

SPECIAL CREATIVE WRITING CONTEST EDITION

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Najoua Jai

Advanced 6

Advanced Contest Winner

TOPIC: *To stop terrorism, speaking has been outlawed in the city: communication is permitted only through technological devices like phones, tablets, and computers. Surveillance cameras are everywhere; anyone caught speaking is arrested by the police. But Hamza has fallen in love with Hiba. He sees her every day on the bus and decides he must tell her—no matter what. But he doesn't even know her username.*

She was there—just there—one meter in front of me. I could smell her perfume on her curly hair. I could see her hands shaking a little. I could see her breathing heavily. I wondered, “Why is she so stressed out?” Suddenly, she turned around, looked at me, and started moving her lips. She was talking. Yes, talking, but I couldn't hear her.

Wake up.

Oh no. I was late again. It has been one week now since I woke up late because of her, because of those dreams.

Pull yourself together, Hamza.

I grabbed my phone. No messages. No phone calls. My conscience reminded me, “Come on, Hamza. You can't make phone calls.” I had forgotten. I can't talk. Sometimes I tend to forget that speaking is now forbidden. Isn't it weird? To protect us, the government has decided since communication was the key to crime, they had to destroy that key. But people can still chat on Facebook and Twitter. The only difference? We are not free anymore. Well, it was either security or freedom, and the government chose security. Now, we are living in a silent world. No one is allowed to speak, not even at home. And if you do... Until now, no one has figured out what happens to those caught speaking.

On my way to the bus station, I see people. They are all silent. Sometimes they smile at each other. Most of them have phones, and they smile into their devices.

One day, I saw a woman say that she had lost her children. The children's father had sent her the news in a Facebook message. She couldn't reply in order to find out where she could see her kids one last time because she'd lost her Wi-Fi connection.

I paid for my ticket and took a seat at

the back of the bus. I looked at my watch. Five minutes until we would reach the next bus stop. It was Hiba's stop. She lived near there.

Hiba was a girl that I saw every day on the bus. I looked at her freckles. I looked at her big, brown eyes. I looked at her curly, rebellious hair. I looked at her hands and her nails, which were always painted a pale pink. I looked at her favorite coat, which she wore every day. It was a blue coat with a peace sign on the back. I looked at her. That's all that I could do.

Someone took the seat next to mine. I was so busy thinking that I didn't pay any attention to the person next to me. *But, wait... That perfume. Those pink-painted nails. It was her. She was sitting just next to me. Hiba was next to me!* I was only a few centimeters away from her. *I could touch her. I could... Wait... Why is she looking at me that way? Oh, no. Don't tell me I was looking at her and smiling like a loser.* I wanted to say that I was sorry.

I pulled out my phone, opened my Facebook and tried to ask her for her profile. She was growing more and more scared. I tried with only the power of my hands and face to show her that I was sorry. I tried to smile kindly and put my hands together in an “I'm sorry” gesture. The bus stopped. Hiba grabbed her peace sign coat and ran off the bus.

What an idiot.

I turned around, trying to follow her with my eyes. The bus was moving. She was sitting at the bus stop, waiting for the next bus, a bus without a crazy guy like me. So, without speaking, I moved my lips as if to say, “I love you.”

Later that day

“Hiba Zalagh sent you a friend request.”

I must be dreaming. This can't be possible. It just can't be. How did she know? Without thinking twice, my finger tapped “Accept.” I opened my conversations to send her a message, and there was her name. Hiba and I had already had a conversation on Facebook—two years ago. *No. That can't be possible. I must be dreaming.* I pinched myself. *Ouch. So, I am awake.* But, how could it be true?

A little over two years ago, all of the governments around the world agreed on one action. Speaking would be banned. No one would be permitted to speak with one another. After that decision, everyone was injected with a serum that made them forget every part of their past lives. All anyone could remember was their family members and all their memories related to family. Everything else was gone: emails, Tweets, Facebook posts, blog posts.

Everyone started over from zero. The government assigned new email addresses and Facebook accounts that were under constant surveillance. All past Facebook conversations had been put into an internet landfill. I couldn't have had anything left over from before that time. I couldn't have had that conversation with her two years ago.

I had a new message. It was her. I opened it. “Sorry, Hamza” was all it said. “What? Why is she apologizing?” I thought. Before I could reply to her message, I heard a noise in my apartment. I went to the kitchen and looked around the house. No one was there. *I must have been dreaming.* Fearlessly laughing at my scared little self, I went back to my room to figure out what was going on with Hiba.

There was a shadow in my bedroom. It was someone wearing all black. Now they were taking my computer. Before I could do anything, I felt a terrible pain in my head. Then the lights started to go out. The last thing I saw was a hand covering my mouth. The nails were painted a pale pink.

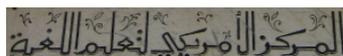
THE 2017 ALC-FES CREATIVE WRITING CONTEST

All of the submissions featured in this issue of the ALC-Fes Student Voice were written as part of the ALC-Fes 2017 Creative Writing Contest.

The student-participants were asked to respond to a creative writing prompt. A winner for each stage – Beginning, Intermediate, Advanced, Juniors, over-18 – was chosen by a panel of ALC teachers.

All of the winning stories appear in this issue. Congratulations to all of the winners. Thank you to all of the students who entered the contest.

FIND YOUR VOICE.
Send your writings to
alcstudentvoice@gmail.com.



Home Schooled

Rajae Sabir

Beginning 3

Beginning Contest Winner

TOPIC: *There's a house in the Old Medina that teaches a lonely girl the values of patience and love.*

The place where you grow up and spend most of your life can teach you a lot. It can put you on the right path or the wrong path.

Khadija was a very young girl who lived with her parents in a house in the Old Medina. She was their only child.

The house was small, and it had three floors. The first floor had a big hall where the girl played all the time. It was in the middle of another living room and the kitchen where her mom prepared delicious food for different meals. Her mom also had the time and patience to teach her daughter how to be a good girl. The second floor of the house had just one bedroom and a small bathroom across from it. Khadija loved staying there with her father when he came home and told her very nice stories. He never forgot to bring her a gift.

The girl hardly ever went to school. She only went to the first class. The school was very far from home, and her father worked all day. At home, Khadija and her mother played, sang, told jokes, and cooked and cleaned together. Soon, Khadija learned new things. She found a way to cleanse her mind and see more clearly. She came to know the values of patience and love.

Now Khadija is a lovely mother herself. She has a big family and a beautiful house, where she lives happily because of the rich upbringing she had in her childhood home in the Old Medina.

An Interview with Philip Byler

Student Voice: *Where are you from?*

Philip Byler: Pennsylvania.

SV: *Tell us about your life as a student. Where did you study? What did you study?*

PB: I have my B.A. in English.

SV: *How long have you been teaching at the ALC?*

PB: Since March 2016.

SV: *How long have you been a teacher in life?*

PB: Since January 2015.

SV: *When did you decide to become a teacher? Why did you choose teaching?*

PB: As I was finishing my degree in English, I started working with immigrants from all over the world. I really enjoyed working with them and also serving them. The more I taught, the more I realized how much I enjoyed it. Teaching is meaningful because it validates and gives meaning to others.

SV: *What do you enjoy most about teaching?*

PB: There are so many things that I enjoy. I enjoy working with students and encouraging them. I like to explain things and see students learn and understand. I enjoy creating lessons to meet the needs of the students.

SV: *Describe your teaching style.*

PB: Work hard, then play hard.

SV: *How is teaching at the ALC different from teaching at other schools?*

PB: This is the first and only school that I have taught at, but from what I hear about other schools, the ALC has a high level of academic standards and provides a rigorous and rich course load for the students.

SV: *What is the role of a teacher in the classroom?*

PB: To be present and enable the student to learn and discover.

SV: *What qualities do good students have?*

PB: Curious, motivated, focused, hard

-working.

SV: *If you weren't teaching English, what would you be doing?*

PB: I'm not sure. Possibly pursuing a Master's [degree].

SV: *What's your favorite word in the English language?*

PB: "Community."

SV: *What's your least favorite word in the English language?*

PB: One of those words that I can never remember how to spell.

SV: *What word or phrase do you overuse?*

PB: "This is why."

SV: *What is your motto?*

PB: Life isn't about what we want; it's about what we need.

The ALC Student Voice
WANTS YOU...



TO FIND YOUR VOICE!

Send us your
**ESSAYS, OPINIONS,
FICTION, and POETRY!**
PHOTOS and DRAWINGS, too!

Email us at alstudentvoice@gmail.com,
Find us on Facebook, OR
Give your writing to your ALC teacher!



Congratulations to the Spring 2017 ALC-Fes Merit Scholars



Every ALC-Fes Merit Scholar receives free tuition for one ALC term because of his or her outstanding academic performance.

Beginning 2	Loubna Nouichi	Intermediate 1	Mourad Rahmouni	Advanced 1	Mohammed Amine Zernoun
Beginning 3	Rajae Sabir	Intermediate 2	Ghita Benseddik	Advanced 2	Asmae Yakkouli
Beginning 4	Oumaima Dkhissi	Intermediate 3	Houda Aiboud	Advanced 3	Taha Jai
Beginning 5	Rita Lamrani	Intermediate 4	Abir Mrini	Advanced 4	Aya Lafdilli
Beginning 6	Afaf Abdellaoui	Intermediate 5	Zineb El Yarmani	Advanced 5	Achraf Belkasm
Beginning 7	Fawaz Abbas Hamid Al Saad	Intermediate 6	Inas El Mrini	Advanced 6	Zineb El Filali

How Life Can Be

Mohammed Mehdi Lahlou

TOEFL Prep

Over-18 Contest Winner

TOPIC: *On your 21st birthday, your parents tell you that you're a robot. They show you the documents to prove it and pictures of you being built in a factory in China.*

February 5, 2017

10:00 a.m.

I've been waiting for this day for a very long time. I can hear my parents preparing breakfast. The atmosphere is a bit strange. Last night, I told them that I would have lunch and dinner with my girlfriend to celebrate my birthday.

I go to see my parents. My mother has that beautiful smile on her face, the one that has always amazed me, but her eyes are different somehow. Deep inside me, I know that she feels sad because this is going to be the first time that I don't celebrate my birthday with her. My father is doing his best to convince me that everything is going to be fine. I am like, "Why shouldn't it be? I mean, I'm 21 years old. You should be proud of the man that I've become, a man who understands the value of love and isn't afraid to show his feelings."

10:30 a.m.

We are all sitting at the table. My mother is serving food while my brother is helping her. We eat breakfast, have my birthday cake, and then we move to the gifting part.

Right after, my brother goes to his room. I'm sitting on the couch with my mom and dad. She starts crying, and my father tells me that we should speak about something. I say, "hit me." I still remember each and every word he said. "Son, you're a grown man, and I think the moment has come to tell you the truth. You're actually a robot that was built in China. Here are the documents to prove it." There are papers... and pictures. My mother says that this is the reason why there aren't any pictures of the day I was born.

I start asking questions, the main one being, "How can a robot be rich?" They tell me that I am not 100-percent robot—I am a hybrid. I am only half robot and half human. They tell me that my mother had an accident two months before I was born and that they had to go to China to save my life.

11:30 a.m.

I have to go out to meet my girlfriend. Before leaving, I see my parents. I hug them, thank them for saving my life, and tell them that I love them.

12:00 p.m.

I'm waiting for my girlfriend to arrive. Here she comes in that beautiful dress that I bought her, all smiling and beautiful. I'm thinking, "Wow, am I lucky!"

I've never doubted her love before, but I know that today I am going to be 150-percent sure about whether she's willing to go through thick and thin with me.

We have lunch, go to the movies, then she gives me my gift. It's a robot that says, "I love you, Mehdi." How ironic life can be.

7:00 p.m.

We're at a different restaurant, waiting for our food. I am about to tell her the truth about myself. I say, "Sweetheart, there's something that my parents have just told me. I'm a robot. I was built in China." Then I tell her about the accident my mom and dad had, and I show her all the proof they gave me. She is shocked. I can't blame her. She starts asking all kinds of questions, which is when I tell her that I am just a hybrid. That is the moment when I notice that she is still holding onto my hands.

Our food is served and we just start eating. She can't stop staring at the documents I had given her. It is starting to get awkward, and I am afraid that it will be our last date. My birthday is turning into a disaster.

She starts laughing and asks, "So all this time, I have been dating an algorithm?" I say yes, and she tells me, "This makes you even more special and unique."

I drive her home to her place. I hug her, kiss her, and thank her.

10:00 p.m.

I am finally home, having just lived the weirdest but maybe the best 12 hours of my life. I am feeling blessed. I am the luckiest man—I mean man-robot hybrid—on earth. My parents were willing to go to war for me, and I am finally sure that my girlfriend is willing to go through thick and thin with me.

How amazing life can be.

When Hamza Met Hiba

Malak Mountaçer

Intermediate I

Intermediate Winner

TOPIC: *To stop terrorism, speaking has been outlawed in the city; communication is permitted only through technological devices like phones, tablets, and computers. Surveillance cameras are everywhere; anyone caught speaking is arrested by the police. But Hamza has fallen in love with Hiba. He sees her every day on the bus and decides he must tell her—no matter what. But he doesn't even know her username.*

It is the 25th-century. Speaking isn't allowed here anymore. People can only use technological devices to communicate. Everyone has been affected by this rule that prevents them from living normal lives. The smiles on their faces have disappeared. Everyone is truly living in misery. Relationships have been falling apart and families have been broken.

It's morning, and Hamza, a 21-year-old man, is sitting on the bus, staring at every young woman who gets on. He's hoping to see his crush—a gorgeous girl with chocolate eyes and long, dark hair that attracts every man's eye. Her name is Hiba. She deserves a gentleman, and Hamza knows it. He is determined to meet her because he is sure that he is in love with her.

There's something special about her. Is it the light that glows inside her eyes every time she smiles? Or is it her big heart? That is up for debate, but there is one thing that he is sure of—she is the one for him. He has been sentenced to a lifetime of deeply loving her. Seeing Hiba on the bus makes his heart beat faster every time she is near. Hamza suffers. Seeing the love of his life every single day but not being able to speak to her breaks his heart into a million pieces.

Just then, the one and only Hiba sits next to Hamza on the bus, interrupting his daydream. He desires to break the rules and speak to her in order to confess his true feelings, but he doesn't have the courage to do so. He is afraid of the people who will torture him.

He doesn't want to lose his only chance to see her stunning face on the bus every morning; however, Hiba looks at him and smiles. He smiles back. She stares into his soulful hazel eyes for what seems like a long time. She loves him, too, deep down. Hamza is the reason she gets on the bus every morning. Hiba takes Hamza's

When Hamza Met Hiba,
continues on page 4

When Hamza Met Hiba,
continued from page 3

hand and pulls it closer to her pocket. She quickly hands him a piece of paper. He opens it immediately to see what is on it, but he can't read much because an alarm starts ringing.

Hiba and Hamza know that they are the ones who have provoked the alarm. Feeling afraid, they run off the bus before the authorities arrive. They keep running, not caring about the danger they are facing, their love for one another turning them into fools. For the first time in their lives, they are happy. They consume all the air inside their lungs and are prepared to sacrifice their lives. Both know that they would gladly give their lives twice.

They finally arrive at a safe place: the tunnels. Hamza confesses his love to Hiba, and Hiba tells Hamza about her feelings for him. They talk into the night, going on about their lives, their deepest fears, and their shared love of books. They have a lot in common and feel a deep connection. Their love is so pure and powerful that they don't feel how cold and hungry they are getting because they are together.

Hamza and Hiba stay in the tunnels for another day, comfortably living in their own bubble and keeping out of trouble. The next day, their hunger becomes too much for them to handle, so they commit the awful mistake of leaving the safety of the tunnels to look for food.

They cover their faces with the hoods of their jackets and go to the grocery store. The other shoppers know who they are, but they don't say anything. The people respect Hiba and Hamza for their courage. With the little money they have, they buy food and stop to look at their photos on the wall. They are surprised. One small piece of paper has caused all of this terrible chaos.

As soon as they hear loud footsteps, they run as fast as they can. They are pretty sure that a police officer is behind them, but they can't go any further. They have been surrounded by police who have blocked their way. They know that it is the end of a love story that didn't even begin in the right way.

They say goodbye, kiss one another, and put their hands on their heads. They are ready to go to jail for having the best two days of their lives. During those two days, they finally had the opportunity to smile. Their only fear is that all their thoughts will return them to those happiest days of their lives when they were living—and speaking—together.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION.
WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO READ?

Break Out of Your Bubble

Douae Arrad
Juniors 12 Advanced
Juniors Contest Winner

TOPIC: *There's a house in the Old Medina that teaches a lonely girl the values of patience and love.*

It was the day of her 17th birthday. Salma, a lonely girl who was living in dark depression, decided to cure herself of the sadness that was making her suffer. She was determined to grasp any chance to draw a smile on her innocent face and make the abundant tears go away. Although she really wished for amnesia to help her forget all of those days when she cried and screamed because of her parents' deaths, she was afraid of the culpability she'd face if she were joyful while her parents were stuck in doubt between Heaven and Hell.

Now that she had made this important decision, she couldn't give up or abandon this war with her emotions. Armed with swords and shields, she knocked on the door of the wise old woman's house. The door opened, and the young girl entered, a shy smile on her lips. This *riad* in the Old Medina was a colorful building with walls decorated with gorgeous patterns. Instead of a roof, the blue sky covered the place. Salma was amazed. She couldn't stop herself from feeling the beautiful sensation of floating in a bubble.

The old woman took her hand and guided her to a sofa. She handed her a cup of sweet mint tea. Salma felt embarrassed; feeling like a stranger was annoying. She closed her eyes and let her mind go with the breeze. The words of her terrible story fell out of her mouth like a soft melody. When she was finished, she felt the amazing relief that only a confession can procure. Her host caressed her hair in a maternal way.

The woman stayed silent for a while,

her deep blue eyes lost in thought, then she said, "You're avoiding happiness. You feel like the prisoner of a dark world that is more dangerous than death—depression. You can be happy, but you don't want to. You've lost the notions of patience and love that make you human. You're not as patient as you have convinced yourself you are. Patience is the key to overcome any struggle that comes along and obstructs your road to success. You have to fight like a warrior, not a worrier."

"You have cried so much that your tears are your only friend in this lonely world. Why don't you give them up? Why don't you try to enter into an enchanting universe where you could be happy? Why don't you turn your life around to find happiness, to meet new people who can support you? You're stuck in a bubble that's not as comfortable as you think it is."

The old woman continued, "You should raise your head with all your pride, open your eyes to the beauty of the world, and fight in this poignant adventure that is your life. You fear joy and love like a blind man who is afraid of the dark. Happiness should be a spring in your step, as replenishing as the gentle breeze that is stroking your beautiful face. Then your spirit will become as colorful as these wonderful walls and your smile as luminous as the majestic sun. Stop being a masochist. Don't stay stuck in the past. Look to the future and its mysteries because it's a side effect of happiness. Learn the values of patience and love, and you will be alright."

Tears streamed down Salma's red cheeks. While the wise woman was speaking, all the silly, sad memories that had been haunting Salma's memories burned away like embers. After a long moment's hesitation, Salma, her green eyes soaked with tears, smiled honestly and whispered, "You're right."



In Memoriam



This issue of the *Student Voice* is dedicated to the memory of Karen Livingstone, who was a delightful colleague and dedicated teacher at the ALC-Fes.

Karen impressed upon her students the value of creativity in practice, emboldening them to employ imagination in their studies.

She heartened her students to articulate their own points of view every time they approached a blank page, pen in hand.

Karen will be fondly remembered for her gracious manner, her sharp wit, and her enduring love of the printed word.