Grade Six Student Work

During the first half of each unit we work together to explore life in a particular culture, over a particular period of time. Students read assigned chapters from their Enki Book. Then, in class, we work more deeply with the issues raised in the readings, through discussion, peer-writers workshop, writing assignments, and art work.

Some of these writing assignments are done as a group, with each student taking on a section of the story, from a particular perspective (usually one of their choice), and then the teacher puts these together into a coherent review or retelling of the story. Other times students write their own complete essay on the topic, making use of the writers workshop to get peer feedback on their ideas and execution.

Once the cultural and historical ground is established, we shift into the "Peer Project" section of the class. The primary goal now is for the students to learn the art of self-respectful compromise: how do they bend on group decisions without giving up something core for themselves. Then they to learn to work with one another's strengths and weaknesses, desires and aversions. Finding creative approaches to taking the content further through research, writing, art work, and technological opportunities is an ongoing undertaking.

Excerpts of both kinds of writing, and some associated art work, follow, as well as links to sample projects done by small groups.

Excerpts from Group Writing Undertaking: Malala's (Jani's) Childhood (in this the students were welcome to write from any perspective they chose; some chose to be a drawer or a mouse in the wall, others from a human character's perspective).

I had just gotten word that my cousin and his wife had just had a baby. I smiled and grabbed some coins, dried fruit, and other sweets and nice things to celebrate the birth of a son. I ran over to a cabinet and grabbed a paper with the entire family tree of our clan, the Dalokhel Yousafzai.

I ran out the door and got into my car and went to my cousin's house. As soon as I got there my cousin rushed out with a big smile and greeted me. We went inside and then my cousin smiled at me and said, "Ah I see you have brought the family tree of our clan; we should write the name of my daughter on it now." A wave of pity and disappointment rushed through me and I slowly tucked the paper under my arm as I looked away from him and pursed my lips.

Seeming dissatisfied, he snatched the family tree away from me and drew a line from his name to a circle where he wrote the name of his daughter. I stood there in shock with other relatives who were watching in shock, as well. On that family tree were only the names of men, but not anymore, I guess. My cousin rolled up the paper and looked at everyone and then said excitedly, "Let's celebrate! Just as you would for a boy!"

Everyone was hesitant at first but then we all gave in and threw riches into the baby girl's cradle and celebrated the birth.

Abigail

I awake to a quiet house. Bhabi isn't shaking me from sleep. No one is beside my bed, telling me it's time to ready for school. The house is completely quiet. I sit up, and push the covers off me. Cool air rushes over my bare legs. But I know it will be hot by the time I walk down the dusty roads to school, so I enjoy this breath of fresh air. Standing, I walk across the uneven boards to the window, and look out. The city spreads out before me like a map. In this last hour before dawn, every building is cloaked in shadows. There is a faint pink glow in the east that reminds me of the coming heat. I sigh, and turn from the window. Quickly I dress and gather my school books.

When I enter the kitchen, the silence is finally broken: Bhabi is preparing breakfast. She must hear my footsteps, as she turns and smiles at me, "morning" she says. I hurry to her side, and taking the knife from her hand, begin to slice the meat she was readying for the midday meal. She watches me critically for a moment, then turns to the dishes, satisfied with my work.

Once the meat has been cut, seasoned, and added to the cooking pot, I sit to eat my own breakfast, then hurry outside to feed the chickens. When I return to the kitchen, Aba is eating at the table. I smile, and give him a hug before grabbing my bag and stepping out into the street.

In the time it took me to help Bhabi with the chores and eat, the city has come to life. Merchants hurry to set up they're stands and small groups of women are already looking over the wares for sale. I hold my bag close to my chest, and walk fast, weaving in between the people. I take all the back roads I know, they often smell terrible, but I prefer them to navigating the loud bazaar.

Rebecca

Students read about Mohammed's early years and each wrote a paragraph or two about some aspect:

I lean over as the coughs get more violent; my thin and frail limbs shaking from the force. When I look up, I see – to my surprise– a woman staring at us. Why is she looking at us like that? On the busy streets of Mecca, you're barely ever spared a glance. I wonder what she's thinking as she watches us? Disgust? Pity? I long for what she has, a full belly and a home.

If only she knew what this life is like. Death always prowling, never knowing when it's going to pounce. Hunger gnawing at you all the time, water scarce, and sickness everywhere. Each day is the same, dust being kicked up by the hurrying passersby – all just a blur of fabric. Grimy beggars at the market corners reaching out their hands; the wealthy sitting high on their camels paying no heed to what's around them, and the hard working merchants selling their goods.

Here I sit, watching everything play before me, the sun reflecting harshly off the white buildings. I lean back on the cool mud wall and close my eyes. This is one of the few places I could find to escape the relentless scathing sun. I sigh. Oh, how I long for a better life.

\- Hazel

As we all set off for Mecca, the woman astride me feels my bony back. Why, dearest gods, does everybody who sits on me have to also have a bony backside? I groan as she turns to look back at the site of the old camp. Hopefully the next place is better, because I don't know how much longer I could withstand the lack of water here. As I stagger along, occasionally being fed a few grains from the bags that hang by her side, the woman riding me falls asleep. I stop. Everyone else rides along until they notice us and they wait until I have to jiggle her before she wakes up and we can head on. My master falls asleep several more times and we are delayed. As I wearily hobble along I hear the tired whinnying of horses, some on their last legs of life. Their only purpose is to fulfill a seemingly impossible task, risking their lives for their masters.

Dash

As I am following this donkey, I realize that it's rider is falling asleep. If not for that donkey, she would have fallen off long ago. I decide that this is a noble donkey, and I give it a blessing, so that even if it's rider does not survive, happiness will be just around the corner for the donkey.

Now I must take my leave of these people, as the noble donkey rides off into the sunset.

Joshua

As we gaze up at the hills of Mecca a wash of relief falls over me. At last I can have a decent meal! As we approach the hills surrounding our destination, I realize how tired I am from traveling without rest last night. I could almost fall over from sheer exhaustion. The people dismount, then set up camp on one of the hills. They lay down to rest, leaving us to graze in the grassy hills. I gaze toward the hustle and bustle of the center of Mecca, and I feel content knowing that the journey is over.

Dash

I don't know how much longer I'm going to be able to carry the mother and her newborn child on my back. My legs are so tired; each time I take another step it feels like five pounds have been added onto my back. I'm so thirsty, my mouth feels like I took a mouthful of sand, sucked on it, and then spit it out. I wonder how the baby is doing? I hope we get to a resting point soon or else I'm going to start falling asleep and look like I'm a crazy person, but a crazy donkey instead, trying to keep my balance. All the other horses and donkeys are already a little bit ahead of me. It's okay; they are waiting for me; just take your time, okay. I'm almost there.

It looks like they set up everything, and are now sleeping. I made it. Oh, it feels so good to lay down in the cool night. The sand feels nice and cool against my stomach. Also, the light breeze, that is going against my face feels like someone is rubbing a feather or something soft against my face, which feels nice. I'm getting very tired. I can barely keep my eyes open. All I can . .see now is . . the. . . dark . . . blue . . . . sky.

Denisse

A couple of times in each Unit, each students writes a full essay. The following were written on topics of aloneness and abandonment, sparked by an experience from Mohammed's childhood. Student's were free to chose any human perspective.

I rolled over in my blanket. I was scared. I shivered; the huge, black darkness was around me. There was a noise. It was just the wind. Every noise made me jump.

It was the first time I was alone at night. Grandfather was in town and was going to spend the night there. Tomorrow he would buy fish, bread, meat and the other things we needed.

I was tired, so I decided to close my eyes just for one second.

There! On the path there was a man! He was dressed all in black, from his hooded head, down to his boots. As he walked toward me, I saw that he was not the only one. A pack of wolves was at his heels. Then, the man stretched out his arm. It stretched out longer and longer toward me. "Aah!" I cried, as I ran for my bow. But it was not there! The man's arm got closer and closer.

I awoke with a start. Sunlight was streaming into the cave. There was no black man or wolves to be seen. The sheep were okay, too. I let them out of the pen to graze.

All day I kept thinking about my dream. "What does it mean?" I thought. I tried to think of an answer, but I could not think of one.

It was not until the end of the day that I noticed one of the sheep was limping. I went to see what was the matter. As I got closer, I could see what had happened. The sheep had hurt its foot on a rock. I carried the sheep to the cave and made it a salve. I slathered the medicine on the sheep's wound before putting it back out to graze.

That night I brought all the sheep back to the pen. I saw grandfather coming down the road and I smiled.

The next few days passed; each day was much like the last. My grandfather would wake me up, then he would let the sheep out of the pen to graze.

One day, one of the lambs was missing. Grandfather said, "You can go look for it. You are old enough now." So, I took my stick and went to go look for the lamb. When I finally found it, it was standing very still, looking down at a stick. I frowned. "Why is it looking at a stick like that," I thought. Then, I saw that it was not a stick. It was a snake! I knew there was no time to lose. One step closer and the snake would bite. Just then, the lamb saw me and let out a loud "baa," and stepped closer to the snake. That was too much for the snake. It bit!

"What happened!" grandfather cried, when I came down the hill carrying the lamb. I told him all that had happened, while he tended the wound. He said, "I think we will wait until you are older for you to go looking sheep by yourself." I nodded and went to bed.

Haydn

Geometric Tiles are a central part of the symbology of Islam because of their inherent order and symmetry, presenting a unity that emanates from a stable center (Al-lah). Students each explored geometric principles until they found a design they wanted to paint on a tile. Each then made a tile.

MOHAMMED:

As we climbed back onto our camels, one last time I looked back at the village where my mother died, then turned away and started my journey home. The sun was very bright and burning hot, and the sand was dry and gratey; it was itchy and annoying. One of the days the wind started blowing very hard. It was really unpleasant because the sand flew in our eyes and our faces and flew everywhere; it was most uncomfortable.

We had packed water and food and small tents. We brought three bows and arrows and four swords. We only had half the journey left so we didn't need as many supplies; we thought we had enough. We rode all day and we were so tired that we set up camp, but we forgot to put out a watch.

The JINN:

These people here have no guard; plus they have food and water that we could steal. I would be hard to spot even in the day – seeing how I am made of smoke! But at night they don't stand a chance. As I glided down into the camp, I saw that everyone was asleep. I went to their water canteens, sitting out in plain sight. I gathered them all in a bunch and then glided out of camp and over hill and dumped the water. "They will be so mad in the morning," I thought to myself.

MOHAMMED:

As I wake up, I see that no one else has woken up yet. I head right over to the water because I am really thirsty after a night in the dry desert. I found that there was no water! There couldn't be no water?! How?! What?! What just happened? We had the water last night. It vanished! What happened? Did someone steal it? But nothing else is gone – but wait, a man would have taken something else too.

Running and shouting, I woke everyone up and alerted them. They were shocked that the water was gone. "Could a Jinn have come and stolen all of our water. But what did we do to deserve having a Jinn steal our water. Did anyone do anything?"

One after the next, everyone said they had done nothing to anger the jinn. "Why would the jinn come if we have done nothing?"

"Maybe it just came to make trouble."

Since there was no way to get the water back now, we started our journey again, hoping to find a well soon. The winds and the sand and the sun all beat down horribly on us. As we rode on, our search for water became more and more desperate, but the camels kept walking. We thanked the Creator God for making the camels so tough, able to do without water for so long.

Two days after we had begun our journey we could barely stay on the camels' backs because we had run out of water. Right as we were on the point of dehydration we found a well, "God of the waters, be praised!" "Yay!" we shouted.

That night we did post a watch.

The JINN:

Tonight they do have a watch, but I think I will be able to sneak past it. As I glide as quietly as I can down into the camp, the guard turns directly at me. I duck behind one of the tents. The guard turns away again. I slip past him and into where the camels are tied. Now I bend down and slash at the ropes so they are freed. Still they don't move.

I have to get them moving. Quickly I slip into lion form and softly growl. They are so terrified that they run across the desert as fast as they can, and disappear like a cloud of dust in the distance.

MOHAMMED:

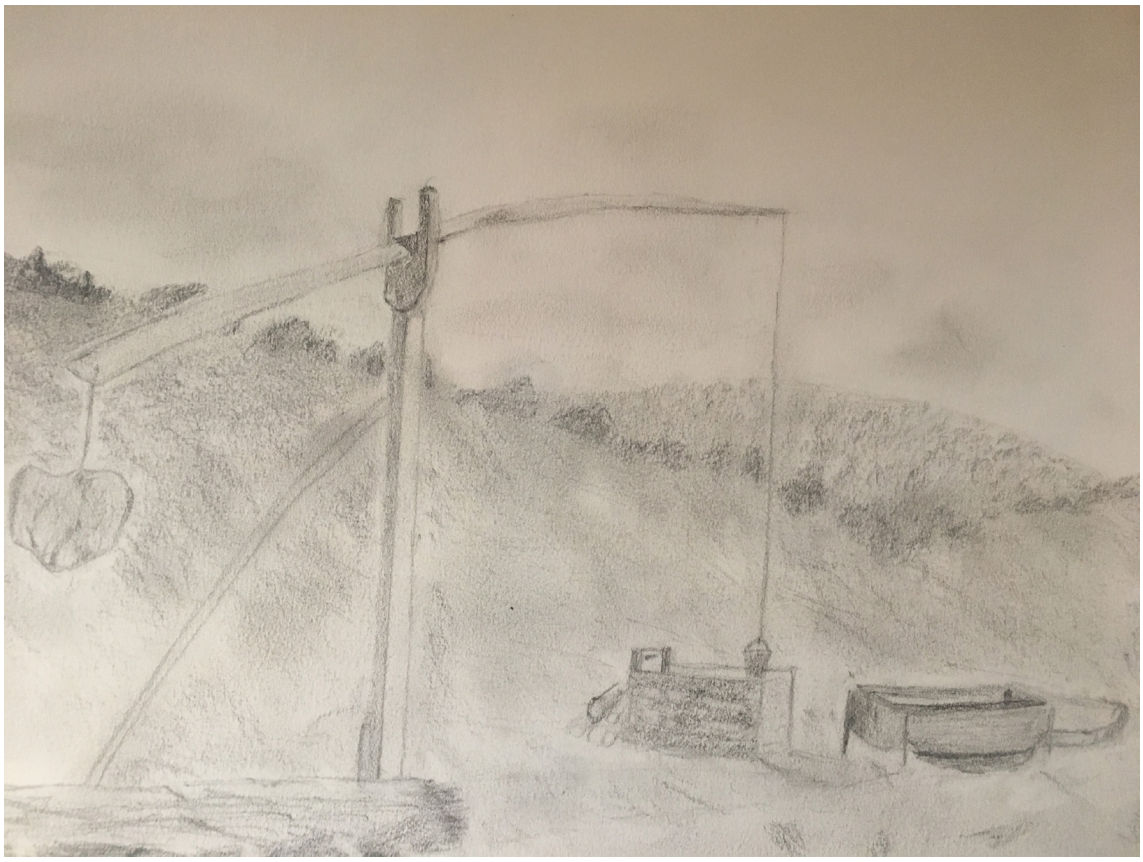
We hear hooves pounding and jump to our feet. We see a lion that should not be here. "Oh no, the camels are gone!" The men load up their bows. The first man shoots an arrow. It goes right through. This IS a Jinni.

We all run after it, firing our bows, until it is too far away to shoot. It is gone.

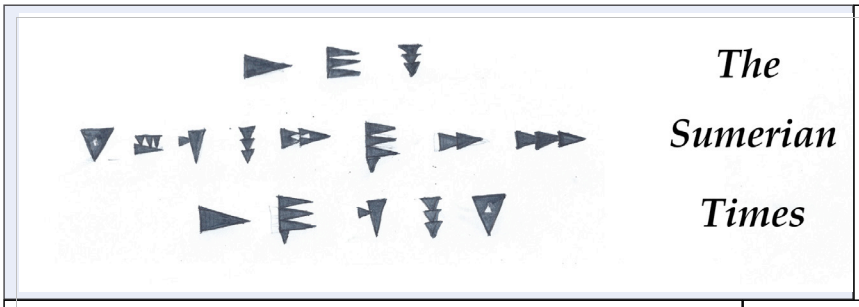
The next day we sent out a search party for the camels. Three hours later, one party returns with the camels. "We are victorious; the camels have been found; the Jinni is gone."

Nothing else interesting happened for the rest of the ride home, but I was eager to get to Grandfather because I have a great story to tell.

Ibra

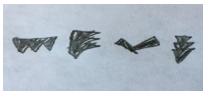


In exploring the history of the area, we went back to Ancient Sumer and looked at the mythology and the movement from hunter-gatherer life to city life. Students did a variety of assignments, including writing a newspaper and writing poetry on the mythology, and writing out titles with the Cuneiform letter of Sumer.



The Sumerian Times

IRRIGATION: a game changer!



A Farmer's Life, *by Haydn McGehee-Lee*

I am reporting from the land of Sumer. Once this land was dry and almost nothing grew here. Since the farmers moved in, the land is green and full of life. Right now, I am sitting with Ur-Nammu, one of our local farmers.

Haydn: Have you always a been a farmer? How did you decide to make farming your life's work?

Ur-Nammu: For much of my life I was a hunter gatherer. However, a few years ago I injured my foot. I was no longer able to walk for very long or fast. Soon after my accident, a friend of mine died. He had no relatives, so he left his farm to me. It is much more work, but I can manage it better than hunting or gathering food and constantly being on the move.

con't pg 2

Should we go back to being Hunter Gatherers? *by Hannah Macri*

Hello, today we will be asking Puabi from ancient Sumer some questions. She lived as a Hunter Gatherer but is now a member of the new city.

Reporter: Do you like living in the city?

Puabi: Sometimes.

Reporter: What do you like about the city?

Puabi: Well it's very easy to get food; all you have to do is buy it or trade for it. There are a lot of people to protect you from raiders and stuff.

Reporter: Did you like being a Hunter Gatherer?

Puabi: Yes Reporter: Why?

Puabi: Well, because we all helped each other. We shared our food and if one person was hurt everyone would help all they could. I also loved the smell of being in the wilderness.

Reporter: Which do you prefer?

con't pg 4

Cuneiform Header by Rebecca; upper Tile by Denisse; Swape by Phaedra

Queen of the stars
Daughter of the earth
Hungry for knowledge
Longing to learn
Sitting in prisons with bars of hate
Wishing for freedom
Wishing for light
Hungry for answers
Thirsty for hope
Tired of silence
Yearning for equality

The Queen of Heaven,
longing to learn.
The Queen of Heaven,
wanting to know.
The Queen of Heaven,
Destined to know,
the secrets of the underworld.

THE DESCENT and the UNDERWORLD

The seven gates towering high
Inanna, sparkling bright
Her Lapis Lazuli rod and stones upon her breast
Glittering in the dark
Walking with pride
Unafraid, she passed through the gates
Smaller and smaller her pride shrunk
Until, nothing remained
but a shivering figure

She walked knowledge to get.
Feeling a terrible chill.
Death gates, consume . . .
Jewels, golden garments, vanish.
Upon the silence, cold air blows towards her
Leaving a feeling of death . . .

Blood on the ground,
death in the air,
monsters watching,
demons waiting,
darkness surrounds all,
still there is hope.

Finally we returned to Malala's story and each child chose an issue of concern to them, and wrote their own speech to the United Nations.

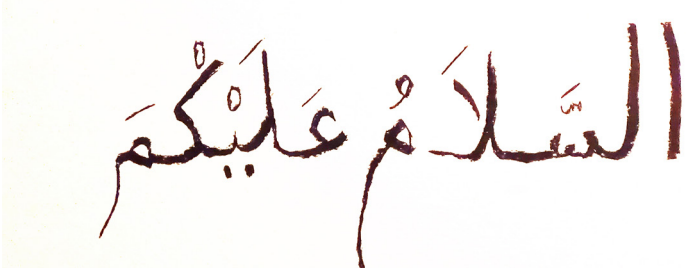
Good morning, delegates of the house and chairperson. My name is Saliou Ibrahim fall. I am here today to discuss the forced labor in Qatar in preparation for the 2022 World Cup. According to BBC, CNN and Amnesty International, economic migrants from Bangladesh, India and Nepal are paying between $500 and $4,300 (enormous sums for those living in poverty) just to get a job in Qatar. Once they arrive, they have their passports taken away, and are provided with terrible living conditions. Many of the workers are paid significantly less than recruiting posts said they would be, they sometimes have delayed salary payments, they may not be given residence permits (required by Qatar law), and are also sometimes threatened with losing their jobs if they complain. This threat has special significance to those with no residence permits, as they then have no ability to work elsewhere in the country, or to leave the country because of their seized passports. In addition, workers who will not work because their conditions are so bad are threatened pay suspensions or deportations with no pay for any work already completed. This is a violation of human rights. The government of Qatar is violating many articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular 4,9,13. These say:

- Article 4: "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude. Slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all forms."
- Article 9: "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile."
- Article 13:
- 1. "Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence in the border of each state."
- 2. "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country."

In addition to Qatar's unethical treatment of the migrants, FIFA (the International Football Association) has done nothing to stop these human rights violations because FIFA is a corrupt and dirty organization. Arrests and investigations for bribery, money laundering and fraud have taken place repeatedly over many years, with a widely publicized bust, taking place in 2015.

I ask you to do something about these Human Rights Violations. Do something to stop this abomination. If you don't do anything, people will continue be cruelly exploited! The UN has pressured FIFA's to change other organizational laws poorly affecting people before, including removing the ban of wearing headscarves. I urge you to at least try; if you do nothing these people will not go home until 2022 or maybe never.

Pass a resolution that denounces FIFA and another one that denounces the government of Qatar and a third that demands Qatar pay them more and to give them back their passports so they can return home. Ibra



A few months ago, President Donald J.Trump signed a paper. It was something presidents do all the time, but this was a paper destined to bring outcry. It was an executive memorandum that directed the Army Corps of Engineers to review, and approve, the Dakota Access Pipeline . This went against the order that President Barack Obama issued late last year, asking the Army Corp to undertake further environmental review on alternative routes before making a final decision. President Trump directed the Army Corps to expedite this process.

Now you can look at laws, who sighed them, and when, all day. But people, people are not as simple as laws and when these papers were written no one could anticipate the volume of outcry they would spark. Americans Indians from all over the country raising there voices in protest. Soon, an issue that had been in the dark for years, a kind of background sound, that you can only hear when the rest of the world is silent; that issue was thrown into the glaring sun for all to behold.

And the only way to look at this issue, is from the beginning:

In 1868, a treaty was put into place between the Sioux Nation and the United States. It promised the Sioux exclusive use of their lands. But it was soon broken, as settlers continued to trespass, and eventually the land that was once the Sioux's was taken through violence. For decades, the Sioux fought for their land in federal courts, and were eventually awarded $106 million. But they refused to accept. They wanted their land, not money.

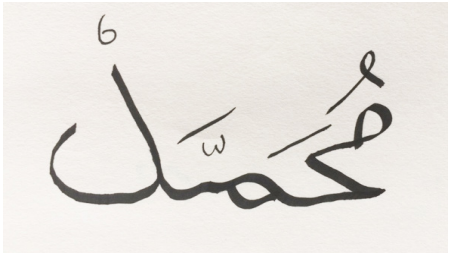
Almost a century and a half later, it is still not theirs. And a pipeline has been scheduled to cut though the land that was stolen from them, and run half a mile from the Standing Rock reservation. And as it will run under the Missouri River, it not only threatens the burial grounds and sacred lands it cuts though, but also poses a massive risk to their supply of water. But I'm not going to go deep into the environmental aspects of this situation. I am instead going to say: throughout our entire history, the American Indians have been seen as "the savages, the redskins, the monsters" who we must fight against. We have forgotten that they are human, we have stomped on their culture. But this isn't about us, or how many jobs we can make, or how much energy we can provide. This is about them. We can not judge how important this land is to them, we can not and we should not. We stole this from them. And there are no words in any language, that we can use to gauge how much this means to them or how important this is.

Now, you may ask why there isn't a law preventing all this from happening and there is: The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) requires the United States to consult with American Indian tribes when permitting on land that may contain artifacts, even if that land is under the ownership of the United States. But this process has not been implemented in relation to the Dakota Access Pipeline. Instead policemen have been sent to quell the peaceful protests with violence. And again we tried to silence their voices, we tried to put them out of sight and out of mind.

But when you begin dissecting these events, it becomes apparent that at some degree this isn't even about the pipeline. This is the American Indian standing and asking "when." When will you keep your promises? When will you follow your laws? When will you honor you treaties? This is them asking for the rights over the artifacts that have shaped their culture. Asking for the land that was theirs for hundreds of years. This is them asking for a future of understanding.

And it's up to us to give that to them. So I'm not here for the environment and I'm not here to list all the reasons this pipeline should be banned. I'm here to give them a voice. I'm here to echo their "when." I'm here to ask for peace.

Rebecca


مُحَمَّد

السَّلَامُ
عَلَيْكُمْ