IEW Contest Winner: Poonam from Pakistan!

Each November, schools across America celebrate International Education Week (IEW), a joint initiative of the U.S. Department of State and Department of Education to promote programs that prepare Americans for a global environment. Communities that host exchange students are lucky to have international youth share their cultures with students and community groups.

PAX students outdid themselves this year, preparing and delivering countless presentations during IEW. Poonam from Pakistan was selected as the winner of PAX’s IEW-themed student contest (second of four)—you’ll understand why when you see her video! She gave 15 presentations to a total of more than 440 people, using PowerPoint and other visuals, preparing Pakistani food, demonstrating dances and games, and teaching a few words in Urdu.

There were so many wonderful submissions for this contest that we are featuring some “honorable mentions” on the next two pages.

—Poonam (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Bouchard family (NH)

A Two-Week Trip of a Lifetime

Martin, a PAX exchange student from Spain who is spending the year in New Hampshire, was able to visit multiple states on a sightseeing trip to the Midwest with his host father and brother. They got to see the St. Louis Arch, Mount Rushmore, and many other sights.

This bonding trip was capped off with a weeklong Ski Race Camp at Copper Mountain, CO, where Martin and his host brother Dow got to ski and train with members of the U.S. Ski Team. Martin is a champion skier and is looking forward to being part of the Gunstock Ski Club and high school ski team—he will get to ski some of the same courses as renowned skiers, including Bode Miller, Ted Ligety, and Mikaela Shiffrin.

—Jennifer Jones (NH), host mom of Martin (Spain)

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The Nuances of Nigeria

Zainab gave cultural presentations to journalism and English classes at her high school. She taught her audience about the diverse ethnic groups, religions, and histories within Nigeria in addition to the political system, natural resources, and teaching methods.

Her audience asked interesting questions, which made her learn even more about her own culture. In the accompanying photo, she meticulously describes a gourd designed by a Hausa man (West African ethnic group), using a small knife called an aska.

—Zainab (YES, Nigeria), hosted by the Parsons family (AZ)

Georgia is a Country Too!

Elizbar addressed an auditorium of his fellow students. Many were no doubt surprised to learn that Georgia’s not just the Peach State but a republic in the Caucasus region.

—Elizbar (FLEX, Georgia), hosted by the White family (OH)

Filipino Flair

Sheena Lee presented to nearly 400 people. Focusing on her school life back home in addition to her impressions of America, she “walked in front of them with a smile on my face and with full Filipino confidence.” She was so happy that her audience appreciated her efforts and notes that being a young ambassador is the most amazing part of the exchange experience.

—Sheena Lee (YES, Philippines), hosted by the Richens family (UT)

A Taste of Tunisia

Soumaya gave six presentations on her native Tunisia to about 140 students during International Education week. Guests learned about Tunisian history as well as spectacular sites, clothes, food (Soumaya’s host sister got to taste test in advance) and more.

—Soumaya (YES, Tunisia), hosted by the Basta family (PA)
An Indonesian Insider

In addition to his PowerPoint presentation, Angelo performed a native Indonesian dance and offered *terang bulan* (a sweet, stuffed pancake) as a snack to audience members, who also learned about other aspects of this Southeast Asian nation made up of an archipelago of thousands of islands.

—Angelo (YES, Indonesia), hosted by the Santillan family (VA)

Unique Ukraine!

Lina gave several presentations on her native Ukraine, showing pictures through PowerPoint, describing many of the country’s traditions, passing around Ukrainian coins, and even wearing traditional clothing so her guests could see how Ukrainians dress for special occasions. “I was really excited about doing these presentations, and I am happy that a lot of people got to know a lot of things about Ukraine,” she says.

—Lina (FLEX, Ukraine), hosted by the Owczarzak family (PA)

A Passion for Pakistan

Sohaib has looked forward to International Education Week since his arrival in the United States, and in the end, he completed 16 presentations at his and other high schools as well as local civic organizations. His favorite element of each presentation was clearing up misunderstandings and stereotypes about Pakistan. Sohaib was ecstatic to hear many of his friends express their wish to visit his home country!

—Sohaib N. (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Reichert family (WY)
**Inspire the Inspiration**

Small steps but big dreams, donut and ice-creams / Dreamland is so cool; American High School / Baseball and homecoming, “stronger individual” becoming / Big gown and prom night, dazzling Christmas sight

Tacos and pancakes, white and pretty snowflakes / Bright sun and tall trees; “Bless you” when you sneeze! / Hold doors and be polite, chin up and smile bright! / Participate in volunteering acts; effective and initiative impacts

Wonderful teaching techniques, test/quiz every two weeks / Adorable and cute pets, nothing that upsets / Huge parks and fresh air, no one to judge or stare / The band and pep rally, living in F Drive Valley

Piano and my favorite choir, singing is my passion and desire / “The Star-Spangled Banner,” singing in my best manner / Psychology and art, to creativity it’s a new start / Algebra and graphing calculator, isn’t difficult to operate anymore

Homewood High School, using all advanced tool / First day and got lost, nervous and was crossed / But people are so kind here, everyone is truly a dear / Lockers and digitalization, one of my hardest adaptations

Loving every bit of my stay, grateful to God for every single day / So, say “yes” to YES—be your community’s assets! / I am simply too blessed to get my host mom, I must express / Thank you PAX for everything, trust me I am not lying.

Without you it would have been hard to leave my nest and fly like a bird / In the end, I must say that I have come a long way.

—Anika (YES, Bangladesh), hosted by the Quijano family (AL)

**Dressing Up**

Aksahra from India dressed both Inas from Lebanon and Inas’ host mom Cynthia in saris to attend the Around the World auction for Beacon Unitarian Universalist Church. Funds raised help the church support charities such as the food bank and social justice programs.

—Cynthia Seelhammer, community coordinator (AZ) and host mom of Inas (YES, Lebanon)

**Exchanging Cultures, Exchanging Ideas**

I didn’t know much about Thanksgiving. It is a very interesting festival. I learned about American culture, its enthusiastic people, and of course the fantastic dinner.

I made my host family birayani, a traditional Pakistani dish. Because they accepted me as a member of the family, I feel confident sharing my culture with them.

—Sohaib R. (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Sutcliffe family (MO)
Busy Days

Celebrations don’t seem to be huge, but looking at the passion and the way Americans celebrate and make everything meaningful is extremely fascinating. This has completely changed my paradigm about American culture, which also involves brotherhood and hospitality. I have learned from Thanksgiving that love is everywhere in this world, and people are very nice if respect is given to their customs, traditions, and ideas.

We got our Christmas tree! My mom, younger host brother, and I went to a nearby garden and cut down a tree in the snow, brought it back home, and decorated it with lowers and ornaments. It looks gorgeous now. I simply love the wonderful experiences of my life!

—Ashfaq (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Binford family (WI)

My Trip to “Americans”

One of the most exciting things about being a foreign exchange student is to try new activities so you can gain tremendous experience, being someone you could have never been before. This was one of the goals I set for myself many months in advance of coming to America.

Being a Future Farmers of America member has given me unique opportunities, such as a chance to attend the 87th National FFA Convention & Expo in Louisville, KY. All my expectations were met by all the fascinating moments of this trip, which I called “A Trip to Americans.” I am lucky enough to have a trip to America—a fantastic one-year journey into American life—but this trip to Kentucky was my trip to Americans, by the virtue of attending an event visited by 62,000 people from all over the nation. I was so happy to realize the image of America, a country devoted to their traditions, proud of providing the whole globe with goods and merchandise people lack.

In the future, my plan is to introduce Russian agriculture to my Nettleton High School FFA chapter and see what common steps we could take in order to make this world a better place.

—Ilya (FLEX, Russia), hosted by the Nettleton family (MS)
Country of Great Emotions

“Push yourself, make yourself uncomfortable.” These are the words of Jordan Blackburn, my coach. Every day in the morning on the running track, when we were supposed to run a mile in under six minutes, I always thought about his words, “Come on, Elo, you can do that. You are strong enough to do that and anything else for your future purposes.” These words are not just for sport; it’s a life motto. Success only comes this way! My purpose, my values, and my personality help me to be the best that I can.

At a variety show at my school, I performed a Georgian national dance, but I had an injured knee. However, when I was standing on the stage, I felt enormous energy, because I saw my friends, family, and teachers and heard their magic cheers for me. I did my dance perfectly, because people who I love were with me. Every night I think about their cheer “Let’s go Elo! You are the best! We love you!” These moments make my life brighter.

—Elizbar (FLEX, Georgia), hosted by the White family (OH)

What is Thanksgiving?

“Do you know what Thanksgiving is? Do you have Thanksgiving in Indonesia?” Those were questions that I always heard when Thanksgiving was near. And with an innocent expression I said, “No, we don’t have it, because in Indonesia we have more Muslims than non-Muslims.” My friend explained to me that Thanksgiving isn’t just for Christians. It’s to thank God for everything we have, and all religions can do it.

We celebrated Thanksgiving with family friends. Before we ate, we prayed. It was a little bit strange, because we have different religions, so absolutely we have different ways of praying. But even if we’re different, they still respect me, and I was so grateful because of it. I feel really thankful for the knowledge about this new culture and the respect the culture shows me in return. I love Thanksgiving, because on that day, I can remember what things I already have and thank God for all of it.

—Meitha (YES, Indonesia), hosted by the Powers family (AZ)

An Unexpected Answer

School dances are a big thing here, and the approach is really creative. The students try to find funny and special ways to ask someone to a dance and also to respond. For the winter dance, I decided to ask one of my friends who knows a little bit of Russian. His answer really surprised me. He said “yes” by writing a poem by himself in Russian! I am really amazed how dedicated he was. Now, we are really excited for the dance!

—Yuliya (FLEX, Russia) hosted by the Miller family (UT)

Yuliya gets a resounding “yes”—and a poem in her native Russian—to her request for a date to the winter dance.
Our Awesome Trip to Washington, DC!

Our group from New Hampshire traveled by train for eight hours from Boston straight to the capital of the United States in November. Twenty of us, including a couple of host siblings and three exchange students from another region, won’t ever forget our five incredible days together. The city was amazing, and we fell in love with it quickly while walking its streets. It was so quiet compared to our last group trip to New York City, with beautiful old buildings from the 1800s everywhere, and we could feel the history of the place as we walked.

In our three full days there, we visited the U.S. Capitol, the White House, the Smithsonian Museums, the Library of Congress, and the National Archives, and we walked around all the monuments and memorials. This was one of the best trips ever! Our trip connected us as a group even more than we already were, and made us understand that it doesn’t matter where you are, but who you are with. Thanks to the other exchange students in my group for being such amazing friends!

—Adelin (FLEX, Moldova), hosted by the Cullen family (NH)

Indonesian on Tour

After a few cultural presentations, Bayu was invited to many other schools and classrooms—eventually reaching around 300 students. Other teachers no doubt heard about his personable and interactive style. As his video shows, he incorporated his native language and dance.

—Bayu (YES, Indonesia), hosted by the Oestreich family, (WI)

Golden Memories

Today, many more people have amazing thoughts about Pakistan than before they met me. I gave 26 presentations on the occasion of International Education Week and got appreciative and amazing comments from my teachers, principal, and others in the community! They said amazing and marvelous things which returned all the energy I invested in my presentations. Their favorite part was when I said, “I am Pakistan, and it is in front of you.”

My city’s news reporter even came with her team to interview me about my country; I was featured in the newspaper! Looking forward to more golden memories…

—Ali (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Maxwell family (OH)

Ali poses with school principal Steve Andersson, following one of his 26 cultural presentations.
We Want to Hear from You!

Whether you have considered hosting a high school exchange student, sending your teen abroad, having an exchange student at your school, working locally to support an international student, or you simply want to learn more about what it is we do, feel free to give us a call at 800.555.6211.

Already involved and have something to share for a future issue? Regardless of your relationship to PAX, we are always accepting interesting content (stories, photos, videos, etc.) for next month’s issue at paxpress@pax.org. Click here for full details.