We’re Not in Arabia Anymore

I’ve always been the kind of person who has had her whole life put together. I had my own schedule, my own friends, and I knew every part of the city I lived in. I left my comfort zone the second that I graduated from high school. I grew up in the Middle East—Saudi Arabia, to be more specific. When I graduated, I knew I wanted to follow both my parents’ footsteps and study in the United States. I didn’t want to stay back home. However, living in the United States, surrounded by Americans, and adjusting to a whole new culture was hard.

It was very hard for me to adjust to speaking only in English, the “public” language and the language everyone around me understood. I grew up in the Middle East where everyone speaks Arabic. At first, in the United States, it was hard for me not to speak the Arabic words that I was used to saying all the time, such as *yallah* for “let’s go,” or *bas* for “but.” I used to throw these words in a lot and no one would understand. Arabic began to feel like a “private language” that I could use only at home or with my family and not in America.

When we were assigned to read the essay, “Public and Private Language,” by Richard Rodriguez, I felt as if I was the author myself because I could completely relate to everything he wrote. Unlike Rodriguez, I knew how to speak English because I had studied in an American school in Saudi my whole life. However, it was hard adjusting to a new environment and being with people with different cultural backgrounds and ideas. When Rodriguez was forced to speak English, he was out of his comfort zone and very uncomfortable, which was exactly how I felt when I first moved to America.

Rodriguez and I both have the same qualities. We both beat the odds and worked hard to fit in and learn the English language and culture like native-born Americans. It was very hard, but it was well worth it. However, I lost the sense of my family’s closeness, like Rodriguez did. He lost that feeling of union and closeness because his whole family would speak Spanish.

In New Voices, I read an interesting essay by Ying Lin titled, “Language and Me.” Lin describes how many people would make fun of her name because it was a Chinese name and not a neutral name like “Mark Watson,” for
example. Lin explains how your name can be significant and impact your future; your name is a representation of who you are. Lin explains how a person should embrace his or her culture and that it is much better to stand out than be part of the crowd. Like Lin, I have a very foreign name that is completely different from other names in the United States and I have also encountered discrimination for that.

When I was young, I was more upfront and direct about how I felt. Sadly, I am not that person anymore. The essay “Creative Writing,” by Lilian Tran, made me realize that. As we all progress from young infants to children to teenagers, we are being taught to grow up and be more mature. What is the meaning of maturity? It is an image you have in your head of what society thinks you should be. As young children, we are our true selves. Our imaginations and our young bodies are full of energy and we constantly ask questions and learn about everything around us. What makes us so brilliant as children is the fact that we honestly don’t care about anyone else’s opinions and just live our lives. Kids celebrate who they are and embrace it. Adults should learn from kids.

Coming to America is one of the best decisions I have ever made because I am learning so much about my surroundings and the people who live in the huge city of Los Angeles. I have learned how to embrace my individuality and my culture even more than I would have if I were still in Saudi Arabia. Being foreign and young has allowed me to learn about all these differences that I am not accustomed to.

Works Cited