



Why I am glad America is a nation of immigrants
Creative Writing Contest

CELEBRATE AMERICA

CONTEST COORDINATOR GUIDE

AMERICAN IMMIGRATION LAW FOUNDATION
PUBLIC EDUCATION PROGRAM

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Introduction

The Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest challenges fifth graders across the country to reflect on and write about the theme “Why I Am Glad America Is A Nation Of Immigrants.” The contest begins at the local level through the efforts of American Immigration Lawyers Association’s chapters. Each chapter sends its first place winning entry to the American Immigration Law Foundation for review by the national contest judges. The national winner and his parents attend the AILF Annual Benefit Dinner, where the winner will read the winning essay and receive a prize package.

This booklet has been provided as a guide. Each chapter determines how its local contest will be run. The packet is divided into subject areas, including the timeline and timeline checklist that provide a step-by-step action plan for organization. To ensure fairness for all finalist submissions, please strictly adhere to AILF’s guidelines on essay length and due dates.

SPONSORING A LOCAL CONTEST IS EASY!

While the instructions contained in this guide are comprehensive, please don't presume that a contest *must* be run very elaborately. The suggestions found in this booklet are based on the contests of chapters that have several years of experience under their belts. A small contest is just as effective in promoting the benefits of immigration to your community, and AILF staff stand ready to be of assistance to your chapter.

Consider these quick tips for getting an initial, small, local contest up and running in your chapter:

1. Sponsor the contest in just ONE school in your area. Is there a chapter leader, or any local chapter member, who has a fifth grade child (or grandchild!) and would be willing to call his child's teacher to suggest this contest? Or, put a notice in your chapter newsletter asking interested members to contact the chapter chair for a copy of the new AILF contest brochure. If your chapter gets more than one classroom participating, your local executive committee can pick the winning entry, and can then submit it to the national contest.
2. Prizes do not need to be elaborate. While some chapters have developed enviable awards that include symphony tickets and museum passes, a chapter running a first contest could issue a \$100 savings bond to the winning student or invite the winner and his parents to a chapter dinner in his honor. AILF can even provide your chapter with an *American Immigrants* poster or small supply of bumper sticker for winners and runners-up.
3. Politicians and the press love local stories about kids winning contests. Call your Congressman's or Mayor's office and ask if they would write a congratulatory letter to the winner that you can frame, read, and present to the winner. Call the city desk or style section of your hometown newspaper or local access cable tv station and ask if they could send a photographer or video camera to the chapter dinner where the winner will read his essay.
4. Use the contest as a project for up and coming leaders in your chapter to test their organizational skills. Current chapter executive committee members are likely overworked already fielding mentoring calls, handling liaison duties with government agencies, and organizing chapter conferences. Why not assign coordination of your local contest to a recent AILA member in your area who regularly shows up at meetings and has expressed an interest in becoming more involved? Or why not use the contest as a challenge to a potential leader you'd like to see become more involved: urge them to help out the chapter. Law student members make good coordinators, too!
5. If your chapter is unable to sponsor a local version of the AILF Creative Writing contest, please consider making a financial contribution to our national contest prize package. Funds raised are used to pay the airfare, lodging, and expenses for the national winner and his/her family to attend the AILF Annual Benefit Dinner and see the sites in the conference city. Your \$250-500- or \$1000 chapter donation would allow AILF to offer a great prize package!

PLEASE CALL OR EMAIL THE AILF OFFICE IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR
NEED ASSISTANCE ORGANIZING YOUR LOCAL CONTEST!

DETAILED CREATIVE WRITING CONTEST TIMELINE

JULY / AUGUST LAY THE GROUNDWORK

1. Chapter Chair appoints Creative Writing Contest Coordinator (CWCC). Notify AILF of appointment.
2. Chapter Chairs receive preliminary Creative Writing Contest materials by mail.
Suggestion: Contact previous years coordinator for recommendations and information.
3. CWCC solicits other chapter members to serve on a Creative Writing Contest Committee. Committee members should be assigned tasks such as: approaching particular schools or school districts; recruiting judges; promoting the contest; soliciting prizes; and planning the awards ceremony.
Suggestion: Solicit volunteers at a chapter meeting and/or in the chapter newsletter.
4. CWCC and committee members approach local institutions, public service agencies and immigrant advocacy groups to co-sponsor the Creative Writing Contest.
Suggestion: Look to minority bar associations; ethnic and religious organizations; civic and veterans groups, and immigration advocacy organizations in your community.

AUGUST / SEPTEMBER APPROACH THE SCHOOLS

1. CWCC approaches local Board of Education to introduce the contest.
Suggestion: Poll chapter members to determine if anyone has a contact at the board, or knows someone who is a teacher, to assist in identifying the appropriate board contact person.
2. CWCC to follow up with Board of Education.

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER FOLLOW UP AND SOLICIT PRIZES

1. Target local schools (public and private). Make initial contact with teachers and principals in local schools to introduce the contest.
Suggestion: Ask chapter members to approach their children's schools.
2. Committee members and other chapter volunteers follow up with the schools they previously approached.
3. Keep a list of schools which have agreed to participate.
4. Begin soliciting prizes.
Suggestion: Approach local businesses, clients of AILA members, etc.

NOVEMBER / DECEMBER
DISTRIBUTE CURRICULUM MATERIALS;
BEGIN PLANNING SELECTION OF WINNER AND AWARDS CEREMONY

1. Distribute Creative Writing Contest packets to those schools that have agreed to participate.
2. Recruit panel of volunteers to do the initial screening of entries to select the top ten for submission to judges.
Suggestion: For volunteers look to AILA members, law school students, members of co-sponsoring organizations, or Board of Education staff members.
3. Solicit judges for selection of winner. Look to prominent members of your community.
Suggestion: Mayor, Members of Congress or State Legislature, local BCIS officials, prominent immigrants, local business owners, local news reporters and radio and television personalities, entertainers, athletes.
4. Start planning the awards ceremony. Choose the date and decide on the format. Look for and reserve an appropriate space.
Suggestion: Schedule the awards ceremony in conjunction with an appropriate local event, for example an ethnic festival or a naturalization ceremony. The student can even be honored at a chapter meeting.
5. Recruit AILA Chapter volunteers to make presentations to participating classrooms.

JANUARY
CREATIVE WRITING CONTEST ASSIGNED TO STUDENTS

1. Participating teachers teach unit on immigration, and introduce the Creative Writing Contest to students.
Suggestion: Ask teachers to require students to write an essay, poem, story, etc. as a classroom assignment, rather than making it voluntary.
2. AILA members speak to participating classes about immigration.
Suggestion: Encourage teachers to invite outside guests to hear the presentation (e.g. parents, students and teachers from other classrooms) - this will help spread the message to an even broader audience.

EARLY FEBRUARY
FINALIZE PANEL OF INITIAL SCREENERS;
DEADLINE FOR ENTRIES TO BE SUBMITTED TO CHAPTER

1. Finalize panel of initial screeners.
2. Deadline for schools to submit entries to CWCC.

FEBRUARY / MARCH
LOCAL CONTEST WINNER SELECTED

1. Panel of initial screeners reviews entries and selects top ten entries for submission to judges.
2. Top ten entries submitted to judges.
3. Judges select first, second and third place winners.

APRIL
SUBMIT ENTRIES TO NATIONAL CONTEST

1. Notify first, second and third place winners.
2. Deadline to submit winning entry to AILF for national contest.

MAY / JUNE
NATIONAL WINNER ANNOUNCED; LOCAL AWARDS CEREMONY HELD

1. Winner of national Creative Writing Contest announced by AILF
2. Awards ceremony held to honor winners of local Creative Writing Contest.

Suggestion: Invite local media, elected officials, school Board members, and other members of the community to attend the awards ceremony.

JUNE
NATIONAL CONTEST WINNER HONORED AT AILF BENEFIT

1. The student who authored the national contest's winning entry will read his or her creative writing piece during the Benefit Dinner held at AILA's Annual Conference.

Promotion & Participation

LETTER TO BOARD OF EDUCATION OR TEACHERS

[DATE]

[NAME]

[ADDRESS]

DEAR:

I am writing to follow up on our recent discussion about the Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest being sponsored by the American Immigration Law Foundation (AILF). Information about AILF can be obtained by visiting its website, www.ailf.org.

As discussed, the theme of the contest is “Why I Am Glad America Is A Nation Of Immigrants”. The 35 chapters of the American Immigration Lawyers Association are sponsoring local contests around the country. The winning entry from each local contest will be submitted to the national contest. Students are encouraged to be creative, and can submit their entries in the form of an essay, poem, story, interview or any other written form. The deadline for submitting entries to the contest is [INSERT DATE HERE].

With the increasing need for awareness of immigration’s positive impact on American society, educators around the country have developed lesson plans dealing with a variety of immigration issues. On the AILF website, click on “Teachers’ Corner” to access AILF’s search engine for immigration lesson plans, which allows for search by subject and by grade level. The Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest can be used as an introduction to a broader unit on immigration in America or can follow, as a final project.

Additionally, I would be happy to arrange for an immigration attorney to [SPEAK AT SCHOOLS/ TO YOUR CLASS] about immigration. In the meantime, I hope that the enclosed fact sheets will provide you with some useful background on immigration.

[FOR SCHOOL BOARD] If you are interested in introducing the Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest to the schools in your district, please contact me at your earliest convenience at [FILL IN YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION] and we can discuss the next steps. Please do not hesitate to call me if you have any questions.

[FOR TEACHERS] If you are interested in participating in the Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest, please complete the attached form and return it to me at your earliest convenience. I will follow up with more materials and details on the contest upon receiving your reply. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [FILL IN YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION].

YES! I WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE
CELEBRATE AMERICA CREATIVE WRITING CONTEST

SCHOOL: _____

SCHOOL ADDRESS: _____

TEACHER: _____

CONTACT PERSON (if not teacher): _____

PHONE NUMBER: _____

NUMBER OF STUDENTS EXPECTED TO PARTICIPATE: _____

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN A GUEST SPEAKER? YES NO

Please return this form to: _____

[INSERT YOUR NAME, address, telephone, fax and email]

SAMPLE LETTER TO TEACHERS PARTICIPATING IN CONTEST

[DATE]

[NAME]

[ADDRESS]

DEAR:

We are very excited that you have agreed to participate in the AILF “Celebrate America” Creative Writing Contest.

As you know, contestants are to write on the theme “Why I Am Glad America Is A Nation Of Immigrants.” Students are encouraged to be creative in their submissions, and we welcome any written piece - poem, essay, story, interview, etc. - that reflects the theme. The contest is open to fifth graders from the [ENTER SCHOOL DISTRICT/REGION/CITY/STATE/OTHER] area. Entries will be judged on the basis of theme, presentation, creativity and message.

Entries are limited to 500 words. Each entry must include a cover page with the following information: student’s name, grade, age, school, address, telephone number, and proof of enrollment in the fifth grade, such as a transcript, report card, or letter from the school principal. In addition, we would ask that the enclosed Authorization for Release be signed by each contestant and his or her parent or guardian.

The deadline for submissions is [INSERT DATE HERE]. Submissions should be sent to [INSERT INFORMATION]. Winners will be announced on [INSERT DATE]. The winners will receive [INSERT DETAILS ABOUT PRIZES] and will be honored at an awards ceremony on [INSERT DETAILS OF CEREMONY]. The first place winner of the [ENTER SCHOOL DISTRICT/REGION/ETC. AS LISTED ABOVE] contest will go on to compete at the national level with other students from around the country.

Curriculum materials are available upon request, if you are unable to access the search engine for immigration lesson plans located on the “Teachers’ Corner” web page on AILF’s website at www.ailf.org. Immigration attorneys from your community are available to speak to your class about immigration. If you need assistance in obtaining the curriculum materials or would like to arrange for a speaker, please contact me at [INSERT CONTACT INFORMATION].

Thank you again for participating in the Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest. Please do not hesitate to call me if you have any questions.

AILF CELEBRATE AMERICA CREATIVE WRITING CONTEST
AUTHORIZATION FOR RELEASE

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Thank you for submitting an entry to the Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest sponsored by the American Immigration Law Foundation (AILF).

Your entry may be published in the AILF Benefit Program Book, in the American Immigration Lawyers Association Annual Conference Program and in any publication of the AILA Chapter sponsoring your local contest. In addition, your creative writing entry and photograph may be published in appropriate newspapers, journals, or other print media. Your name, address and telephone number may be released to such publications in the event that they wish to contact you in connection with your entry. It is understood that the use of these materials by AILF, AILA, or any other institution will not be for personal gain.

By signing this release, you are agreeing to transfer copyright and other rights for your creative writing entry to AILF, and to release AILF, AILA, and other participating organizations from any claims relating to the above-stated uses.

By signing this release, you are agreeing that the above-named student's entry is 500 words or less, and that if it is longer, it will not be eligible for national judging.

Author

Date

Parent or Guardian

Date

Please return this form to: [INSERT CONTACT INFORMATION]

SUGGESTED OUTLINE FOR CLASSROOM PRESENTATIONS

- ❑ Introduce yourself. Explain what you do as an immigration attorney and the type of clients you serve.
- ❑ Describe the immigration process. Try to emphasize the careful screening of applicants and the lengthy process to counter any myths the students may have heard to the contrary. Explain the visa process, working with the INS inside the United States.
- ❑ Put a face on immigration facts. Give examples of some of your clients, how they came to the U.S., what they left behind, how they are doing in the U.S. Consider whether one of your clients is willing to come with you to tell his or her story first hand.
- ❑ Emphasize the important contributions immigrants make to the country and to the community. Give examples.
- ❑ Ask for any questions.
- ❑ Thank the class for their participation in the Creative Writing Contest and their interest in immigration.

BEFORE YOU AGREE TO SHARE WITH THE CLASS TIPS ON SPEAKING IN FRONT OF A ROOMFUL OF STUDENTS

by Evelyn Porreca Vuko
The Washington Post, September 23, 2003

If thoughts of speaking to a classroom full of kids makes your eyes bulge with horror, get over it. Teacher Says: You don't have to speechify like Abe Lincoln to share your experiences and talents in school. All it takes is passion and a feathered dance stick.

"What makes a great school speaker is someone who has the passion to convey their expertise in a way that inspires a child to say, 'I can do that,' " says Gail Woolf, Connection Resource Bank coordinator for Montgomery County public schools, which provides volunteer speakers, tutors, mentors, judges and consultants for MCPS teachers.

Even speaking for 20 minutes could change a kid's life for the better. "Though a meeting might be momentary, you could become a support person for a child," says veteran school speaker Mitzi Young, a litigation attorney for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Talents of all kinds help kids. Rick Harrison, a branch chief in the review section of National Institutes of Health's National Institute on Drug Abuse and a member of Oklahoma's Osage tribe, demonstrates tribal ceremonies and talks about commonly shared issues like tolerance, diversity, prejudice, trust and generosity. Young speaks about black history and career planning. Physical therapists, writers, authors, artists, scientists, fashion designers, accountants, dentists, lawyers and cooks all can teach a kid a thing or two, so get over yourself and get into the classroom.

It's brief. "Typically, a speaker spends 20 to 30 minutes in an elementary classroom and about 45 minutes in middle and high school," says Woolf. Speakers with more flexible schedules might offer a series of presentations or participate in assemblies, career planning days, science fairs, field trips or teacher in-service training.

The following suggestions target audiences from kindergarten to grade 12:

Do your classwork. "Talk to the teacher ahead of time. Find out what they are doing in the classroom," says veteran classroom speaker Sallie Lowenstein, a young adult author and illustrator from Rockville.

"We told the scientists ahead of time about our curriculum so they could plan age-appropriate activities," says Judith Theiss, principal of Cannon Road Elementary School in Silver Spring, where seven scientists lit up Science Night. "They were great. You could tell they loved their area of expertise," she says.

Know your audience. How long will you have to speak? What kinds of activities does this class enjoy? Are there any trigger words to avoid or games they dislike? Ask the teacher about ages, boy/girl distribution, group size and special-needs students. Get a feel for ability, vocabulary and attention levels. "Know the audience so that there is an interplay," says Woolf. Seek some class management tips, too.

Case the place. "Find out what kind of facility you will be in," says Lowenstein. Discuss location, room size, equipment availability and parking. If students sit in desks in rows, will there be room to watch your demonstration up close? Talk about lighting, acoustics and temperature. Make a Plan B to anticipate faulty equipment or last-minute moves.

Make real-world connections. An important mission is to show kids how your career relates to what you learned in school. Save the bragging for cocktail parties. Your aim here is to inspire kids.

Medical careers teacher Maureen Goodwin, of Sherwood High School in Sandy Spring, provides speakers with prompts for tracking their career path, such as: What made you choose your career? What high school subjects would you recommend a student taking? What special aptitude, skills and interests are helpful? How much schooling did you need? What are the physical and emotional demands? What about the work week, shift work, overtime and holidays? What is the salary range? And because kids seldom realize that "a job is all about getting along with other people, talk about how character traits such as respect, honesty and loyalty relate to careers," says Helene Zeitlin, a counselor at Gaithersburg Middle School.

Gear your talk to the group. The easiest way to make sure you aren't speaking over the students' heads is to type a sample paragraph on your computer, then check the "grade level score" feature found in popular word processing software. Since younger students and those new to English typically have a larger "receptive" than reading vocabulary, a paragraph that yields a 6.1 grade level score will be understood by some third-graders. Don't hesitate to toss in an occasional big word, but explain it and don't be pompous. "You have to be real. Kids are incredibly sensitive to hooley," says Woolf.

Grab their attention up front. "Do a lot of personality," says Young. Author Sallie Lowenstein disarms kids with conversations about books they hated. Harrison appears in an Osage man's traditional ceremonial dress and carries a feathered dance stick. "Be prepared for several different types of deliveries to adapt to your audience," says Young, who taps her operatic talents to reach young students. And don't forget to introduce yourself, maybe even orbit the room and shake some hands.

Interact with them. Lowenstein plays writing games. Harrison invites kids to dance with him. Forensic psychologists brought slides of accident victims, and physical therapists brought muscle stimulating machines and demonstrated on the kids in Goodwin's medical careers class. "Bring something that can be used to interact with them," she says. Ask for responses regularly to keep the kids engaged.

Don't be boring. When a monkey pile forms in the rear of the kindergarten classroom, it's a bad sign. "No lectures," says Zeitlin. However, if you can't help being boring, know that school audiences are always advised to be polite. "The kids are usually pretty good about these kinds of situations," she says. Redeem yourself with a graceful exit. And remember, in school you always get another chance to prove yourself.

Judging

SAMPLE LETTER OF INVITATION TO PANEL JUDGES

[DATE]

[NAME]

[ADDRESS]

DEAR:

Each year, the American Immigration Law Foundation (AILF) sponsors the Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest directed towards fifth graders with the theme “Why I Am Glad America Is A Nation Of Immigrants.” The entries of the national contest are the winning entries of local contests from around the country. The [REGION/STATE] AILA Chapter requests that you consider participating in the contest as a judge to aid in the selection of our local winners.

The Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest is part of AILF’s ongoing efforts to spread a positive message about the benefits of immigration. We believe that this contest plays a significant role in demonstrating the important contributions immigrants make to our community and to America, and that it facilitates education of the students, their families and teachers of the history of immigration and how it may relate to them on a more personal level.

Approximately [INSERT NUMBER] schools in the [INSERT REGION/CITY/STATE] area are participating in the contest. The deadline for submissions is [INSERT DATE HERE]. A committee will screen all of the entries, and the top ten will be submitted to a panel of prominent people from [INSERT AREA] to rank and determine the first, second and third place winners. We hope that you will agree to participate in this panel.

Thank you in advance for considering this request. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [INSERT PHONE NUMBER AND EMAIL ADDRESS].

SUGGESTIONS FOR INITIAL COMMITTEE SCREENING

Essay Anonymity. Before providing the panel of screeners with the creative writing entries, assign each entry a number and delete any reference to the author's name, school or other identifying information. The top ten entries should also be submitted to the panel judges identified by number only.

Initial Screening. This can be done a number of ways, depending on the number of entries received. If there are a large number of entries, divide the entries evenly between the screeners, and ask each screener to choose the top three entries from their group using the suggested criteria indicated below (or other criteria developed by the Creative Writing Contest Committee). A smaller committee can then review the top three entries from each group, using the same criteria, to select the "final" top ten for submission to the panel judges.

Alternatively, if a more manageable number of entries is received, each screener can review and rank all of the entries and select the top ten for submission to the panel judges.

Judging Criteria. To determine the top ten entries please use the following criteria:

Content/Theme: How well does the entry explain "Why I Am Glad America Is A Nation Of Immigrants"?

Presentation: Are ideas well developed?

Creativity: Is the submission unique in some way?

Powerful Message: Are you moved by the message?

We suggest that each category be given a score from 1 to 5 (5 being the best). Add up the scores from each category so that each entry receives a total score out of 20. The scorecard on the next page may be helpful.

SAMPLE LETTER TO JUDGES WITH RANKING INSTRUCTIONS

DEAR:

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a judge in the Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest. I am pleased to report that [INSERT NUMBER] entries were submitted to the contest. Enclosed you will find the top ten entries that were screened by a committee of [INSERT GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS, E.G. 15 ATTORNEYS AND BOARD OF EDUCATION STAFF]. The entries were evaluated on the basis of theme, presentation, creativity, and message. You will see that in addition to poems, there are [INSERT OTHER FORMATS THAT WERE USED, IF APPROPRIATE] among the top ten entries.

We are asking the panel of final judges to rank the top ten creative writing entries from "1" to "10" (one being the best) using the criteria. The winning submission will be that which has the lowest overall score tabulated from the rankings assigned by the judges. [INSERT JUDGING CRITERIA]

The first, second, and third place winners of the contest will be honored at [INSERT DETAILS OF AWARDS CEREMONY]. In addition, the first place entry will be submitted to the national contest, the winner of which will be honored in June at the American Immigration Law Foundation Annual Benefit.

Each entry has been assigned a number. We have prepared a ranking sheet for your scores. We would ask that you return your rankings to us no later than [INSERT DATE HERE].

We hope that you will be able to join us at the awards ceremony on [INSERT DATE]. Thank you, once again, for your participation in this important project.

AILF CREATIVE WRITING CONTEST

“WHY I AM GLAD AMERICA IS
A NATION OF IMMIGRANTS”

Judge’s Scoring Sheet

Entry Number	Score (1-10; 1 being the best)

Comments: (optional)

Judge’s Name:

Date:

Please return this no later than [INSERT DATE HERE] to:
[INSERT NAME, ADDRESS, AND FAX NUMBER]

Winners

SAMPLE LETTER TO TOP THREE LOCAL WINNERS

[DATE]

[NAME]

[ADDRESS]

DEAR:

CONGRATULATIONS!!! You are the [FIRST, SECOND, THIRD] place winner in the Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest. Your [INSERT FORM OF WRITTEN WORK SUBMITTED - POEM, ESSAY, ET] was selected from [INSERT NUMBER] entries received. You should be very proud of your achievement.

As a winner, you will receive [INSERT PRIZES]. In addition, you will be honored at an [AWARDS CEREMONY/AILA MEETING] on [INSERT DETAILS OF DATE, TIME, AND PLACE OF EVENT]. Your family [FRIENDS, PRINCIPAL, TEACHER AND ENTIRE CLASSROOM] are [ALL] invited to attend the awards ceremony.

FOR FIRST PLACE WINNER INSERT: As the first place winner in the [CITY/STATE/REGION] contest, your [TYPE OF CREATIVE WRITING PIECE] will be submitted to the national contest, together with other entries from around the country. The winner of the national contest will receive prizes that include a trip to read his or her winning entry at the American Immigration Law Foundation's Benefit Dinner.

Once again, congratulations. I look forward to meeting you at the ceremony.

Award Ceremony & Prizes

SAMPLE LETTER TO SOLICIT PRIZES

Dear:

I am writing to you on behalf of the American Immigration Law Foundation (AILF), the [ENTER YOUR REGION/STATE AILA CHAPTER], [LIST OTHER SPONSORS] to ask for your assistance with the Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest.

Fifth grade students from around the [INSERT CITY/STATE/REGION/SCHOOL DISTRICT] area have been asked to submit creative writing pieces on the theme “Why I Am Glad America Is A Nation Of Immigrants.” The contest is part of AILF’s ongoing efforts to spread a positive message about the benefits of immigration.

The top three winners of the [INSERT AREA] contest will be honored at an awards ceremony on [INSERT DETAILS OF CEREMONY]. We would like to invite [INSERT NAME OF ORGANIZATION] to participate in the Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest by asking you to donate [INSERT ITEM YOU ARE REQUESTING]. Your generous contribution will be noted in the program for the awards ceremony.

We hope to make this contest an enriching experience for the students writing about immigration and for the community as a whole. Your contribution will help us achieve this goal.

I am including a brochure about the Creative Writing Contest and a brochure about the American Immigration Law Foundation and its goals.

Thank you for considering our request.

SAMPLE LETTER OF INVITATION TO AWARDS CEREMONY

DEAR:

The [STATE/REGION] AILA Chapter would like to invite you to what promises to be a very heartwarming event in our community. On [INSERT DATE], three [INSERT CITY] area students will be honored for their writing entries on the theme “Why I Am Glad America Is A Nation Of Immigrants” during a ceremony at [INSERT PLACE OF CEREMONY]. The ceremony will begin at [INSERT TIME] and will last approximately [INSERT ESTIMATED LENGTH OF CEREMONY].

The winning pieces were selected from [ENTER NUMBER] entries submitted by fifth grade students from the [ENTER CITY/STATE] area. The Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest, sponsored by the American Immigration Law Foundation, helps spread a positive message about the benefits of immigration to America. All of the entries received contain truly inspirational messages.

The three students to be honored are: [INSERT NAMES OF STUDENTS AND THEIR SCHOOLS].

The winners were selected by a panel of judges from the community: [INSERT NAMES OF JUDGES].

The entry of the first place winner will be submitted to the American Immigration Law Foundation for the national contest.

I hope that you will be able to join us for this event. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [INSERT PHONE NUMBER AND EMAIL ADDRESS].

SAMPLE AWARDS CEREMONY PRESS RELEASE

CONTACT:

[INSERT NAME AND PHONE NUMBER]

ELEMENTARY STUDENTS ARE GLAD AMERICA IS A NATION OF IMMIGRANTS

Creative Writing Contest Authors Emphasize
the Contributions of Immigrants

[INSERT NAME OF CITY]: Three [INSERT CITY] area students will be honored for their winning entries on “Why I Am Glad America Is A Nation Of Immigrants” during a ceremony at [INSERT PLACE, DATE, AND TIME OF AWARDS CEREMONY].

The winning entries were selected from [ENTER NUMBER] entries submitted by fifth grade students from the [ENTER CITY/REGION/STATE] area. The Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest was sponsored by the American Immigration Law Foundation (AILF), the [INSERT STATE/REGION] AILA Chapter, and [INSERT NAMES OF OTHER CO-SPONSORS], to help spread a positive message about the benefits of immigration to America. [INSERT QUOTE FROM CONTEST COORDINATOR: e.g. “We were overwhelmed by the profound insight, humor and optimism of the entries. These children can teach many Americans some very important lessons.” said Joe Smith, coordinator of the Creative Writing Contest.]

The three students to be honored are: [INSERT NAMES OF STUDENTS AND THEIR SCHOOLS].

The winners were selected by a panel of judges from the community: [INSERT NAMES OF JUDGES].

The winners will receive [INSERT PRIZES]. In addition, the first place entry, written by [INSERT STUDENT’S NAME] will be entered into the National Creative Writing Contest, the winner of which will receive prizes that include a trip to [INSERT ANNUAL CONFERENCE CITY] to read his or her winning entry at the American Immigration Law Foundation’s Benefit Dinner.

SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER TO PRIZE CONTRIBUTORS

DEAR:

On behalf of the American Immigration Law Foundation, the [YOUR STATE/REGION] AILA Chapter, [LIST OTHER SPONSORS], I would like to thank [INSERT NAME OF DONATING ORGANIZATION] for its generous donation of [INSERT PRIZE] to the Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest.

Approximately [INSERT NUMBER OF CONTESTANTS] students participated in the contest, and thanks to the generosity of [INSERT NAME OF DONATING ORGANIZATION] and other local sponsors, we were able to award prizes to the author of the entry that was selected from all the participants/to the best submission from each school [MODIFY AS APPROPRIATE].

Your contribution has certainly helped make learning about immigration an enjoyable experience for the students. I have enclosed copies of the top three creative writing entries for your and your staff’s reading pleasure. You will also find a copy of your listing in our awards ceremony program.

Thank you again for your support.

Timeline Checklist

CREATIVE WRITING CONTEST CHECKLIST

TIME FRAME	ACTION	COMPLETED
July/August	Select Creative Writing Contest Coordinator(CWCC)	_____
	Form Creative Writing Contest Committee	_____
	Approach potential contest co-sponsors	_____
August/September	Approach Board of Education	_____
	Follow up with Board of Education (get commitment & contact)	_____

September/October	Target local schools	_____
	Follow up with schools (get commitments)	_____
	Begin prize solicitation	_____
November/December	Distribute contest material to participating schools	_____
	Recruit volunteers for panel to do initial screening of entries	_____
	Solicit judges	_____
	Start planning awards ceremony	_____
	Recruit volunteers to make presentations to participating classes	_____
January	Volunteers make presentations in classrooms	_____
Before February	Finalize panel of initial screeners	_____
February	Deadline for schools to submit entries to CWCC	N/A
February - March	Panel screens entries and selects top 10	_____
March	Submit top 10 entries to judges	_____
March - April	Submit winning entry to AILF & announce local winners	N/A
April (first Friday)	Submit winning entry to AILF for National Contest	_____
April / May	Finalize details for awards ceremony	_____
May (first Friday)	National Contest winner announced by AILF	N/A
May (before school is out)	Local awards ceremony	_____
June	National winner honored at AILF Benefit	N/A

See www.ailf.org/essay for exact deadlines each year

ABOUT THE FOUNDATION...

The American Immigration Law Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, educational, charitable organization dedicated to increasing public understanding of immigration law and policy, and the value of immigration to American society; to promoting public service and excellence in the practice of immigration law; and to advancing fundamental fairness and due process under the law for immigrants.



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