BBB

LAWS OF LIFE CONTEST GUIDE

ESSAY CONTEST

2027

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ABOUT THE ESSAY CONTEST

The Laws of Life Essay Contest is a character-themed essay competition for students, originally created by Sir John Templeton in 1987, and adopted by BBB's Center for Character Ethics in 2006 as a vital component of the future leaders programming. The contest challenges young people to discover, through reflection and writing, what matters most to them in their own lives and the principles they believe should guide their behaviors and choices.

The Central Ohio BBB Laws of Life Essay Contest is a competition of the best Laws of Life essays written by 6th, 7th and 8th grade students in BBB's 21 county service area. Teachers, school personnel or youth group leaders select the best essays written, then submit them to the contest. Using volunteer judges from the business and education communities, BBB's Center for Character Ethics judges the essays and selects finalists. The finalists, their families, and teachers are invited to a celebration where the students are honored and the awards are announced. Students receive a cash award and other prizes. BBB's Center for Character Ethics sponsors the contest to encourage schools and communities to engage in this enriching and valuable experience.

KEY DATES

Fall 2026 - Contest opens

March 1, 2027 - Contest closes

April 2027 - Finalists notified

Awards banquet/celebration to be announced

CONTACT INFORMATION

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BBB Center for Character Ethics®

> "I LOVE THAT IT MAKES STUDENTS TAKE TIME TO REFLECT ON THEIR LAWS AND WHAT IS IMPORTANT. AS A TEACHER YOU GAIN INSIGHT INTO YOUR STUDENTS; YOU LEARN THINGS YOU MAY NOT HAVE KNOWN. STUDENTS ALSO HAVE THE CHANCE TO LEARN ABOUT EACH OTHER WHICH HELPS BUILD A POSITIVE CLIMATE IN THE CLASSROOM."
>
> Columbus City Schools Teacher

ENTERING THE CONTEST

Laws of Life Essay Contest is for 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students who have a law of life they are passionate about, or who want to use writing their essay as a way to discover what they feel is important to them.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

Essays written by 6th, 7th and 8th grade students who reside in the eligible Ohio counties* who have been selected by teachers or contest coordinators as the best of the group should be submitted to the contest. Students cannot submit essays individually, they must work through a class, school or other youth group.

**Athens, Champaign, Coshocton, Delaware, Fairfield, Fayette, Franklin, Hocking, Knox, Licking, Logan, Madison, Marion, Meigs, Morrow, Muskingum, Perry, Pickaway, Ross, Union, and Vinton*

HOW TO ENTER

Each teacher (school, or youth group) selects the best essays written by their students and submits them to the contest. The number of entries is determined by the number of essays written in each class, school or youth group, according to the following table:

Total Number of Essays Written	Number of Entries*
1-15	1
16-30	2
31-60	3
61-99	5
100+	Top 5%

**See page 13 for opportunity to submit an additional entry*
***Please document the full amount of essays written as well!*

WHAT IS THE ESSAY TOPIC?

While there is no required essay prompt, essays should be about a law of life of the student's choosing. Some students write about how they learned the law, how they live by it or why it is important to them. Some students use a quote or "maxim" and explain it and why it is important to them. Students can also use one of the the UncommonSense® themes (page 26).

SPECIAL THEME 2027

The special theme for 2027 is EXCELLENCE. We have added a special prize category for students who choose to write about excellence and allow schools to submit **one additional entry** on this topic.

We ask students to reflect on what responsibilty means to them, why it is an important Law of Life, how they learned the trait, and how they have changed their behavior to live up to that law.

The best essay on this topic will be awarded $150. Students are not required to write about this topic, but if students choose to write about responsibilty, the best essay on that topic may be submitted as an additional entry for that school.

IS THERE A MAXIMUM LENGTH?

All essays (including the special theme) should be no more than 3 typed, double spaced pages. Teachers are strongly encouraged to submit their entries online (and all finalists are required to submit an electronic version), so teachers/contest coordinators are encouraged to ask for electronic files from their students.

SUBMITTING ENTRIES

Please note – you don't have to complete your submission at one time, information can be saved and edited by clicking the "Save" button at the bottom right of the form.

- Log onto bbbLawsOfLife.org to submit your entry. Entries should be no more than 3 typed, double spaced pages.
- Designate one person (teacher or other school personnel) to act as the "contest coordinator". All communication will be with the contest coordinator, so please include a working email address. If only one teacher is participating, that person is the "contest coordinator".
- The contest coordinator should go to bbbLawsOfLife.org to begin the entry process.
- From the Laws of Life Home Page, click the "Begin Entry Process Here" button to start. You will
- be asked to complete the Contest Coordinator Registration Form which includes:
  » your contact information
  » survey questions about your contest experience
- Once this information has been entered, hit submit and you will receive an email with an "Add a School" entry form link. This link creates a new school entry form each time you click it, so it can be used more than once if you are coordinating multiple schools.
- Click on the "Add a School" link and it will take you to the entry form. On the first page, you will be asked for:
  » general information about the school you will be representing (use the "Add a School" link for each school)
  » the total number of essays written (not just those entered)
  » teachers participating in the contest
- On the second page, the contest coordinator will complete an entry for each student essay. For multiple



essays, simply click on the “Add Essays” button.

- For each student the contest coordinator will complete student information and upload the essay (word or .txt files only – no PDFs). To avoid confusion, please use the student’s first initial and last name as the file name (ex ASmith).
- If your school has a Cover Design entry, answer “Yes” to the Cover Design question. This will reveal the section to fill out student information and upload the cover art in jpeg format.
- Once all student essays (and cover design) are uploaded, the contest coordinator will hit “Submit”
- Please advise parents to check their spam folder if they did not receive the request for a signature.
- Since a parent and student signature are required, when the “Submit” button has been clicked – it will automatically send an email for signatures to each parent email address.
- After the parent submits the form, the Contest Coordinator will receive notification
- Final submissions are due by Midnight March 1

Mailing Instructions

If you are unable to complete the submission process electronically, hard copy entries will be accepted by mail. Please complete an Entry form for each essay entry and paperclip to 2 copies of the essay and mail along with a completed Contest Coordinator Registration form to:

Better Business Bureau serving Central Ohio
C/o Keith Pickett Jr
1169 Dublin Rd
Columbus, Ohio 43215

All entries must be postmarked by **March 1, 2027**.

JUDGING CRITERIA

Entries for the Laws of Life contest are evaluated by an outstanding group of volunteers from the business and educational community in Central Ohio.

Essays are judged primarily on their content, whether they are positive and life-affirming, include a clearly defined “law of life” that the author believes will make the world a better place, capture a value or ideal in a special way, or explain and relate a quote or “Timeless Truth” effectively.

Some importance to presentation and the mechanics of writing will be considered in judging to the extent that the ideas put forth by the author are clearly understood. In cases where the content is judged as having equal merit, the essay which is better written or presented will be given a higher score. Before submitting essays, local contest coordinators and teachers should ensure that students have proofed and typed their essays.

SCORING RUBRIC

Scoring rubric – our judges use the following rubric to evaluate the essays:

Compelling Content (16 total points possible)

Law of Life (score 1-5; 5 is best)
Does the essay include a clearly articulated law(s) of life or other moral message that would make the world a better place if everyone practiced it? Is the essay positive and life affirming and does it have universal appeal? Would most people agree that this is an important law of life?

Depth of Understanding (score 1-5; 5 is best)
Does the author relate the law(s) of life to their experiences? Did the essay make you both think and feel? Is there evidence of the author’s self-reflection and genuine learning - does it capture an “epiphany” or a moment when the “light bulb went on”?

Originality (score 1-3; 3 is best)
Did you learn something special and compelling about the author? Did the essay capture a value or ideal in a unique and special way? Was the essay moving?

Presentation, Grammar and Spelling (score 1-3; 3 is best)
Is the essay easy to read? Is it clearly written? Were you able to tell exactly what the author was trying to share? Do ideas and paragraphs flow smoothly? Judges should determine to what extent poor grammar and spelling distract a reader from comprehending the basic message of the essay.

COVER CONTEST

The winning essays from the Central Ohio BBB Laws of Life Essay Contest will be published and distributed to contest winners, sponsors, judges and interested schools. Your students can design the cover of the book!

WHO CAN ENTER?

Each eligible school or community that submits essay entries to the Central Ohio BBB Laws of Life Essay Contest may submit **one** cover design entry for consideration.

HOW WILL THE COVER BE JUDGED?

The entry should be a graphic representation that depicts a student's "law of life". Include with the drawing a title and brief description or explanation of the law of life the artwork depicts.

Entries must be:

- In color
- No larger than an 8.5 x 11 page
- Portrait orientation (no landscape designs)
- In reference to a specific Law of Life

Please take into account that the winning entry may need to be shrunk to accommodate text on the cover, so students should not include details so small that they will not be understood if smaller. If words are used in the design, make sure they are legible. Entries will be judged on design, how well it captures a "law of life" and appropriateness for use as a booklet cover.

HOW TO SUBMIT AN ENTRY

Cover design entries should be submitted using the same form as for essay entries. Only schools that submit entries are eligible to submit a cover design entry. The cover design should be submitted as a .jpeg file (no PDFs) or an original drawing on paper (mailed).

The student whose cover design is selected for the book will win $100 and be invited along with their parents/guardians and teacher to attend the banquet.

"I ALWAYS SEEM TO GET THE MOST IN-DEPTH WRITING FROM MY STUDENTS WITH THIS ESSAY. THE STUDENTS LOVE WRITING FROM THEIR OWN PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AND OUR RIGOROUS CLASSROOM SCHEDULE HARDLY ALLOWS FOR THIS TYPE OF WRITING, SO THE LAWS OF LIFE IS A GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR THEM."

Columbus City Schools Teacher

BANQUET & PRIZES

Student finalists, their families, teachers and contest coordinators will be invited to an awards banquet to honor the students and announce their awards.



BANQUET & PRIZES

All finalists will be notified in April 2026. **The finalists, their families and teachers will be invited to a banquet in May 2027.**

Grade Level Awards*	First Place	Second Place	Third Place
8th Grade	$100	$75	$50
7th Grade	$100	$75	$50
6th Grade	$100	$75	$50

Overall Awards*

Best Overall Essay	$500
2nd Place Overall	$250

Best Special Theme	$150
Best Cover Design	$100

**Depending upon funding levels, additional award levels may be added*

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Who is eligible for the Laws of Life essay contest?

A: The Central Ohio contest is open to schools with students in grades 6, 7, and 8 in the following Ohio counties: Athens, Champaign, Coshocton, Delaware, Fairfield, Fayette, Franklin, Hocking, Knox, Licking, Logan, Madison, Marion, Meigs, Morgan, Morrow, Muskingum, Perry, Pickaway, Ross, Union, Vinton.

Q: How many essays can be submitted per school?

A: Teachers and/or contest coordinators should choose the top essays based on the following scale:

Number of Essays Written	Number of Entries
1-15	1
16-30	2
31-60	3
61-99	5
100+	Top 5%

***Please document the full amount of essays written as well!*

Q: How many covers can be submitted for the cover contest?

A: One piece of cover artwork may be submitted per school that is entering essays.

Q: When are the essays due?

A: Essays are due by midnight on March 1, 2027

Q: What topics are acceptable for the essay?

A: The laws of life are the core values, ideals and principles by which we live. Essays should be about a law of life of the student's choosing. They are also welcome to chose a topic from the UncommonSense® Framework (page 26).

Q: What is the maximum length for an essay?

A: No more than three pages, double spaced.

Q: Where are essays submitted?
A: Essays should be submitted online by the designated contest coordinator for your school. Please go to bbblawsoflife.org for additional information on the submitting process (or see page 9).

Q: When are the finalists notified?
A: Finalists will be notified in April.

Q: What is the award for winning essays?
A: There is a first, second and third place award for each grade level; $100, $75 and $50, respectively. Overall awards are as follows: Best Overall Essay $500, 2nd Place Overall $250, 3rd Place Overall $100, Best Special Theme Essay $150, and Best Cover Design $100. Additional awards may be added depending on funding.

Q: Who selects the winners?
A: A group of volunteers from the community.

Q: When is the Awards Banquet?
A: The awards banquet is typically held the second week of May. Each student finalist, their parents/guardians, teacher and contest coordinator will be invited.

Q: What if I can't attend the awards banquet?
A: If the student is unable to attend the banquet their award will be mailed to the home address listed on the student's entry form.

Q: Are there resources for teachers that would like to incorporate Laws of Life in their classroom?
A: Yes, please visit bbblawsoflife.org for classroom resources.

TEACHER RESOURCES, TIPS & SUGGESTIONS

STEP 1: INTRODUCE THE ESSAY

Discuss what a "law of life" is. There are many ways to approach this topic, depending on any other themes or subjects the students are studying. Different ways to approach include questions such as:

- How do laws affect what people can and cannot do? What are some examples? What about laws in nature or science? How do scientific laws affect how matter/objects behave? Now steer the conversation toward social rules – ask what are some rules that aren't formal "laws" that help people get along with each other? Which of these rules or laws do you think is most important? Do you have rules or laws that you try to live by? Which ones would make the world better if everyone followed them?

- Who is someone you admire? What is it about them that you admire? (steer toward character traits like compassion, honesty, diligence, etc.) Do you try to be like that person? What do you do to be like them?

- Discuss a famous person (for example George Washington, Mother Teresa, Abraham Lincoln, etc.). What trait are they most known for? (honesty, compassion, etc.) How would you want to be remembered? What rules/laws/traits do you try to live by?

TOPICS:

PURPOSE
HONESTY
COURAGE
HUMILITY
PERSEVERANCE
GENEROSITY
FORGIVENESS
RESPECT
COMPASSION
WISDOM

STEP 2: INTRODUCE THE CONTEST

1. Describe how the Central Ohio Laws of Life Contest works. (Students in grades 6-8 write essays in class on a Law of Life of their choosing, the best ones are selected to submit to the Central Ohio BBB where they can win cash prizes of up to $500 and attend an awards banquet or virtual celebration.)

2. Briefly describe topics used by prior winners and explain that many of the essays were written by students who first thought they had nothing to write about.

3. Emphasize teacher commitment to the contest and reassure students about the confidentiality of the contest. Since some students write about personal issues, they can choose whether to share them with others or submit them in the competition.

Use the following checklist to help you plan your introduction:

- [ ] Tell students what the contest is about.
- [ ] Explain how it will work in your classroom or school.
- [ ] Discuss benefits of contest: writing process practice, self-reflection and expression, recognition/prizes.
- [ ] Describe the procedures that protect confidentiality.
- [ ] Inform students of the deadline. (March 1)

“ONE 7TH GRADER IN THE CONTEST SO ENJOYED WRITING THE ESSAY THAT NOW SHE IS INSPIRED TO WRITE MORE. SHE IS WRITING MANY STORIES AND SPENDS HER FREE PERIOD AT SCHOOL WRITING.”

Zanesville Teacher

“I HAVE A STUDENT WHO WAS VERY EXCITED TO USE HER ARTISTIC ABILITIES FOR THE COVER CONTEST. STUDENTS WERE IMPRESSED WITH HER DRAWING AND HER TEACHER LOVED IT. IT HELPED HER FEEL LIKE SHE FIT IN.”

Zanesville Teacher

Use one or more of the following approaches to help students select a topic:

- **Student questionnaire:** Use the student questionnaire (on page 25) and tell students that it will help them identify their laws of life and possible topics. Allow sufficient time for completion; some students request extra time to complete the questionnaire at home. Look over their responses and mark those that might be used as a basis for their essays.

- **Journal entries:** Some teachers use student journal entries to help students choose topics – make notes in margins to students such as "this might make a good Laws of Life essay!"

- **Famous quotations:** Some students use famous quotations in or as the basis for their essays.Provide resources for quotations (such as The Foundation for a Better Life at www.values.com).

- **Current class units or a recent reading assignment:** Point out laws of life themes from any units you have studied or characters students have read about.

- **Personal experiences:** Encourage students to use their personal experiences (either positive or negative) to generate ideas for their essays.

- **Role models:** Students use their role models including historical or literary figures to exemplify their laws of life. Encourage them to include how they try to live by the traits they admire.

- **UncommonSense (see page 26):** The BBB Center for Character Ethics has adopted the UncommonSense principles as a guide to developing leadership character. Students might want to select one of these principles to write about.

TEACHER TIPS:

1. Have students write their essays in class whenever possible. Many teachers have commented that students are much more likely to complete their essays in an environment where help is immediately available.

2. Allow time for students (who volunteer) to read aloud or exchange their working drafts. Teachers have commented that this process promotes understanding and empathy among their students.

3. Consider providing extra credit (if the essay is optional) or a completion grade (if the essay is required) for students who hand in an essay.

4. Remind your students that they should be honest when writing about their experiences. Some teachers have their students sign honor statements.

5. Please remember the trust that students place in you. Your compassion, sensitivity and professionalism are essential.

Encouraging and motivating students:

- Reassure students about the confidentiality of the contest. Tell them that their names do not appear on their essays. Students feel freer to write about personal experiences when they are confident that their essays will remain anonymous - if they choose.

- Communicate to students that the essay is an opportunity for personal growth and reflection. The contest encourages students to examine and affirm their personal beliefs.

- Encourage all students to submit an essay. Many prizewinning essays have been written by students who first thought they did not have a topic worth exploring. Emphasize that prizewinning essays come from students of all abilities and ages, and participants do not have to be “A” students to be winners.

- Be flexible. Students of all abilities and levels can write meaningful essays. Individualize your expectations for each student.

- Encourage your students to ask for your help with their essays; however, be mindful of your involvement. Remember that the essays are being judged and awarded prizes for student writing.

- Be prepared to confer one-on-one with students who are having difficulty finding ideas for their essays. Some students may need a little prodding to arrive at a meaningful topic. Be patient. Each student has something to write and will be more apt to write honestly if he or she knows that it has value.

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Who is someone you admire? List three qualities that you admire about that person. What law(s) of life does that person demonstrate? How has that person influenced your life?

2. Describe an incident or event from which you learned a lesson “the hard way.”

3. Describe a personal experience that has helped you develop your law(s) of life.

4. What could you change about yourself to become a better person?

5. Describe a time in your life when someone has helped you. How has this affected your law(s) of life?

6. What three qualities do you value in a friend, a teacher, a parent(s)?

7. Describe a situation in which you went out of your way to help someone else.

8. If you become a parent, what law(s) of life will you teach your children?

9. Name three things for which you are thankful.

UNCOMMONSENSE® FRAMEWORK

Ethical principles to help students develop leadership character

BE PRINCIPLED & GENUINE:

1. Seek Wisdom
I will seek something greater than intelligence (knowing information), I seek wisdom, knowing what is right or true.

2. Trustworthiness
I will strive to stay true to my beliefs and be who I say I am.

3. Integrity
I will strive to do what I say I will do.

4. Honesty
I will strive to tell the truth, with compassion for the feelings of others.

VALUE OTHERS:

5. Respect
I will strive to treat others as I woud want to be treated.

6. Compassion for Others
I will strive to extend kindness to others, even if not earned.

7. Forgiveness
I will strive to forgive others, even when undeserved, and ask humbly for others to forgive me.

8. Unity
I will strive to build relationships that foster harmony and collaboration.

9. Learning & Mentoring
I will strive to be a life long learner and pass it on to others

10. Serving-Leadership
I will strive to put the success of others and the group ahead of my own.

11. Honoring Authority
I will strive to respect legitimate boundaries for behavior.

SEEK RESULTS:

12. Justice
I will strive to uphold the truth, expose error and correct wrongs.

13. Courage
I will strive to act on my principles, and persevere through difficulties.

14. Accountability
I will strive to self-evaluate and welcome feedback from others.

15. Stewardship
I will strive to act responsibly toward the world and all resources.

16. Seek Counsel
I will strive to seek advice from others who have wisdom, especially when confronted with ethically ambiguous situations.

17. Responsibility
I will strive to fulfill my obligations as a family member and citizen.

18. Excellence
I will strive to be my very best as I do my very best everyday.

DISPLAY GROWTH:

19. Maturation
I will strive to learn from experience and improve over time.

20. Transformation
I will strive to be committed to consistent, positive character.

BBB Center for Character Ethics®

Persevering as a character-builder is the only thing that is truly 100% within everyone's personal control, and is not dependent on change in others or in circumstances. Our conscience drives our convictions, which drive our conduct, regardless of our past or current situations

LAWS OF LIFE

Better Business Bureau
Center for Character Ethics

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bbbcenterforcharacterethics.org