

Learner Spark

A MAGAZINE *BY* LEARNERS, *FOR* LEARNERS



This special edition of Learner Spark is in honor of the United States' 250th Anniversary and Grand Rapids' 175th Anniversary!


LITERACY CENTER
OF WEST MICHIGAN

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SCALLION OIL NOODLES

BY JIE HAN

This recipe is unbelievably fragrant and seriously delicious!

Adding a little sugar makes the flavor richer and slightly sweet, but not greasy or overpowering. Combined with the strong aroma of scallions and noodles fully coated in sauce, it tastes amazing.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 jin (about 500g/1 lb) noodles
- 1 bunch scallions (green onions)
- 4 tbsp light soy sauce
- 2 tbsp dark soy sauce
- 2 tbsp white sugar
- White sesame seeds

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Wash the scallions, drain well, and cut them into sections.
2. Make the sauce: mix together light soy sauce, dark soy sauce, and sugar until combined. This amount was perfect for about 1 jin (1 lb) of noodles—not too sweet or too salty. If you don't like sweetness, just add a tiny bit of sugar to enhance the flavor.
3. Add oil to a wok or pan. Once the oil is hot, add the scallions and fry them. Make sure the scallions are dry, otherwise the oil may splatter.
4. Fry for less than a minute, until the scallions become browned and release their aroma. Then turn off the heat and let the oil cool slightly.
5. After cooling for about 2 minutes, pour in the sauce mixture. Simmer on low heat for several seconds until it starts to boil. No need to transfer it to a bowl—just keep it warm in the pan using the residual heat.
6. Cook the noodles. While the oil was cooling, I started boiling the noodles to save time. These noodles take a while to cook, so I boiled them for about 10 minutes.
7. Once cooked, rinse the noodles briefly with cold water. I used bottled water, but you can also use cooled boiled water.
8. Pour the prepared sauce over the noodles, add some chopped scallions and white sesame seeds, then mix well and enjoy!



MY ONLINE ENGLISH LEARNING STORY WITH MY TUTOR

BY AMENAN MARIE-LOUISE KOUTOU

In my world where proficiency in English has become an essential asset, many learners like me are seeking more personalized and student-centered approaches. It all started with a simple powerful desire to learn English truly. I know it wouldn't be easy but I had that little inner flame that said "I can do this".

This is my case, I'm a French-speaking student who after unsuccessful attempts found a new motivation from the Literacy Center of West Michigan thanks to my tutor Amandeep Kaur.

In the beginning, from my first session with my tutor Amandeep I felt something: A connection, a sense of trust and a way of explaining things that made me want to go further. Every lesson became a special moment. She helped me to speak even when I doubted myself. She corrected me without breaking my motivation. She pushed me to make progress always with gentleness. I learned how to build sentences, understand expressions and little by little I felt something changing inside me. I started to become a confident learner.

Then, I discovered a different culture, a different way of communicating and above all a newfound confidence in my abilities. Every session, every word, every step forward adds a new line to it. And Amandeep is there as a guide, a reassuring presence.

This journey is not just that of one individual. I mean that personalized, distance learning is becoming more effective and more human. My story illustrates the importance and the evolution of online education. Learning English is a never-ending process, but for me one thing is certain: I am now moving guided by a method that supports me and my tutor who has helped me realize this potential. A journey continues.

Thanks for Literacy Center of West Michigan to give us this opportunity to learn English and thanks to teachers like Amandeep who are able to adapt their teaching methods to each student profile. My story isn't over yet. I'm moving forward step by step with determination because I'm no longer alone on this journey.

Thanks to all.

GRAND RAPIDS

BY HAJO SHAMSI

1) What is your favorite place around Grand Rapids?

Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, because it blends world-class horticulture with an extensive art collection, featuring a renowned Japanese garden, a tropical conservatory and massive outdoor sculptures.

2) What is something that surprised you about Grand Rapids?

It's weather and clean water. It was the first city in the world to add fluoride to its drinking water.

3) How did you come to live in the United States?

I came to the United States through a refugee program.

4) What is something you look forward to for the summer in Grand Rapids?

I am looking forward to enjoying the summer weather with my family, friends and community.

5) What does happiness mean to you?

It means a lot to me.



MY WINGS

BY MICHAEL RIPPLE



In 1996, I was born prematurely, with cerebral palsy, weighing only 1 lb, 15 oz.
According to the doctors, I wasn't supposed to comprehend anything around me.

I learned to suffer quietly but other times, I cried loudly.
But yet, when other people spoke to me, it was almost like they had never seen or spoke to anyone like me, or same as me...

There will never be another me... who speaks gently, but fiercely, articulately.
But unfortunately, I doubted myself... hated myself because I listened to others instead of questioning possibilities.

But through literacy, I opened doors. I opened a door to possibilities that, thought by other people's opinions, were not afforded to me.

But through literacy, I opened doors.

I opened a door to possibilities for myself that, thought by others because of my disabilities, were not afforded to me.

But now I opened a door that in the past did not seem possible for me.

Now, I dare to reach the stars, even when they are not shining right in front of me. I still reach for them... in the daylight when the sun is bright.

I reach for them with all my might!

All my life, I thought I had broken wings, but now, I take flight!



SELECTED POEMS

BY ALANGUE VALBRUN

TRANSLATIONS BY AMENAN MARIE-LOUISE KOUTOU & KADI D

Chanson du vent

J'ai entendu
la chanson du vent
en mauvaise note
de musique
traversée le regard d'un homme
dans une nuit opaque
qui annonce le jour des morts
un mort a volé son baiser

Poésie perdue

Poésie enfermée
Dans la chambre
Nostalgique
Elle m'habille nue
Devant un miroir insolent
Je sens l'odeur
De ses vêtements
Caresser la nudité
De mon âme
Je l'ai beau cherchée
Mais elle est partie
Avec ton dernier sourire.

Song of the Wind

I heard
the song of the wind
in a discordant note
of music
passing through a man's gaze
on a pitch-black night
that heralds the realm of the dead
a dead man stole her kiss

Lost Poetry

Locked-away poetry
In the bedroom
Nostalgic
She dresses me naked
In front of a defiant mirror
I smell
The scent of its garments
Caressing the nakedness
Of my soul
I searched for it in vain
But she's gone
With your last smile.

Ils ont peur

Ils ont peur d'aimer
 Parce qu'ils n'aiment pas
 Mais peur aussi d'affronter l'amour
 Pour ne jamais aimer

Ils ont peur de lutter
 Parce qu'ils ne luttent pas
 Mais peur aussi de rêver
 Pour ne jamais lutter

Ils ont peur de vivre
 Parce qu'ils ne vivent pas
 Mais peur aussi d'affronter la vie
 Pour ne pas cesser de vivre

Ils ont peur de moi enfin
 Parce qu'ils ne me connaissent pas
 Mais peur aussi d'eux-mêmes
 Pour ne pas se connaître.

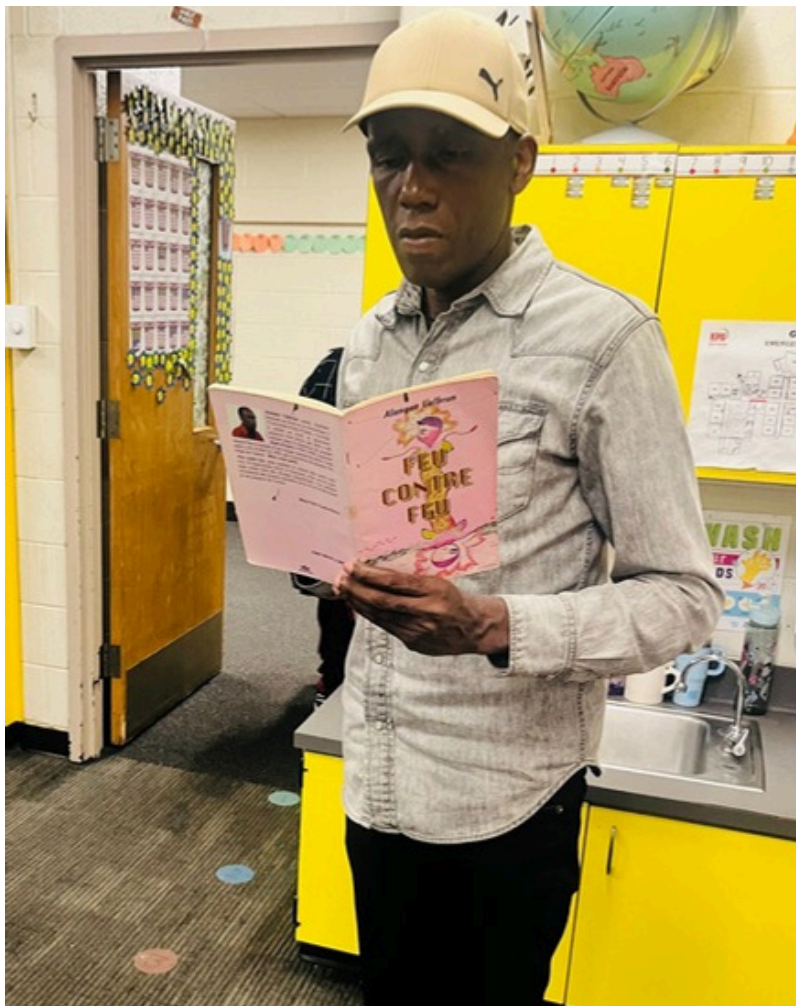
They Are Afraid

They are afraid to love
 For they do not love
 Yet they are afraid to face love too
 And so they never love at all

They are afraid to fight
 For they do not struggle
 Yet they are afraid to dream as well
 And so they never dare to fight

They are afraid to live
 For they do not truly live
 Yet they are afraid to face life itself
 And so they never cease merely existing

They are afraid of me, at last
 For they do not know me
 Yet they are afraid of themselves as well
 And so they never come to know who they are.



The author, Alangué Valbrun, and his published work, Feu Contre Feu.



*什么是幸福？

BY ZIHONG WAN (紫红)

TRANSLATION BY YILIN WENDLAND-LIU

我叫玛丽，我来自中国南方一个美丽的城市龙城。我与先生在中国结婚多年以后移居美国，迄今为止我在美国生活了11年。我最喜欢大急流城市的市中心安利大酒店，因为它是这座城市的最高建筑，更因为我在这里工作了10年多，对这里充满了感情，在酒店里工作看着窗外日出日落，春华秋实、飞雪迎春、四季的风景悄悄地在眼底里更替，一条河流穿城而过，架起无数座桥梁，这让我惊讶不已：这座城市的桥梁之多竟与我的家乡是何等相似！夏天来了，我期待我种在院子里各种果树和绿植茁壮成长，期待院子里盛开的玫瑰花带给我快乐和温暖，每当我卸下工作疲惫回家，那满园盛开的粉色花朵像张开了双臂一样热烈地拥抱着我归来，我感到由衷的欣慰，与家人一起努力工作，健康快乐地创造美好的生活，珍惜每一天和家人团聚，对我而言，这就意味着幸福！我爱我的家人，我热爱生活！

My name is Mary, and I am from a beautiful city in southern China. My husband and I moved to the United States after many years of marriage, and we have lived here for 11 years. I especially love the Amway Grand Hotel in downtown Grand Rapids. It is the tallest building in the city, and I have worked there for more than 10 years, so it holds a special place in my heart. From the hotel, I have watched the sun rise and set and seen the city change with every season, from spring blossoms, autumn harvests, to winter snow. The Grand River runs through the city and is crossed by countless bridges, which reminds me so much of my hometown in China. In the summer, I look forward to the fruit trees and plants in my yard growing strong and to the blooming roses that bring me joy and warmth. After a long day at work, coming home to a garden full of pink flowers feels like being welcomed with open arms. That brings me great comfort. To me, happiness means working hard with my family, building a good life in health and joy, cherishing every day together, and loving both my family and my life.

MY NAME IS MAKARIM

BY MAKARIM BABIKER

My name is Makarim Babiker. I am an immigrant. I am from Sudan. I speak Arabic. I have been in the U.S. with my husband and my kids for six years. Learning English has been one of the most important parts of my journey. When I arrived, I was nervous about speaking because I was afraid of making mistakes. After that, I attended the Literacy Center of West Michigan. Over time, I improved my speaking, listening, reading, and writing. It is not easy to be a mom and attending school to learn a new language, and doing home chores and helping my kids for homework was challenging. I have never given up. I continued my education. Two years ago, I obtained my Certification of Medical Administrative Assistant from West Michigan Center for Arts and Technology. I am proud of myself.





MY JOURNEY FROM SRI LANKA TO THE USA

BY SUDHARSHANI RAMIYAH

My name is Sudharshani. I am married to my husband Rajender, and we have three beautiful daughters. I am from Sri Lanka. It is a small and beautiful island with a rich culture, strong family values, and kind-hearted people in Asia. Even though I now live far away from Sri Lanka, it will always hold a special place in my heart.

In June 2025, I moved to the United States with my family to build a better future. When we first arrived, the time was around 9:30 p.m., but still it's light outside. That was my first surprise in Grand Rapids. In our country, mostly around 7 p.m., it gets dark. At the beginning everything felt new and confusing. We didn't understand the systems, the language, or daily life. Even simple things were hard at first. We use public transport for travelling and mostly walked for short distances. One of the biggest challenges was speaking English and understanding American pronunciation. Using English every day was not easy for me. I felt shy and afraid of making mistakes. Still, I kept trying, and little by little, I began to feel comfortable.

One of the best things that happened to me in Michigan was finding the Literacy Center of Michigan. I heard about this center from one of my coworkers, and she encouraged me to go there. The center helped me improve my English, especially my pronunciation, and gave me confidence. With the support I received from my teacher Olivia, learning became less stressful and more enjoyable. The staff at the Literacy Center are very supportive and friendly. Ms. Damindra, who is the coordinator for our class, welcomed us and gave us a test to understand our English level. She helped organize our classes and create a good learning environment. Her guidance made the process comfortable from the beginning.

The Literacy Center of West Michigan also offers childcare services during class hours, which makes it easier for parents to focus on their learning. The childcare staff are also very kind and joyful to the children. Today, both my husband and I are working, and we are slowly settling into our new life.

We live in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and we really enjoy it here. The city feels calm and welcoming, and the people are friendly. I like to walk around the downtown at night. I have lovely neighbors. They help us with their guidance and physical support also. This is a great place to raise our children and build our future. My life in the United States did not start easily, but it has helped me grow stronger and more confident. I am proud of where I come from, and I am grateful for the opportunities I have here. This journey has taught me to believe in myself and keep moving forward.

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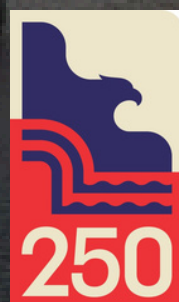
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