

***We hope you will consider alerting your readers about this high school essay contest. One upcoming news hook, if you need one, is Thursday, Sept. 17: [Constitution Day](#). The *Being an American* Essay Contest provides an excellent opportunity for classrooms to observe this nationally recognized day.

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LARGEST HIGH SCHOOL ESSAY CONTEST OPENS FOR 2009-10

***BEING AN AMERICAN* ESSAY CONTEST FOCUSES ON AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP**

***Students and Their Teachers Compete for Cash Prizes Up to \$5,000;
Nearly \$200,000 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 \$200,000 in prize money by participating in the fourth 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 31,000 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. The contest's national sponsor is David H. Koch. Additional sponsors include [Amway Global](#) and the [Jack Miller Family Foundation](#).

“This contest is unique in that it gives students the opportunity to share their thoughts about how the principles expressed in America's Founding Documents shape and influence contemporary American citizenship,” said [Bill of Rights Institute President Victoria Hughes](#). “This conversation is vital to preparing the next generation of voters and civic leaders for the challenges that are ahead of them and our country.”

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 2010 where they will be awarded cash prizes of \$5,000 (First Place), \$2,500 (Second Place), and \$1,250 (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 \$250 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 Jason Wilson.

Nearly 50,000 students have participated in the essay contest since it began in 2006. Now in its fourth year, the contest is the largest high school essay contest in the country.

“Fifty years ago Rich DeVos and Jay Van Andel founded a company with core values that embraced the opportunities and freedom America offers,” said Jori Hartwig, Vice President of Marketing for Amway Global. “Today, Amway Global’s values remain the same, and that’s why we’re excited to sponsor the *Being an American* Essay Contest. It provides us an opportunity to encourage youth to embrace American history and express what they believe it means to be an American.”

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

MEDIA FAST FACTS:

BEING AN AMERICAN ESSAY CONTEST

2009-2010 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, US 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: David H. Koch (New York City, NY), Amway Global (Ada, MI), and the Jack Miller Family Foundation (Buffalo Grove, 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 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.”

STUDENTS ELIGIBLE: 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:** \$2,500 each
- **Third Prize:** \$1,250 each
- **Seven Honorable Mentions:** \$250 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:** \$2,500 each

- **Third Prize:** \$1,250 each
- **Seven Honorable Mentions:** \$250 each

WASHINGTON, D.C. TRIP: The top three winners (first, second and third places) from each region, their teacher, and a guardian will be awarded an all-expenses paid trip to Washington, D.C. in the Spring of 2010.

CONTEST START DATE: September 17, 2009

DEADLINE FOR ESSAY SUBMISSIONS: December 1, 2009

WINNERS ANNOUNCED: Spring 2010

WEB SITE AND CONTEST GUIDELINES: <http://www.BeingAnAmerican.org>