

What does the concept of immigrant struggle mean to me?

The concept of immigrant struggle holds deep personal meaning to me, as I have witnessed firsthand the resilience and determination of my grandmother who immigrated to the United States from Edinburgh, Scotland. Her journey is a testament to the hardships faced by immigrants and the incredible strength it takes to overcome them.

Growing up in Scotland during World War II, my grandmother experienced significant economic struggles as the middle of 8 children in a lower-middle class family. She told us tales of tea parties in which you brought your own cup and saucer and your own bread. She also told us of how instead of toothpaste they used soot from the fireplace to clean their teeth. With limited educational opportunities beyond basic high school, she had to face the challenges of a society ravaged by war and economic instability. However, her ambition and desire for a better life led her to make a bold decision at the age of 18—to leave her home and embark on a new journey in the United States alongside her sister, who was just two years older.

Arriving in a foreign land meant she had to adapt to a new culture and economy. The struggles she encountered were not merely physical or material but also emotional and psychological. She had to navigate unfamiliar systems, learn new skills and find a job that could provide financial stability. The path she chose was undoubtedly difficult and it demanded immense courage and perseverance. She was not one to romanticize the past and she found opportunities that would not have been available to her had she remained in Scotland. Through her perseverance, she was able to raise twin boys and put them through college without debt.

From my grandmother's experiences, I have learned invaluable lessons about resilience and perspective. She instilled in me the belief that no challenge is insurmountable and that the darkest times can offer opportunities for growth and transformation. Her unwavering determination to create a better life for herself and her family has served as a constant source of inspiration.

My grandmother's journey is a testament to the countless individuals who have left behind their familiar worlds in search of new opportunities. Their stories are not just tales of struggle, but also of triumph, as they forge paths for themselves and future generations. They leave behind their homelands, cultures and, sometimes even loved ones, all in pursuit of a better life.

The concept of immigrant struggle holds immense significance to me because it encapsulates the indomitable spirit of individuals who dare to dream and are willing to work tirelessly to make those dreams a reality. It serves as a reminder that obstacles are not roadblocks but stepping stones on the path to success.

As I reflect on my grandmother's journey and the lessons she imparted, I am grateful for her unwavering determination and resilience. Her story inspires me to embrace challenges, view the world from a different perspective and always strive to overcome any obstacle that may come my way. The concept of immigrant struggle, as embodied by my grandmother, continues to shape my outlook on life, reminding me that with perseverance and a positive mindset, I can overcome any challenge that may seem too hard at the time.

How do I celebrate my cultural heritage?

Celebrating my cultural heritage is an integral part of my identity, as I come from an Irish-Scottish family. One of the primary ways in which I honor my heritage is through my passion for Irish dancing. For the past 12 years, I have been actively involved in competitive Irish dancing, which has allowed me to connect with my roots and showcase the rich traditions of Irish culture. Participating in various St. Patrick's Day parades, including those in Stamford, Greenwich and Norwalk, has been a significant highlight of my cultural celebration. These parades have provided me with the opportunity to share my love for Irish dancing with the community and spread joy through performances in nursing homes, care centers and preschools throughout the month of March. Additionally, serving as the Vice President of my dance school's Youth Council has allowed me to give back to society by organizing blood drives in collaboration with the American Red Cross.

In addition to my involvement in Irish dancing, I also cherish my Scottish heritage and find ways to celebrate it with my family. Every January, we gather together to honor Scottish poet Robert Burns in a special family event called the Burns Supper. This occasion serves as a beautiful reminder of our shared ancestry and the importance of familial bonds. It is a time when we come together to recite Burns' poetry, enjoy traditional Scottish cuisine and engage in meaningful conversations about our heritage. This annual gathering not only allows us to celebrate our Scottish roots but also provides a precious opportunity for family members, both immediate and extended, to strengthen our connections and create lasting memories.

Looking ahead, as I embark on my college journey, I plan to continue celebrating my cultural heritage by joining the UCONN Irish Dance team. This will enable me to remain connected to my Irish roots and continue pursuing my passion for Irish dancing. Being a part of the team will offer me the chance to collaborate with like-minded individuals who share a deep appreciation for Irish culture and traditions. Together, we will perform at various events, showcasing the beauty and vibrancy of Irish dancing while spreading cultural awareness on campus and beyond.

Celebrating my Irish-Scottish heritage through Irish dancing and family gatherings has allowed me to foster a strong sense of pride in my cultural identity. These experiences have deepened my understanding of my roots and the significance of preserving and sharing traditions. Whether it be through lively performances in parades and shows, organizing charitable events or embracing family traditions, I am committed to honoring my heritage and ensuring that its rich legacy continues to thrive for generations to come.