



Few professions in America have more daily interaction and long-term impact on immigrants than teaching. As teachers listen and get to know their students deeply, they impart not only knowledge, but orientation, hope, and guidance in a new reality. Teachers get the opportunity to introduce America to a whole new group of Americans, and create atmospheres for learning that bring all types of students together.

In 2017, our school district put out a call for stories from teachers about their experiences with immigrant students. We wanted to better understand and respond to the impact of immigrant and refugee arrivals in our classrooms. What emerged is a collection of stories authored by educators who are truly changing the world. The stories are as varied as the students themselves. Some are uplifting and lighthearted; others are tough. Teachers are front-line observers to everyday happenings in their community, and here we get a glimpse of their unique perspective, insight, and compassion.

El Cajon, where we teach, is a national refugee resettlement destination. Our district has received over 850 newly arrived students in the 2016-2017 school year alone, from Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and a handful of African and Latin American countries. In total, refugee children comprise over 19% of our student body, nearly 1 in 5 students in our district.

We have been careful to protect the confidentiality and cultural traditions of students described in this book. We have not used their real names, and pictures are not necessarily of students described in the stories. Teacher names are presented with the level of confidentiality preferred by the teacher.

We'd love to hear from readers of this book. Are you an ally hoping to do right by immigrant and refugee kids? Please reach out to us with your thoughts and ideas.

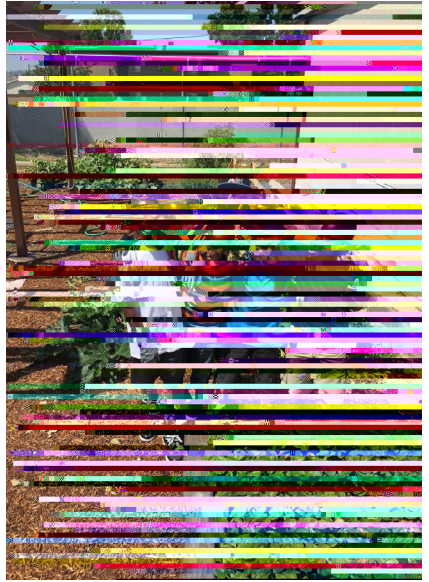
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Melanie Ellis

Jessica Harnett

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Alto.



In these stories and in our Cajon Valley classrooms the common theme is “Love”. We feel so fortunate to be the first Americans to welcome these beautiful children to their new home, community, and country. These wonderful vignettes our teachers took the time to share with you are just a small sample of the wonder, joy, excitement... and oh yes “Love” that our students are welcomed with every day in their schools. I’m inspired by the passion our teachers have for learning but even more blown away by the love they have for children. All children!

This calendar year we’ve welcomed almost one thousand new refugee students fleeing war and persecution... most of whom speak little or no English. Some of our students arrive having never set foot in a school or classroom. But when they can’t tell you what they are thinking or how they are feeling with words, they speak with their eyes, their hugs, their smiles... and sometimes their tears. We haven’t walked a mile, or even two feet, in their shoes but a year just a few weeks you’d think we’ve known them forever.

There is so much we hope they learn from us in the short time we have them as students. What I think that surprised us all is just how much we’ve learned from them. If every community enjoyed the rich diversity we have here in Cajon Valley, I think the world would truly be a better place.

Our goal is to make Cajon Valley the very best place to live, work, play, and raise a family. In order to make this a reality for all families, we’ll need adequate resources and support. Please join TEMC [cealtnng wpath to m](#)

