

Local Students and Teachers Eligible for \$5,000 in Largest High School Essay Contest in the Nation

Written by Rachel Gillespie
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BEING AN AMERICAN ESSAY CONTEST FOCUSES ON AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP

Students and Their Teachers Compete for Cash Prizes Up to \$5,000;

Nearly \$115,000 and 54 All-Expenses Paid Trips to Nation's Capital to be Awarded

Arlington, VA – U.S. high school students and their teachers are invited to compete for nearly \$115,000 in prize money by participating in the [Bill of Rights Institute's fifth annual Being an American Essay Contest](#)

. Top prize winners and their teachers will also receive all-expenses paid trips to the nation's capital.

The largest high school essay contest in the country, awarding 180 students and teachers with cash prizes and attracting more than 50,000 essays last year, explores the rights and responsibilities of American citizenship. The contest is administered by the [Bill of Rights Institute](#), a non-profit educational organization in the Washington, D.C. area devoted to educating children about the Constitution and Founding principles. The sponsors include the History Channel and the Stuart Family Foundation.

“This contest is unique in that it gives students the opportunity to think about the important civic values communicated in our Founding documents, and embodied by American civic heroes,” said Dr. Jason Ross, Bill of Rights Institute Vice President of Education Programs. “This

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context is vital to helping students see their own acts of good citizenship as a meaningful part of the American experiment of self-government.”

Specifically, students are asked to share their thoughts on American citizenship by answering the following question: **“What civic value do you believe is most essential to being an American?”**

The top three student winners and their teachers from each of the nine geographical regions will be announced at a special Washington, D.C. Awards Gala in the spring of 2011, where they will be awarded cash prizes of \$5,000 (First Place), \$1,000 (Second Place), and \$500 (Third Place). The winning students will also explore the nation’s capital, meet contemporary American heroes and national leaders, and visit national landmarks.

Additionally, the contest will award 126 honorable mention prizes of \$100 to seven students and their teachers from each region.

“The contest not only honors and awards sponsoring teachers, but also equips them with free lesson plans and other supplemental materials that meet state and national academic standards so they can easily incorporate the essay contest into their classrooms,” said Being an American Essay Contest Director John Croft.

Nearly 100,000 students have participated in the essay contest since it began in 2006. Now in its fifth year, the contest is the largest high school essay contest in the country.

“The Being an American Essay Contest is a wonderful way to awaken students' interest in the ideas of the American Founding. The Stuart Family Foundation is honored to be one of the Contest's supporters,” said Stuart Family Foundation Executive Director Truman Anderson.

Complete contest details can be found below. Further information, including submission criteria, lesson plans and background information on the Constitution, Bill of Rights, Founders and other Americans who have contributed to America’s shared civic values, are available at www.BeingAnAmerican.org

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MEDIA FAST FACTS: BEING AN AMERICAN ESSAY CONTEST

2010-2011 SCHOOL YEAR PARTICIPATING REGIONS:

- *New England:* Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont
- *Mid-Atlantic:* New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania
- *South Atlantic:* Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Washington, D.C.
- *Mid-South:* Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee
- *South Central:* Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas
- *Great Plains:* Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota
- *Great Lakes:* Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin
- *Mountain:* Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming
- *Pacific:* Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington, U.S. Territories, American Armed Forces Schools Abroad

SPONSORING ORGANIZATION: Bill of Rights Institute, Arlington, VA.

The Bill of Rights Institute, founded in 1999, is a nonprofit educational organization. The mission of the Bill of Rights Institute is to educate young people about the words and ideas of America's Founders, the liberties guaranteed in our Founding documents, and how our Founding principles continue to affect and shape a free society.

FUNDING PROVIDED BY: History Channel (New York City, NY) and The Stuart Family Foundation (Chicago, IL).

CONTEST GOAL: To explore the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and the civic values that unite us as Americans.

ESSAY QUESTION: "What civic value do you believe is most essential to being an American? Trace the enduring importance of this value throughout the American story by discussing: a

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Founding document that reflects this value; a figure from American history who embodies this value; and examples of how you have and/or could put this value into practice.

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ELIGIBILITY: Students in grades 9-12 who are U.S. citizens or legal residents and are either attending public, private, religious, or charter schools, being home-schooled, or participating in a GED or correspondence school program but are no older than 19 years of age. Military bases and U.S. territories are also invited to participate.

ESSAY LENGTH: No more 750 words. **JUDGING CRITERIA:**

- Adherence to Essay Question
- Originality
- Organization
- Writing Style
- Depth of Analysis

JUDGES: High school teachers

STUDENT CASH PRIZES: Ten cash prizes **per region** will be awarded to students:

- **First Prize:** \$5,000 each
- **Second Prize:** \$1,000 each
- **Third Prize:** \$500 each
- **Seven Honorable Mentions:** \$100 each

TEACHER CASH PRIZES: Ten cash prizes **per region** will be awarded to the teachers of the winning students:

- **First Prize:** \$5,000 each
- **Second Prize:** \$1,000 each
- **Third Prize:** \$500 each
- **Seven Honorable Mentions:** \$100 each

WASHINGTON, D.C. TRIP: The top three winners (first, second and third places) from each

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region, their teacher, and a guardian will be awarded an all-expenses paid trip to Washington, D.C. in the Spring of 2011.

CONTEST START DATE: September 1, 2010

DEADLINE FOR ESSAY SUBMISSIONS: December 1, 2010. All essays must be submitted by a high school teacher at www.BeingAnAmerican.org

WINNERS ANNOUNCED: Spring 2011

WEB SITE AND CONTEST GUIDELINES: www.BeingAnAmerican.org