



VISIONS

Reconnect

HILLSBOROUGH
LITERACY COUNCIL

teaching Adults to Read and to Speak English

2022

**Stories by New Adult Readers
and English Language Learners**

Welcome



Message from the Hillsborough Literacy Council President

This year's Visions theme is **Reconnect**. Language - both written and oral - gives us the ability to not only communicate, but also to connect with each other. Building new skills that allow for deeper, more meaningful connections in both work and personal relationships is a primary driver of why many seek out the Hillsborough Literacy Council to help improve their English language literacy.

After over 30 years of connecting tutors and learners, this year was one of reconnection at the Hillsborough Literacy Council. As library meeting rooms reopened, many learners began to meet in person with their tutors, while others continued to connect virtually for language learning and Conversation Corners.

Through their work through Hillsborough Literacy Council, our students and teachers can connect across cultures and other differences. I applaud the hard work and dedication of all to improving language skills which improves lives. While logging hours and reaching personal goals, our tutors and students are also strengthening the Tampa community by building connections with each other and beyond. Thank you to our students, volunteers, the Hillsborough County Library and staff, and our donors for another year of purposeful connections.

Finally, congratulations to our Visions authors, graduates, and honorees! Let them inspire us all to reconnect with Hillsborough Literacy Council and grow our learning community.



HILLSBOROUGH
LITERACY COUNCIL
Teaching Adults to Read and to Speak English

Brandi Meredith
President
Hillsborough Literacy Council

Message from the Library Director

After two years of pandemic, it's time to start getting back out in the world in meaningful ways: going to school, work, and church; gathering with friends and members of our community; and closer interaction with others in public. **It's time to reconnect!**

The connections we've made online are governed by technology, often feel very isolating, and are especially difficult for those struggling with language. It's time to dust off and improve our social skills and our conversational abilities as we return to an in-person world.

We are so fortunate to have an organization like the Hillsborough Literacy Council that offers free assistance with spoken and written English language skills. Improved communication lets us be an active part of our community.

I admire the courage shown by adult students and new Americans in recognizing the importance of communication and in seeking help with basic written and spoken English. Their efforts are remarkable, and the stories and poetry shared in the pages of Visions are inspiring.

I want to applaud the hard work and dedication of the students, tutors and Board members of the Hillsborough Literacy Council for committing to improve the lives of our residents. Your example serves as an inspiration to others who also believe that it is time to reconnect with our community.



Andrew Breidenbaugh
Director of Library Services
Tampa-Hillsborough County
Public Library

The Hillsborough Literacy Council

The Hillsborough Literacy Council (HLC) is a nonprofit affiliate of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library teaching functionally and marginally illiterate adults to read and write. Through its Adult Basic Literacy program, participants learn to read, write, and communicate in basic English.

HLC accepts adults 18 and over. Depending upon the student's level, learning to read can take a year or more. HLC needs volunteer tutors and will provide them training and materials. We ask our tutors to commit to 48 hours of tutoring time, with a minimum of one hour a week.

HLC seeks funding partners and donations which will directly support the program by providing student materials and supplies for tutor trainings. For more information, [visit hillsboroughliteracy.org](http://hillsboroughliteracy.org) or call 813-273-3650.

The Hillsborough Literacy Council Board of Directors

Brandi Meredith, President
Jenifer Schneider, Vice President
Drew Pfeifer, Treasurer
William Hunter, Secretary
Carol Bockeneck
Joanna Cheshire
Karla Guzman-Mims
Eric Hughes
Paul Suppicich

Hillsborough County Public Library Cooperative Library Support

Andrew Breidenbaugh, Director of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library
Chely Cantrell, Library Brand Innovation Officer
Cheryl Wolfe, Manager of Library Learning Experiences
Giselle Suastegui, Literacy Assistant



**“To Learn to read is to light a fire;
every syllable that is spelled out is a spark.”**

~Victor Hugo

Annual Student & Tutor Appreciation Assembly

Welcome and Introductions

Brandi Meredith, HLC President
Andrew Breidenbaugh, Library Director

Keynote Speaker

Dr. Janet C. Richards
Professor of Literacy and Qualitative Research
University of South Florida

Student Speakers

Awards and Recognitions

Students of the Year
Tutor of the Year
Graduates
Sylvia Miller Award

Closing Remarks

Brandi Meredith, HLC President



Italian Club Ybor City
1731 E 7th Ave., Tampa, FL 33605

September 17, 2022
10 a.m. - 12 p.m.

**Special Thanks to The Mosaic Company and Rotary Club
for their generous support of our annual tutor-student recognition ceremony.**



Hillsborough Literacy Council Student Stories

The Hillsborough Literacy Council supports our tutors who graciously volunteer to help students develop strategies and techniques for reading and comprehension. It is a lifelong learning process, and our students excel in their dedication and commitment. The following entries are written by our current students. The entries have been printed in the exact way the students have written them.

Please enjoy and learn about our amazing students through their work.

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One Decision by Yesenia Giraldo

One day, a woman recently arrived in the United States decides to walk around and look for a job. She walks and visits some restaurants that are near, but none of them are hiring people for work.

After walking for a while, she finds a fancy place and sits outside to think. She thinks that in that place they won't give her a job. She doesn't know how to speak English and she has no experience in restaurants.



She waits outside for about 10 minutes and she thinks if she is going to enter or not. Finally she thinks, well I'm here, I need to work and the worst thing that can happen inside is that they say No thanks. So she walks in and for her surprise they say yes!

In that place she is received by wonderful people who teach her, they are patient and they treat her with love and respect. In addition to that, she meets the love of her life (the chef of the restaurant) who is now her husband and they have two daughters!

That is my love story.



Memories and Dreams

by Luzmariam Sandoval

My favorite memory was when I was 15 years old, I traveled on bus to Margarita (Venezuela Island) with my mom.

We celebrated my birthday for a week, we visited: “El Agua” beach, “La Restinga” lagoon, “El Agua” park, “El Yaque” beach and more. We had opportunity to share time as mother and daughter and learn more about the country.



I admire my mother because she is a strong woman in the face of adversity and always has a smile. My dream vacation is on the beach with my family enjoying the sea, sand, and sun.

Learning to speak and read English is very important because communication is the foundation of society. Once I have learned this language, I will be bilingual and realize my dreams of becoming a fitness instructor in this country and have my very own class.



The Solitude of the River by Shirley Andrade

It is common sense to believe that decisions have the power to change lives, but I think life is more like a river than clay that someone can sculpt into a statue. While we can control some aspects of our existence, life has a mysterious sense which is elusive. Its course is often unpredictable, and rubble lies at the base of the riverbed, unseen by human beings.

The life of the river is a vast and powerful water spirit; for me, this indicates that people have crossed it before us, and that the water will continue on its way.

The mystery of my life has been to understand why I am alive, what is the purpose of my professional career, what is the way I can love and be loved, and other deep questions for which I still do not have answers. Currently, a different concern occupies me: I wonder if becoming an immigrant is worthwhile. In any scenario, migration involves grief. One grieves for their culture, language, family, friends, and profession.

Sometimes the loss takes on more gravity than the new experiences. Being an immigrant as an adult, neither young nor elderly, as a woman, and as a person who does not speak the language of this country fluently, has made me feel sad, humiliated, and alone.

I interpret this moment of my life as a dramatic change of the river's direction, the river of my life. In this new curvature, there is a cloudy sky, a lot of sand, and not a single goldfish or snail in sight. Nonetheless, I have experienced a potent sensation of independence, courage, and hope. I have faith in existence because for the first time, I have to believe that life is wiser than I am.

In fact, I have discovered beautiful things throughout my experience of immigration that I was not aware of before. For example, I am delighted by the play of the leaves in the trees, the sound of the wind before the storm, and the friends who still write to me even though we live thousands of miles away from each other.

I have met people who think that life is a set of good or bad choices. Although I respect that opinion, I like to think about my path in another way. Perhaps this allows me to embrace the splendor of simple things, or maybe it is the way I prefer to tell myself that my life is unique and meaningful. If life is a river, and water is its spirit. I am just a wave. That means that sometimes I am brilliant, elegant, strong and versatile, and other days I am dark, calm, quiet and weak. In both cases I am still water, and life is still magnificent.



Untitled by Flor Guzman

Last week we were preparing for a trip with the destination to N.C. We were going to visit my husband's family. My children are in summer vacation and in my work is annual vacation also for two weeks.

We don't have a tradition of travel in the summer but I like it. It is a good idea to make a list for the items that I need. I packed belongings in the suitcase and the children packed too. I keep my critical documents with me. The organization is important because everything is more easily found. I learned that. My husband drove all night, we stopped in S.C. for visits with my.

We had a very good time. The children played with their cousins. They went shopping, the children swam in the river, we went to a water park, they watched the movies and played volleyball, basketball, and table games.

When we drove back home we saw a lot of beautiful landscapes. We played a game searching for license plates. We found Alabama, New York, Georgia, and Florida too. Now I am thinking we do that every summer! It is fun!



Untitled by Aida Torres Perez

Hi, my name is Aida. I'm so glad to improve my English, because I like to work. Now I was retire and de social security is to low for me. I need to work, because the doctor said that I have to eat fruits and vegetable they now are very expensive.

The other reasons is I need to communicate very well to the other people, because I need to understand what they said,

Now I have a good teacher my tutor is very good. It is to early for my to know a lot, but I know it was a hard time I'm 74 year old now. But 'm happy to start.



Untitled

by Ceferina Martinez

This article will explain the experience I had, since I started to read in August 11, 2021. I have been reading with a tutor. Which he is excellent for me. The first we did was get in a program the name is Marshall. We learned about Labor Day that's national day to honor American work.

Next was about Susan B. Antony who has fought together with another woman, for voting right. After that, he told me about so many things, such things as the, president the United States. As Benjamin Franklin, who was a very smart person, scientists who, invent a lot of great things.

I like something, that he used to said it. The wise man go to the early and got up early. Thomas Jefferson, who was the third president of the U.S. Through his life he did a lot of important things. Which I didn't know until, reading along with him.

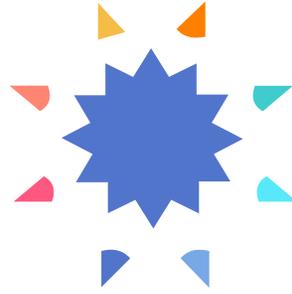


Through our class he always explains something else to me. Such as, last week he told me about, how to graft, I don't even know anything about that. The other day, he talked about, how hard it is to publish a book. I don't even imagine it. And he explain to me point by points. Here are something very good is it. That I'm understanding what he said.

However reading for me has not been easy. **Despite, what doing a challenge, I did not give up. I would like to said thanks.**

For all you help, I really appreciate that. And I also have an advice for you too. You are a very smart person you can be encouraged to write your book.

I hope one day, I will read your book. I know it is very hard work, but you can do it.



Untitled

by Seema Suryawanshi

Hi, my name is Seema Suryawanshi. I came to the USA in 2017. It was my first time going on a journey that was in an airplane. I was very scared the day I came to Tampa, a new place, new language, and new people, and it was very confusing for me.

My kid's school teacher spoke only in English. I wasn't able to understand because I spoke Continued

Marathi. I met one person who told me why don't you go to the library? Then my husband called the library for the English class Information.

Then I joined the class and started learning English. I was very confused on the first day and didn't really understand anything they said.

When I started to go to the library daily, I was able to understand English a lot better than usual. The library also provided a lot of books that helped me learn English.

I want to thank my English teacher for his guidance. Due to him, my English has improved a lot.





Everything has Changed by Josefina Arrequin

When I started tutoring, I was nervous. **But I believed in myself and it has changed everything.** I can now help my son – the reason I signed up for tutoring in the first place. Now I feel I'm part of my community. I understand English correctly, thanks to my teacher, Zuly. She is very patient with me. She has helped me 100%. She is my support.

This past school year, I participated more in my son's academics, school meetings, and even in communicating with teachers through texts and emails. Now I can understand more because I am growing in my speaking and listening skills. Tutoring has been the best for my life!

Before tutoring it was so difficult for me to understand my son and daughter's schools. It was hard for me to connect. But now everything has changed. I am so happy because I know how to help my son with his learning and his projects. And he is happy because we are working together.

It's not too late to start. It doesn't matter how old you are. When we want – We can. I thank the Literacy Council, its staff and volunteers, for their help and patience to the community.





The Challenges Can Change Your Life by Angie Laverde

Before I came to the United States, I had many thoughts about what it would be like. However, it was different than I believed. I expected I would come just to improve my English, but I learned many other things through experiences.

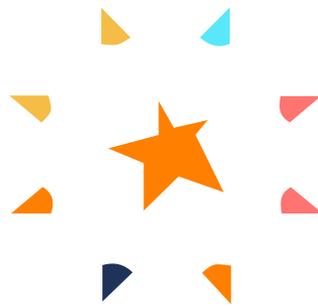
I thought learning English would be easier, but it is still a challenge every day. Trying to have good communication and express myself in another language can be frustrating sometimes, but not impossible. You need to be yourself and express your feelings. **Be consistent and work hard to make your English better.**

I want to talk about the differences in the United States than in Colombia. For instance, in my country we don't have brunch. We always have three or four meals a day, and dinner is not our big meal and principle like here. The second difference is, we can live with our parents longer. It doesn't matter what your age is, in fact most of the children leave the house when they are married. Additionally our family time is more of a priority. We spend more time with our parents, grandparents, cousins etc. Moreover, We express our feelings more often and a little bit differently.

The last difference is the parties, we always dance to get rid of our stress. Here, it is more about talking and drinking, in my experience here never dancing. Columbia has Central time. The sunrise is always 5:30AM and the sunset is 6:00PM. I was so confused on my first day when I came to Florida in February, and at 6:00AM and 7:00AM in the morning it was still dark.

Then the days were so long in the summer because the sun arrives at 5:00AM and the sunset is 10:30PM! Another challenge was the weather because in comparison to the US where it has seasons. We don't have them in Colombia, then I was living in a place with perfect weather, what I mean is 59F- 60F, not so cold, not so hot, just ideal.

Even though time are different that I expected in coming to the United States, as a result I have learned and improved my skills. All moments help me adapt and grow in every single aspect of my life. I have become more flexible, patient and a risk taker. I also learn more about myself. I discovered I'm considerate, prudent, and I can do more and I'm stronger than I thought. At this point I feel grateful to God for allowing me every single one of the experiences and challenges to learn and improve my life.



Vision and Mission are a Very Powerful Tool

by Harry Caliz

On this occasion, I want to speak to you. About what it means to me to start a new business in my new country, the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, and how the Vision and Mission helped me become as an entrepreneur.

This year, I decided to start my own home remodeling company. It all starts because I want to provide a better quality of life for my family and be able to spend more time with them. It cost me a lot to make this decision to be an entrepreneur because people always tell you that beginnings can be hard, and I did not want to play with the economic future of my family, but at the same time, I trusted the experience of the jobs I have had in my new country. These jobs helped me to have a clearer vision of what I want to achieve. My Vision is to be one of the best remodeling companies in Tampa Bay.

After my vision, I had many questions about how I am going to achieve the proposed goal. So here comes the Mission. For me, it was trying to find answers to each question that I asked myself over a long period. The Mission helps you to execute each answer you previously gave yourself. Every Mission must have a plan where you must complete certain tasks that will take you to your goal. I continue to work on my Tasks and I hope that in the not-too-distant future they will lead me to fulfill my Mission of being one of the best companies in Tampa Bay.

It is incredible that these two simple words (Vision and Mission), can help you overcome something in your life that is not right or that has you stuck in the same place.

I am a person who believes in cause and effect. And that is why I want to motivate other people who fight daily to achieve their dreams and goals with these two words.

From A Tutor's Viewpoint by Carol

I would like to share an HLC experience from the tutor's point of view.

I have had several students over the years. None of my students reached the level of graduation but all made real progress. One success story stands out.

This student's name was Maud. She came from Haiti but she was not an ESOL student, she spoke English. Maud could not read. She was born with a cleft palate that went unrepaired. Because she was teased at school her parents did not make her attend. After the first day or two she never went back to school.

Maud married, came to the United States, and had two daughters. Her husband was not good to her. Because she could not read the only jobs she could find were cleaning houses and sometimes she worked as a cook. She remained with her husband until both daughters graduated from college then they divorced.

After the divorce Maud managed to get help and had her cleft palate repaired. Then she set out to find someone to teach her to read. She had gumption! She found the Hillsborough Literacy Council and I was the lucky tutor assigned to her. Maud's goal was to learn to read well enough to pass the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) exam. To be a nurse was her dream.

We met at the library as often as we could. Like other students she often had car trouble or had to work late but she kept at her studies. We managed to get almost all the way through book 3 of the Laubach series. Then both of her daughters were called up to go to Afghanistan. They had joined the military to get their college degrees and had to fulfill their obligations. Both had children and were living on the east coast of Florida. Maud was needed to care for her grandchildren and she had to leave Tampa. We found the names and numbers of literacy organizations in her new town. I said goodbye and wished her luck. I was skeptical that she would have time to continue her journey to reading.

We lost touch, she was busy with her life and I with mine. About a year and a half later my phone rang and the caller was Maud. She told me excitedly that she had just passed her CNA exam! She had found a new tutor and managed to learn to read well enough to take the exam. We both immediately began to cry. I was so extremely proud of her and impressed with her determination and drive. She had achieved her dream.

This is what makes volunteering as a literacy tutor so fulfilling. Some people may not understand but those of us who continue to tutor truly do. Changing lives, one person at a time. It works.

Tutor's Message from Mohan Rao

I have been teaching English to foreign students for quite a while, in that time I have had the opportunity to meet with students from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds; the common thread that I see in most of the students is the avidity with which they which they pursue their desire to communicate in English.

For my part I have enjoyed most everyone especially in trying to design teaching models which would suit their individual needs.

These lessons are not just teaching sessions but also interchange of ideas personalities and interests and the students are especially responsive when we show any interest in their personal lives.

I feel I have received more benefit from these interactions than what I have imparted.

It's very touching when some of them spontaneously bring a small token of appreciation besides of course their heartfelt gratitude which they readily express. I sincerely hope to continue doing this work in the foreseeable future.



HILLSBOROUGH LITERACY COUNCIL

Teaching Adults to Read and to Speak English



**Hillsborough
County** Florida



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