t let people talk to him like that, and he should speak up whenever he sees someone disrespect him or someone he knows. He took that to mind, and now he seems more confident about being around other people.

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RICARDO R.

I Felt Like I Didn't Belong There

I was getting sick and I felt very weird, so the teacher told me where the bathroom was. Then I realized that all I needed was some cold water and a towel; it made me feel so much better.

It was September 14th of 2017, I was 15 years old, and it was my sophomore year of high school. At 7:20 in the morning, my older sister and I walked in the auditorium. We saw a bunch of students sitting down in rows and taking tests, so I felt nervous because everyone was writing in English and speaking good English. It felt like I didn't belong there because of the way I was dressed and the way I talked. Every little thing seemed different: even the way the students ate walked or the way they walked. I felt like I didn't belong there because they were all wearing jeans, cool shirts, and almost everyone had their iPhone and headphones, while I was wearing that terrible uniform from the school I used to go to, and

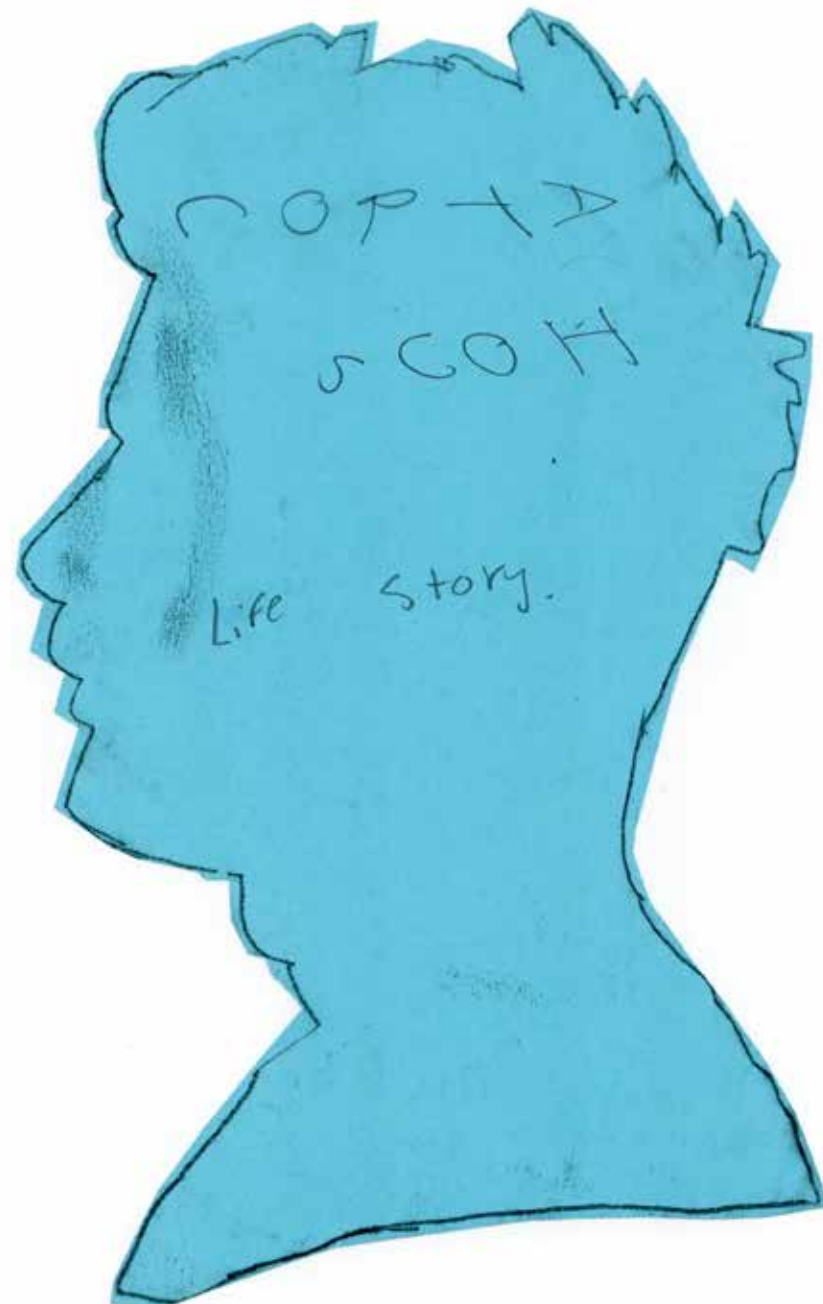
WRITTEN BY

YOUSEPH

had no phone, so I definitely knew I couldn't fit in with everyone else.

I felt sick and nervous. I had seen a random woman walking around helping students, so my sister asked her to take me to the bathroom since I didn't know where anything was. I washed my face with cold water, and dried my face up. Just doing that made me feel better and less nervous.

I took my test and passed it. The next day, I came to school and I didn't know anyone there, so I just stayed on my own for the first couple of months. It took me a while to speak better English and communicate with people. Then I started making new friends and started having a better life. Today, when I think about that moment, I realize that sometimes, all you need is some cold water and a towel. It'll make you feel so much better.



About the Student Authors

tragedies from across the world. *Eyes of the World* is a 2017 YALSA Finalist in Nonfiction. Their previous book, *Sugar Changed the World: A Story of Magic, Spice, Slavery, Freedom & Science*, was a 2010 Los Angeles Times Book Award Finalist and also a YALSA Finalist in Nonfiction.

Marina is the author of the young adult novels *Tell Us We're Home*, which was a 2017 Essex County YA Pick and *Ask Me No Questions*, recipient of the first James Cook Teen Book Award, an ALA Best Book and Chicago Library's Best of the Best, among other awards. She has published the adult novels *The Professor of Light* and *House of Waiting*, and a nonfiction book, *Remix: Conversations with Immigrant Teenagers*. Her books have been published in several countries and her short stories, articles, essays, and book reviews have appeared in publications such as *The Daily Beast*, *The Awl*, *The Huffington Post*, *LitHub*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Ploughshares*, *The Nation*, *Dissent*, *Marie Claire*, *Redbook*, *Travel & Leisure*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and in anthologies.

Marina Budhos has been a Fulbright Scholar to India, received an NEA Literature Fellowship, an EMMA (Exceptional Merit Media Award), a Rona Jaffe Award for Women Writers, the 2018 Maplewood Literary Award, and two Fellowships from the New Jersey Council on the Arts. A graduate of Cornell and Brown universities, she is a professor of English at William Paterson University, and frequently gives talks throughout the country and abroad.

She is married to the author Marc Aronson and lives in New Jersey with their two sons, Sasha and Rafi.

We are from many different countries including Albania, Bangladesh, Honduras, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Hungary, Pakistan, the United States, Uzbekistan, and Venezuela.

This year, we are learning about our identities.

In this class, we are all equal. We celebrate having many religions, races, and cultures.

About Behind the Book

Behind the Book brings authors and their books into classrooms to build literacy skills and create a community of lifelong readers and writers. Working with classes from Pre-K through 12th grade, our series of workshops is designed to bring books to life and inspire students to reach their full potential. Behind the Book is embedded in the class curriculum, nurtures critical thinking, creativity, and self-confidence in New York City public school students. All programs meet the Common Core Learning Standards.

Common Core Learning Standards Addressed

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.5

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

RAN VARIZA SADRINA KEVIN KALPET TASNIM TEMUR SAVLAT JASON ERIKA EDISON ISRA
T MOHIGUL REBEKA BAO YING FERUZA IBODULLO MOHAMED AROOJ ERELI
JENNIFER KEVI RICARDO YOUSEPH MUJTABA UGILOY RICARDO MIAO NOURAN VARIZA
BRINA KEVIN KALPET TASNIM TEMUR SAVLAT JASON ERIKA EDISON ISRA MOHIGUL
REBEKA BAO YING FERUZA IBODULLO MOHAMED AROOJ ERELI JENNIFER KEVI RICARDO
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