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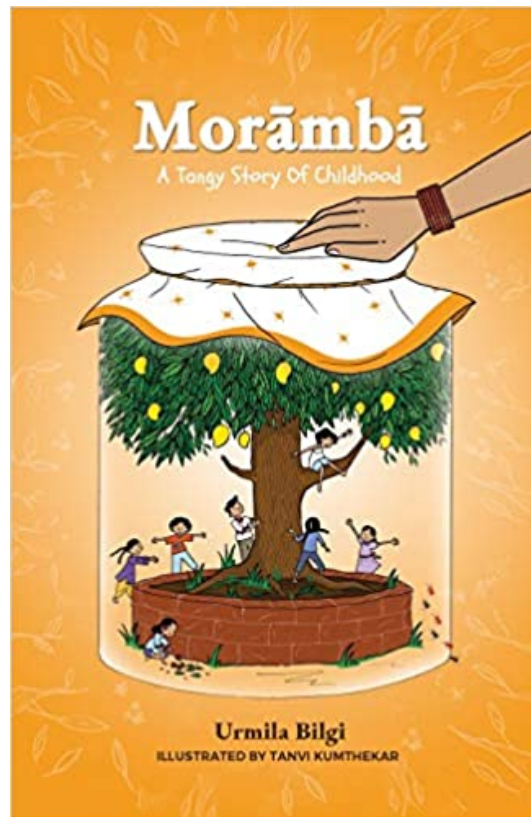
SCII Agenda Newsletter

November 2021 Issue

The mission of the Schoolcraft College International Institute (SCII) is to coordinate cross-cultural learning opportunities for students, faculty, staff and the community.

Author & SC Alumna Urmila Bilgi

By Colleen Pilgrim



Meet Urmila Bilgi, not only a children's author, but an Alumna of Schoolcraft College. Ms. Bilgi recently was our speaker for a [SCII GlobalEYEzers](#) event for students from Professor Anna Maheshwari's English class and other members of the campus community. Ms. Bilgi was also kind enough to sit down with me for an interview about her past and current accomplishments, and how they circle back to her time here as a student at Schoolcraft College.

Her recent book [Morāmbā – A Tangy Story of Childhood](#) is a novel about a girl named Avani, who along with her friends, sets out to save their favorite mango tree from an intended parking lot. In her quest to save the tree, Avani must stand up to the adults and in doing so, shows “grit” and learns lessons about friendship and kindness. In the acknowledgements of the book, Ms. Bilgi credits Schoolcraft as the “birthplace of *Morāmbā*” which started years ago as a working story in Professor Steve Dolgin's creative writing course. It is an immigration story that parallels her own immigration experiences; she calls it “being an alien” in the figurative and literal sense of the word.

The story is post-globalization where the battle over the intended parking lot, appeals to children, parents, and classroom teachers alike. Ms. Bilgi has written this cross-over literature such that interwoven into each chapter are discussion questions for parents and children; also, they can be easily incorporated into lesson plans for the classroom. Ms. Bilgi commented that when she began writing the story, she was younger and was more in touch with Avani's world

view, but now years later, her parental insight makes her able to view both sides of the story.

While the story takes place in India, the message of children and parents not always understanding each other's point of view, draws in audiences from all cultures. The discussion questions tap into issues of bullying, parent-child conflicts, and environmental issues, without being "too preachy" as she wants the readers to connect on issues beyond the story. She has also interwoven Indian language into the story, and the word *morāmbā* means mango marmalade. Throughout the story readers are exposed to other Indian language words such as *Aai-Aaji* (grandmother), *Bhaiya* (brother), *taadgola* (ice-apples), and many, many more. These Indian language words immerse the reader in the story, however to avoid frustrating the child reader, the English translation is in a parentheses following the Indian language word (just like above).

Ms. Bilgi also credits the Schoolcraft Computer Graphics Technology (CGT) faculty for the completion of her novel. Her completion of a Schoolcraft Certificate in Graphic Design helped her gain the technical skills needed to navigate and conquer the self-publishing world with *Morāmbā*. Ms. Bilgi stated that the CGT faculty were so extremely patient and wonderful in helping her transition from a person who "was scared to touch the computer" to a person highly skilled in technical and digital software. In self-publishing you "must do it all yourself" she told me, but you gain freedom and control over the process from start to finish.

A tremendous benefit to self-publishing is the ability to choose your own illustrator, and she is thrilled to have Tanvi Kumthekar as the illustrator, who is also originally from India. If she was using a publisher, she would not be guaranteed an Indian illustrator and Tanvi brings her own richness to the story. Ms. Bilgi pointed out that they come from different regions in India, which many do not realize is a diverse country, thus each brings their own unique perspectives to the storytelling.

During her time at Schoolcraft, she served as the Assistant Layout Editor for the Schoolcraft Connection and credits Todd Stowell, Rena Laverty, and Elizabeth Machniak for much support. She gained additional financial help and technical experience as she created graphics and layouts, designed advertisements, and utilized her photography skills. She won the Schoolcraft Agenda first prize in student artwork as well. I felt "so very comfortable at

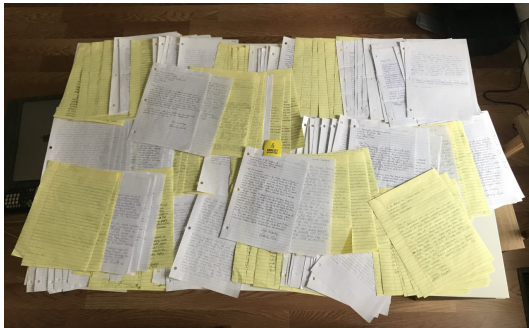
Schoolcraft” she said to me.

In addition to her Bachelor’s Degree, Ms. Bilgi holds a Diploma in Journalism, two Master’s Degrees, one in Communication Studies and another in Children’s Literature. Ms. Bilgi currently has begun a second book and relayed that self-publication takes time, but eventually you build your reputation. She is working on multiple relationships with libraries in India and the United States, and with a gift company. In addition, she has been talking with her local school to use *Morāmbā* in their classrooms. She makes her home in Novi with her husband Aneesh and their children Mihir and Ramaa.

Colleen Pilgrim is a Professor of Psychology and the Editor of the SCII Agenda; she can be reached at cpilgrim@schoolcraft.edu.

SC Amnesty International

By Emily Podwoiski





Write FOR RIGHTS 2021

Join the fight for human rights around the world.

Wednesday, Dec. 8
10:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Lower Waterman

Join us for **Write for Rights**, Amnesty International's Global Letter Writing Campaign! Every December, supporters across the globe write millions of letters for those whose basic human rights are being attacked.

Human Rights Day is Dec. 10, but we will mark it on Dec. 8, when we gather and write to governmental officials about human rights violations. Letters are pre-written; students just need to copy onto lined paper.

QUESTIONS?
Contact Shaida Azzam
 Schoolcraft College
 Amnesty International Club President
shaida.azzam@schoolcraft.edu

Panusaya "Rung" Sithijirawattanakul (pictured below) is a promising university student who, like many other young people, has been peacefully protesting as part of Thailand's democracy movement. Because Panusaya dared to publicly and peacefully call for change, she faces multiple criminal charges against her and the possibility of life in prison. Join us to write letters for her immediate and unconditional release.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL    **Schoolcraft College®**

This event is sponsored by Schoolcraft College Amnesty International Club and the Scholars Honors Program.

Schoolcraft College Amnesty International (SCAI) is a student-led club focused on defending human rights. The SCAI goal is to spread awareness and compassion on campus through various events such as global letter-writing campaigns, documentary movie nights, and more. By joining the Amnesty International chapter at Schoolcraft, you will also join a global movement of millions of activists demanding human rights for all people.

On Wednesday, December 8 from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., SCAI and the Scholars Honors Program will host the third Write For Rights event on campus in Lower Waterman, Conference Room C. During this event, we will gather, write, and celebrate the global campaign's twentieth birthday. Every December since 2001, Amnesty International highlights ten cases of human rights violations that require immediate action. This year, we will write letters on behalf

of people from all over the world, including Guatemala, China, Egypt, Mexico, Ukraine, Nigeria, Thailand, Belarus, and Eritrea. We will write letters for people like Imoleayo Michael, a computer programmer who was locked away in an underground cell for protesting the violent SARS police in Nigeria; or people like Panusaya “Rung” Sithijirawattanakul, a college student who faces multiple criminal charges for peacefully protesting the Monarchy of Thailand. Some of the cases highlight people as young as fifteen, like Ciham Ali, a teenager who was arrested at the Sudan border and then never seen again. Ciham is a US citizen, but her case has been ignored by authorities.

During the event, we will write two types of letters: one letter is to a governmental official who holds the power to enact change. These letters are pre-written; students simply copy the script, though they are welcome to incorporate their own voice. The second is a solidarity letter to the person or group we are defending. Students are invited to send their support, draw pictures, and get creative. Lined paper, stationery, case information, pens and pencils will be provided. Students, staff, faculty, and community members are welcome to join us at any time; write as few or as many letters as you like. In 2019, we collected and mailed over 200 letters around the world, and we hope you will join us again this year. Through the power of collective action, your letters will help convince government officials to free people unjustly imprisoned or facing abuses.

Finally, SCAI welcomes all students to join us for our club meetings on the first Wednesday of each month. Meetings are held virtually at noon. If you would like to sign up as an Amnesty Club member, please contact Emily at the email below and you will receive a Zoom invitation to join.

Emily Podwoiski is the Honors Program Coordinator, the Amnesty International Club Advisor, and an Associate Editor of the SCII Agenda; she can be reached at epodwois@schoolcraft.edu.

Ongoing Campus Event: Cultural Coffee Connection



Visit the first portion of the event to hear from a Schoolcraft English as a Second Language student on cultural values and traditions that are important or interesting to them. Followed by time to ask questions and break out into small groups of conversation. This is a wonderful opportunity to connect with others of different backgrounds and learn something new! Staff, faculty, students, and community members are invited to grab some coffee and have a conversation with others about a variety of topics.

Virtual Meeting Day: Wednesday, Dec. 1st 3-5pm

<https://schoolcraftcollege.zoom.us/j/3829922327?pwd=MWR3aUU2eWI0ajBCUTVVR1paVWVhrUT09>

Meeting ID: 382 992 2327

Passcode: 123

For question please contact Annika Sholander as the International Learning Support Academic Success Coach in Learning Support Services (LSS); she is also an Associate Editor for the Agenda and can be reached via phone (734)462-5326 or email asholand@schoolcraft.edu.

Midwest Institute

By Helen Ditouras



On November 5-6, the [Midwest Institute for International Intercultural Education \(MIIE\)](#) hosted their first virtual conference of the year. Represented at this year's conference included Professor Anna Maheshwari, Dr. Steven Berg, and Professor Helen Ditouras who all delivered presentations that covered topics such as Human Rights in India, Student Transformation Through International/Intercultural Education, and Chinese Food Etiquette and Interpersonal Communication.

Both days included engaging presentations on global education in disciplines ranging from the Liberal Arts to STEM, with a wonderful presentation by Dr. Maria del Carmen Paniagua Quinones from Ivy Tech Community College. Her presentation titled "Deconstructing the Multidimensional Poverty Index" was a result of a curriculum module she developed for her math students that encouraged them to think critically about global poverty and mathematical application.

To date, the Midwest Institute houses over [568 Curriculum Modules](#) developed by MIIE faculty across member institutions, several developed by Schoolcraft College faculty, and can be accessed via the new MIIE website. In addition, any faculty interested in accessing these curriculum modules can contact Helen Ditouras at hditoura@schoolcraft.edu for the passcode.

Finally, Schoolcraft College will be hosting the next MIIE Conference in April 2022; stay tuned for forthcoming details.

The Midwest Institute is directed by [Theo Sypris](#) and located at [Kalamazoo Valley Community College](#), Kalamazoo, MI.

Helen Ditouras is a Professor of English, Co-Chair for SCII, and a Consulting Editor of the SCII Agenda; she can be reached at hditoura@schoolcraft.edu.

Internet Resource



The University of Bolton has a nice resource on religions across the globe.

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