

Announcing Class and Individual Essay Contest

The first sentence of the Constitution of the United States begins: “We the People” and continues “of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” Please write an individual or class essay with the theme:

“We the People”

Brought to you by the Third Circuit Courts, Community, and Rule of Law Committee



This essay contest is open to all 5th and 6th grade students and classes in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and U.S. Virgin Islands schools. The essay contest is open to 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th grade students and classes in Delaware. The essay may be

an individual essay or a class essay. If a class is submitting an essay, one essay must be submitted on behalf of the class. Individual and class essays must be submitted on or before Monday, March 31, 2025.

Consider the following questions to assist in developing the essay but the essay need not discuss all the questions:

Why did our Founders refer to “the People” in the first three words of the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution?

What did our nation’s Founders mean by the phrase “We the People” and how should we interpret this phrase today?

What does “We the People” mean to you?

How do the different life experiences of Americans from all walks of life combine to shape the dynamic country we all live in today?

Teachers should feel free to contact the committee if they would like a lawyer or a judge to assist students or the class in the discussion or development of this topic.

Essay contest rules, contact information, and suggested resources follow.

2025 Essay Contest Rules

ESSAY CONTEST OPENS: Tuesday, December 10, 2024.

ENTRY DEADLINE: Entries must be submitted by 11:59 pm, March 31, 2025.

Finalists will be selected in April.

PRIZES: One winner will be selected for the individual essay category and one winner will be selected for the class essay category. Winners will be invited to participate in Law Week programs with federal judges and practitioners in area courthouses.

HOW TO ENTER: Entry information can be accessed at

<https://ca3ccrofl.powerappsportals.us/>

Essays, in PDF format, must be submitted electronically to the mailbox (email addresses provided below) for the courthouse closest to your school:

edpa_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (Philadelphia, Berks, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Lancaster, Lehigh, Montgomery & Northampton counties)

mdpa_harrisburg_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (Harrisburg area)

mdpa_scranton_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (Scranton area)

mdpa_wilkes_barre_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (Wilkes Barre area)

mdpa_williamsport_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (Williamsport area)

wdpa_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (Pittsburgh area)

dnj_camden_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (South Jersey)

dnj_trenton_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (Central Jersey)

dnj_newark_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (North Jersey)

dde_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (Delaware)

dvi_st_thomas_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (St. Thomas)

dvi_st_croix_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (St. Croix)

LENGTH AND FORMAT: Individual and class essays should be typewritten and no longer than 500 words. If a class essay, one essay should be submitted on behalf of the class, ideally written by the class as a group effort. The class essay should be submitted by the class teacher on behalf of a class as a PDF and include the teacher's email and telephone. An individual essay should also be submitted by the student's teacher as a PDF along with the teacher's email and telephone.

JUDGING: Individual and Class essays will be judged separately and based on four criteria:

(1) Focus, (2) Content Development, (3) Organization, and (4) Style

Each criterion will be worth 25 points.

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CONTEST PLEASE CONTACT US:

Courts_Community_Rule_of_Law@ca3.uscourts.gov

or 267-299-4306

Suggested Resources

Defining the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution

1. Annenberg Public Policy Center:
<https://www.annenbergclassroom.org/resource/our-constitution/our-constitution-preamble/>
2. iCivics: <https://youtu.be/2ANyeM5TuQ8>
3. Khan Academy Video with Jeffrey Rosen of the National Constitution Center:
<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-government-and-civics/us-gov-foundations/us-gov-ideals-of-democracy/v/preamble>
4. National Constitution Center: <https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/preamble>
5. New York Historical Society Video with Law Professor Akhil Reed Amar:
<https://youtu.be/yQmju8MGTbw>
6. Schoolhouse Rock! The Preamble:
https://youtu.be/8_NzZvdsbWI?si=9ISay7oNx0EpUtcI
7. United States Courts: <https://www.uscourts.gov/about-federal-courts/educational-resources/about-educational-outreach/activity-resources/us>

Relevant U.S. Cases

1. *McCulloch v. Maryland*, 17 U.S. 316 (1819); available at
<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/17/316/>
2. *United States v. Virginia*, 518 U.S. 515 (1996); available at
<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/518/515/>

Text of the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution

Justia: <https://law.justia.com/constitution/us/preamble.html>

National Archives: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution>