

**Fall 2024**

# MIDTESOL Matters

*The Mid-America  
TESOL Affiliate Newsletter*



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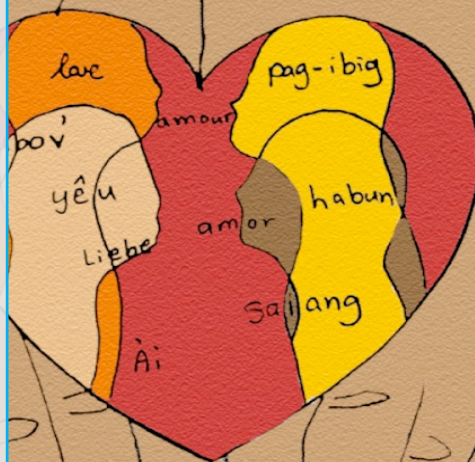
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*MIDTESOL 2024 Adult  
Student Essay Contest  
Winners!*

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# MIDTESOL 2024

love, language,  
and literacy  
for all



## *MIDTESOL Matters* CONFERENCE PREVIEW EDITION (2024)

What is in store for you at  
MIDTESOL 2024 at the Mid-  
America Center in Council Bluffs?  
Read on to find out!



# MIDTESOL Matters

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### Follow Us!



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## A Letter from the President

**Ben Vilkas**  
**MIDTESOL President**  
Wayne State College  
Wayne, Nebraska



### From the MIDTESOL President

Over the summer, I once again caught a “fever” that I tend to acquire every four years. My “Olympic Fever” only lasted for a short time, but it was a major part of my summer experience. Like many people around the world, I was swept up in the excitement of the 2024 Summer Olympics. I enjoyed the athleticism, the pageantry, and all the drama that comes from these events. As an avid runner, I will admit I was most excited to watch the events that I connected to on a personal level. I know what it is like to run a marathon and watching the competitors as they raced towards the finish line was an amazing experience for me- even if I was only at home and not on the streets of Paris.

Well, we at MIDTESOL are racing towards our own “finish line” as our annual conference is approaching soon. If you have not yet registered for this two-day event, please do so as soon as possible. We will be gathering in Council Bluffs, IA (right across the Missouri River from Omaha, Nebraska) on September 27th and 28th. This year’s theme is Love, Language, and Literacy for All.

The MIDTESOL24 Conference Committee has worked many long hours to prepare for this annual event and I am so excited to hear from our invited speakers. On Friday, we will have Amy Alice Chastain, the Executive Director of Global Ties Iowa share with us during lunch. Then, Dr. Don Vu will come to speak to us on Saturday, bringing his expertise in Education and Literacy to our conference. We will also have two “Teachers of the Year”- Ann Mincks and Lee Perez- participate in a panel discussion regarding K-12 education and have opportunities to learn from Immigration lawyer Julia Cryne as well as Dr. Shanna Opfer who focuses her efforts on helping educators to utilize technology to help their students find success in learning. I am sure that the two-days will go by quickly and we do not want anyone sitting on the sidelines for this event. Let’s come cheer each other on and encourage our fellow educators in all our endeavors.

Finally, the MIDTESOL24 Conference will mark the end of my one-year tenure as the MIDTESOL President. Our current Vice President, Dr. Shabina Kavimandan, will officially be handed the MIDTESOL gavel on Friday and become our new President. I look forward to continuing to work with Dr. Kavimandan as I will then step into the role of Past President & Nominating Committee Chair. During this year, I have learned a lot about our organization and have been so encouraged by the work that many of our members have been doing in their respective fields. It is wonderful to see the passion and dedication that so many MIDTESOL members have and the ways that they strive to help students- of all ages- be successful. I want to end by recognizing the years of service that Dr. Adrienne Johnson has given to MIDTESOL and her work as the Socio-Political Concerns and Professional Standards Chair. If there was a “Gold Medal” award for service and advocacy to English Language Learners, you deserve it!

Once again, thank you for all you to support English Language Teaching and I hope to see you all at MIDTESOL24!

Sincerely,

**Ben Vilkas (MIDTESOL President)**



## Join the MIDTESOL Team!

### Open Positions

*Are you looking for a way to make an impact while gaining experience, serving the profession, building your C.V., and expanding your network by collaborating with a diverse group of English language teaching professionals? MIDTESOL has several open board positions to be filled yet this year. Please reach out to MIDTESOL Past President Zach Smith (zacharysmith@midtesol.org) to indicate your interest or with any questions.*

**TREASURER [elected]**

**SOCIOPOLITICAL CONCERNS AND PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS [appointed]**

**CONFERENCE COMMITTEE (MIDTESOL 2025) [appointed]**

**COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE (Membership Coordinator, Social Media, Database Management) [appointed]**

### Coming This Week!



#### ***MIDTESOL Journal Volume 7 (2024)***

See the MIDTESOL Website ([midtesol.org](http://midtesol.org)) to access the journal.

***A special thanks to the MIDTESOL Journal editorial board (Editor Jeanne Beck and Associate Editors Sebnem Kurt and Shamini Shetye) and to all of you in MIDTESOL who acted as reviewers!***



## **MIDTESOL 2024 (September 27-28, 2024) at the Mid-America Center in Council Bluffs!**

**#MIDTESOL24 Conference**

**What does MIDTESOL 2024 have for you?**

- **6 invited speakers**
- **2 Teachers of the Year**
- **14+ exhibitors**
- **107 sessions on a variety of topics related to teaching multilingual learners in K-12 schools, community colleges, universities, migrant, immigrant, and refugee organizations and state education programs;**
- **Networking opportunities for states and MIDTESOL Interest Sections**
- **Awards presentations**
- **Giveaways**
- **And more!**

*Early Bird Registration has already closed, but Regular Registration is still open at the MIDTESOL Website (<https://midtesol.org/midtesol-24/>).*



## MEET THE MIDTESOL 2024 INVITED SPEAKERS!



### KEYNOTE SPEAKER:

**Amy Alice Chastain** – Executive Director, Global Ties Iowa

### Keynote: “The Community Impact of Global Exchange”

Amy Alice Chastain’s own teaching and learning ranges from France to China to the Middle East and covers the dominant cultures and languages in each as well with varying degrees of proficiency. Now the Executive Director of Global Ties Iowa, she served as an Associate Professor of Instruction in the University of Iowa’s Department of Linguistics and is proud to bring her diverse experience from her academic years here and abroad to her work with global exchange within Global Ties Iowa. Upon discovering this organization and the

International Visitor Leadership Program, Amy knew she had found her people—her community—and could continue to maintain an international connection while living and working in eastern Iowa beyond teaching. Her driving vision is to make the benefits of global exchange inclusive of and accessible to everyone.



### KEYNOTE SPEAKER:

**Don Vu** – Elementary Teacher and Principal, Author, and Literacy leader

### Keynote: “Life, Literacy, and the Pursuit of Happiness: Creating a Culture of Reading for All”

Dr. Don Vu has been an elementary school teacher and principal for 25 years.

Don and his former school staff chartered a literacy campaign in 2013 to foster the love of reading in all students. In 2017, he received the Celebrate Literacy Award from the California Reading Association (CRA) for his outstanding leadership in literacy. In 2018, his school was one of five schools nationally to receive the Exemplary Reading Program Award from the International Literacy Association (ILA). In 2020, the school received the California Distinguished School Award for its work in closing the achievement gap for all kids. In 2022, Don received his second Celebrate Literacy Award from the California Reading Association for his literary contributions and advocacy in literacy.

He understands the challenges children face when learning a new language and culture, having fled Vietnam with his family in 1975. He also knows that reading can be transformative and life-changing. Don continues to spread the message that literacy can change the world through his work with state and national literacy organizations as well as his writing in publications such as Edutopia and Scholastic. He currently serves on the national advisory boards of Scholastic Book Fairs and the Library of Congress Literacy Awards Program. His book, *Life, Literacy, and the Pursuit of Happiness* (Scholastic), is a call to action for all educators who want to build a school culture of reading to empower all students— especially our immigrant and refugee children— as they pursue their American Dream.

**INVITED PANEL SPEAKER:**

Anne Mincks – 2024 Iowa Teacher of the Year  
Hoover High School, Des Moines Public Schools



**Featured Panel Discussion (with Lee Perez): “Tales from Two Teachers of the Year: A 2-Person Panel Discussion on K-12 ESL Instruction”**

Ann Mincks, the 2024 Iowa Teacher of the Year, is an English Language Learner (ELL) teacher at Hoover High School in Des Moines Public Schools, located in Des Moines, Iowa. She teaches various English classes for 9-12 grade students ranging from emerging to advanced language levels.

Mincks earned her Bachelor of Arts in English Education with a Minor in Spanish and an endorsement in English Language Learner instruction from Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa. Later, she earned her Master of Arts in Education with a Reading Endorsement and Literacy Specialist Endorsement from Viterbo University in La Crosse, Wisconsin. During her sixteen-years as an educator, Mincks has had various roles including professional learning community (PLC) leader, model classroom teacher, teacher mentor, curriculum developer, instructional coach and adjunct professor.

A lover of language and education, Mincks considers her most important job to support students with the language skills they need to navigate the forces that affect their lives. Her passion is working with both students and staff to support the language development of all learners and to improve literacy practices through evidence-based instruction. Seeing students grow inspires Mincks to continue to evolve in her teaching practice each year.



**INVITED PANEL SPEAKER:**

Lee Perez -- 2022 Nebraska Teacher of  
the Year

2023 Horace Mann Award for Teaching Excellence recipient  
Omaha Benson High School, Omaha Public Schools

**Featured Panel Discussion (with Ann Mincks): “Tales from Two Teachers of the Year: A 2-Person Panel Discussion on K-12 ESL Instruction”**

Lee Perez is a 9th-12th grade English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher at Omaha Benson High School in Omaha, Nebraska. Perez holds an Associate of Arts degree from Mid-Plains Community College, a Bachelor of Science degree in secondary education from the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and a Master of Science degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) from Concordia University in Seward, Nebraska. He holds two teaching endorsements in Nebraska: grades 7-12 social sciences and pre-K-12 ESL.

Perez has taught for 18 years in the diverse, urban Omaha Public Schools district. He started his career at Marris Magnet Middle School teaching seventh-grade world studies for the dual language program. He then taught ESL at Alice Buffett Magnet Middle School and Omaha North High School. Currently, he teaches ESL at Omaha Benson High School. Additionally, Perez is an adjunct professor for Bellevue University in their Teacher Education Department.

Perez was featured in a professional development series through EdPuzzle, where he did five Professional Development videos on working with English Language Learners (ELLs.). Perez has received several recognitions for his work as a teacher. He was the recipient of the 2021 Award for Teaching Excellence through the Nebraska State Education Association and named a Cox Communications Education Hero for the Omaha area. In 2022, he was named the Nebraska Teacher of the Year. Perez was the first ESL teacher and person of color to receive this award in Nebraska's history. He is also a member of the Commissioners of Education's teacher advisory committee; the Hispanic/Chicano representative for the Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee; and a member of the National Education Association's Teachers of Color cohort. In 2023, Perez received the national Horace Mann Award for Teaching Excellence award through the National Education Association (NEA) Foundation. He is the first person from Nebraska to receive this recognition.

**INVITED SPEAKER:**

Julia Cryne, bilingual attorney, partner at the law firm of Carlson Blakeman LLP, in Omaha, Nebraska

**Focus Session: "Immigration and Immigrant Children in Schools"**

Julia Cryne is a bilingual attorney, specializing in the practice of Immigration law. Julia is a partner at the law firm of Carlson Blakeman LLP, located in Omaha, Nebraska. She has practiced as an attorney since 2010, and is a graduate of the University of Oklahoma School of Law with a Juris Doctor degree.



**INVITED SPEAKER:**

Dr. Shanna Opfer, Associate Professor of Education and Director of the Elementary Education Program, Concordia University Nebraska

**Focus Workshop: "Elevating ESL Teaching With AI"**

Dr. Shanna Opfer has served at Concordia University, Nebraska since 2008, after spending six years teaching in grades 4-6 in public schools. She currently serves as an Associate Professor and Director of the Elementary Education Program. She is a graduate of Concordia University, Nebraska, with a B.S.Ed. in Elementary Education and Special Education as well as a M.A. in Elementary Administration. In 2020 she earned a Ph.D. in Education with an emphasis in Learning, Instruction, and Innovation from Walden University, studying the factors that influence the student-centered technology practices of elementary teachers. She is passionate about empowering educators with research-based instructional strategies, fostering a joyful enthusiasm for their vocation, and enhancing their skills in leveraging technology to elevate student learning outcomes.







All MIDTESOL states (Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas) will hold special sessions during the conference to give you a chance to network and discuss your state's unique challenges. See the conference schedule for more information on time and locations.

## Members-At-Large State News

*MIDTESOL wants to give a hearty shout-out to all the state representatives that serve as members-at-large on the MIDTESOL Board! These representatives are the most direct link between the MIDTESOL organization and the particular needs of your state, working hard to make connections between people and resources in a way that builds us up as professionals and helps our students. Way to go, State Reps!*



**Diana Mendoza**  
**Kansas Member-at-Large**  
*Dodge City Public Schools*  
*Dodge City, KS*



## Conference AND State Report: Kansas

Dodge City High School Teachers currently participating in a TESOL learning cohort (ESOL Endorsement courses), through Kansas State University, will be sharing their experiences as they apply learning from their courses into their content areas. Those presentation titles are as follows:

- From Construct to Canvas: BDI in the Art Classroom
- Biography-Driven Language Development: Empowering Newcomer Learners Through Personal Narratives

Dodge City's ESOL & Diversity Director (and MIDTESOL Kansas Member-at-Large), Diana Mendoza, will be presenting on how Dodge City Public Schools utilizes an Inclusive model to meet the needs of their English Learners, which make up 47% of the student population. She will also present two additional workshops to highlight practices that have proven to be beneficial within the district's inclusive model. These are...

- Translation & Translanguaging: Considerations for Effectively Using Translation in Practice
- Every Student Thrives: An Inclusive Approach to ESOL Programming
- Consideration for Teaching Phonics and PA to English Learners



**Dr. Debra Cole**  
**Missouri Member-at-Large**  
*University of Missouri --  
St. Louis*



## State Report: Missouri

### Upcoming MELL Events

- September 26 - SW MELL Conference in Springfield, MO *[Just remember to come to come to MIDTESOL the next day!]*
- October 9 - “Narratives & Norms: Teaching Students from Diverse Cultures” by Dr. Michelle Izquierdo - Kansas City.
- October 28 - 29 - “Writing with MLs in the Elementary Grades” WIDA Training in Columbia, MO
- November 18-19 - DESE Federal Programs Conference
- February 20 - “Boosting Achievement” by Carol Salva in Kansas City
- March 26 -ELE conference in Springfield, MO (Andrea Honigsfeld is keynote)
- June 3-4 - ELevate Conference - Ft. Zumwalt West High School

**SW\* MELL FALL CONFERENCE**  
September 26, 2024  
DARR Agricultural Center - Springfield, MO

Hosted by Rhonda Hittenberger Ortiz  
MELL Instructional Specialist

**SHARE the BRILLIANCE!**

8a - Welcome, coffee and tea  
8:30 - Springfield ELD team: 7 steps to a language rich environment  
-11:30a Lunch is served-  
12:30p - Giveaways  
1p - Nixa ELD team: NELDA academy  
1:45 - Generative AI Tools & Tips  
2:30 - ELI Instructors: Welcome Family Program

**FEE INCLUDES LUNCH & "7 STEPS" BOOK**

**\$45**

Register at My Learning Plan.

**SAVE the DATE!**  
Wednesday 3.26.25  
8:30a-3:30p

**The LIFT ELs Conference**  
@ Missouri State University  
welcomes...

**Dr. Andrea Honigsfeld**  
Author & Educator

**Keynote:** "Integrating Content and Language Instruction to meet the educational needs of English learners through Collaborative instruction"

**PLUS:**

- Instructional breakout sessions
- Expert panel discussion
- Networking opportunities
- Vendors

*\$100 registration fee includes Honigsfeld book & lunch*

Watch your inbox for how to register for this event.

Here is a direct link to the ESOL certification requirements for Missouri: <https://dese.mo.gov/media/file/esol-certification-requirements>. (Link not live from this document.) **The Praxis is now required in Missouri for certification.**

Here is a list of institutions in Missouri that offer ESL/ELD teacher certification programs (list does not include live links):

[Avila University](#)

[Calvary University](#)

[Evangel University](#)

[Mission University](#)

[Missouri Southern State University](#)

[Missouri State University](#)

[Missouri Western State University](#)

[Park University](#)

[Southeast Missouri State University](#)

[Truman State University](#)

[University of Central Missouri](#)

[University of Missouri - Columbia](#)

[University of Missouri - Kansas City](#)

[University of Missouri - St. Louis](#)

[Webster University](#)

Check out the monthly **ELD Virtual Check-Ins** (<https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vQBubLSK-J1tfo8Hmp381yxd50V67LV-f80nE3ptYbp5Fm758kjT-zFQj1G-H5etQ/pub>). Anyone interested can sign up through the DESE Curriculum Calendar at the bottom of this page (<https://dese.mo.gov/college-career-readiness/curriculum>) or through the link at the top of the ELD Check-In Hub (the Hub is link is found on the [ELD webpage](https://dese.mo.gov/college-career-readiness/curriculum/english-language-development) (<https://dese.mo.gov/college-career-readiness/curriculum/english-language-development>) under the Prof Development tab).

There are self-paced **WIDA eWorkshops** available to any Missouri educator. Information on these eLearning opportunities is also located on the ELD webpage under the Prof Development tab. Any PD offered by MELL is posted on the DESE Curriculum Calendar.

You will find sign up information for **the in-person WIDA Writing Workshop for Elementary ELs for Oct. 28-29**. There is also a 2-part facilitated WIDA virtual workshop on supporting dually identified MLs (student with disability and multilingual learner) on October 7<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> available to any Missouri educator. There are limited seats available for both WIDA events. All of these events are free to participants.

In Missouri, all local education agencies (LEAs) are required per Section 167.645, RSMo, to address literacy and reading proficiency as part of their CSIP. DESE has developed the [Steps to Success Series](https://dese.mo.gov/college-career-readiness/literacy) (<https://dese.mo.gov/college-career-readiness/literacy>) to support LEAs in developing a Comprehensive Literacy Plan (CLP) in order to meet this requirement. Guidance has been/will be released to address the specific needs of English learners with regards to these requirements.

MELL also now participates and offers **EL sessions at the Interface Conference for Math and Science and the FLAM Conference** (<https://www.flamnet.org/copy-of-annual-conference>), held in three different locations in the state!

### **Missouri Seal of Biliteracy**

School districts (LEAs) who are participating in the program are encouraged to use the Pathways to Biliteracy Award to recognize the progress ELs are making towards English proficiency in the lower grades and to encourage efforts to further obtain the Missouri Seal of Biliteracy for proficiency in their home language and English. In 2022-23, 31% of the students who achieved the Missouri Seal of Biliteracy were ELs or former ELs.

**DO YOU HAVE MORE Missouri EL related news? Please contact Dr. Cole at [debracole@midtesol.org](mailto:debracole@midtesol.org) !**

All MIDTESOL Interest Sections will hold special sessions during the conference to give you a chance to network and discuss your group's unique challenges. See the conference schedule for more information about locations and times.

**Educational Technology – Community College/Adult Education – K-12 – Intensive English Programs – Program Administrators – Higher Education / Teacher Training**



## Updates from MIDTESOL Interest Sections

*Interest sections drive our organization's professional development!*

MIDTESOL's **six** different interest sections work hard to enable MIDTESOL members to grow professionally and to find resources to meet the needs of their particular English learners. How many interest sections do you belong to? (MIDTESOL members can belong to more than one interest section!) A huge thanks from MIDTESOL to these interest section leaders for all of their work!

### From the Program Administrators Interest Section (PAIS)

**Kelly McClendon**  
**MIDTESOL Program Administrators Interest Section Chair**  
Coordinator, Intensive English Program  
Washburn University  
Topeka, Kansas



### Welcome to the Fall Semester, fellow Program Administrators!

As current chair of this interest section, I'm looking forward to see you and meeting up at the MIDTESOL 2024 conference in a month! We will gather at and discuss current issues trends we all are experiencing. We will also discuss how we will connect and support each other throughout the year and decide some topics for Zoom lunch break gatherings. We will also need to elect a chair. The next Lunch Break zoom will be in October after the conference. I'll email out the minutes of the gathering so even if you can't meet us there, you'll know what's going on.

~Kelly McClendon, Program Administrators Interest Section Chair, IEP Director at Washburn University.



**Elissa Jones**  
**MIDTESOL K-12 Interest**  
**Section Chair**  
ESOL Teacher  
Topeka West High School  
Topeka, Kansas

## From the K-12 Interest Section

- The **K-12 Interest Section will be meeting** together in a large space so that all the K-12 people can be in one place! We will go over highlights and activities from the year, and talk about the responsibilities of being chair. The Interest Section need to elect a new chair (and hopefully co-chair so we can get on a revolving 2-year cycle), because Elissa (after much nudging from MIDTESOL Board members) is running for Vice President of MIDTESOL!
- Elissa will also be presenting a session on creating Curriculum Design Maps, a must in her district since they don't have a prepackaged curriculum. Elissa is excited to share how her district conceptualizes, sources, and creates materials

*Elissa sends monthly e-mails to K-12 Interest Section members which are full of ideas and teaching tips. Greatly appreciated! To sign up to receive Elissa's e-mails, you can contact her at [elissajones@midtesol.org](mailto:elissajones@midtesol.org).*



## From the Higher Education/Teacher Training Interest Section

**Jacob Rigal**  
**MIDTESOL Higher**  
**Ed/Teacher Training Interest**  
**Section Chair**  
Linguistic Support  
Université de Paris – Diderot  
Paris, Île-de-France, France

Jacob is currently living and working in Paris—from where he has been providing leadership for this Interest Section—and he urges you to come to the **Higher Education/Teacher Training Interest Section meeting** at MIDTESOL 2024! The interest section needs to elect some new leadership, and the meeting will provide a way for you to be part of the discussion of what areas the interest section to give attention to next year. Don't miss it! [Sidenote: Jacob manages a series of posts on LinkedIn you might want to check out:

[https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jacob-rigal\\_americanenglish-speakenglish-learnenglish-activity-6669435895323623424-2hsZ?t=%7Bseek to second number%7D.](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jacob-rigal_americanenglish-speakenglish-learnenglish-activity-6669435895323623424-2hsZ?t=%7Bseek%20to%20second%20number%7D)]

## From the Intensive English Program Interest Section

**Dr. Joe Scott**  
**MIDTESOL Intensive  
English Program Interest  
Section Chair**  
Center for English Language  
Learning – International  
Programs  
University of Missouri  
Columbia, MO



At this year's **IEP Interest Section Meeting**, we'll talk a bit about some issues that are affecting IEPs right now, such as the range of approaches programs might be taking toward the use of AI, and we'll have time to split up in groups to discuss those issues. See you there!



## MIDTESOL Community College/Adult Ed Interest Section Co-Chairs

**Georgia Deming**  
ESL Program Manager  
Johnson County Comm. College  
Overland Park, Kansas

**Lorraine Gardner**  
Lead ESL Instructor  
Ozarks Technical Comm. College  
Springfield, Missouri

## From the Community College/Adult Education Interest Section

This has been a year of many challenges and many questions! Come to the **Community College/Adult Education Interest Section meeting** to connect with people in your field who might be able to direct you to answers. Interest section meeting times and locations will be highlighted in the MIDTESOL 2024 Conference Schedule. Looking forward to seeing you there!

## From the Educational Technology Interest Section

### Amber Schrage MIDTESOL Educational Technology Interest Section Chair









Center of Grace ESL  
Coordinator/Educator  
Johnson County Adult Ed.  
Johnson County Comm. College  
Overland Park, Kansas

Don't miss the **Education Technology Interest Section Meeting** at MIDTESOL 2024! This year's meeting will involve discussion of several current topics that are relevant to us as educators, and we want you to be part of it. (If desired, there can even be a follow-up discussion of the invited focus workshop led by Dr. Shanna Opfer, "Elevating ESL Teaching with AI.") Come join us!

#### And in the meantime....

#### Join the conversation any time!

There are many ways to get involved.

 <b>Resource Library</b>	 <b>X</b> (formally Twitter)	 <b>Facebook</b>
Bookmark this website to find tips on using technology for speaking, writing, literacy, home-school communication, and much more. Let us know what topics you want to know more about!	Follow us on Twitter for up-to-date tech tips. Mention us in your posts and questions!	Join our Facebook group to talk to one another, ask questions about technology, and receive up-to-date tips from everyone in our Educational Technology Interest Section. If you already follow our Facebook page, you will receive an invitation.
 <a href="https://tinyurl.com/EdTechLibrary">tinyurl.com/EdTechLibrary</a>	 <a href="https://twitter.com/Midtesol_EdTech">@Midtesol_EdTech</a>	 <a href="https://tinyurl.com/EdTechGroup">tinyurl.com/EdTechGroup</a>

## MIDTESOL 2024 Adult Student Essay Contest Winners!

MIDTESOL wants to extend a hearty congratulations to this year's student essay contest winners, multilingual students of MIDTESOL member Elizabeth (Betsy) Baertlein! Winning submissions received cash prizes, and these students and their teacher will be honored in a special manner at the upcoming MIDTESOL 2024 conference. Way to go, students! And thanks for the impact you have made, Betsy!

### The Biggest Influences of My Success in Life

*(Mouftaou Kolawolé Orou Dramani, Kirkwood Community College)*



Success in life is sometimes closely linked to the type of people you meet along the way. I am a young Beninese from a poor family whose parents separated when I was barely 3 years old. This separation of my parents would forever mark my destiny. My childhood and adulthood were therefore shaping up without much guidance and paternal figures. The absence of my father by my side to serve as a reference and guide would later be filled by two wonderful people that fate placed in my path. They are my childhood friend, named Jean Olinde and my mother, to whom I owe a great deal in terms of maturity and the thirst for success against all odds. My story begins in the late 1980s, where my two parents met in a restaurant in a city in my country, Benin. At that time, my father was a gendarme and my mother worked as a waitress in the restaurant where they met. From this encounter, three children were born: my elder sister, my younger sister, and me. Everything was going well until one day a very violent marital dispute erupted in my parents' home. Following this violent dispute, which left physical scars on my mother, she was forced to leave with three children in her care. Thus began a challenging journey for me. With little resources, my mother had to give everything to provide us with a roof over our heads and food to eat. In the ambition of giving us a better future, she enrolled me in primary school without a birth certificate since she left the marital home hastily and without any contact with my father. So, I was enrolled in primary school in the city of Parakou, which is the third largest in my country, Benin. In primary school, I made quite a few friends, but among these multiple friendships, the one with my friend Jean Olinde stood out, impacting my academic and personal journey forever. Jean Olinde, better known by the nickname "Linlin" comes from a modest family and is a year older than me. Our meeting was centered around our common passion for football. Very early on, we began to appreciate each other first because of football, without realizing that this passion for the round leather ball would go far beyond. It should be noted that we were both among the best in our classes, but he was a bit brighter than me. Once primary school was over, we agreed to meet again in the same secondary school to continue nurturing this beautiful friendship woven around football.

Once in secondary school, our passion for studies and excellence to be among the top students in our respective classes would further bond us. From the sixth to the ninth grade, my friend and I would challenge each other from a distance. He was very bright in literature and science, while I was just average because I had difficulty adapting to secondary school life. And that's where my friend would be of very precious and vital help. He immediately encouraged me to take an interest in literature. Under his precious advice, I went to subscribe to the main library in the city. This act significantly impacted my level of writing and expression in French. When I had difficulty getting there because my home was a bit far from the library, he didn't hesitate to lend me his brand new bicycle, which he received as a reward for his excellent end-of-year results in primary school. Thanks to him, I connected with a man who gave him private science lessons at home. This encounter sharpened my appetite for math and physics, and thanks to that, I was able to pursue my higher education in mathematics initially and later in statistics. In our last year of secondary school, we were always together, working and



motivating each other to be the best of our generation. This encounter literally changed the course of my story and put me on the path to success and personal fulfillment. If today I am a responsible and resilient man, I owe it to my mother, who is my role model and source of motivation. Her courage and self-sacrifice allowed my sisters and me to have a less difficult childhood than expected. Indeed, my mother embodies discipline and self-sacrifice for the happiness and success of her children. Without any help from her family, she had to work tirelessly day and night to provide us with a roof over our heads and to continue our education without any difficulty. From her, I learned courage, determination, and perseverance. I didn't need any other model of success in life because I had her by my side. She started with very little, and with a sharp sense of savings and financial management, she accomplished so much that I am and remain in awe of everything she achieved without even setting foot in a classroom. She never stopped telling us that when you earn money, you have to save it for rainy days because life is not always smooth sailing. When I saw her prosper in her business and secure her future and ours through the acquisition of real estate and diversification of her investments, it fueled in me the desire to follow her example and surpass what she had achieved. If today I don't back down from any difficulty, it's largely due to the resilience my mother showed when everything was against her.

Life sometimes puts us against the wall, and the future seems to be fraught with obstacles and difficulties of all kinds. However, the connection with quality people, motivation, and support allows us to overcome all these obstacles and achieve our dreams. The presence of my mother by my side as a mentor and the encounter with my childhood friend Jean Olinde forever reshaped the trajectory of my life.

## My ELA High School Teacher

*(Le Dat, Kirkwood Community College)*



Do you know that our teachers and professors are the people who will give us keys to succeed in the future? That feels like teachers and professors play a huge, significant role in our journeys. I believe this is the truth. I am a student at Kirkwood, and I am focusing on engineering as my major to study. I graduated from City High school last year, and I miss my high school teachers there so much because they were very nice to me. In the following paragraphs, I will talk about one of my high school teachers who has most influenced my life and helped me a lot in my study journey.

The high school teacher who has supported me in my learning journey was an ELA teacher named Aleah Suchomel, students usually called her "Mrs. Su." She is an American with green eyes, white skin, and blonde hair. She was my teacher when I first came and studied in high school in the U.S. I remember that she was teaching me in writing, reading, speaking, and listening English classes, and she was my teacher for my sophomore and junior years. I enjoyed studying in her classes because she always tried to make the class interesting and exciting for students. She cared for every single student in every class she taught, and she always tried to help students who had problems and gave good advice to them. To me and every student in her class, she was the best teacher because she was always very nice to us. To me, that high school ELA teacher was the person who has most influenced my life and helped me to learn and to mature both personally and professionally.

During my first days of high school, I was very quiet and too shy to talk to other students because my English was so bad, and I felt ashamed about it. Every day I came to classes, I was just sitting very quietly by myself without talking with anyone. When Mrs. Su saw and understood my problem, she tried to help me talk to others by creating some games and

group activities in class and introducing me to some students who shared similar interests with me. Every day I came to her class, she always said “Hi” to me and started asking me some questions about my life and classes to help me practice and improve my English. Not long after, thanks to the help from my teacher, my English was improved a lot, and I could talk and listen to others much better than before. Not only helping me in English classes, my teacher also helped me with any assignments from other classes or problem in my life. Although she was teaching English classes and was not good at math, she was willing to help me with math problems. To help me with math, Mrs. Su tried to make appointments with math teachers for me and help me explain my confusion.

Although I was not studying in her class in my senior year, she also always cared about me and was always ready to help me whenever I needed. In addition, she was also the person who helped me orient myself on my study path and gave me very useful advice. One of the pieces of advice she told me that I always remember was, “If you give up, you will always be a failure, so never give up.” She gave me this advice when I felt so embarrassed about my English and almost wanted to give up; she told me this to help me be more motivated and believe in myself that I could do this. My ELA teacher was my best teacher in high school. She always gave me useful advice to bring me up and really cared for me and every student. If I had not met Mrs. Su, I would still be shy and still be a quiet person with low self-confidence. She was the one who gave me more motivation to try harder in my studies. Maybe I would have easily given up learning English if I had not met her. I feel very grateful for the helpful advice, interesting lessons in English classes, the friendliness of my teacher, and all the other things that Mrs. Su has done for me. Mrs. Su, Thank you for all.

## My Way to English

*(Adjo Kezia Zamba, Kirkwood Community College)*



Everybody has their own story of how they have become, why they are today and how they are able to do the things they are doing. Well, here is mine, my name is Kezia Zamba I'm originally from Togo, I've been in the US for almost two years now and I'm working my way to get into the nursing program. Let's talk about my experience as a non-English speaker and some people and things that have most influenced my life and helped me become a good English speaker. The first teacher that I had in high school in the US was named Tiphannie Roisland. To everyone else she was just a mean and demanding teacher, but for me she is one of the reasons I can write and understand this essay right now. She was really welcoming when we met, and even though I couldn't understand what she was saying she didn't get upset with me. She was always calm to us; she would explain the word more than three times so we all could understand it. I remember students hating her because she did not allow phones in her lecture. My favorite part of her class was when she would let us read out loud and do some vocabulary research. I learned many new words in her class, and I also learned how to use them. Roisland was and will always be one of the best teachers I've ever had in my life, I'm sure all the students in her class felt the same way about her teaching.

The second thing that helped me in my English learning journey was my books. If you're a reader you know how you feel when you're reading. Now imagine not being able to feel what the characters are feeling, not knowing what the characters look like or smells like just because you can't read the language. I don't know about anyone else but for me it was like someone was taking something really important from me. This perfect world I used to create when I'm reading was completely gone because of my language barrier. I couldn't take it, so I started taking the books in two different languages, French which was my second language and English. I did that until I felt like now, I can read the English

without needing to translate it. It wasn't easy but it was Important to me so I stick with it until now I can read and understand everything perfectly.

In life you don't always learn from good experiences, you can also learn from the bad ones and sometimes good things will come out of it. Even though all my teachers were welcoming in my first year in the US, not all my classmates were. I remember how they wouldn't want to work with me because I couldn't speak the language, and I did understand that the only thing I didn't understand was why they would talk badly about me because they thought I couldn't hear or understand anything they said. It took me a while to understand how differently people treat you based on how you talk or don't talk. I worked harder so I could speak English but in the end what they thought about me didn't really matter because there were so many things I could do with this new language. My English journey was long but satisfying. I had people like my teachers, my parents and other things that kept me going no matter what the obstacle was, and for that I will always be grateful for them. It was not all Sunshines and rainbows, but some days were better than the others but today I can say with joy that I don't regret anything.





# About our Organization

Contact us at  
[www.midtesol.org](http://www.midtesol.org)



**MIDTESOL** is a professional organization, an affiliate of TESOL International Association, whose goal is to support teachers and enhance the teaching of **English to Speakers of Other Languages**.

**MIDTESOL Matters** is a quarterly publication and is distributed to subscribers and dues-paying members of **MIDTESOL**. Articles, Teaching Tips, and Reviews are welcome from all members. The editor reserves the right to edit for space, clarity, or editorial balance. Materials published in **MIDTESOL Matters** become the property of MIDTESOL and could be shared with other TESOL affiliate organizations.

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## Our Mission

The mission of **Mid-America Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages** is to foster excellence in English language learning in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska to people whose native language is a language other than English while respecting their individual language rights.

**As a regional affiliate of TESOL and a professional organization, MIDTESOL:**

- *supports those involved with English language teaching, teacher education, administration and management, curriculum and materials design, and research*
- *provides leadership and direction through the dissemination and exchange of information and resources*
- *encourages access to the standards for English language instruction, professional preparation, and employment*