

# Cristela

Cristela came to the United States from El Salvador when she was five. She attended kindergarten in Texas before moving to Maryland, where she resides with her mother, uncle, and three cousins. Her mother does not read or write in Spanish or English; her uncle, who is more proficient in English, regularly helps with translating.

Cristela was placed in a first-grade cotaught classroom, where she had support from one of her Spanish-speaking classmates and from her newly found English-speaking friends as well. Cristela learned to follow the well-established routines with relative ease, perhaps because her classmates were eager to include her and help her throughout the day. Initially, Cristela nodded and smiled a lot, even when she did not quite understand what was happening around her. At other times she looked confused and approached her teachers or classmates speaking in Spanish. She enjoyed the songs and chants that were shared in the classroom, and after one of those morning meeting chats, she came out of her silent

period and began to repeat words and engage in simple conversations.

She received instructional support from the ELD (English language development) teacher three periods each day. There were eight other students in the classroom who spoke Cristela's native language, so Spanish was heard on the playground, during recess, in the lunchroom, and when Cristela worked in groups. Now five months after her arrival, she has begun to learn her letters. She still has difficulty with pronouncing some of the sounds in English, but she works diligently and giggles at times when she cannot quite get a sound right. It is easier for her to enunciate beginning word sounds than ending sounds. Cristela has learned several two- and three-word phrases to accomplish a task; "Can you help me?" is one of them.

Cristela does best when she describes the pictures she has drawn using patterned sentences. She is able to write "I see" sentences and even gets the initial sound of most words correctly using inventive spelling. Although she is still a Starting level student, she has made considerable growth in five short months. She is completing her homework at home with her uncle, who also shared that Cristela is now teaching her mom English!



## → STOP AND REFLECT ←

What were Cristela's greatest assets as a newcomer to the United States? What could her steady progress be attributed to? What would you do to help her further expand her language and literacy skills?

# Tamir

Tamir is a twelve-year-old boy from Syria, whose family has suffered greatly since the start of civil war in 2011. He lost his home and several close family members in Aleppo, Syria, when his neighborhood was bombed. Tamir's grandmother and uncle are unaccounted for, but the rest of the family fled to neighboring Jordan. Tamir's father, mother, two siblings, and cousin spent two years in a Zaatari refugee camp, where they lived in a trailer and food and medical supplies were scarce. Although Tamir did well in school and enjoyed reading, art, and studying in general prior to the civil war in Syria, he has not attended school regularly for quite a while. Tamir's father, who was an instructor at the Mamoun University for Science and Technology, tried to help him continue his education, but the lack of appropriate textbooks and school supplies limited the scope of their studying. By pointing to a map, Tamir was able to share that the family migrated through Turkey, Eastern Europe, and Germany on their long journey to the United States. The family was waiting for a visa to allow legal entrance to the United States for a number of years and went through several rounds of screening before finally they were admitted six months ago. Now in the United States, Tamir attends seventh grade in a newcomer

center, which is specially designed to welcome kindergarten to eighth-grade students and support them with the vast cultural and linguistic shifts they experience when they first arrive in the United States.

He understands basic commands and directions, especially when his teacher uses gestures and visual cues. Two months after his arrival, he has not yet spoken in English to any of his peers or teachers, but he pays more attention in class and does not always sit alone in the cafeteria any more. He has a buddy who taught him how to use the locker, and he quickly learned the routines of the day. He most enjoys art projects and his science classes, where he can watch his teachers show him what to do.

## → STOP AND REFLECT ←

Why is it important to understand the complex experiences that Tamir brings to school? In what ways should Tamir's teachers respond to the trauma that he has lived through? What assets can his teachers tap into? What would you do to help him thrive in middle school after he leaves the newcomer center?