



Celebrate America

AMERICAN IMMIGRATION COUNCIL

Creative Writing Contest

The **American Immigration Council** is proud to sponsor the 18th annual "Celebrate America" Creative Writing Contest. The contest inspires educators to bring U.S. Immigration history and lessons into their classrooms and gives fifth graders the opportunity to explore America as a nation of immigrants.

Past winners have documented the experience of immigrants who have left their homelands in search of a more promising future in America, spoken of their immigration experiences or reflected on their ancestors or parents.

Fifth grade students enter their work in local contests which are sponsored by chapters of the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA). Each chapter forwards the local winning entry to the National Competition where entries are reviewed by a distinguished panel including U.S. Senators, award winning authors and noted journalists. Winning entries will then be printed in the Congressional Record.

The grand prize winner (and two guests) will receive an all-expenses-paid trip to the Council's Annual Benefit Dinner where the winner will be recognized and will recite the winning piece. Local and national judges are looking for student writing that is original, thoughtful and speaks to the Council's mission to educate the public about the benefits of immigration in our society.

If you are interested in participating, please contact your local contest coordinator. More information can be found on the Council's website at www.celebrateamericawritingcontest.org.

How It Works

The Creative Writing Contest kicks off in the fall or early winter (depending on the local contest rules) as volunteer attorneys from local AILA chapters visit teachers and classrooms. The attorneys give classroom presentations on immigration to inform students and teachers about the important role immigration plays in our society. The attorneys also explain contest details and get students excited about participating.

In the winter and early spring, teachers submit student entries to local AILA chapters who then select and honor a winner(s) on the local level. In April, local AILA chapters send winning entries to the Council, which we forward to our panel of national celebrity judges. The top national winner is announced in early May.

For a more detailed schedule, check out: www.celebrateamericawritingcontest.org.

Past National Judges Include:

Dave Eggers, Award Winning Author
Gerda Weissman Klein, Presidential Medal of Freedom Recipient
Peter Coan, Author
Warren St. John, Author/Journalist
Henry Cejudo, Olympic Gold Medalist
Edwidge Danticat, Award Winning Author
Charles E. Schumer, Senator (D-NY)
Mary Williams, Founder of the Lost Boys Foundation
Randi Weingarten, President AFT

The National Grand Prize

The winner and two guests receive an all expenses paid trip to The Council's Annual Benefit Dinner where he/she is honored and reads his/her winning entry aloud. This year's Annual Benefit will take place June 19, 2015, in Washington, DC. The winner also receives a travel stipend, engraved plaque, his/her winning entry printed in the Congressional Record and a flag flown over the Capitol in his/her honor.

Guidelines

Theme

"Why I Am Glad America is a Nation of Immigrants"

Entrants

5th graders

Format

Any written entry (essay, poem, story, interview, etc.) that reflects the theme. Entry should be submitted to your contest coordinator (some local contests require electronic submissions, so please check with your coordinator).

Word Count

Up to 500 words

Judging Criteria

Theme, presentation, creativity and message

Entry Requirements

- Cover page must include student's name, address, grade, age, school and telephone number and email
- Proof of enrollment in the fifth grade—such as report cards, transcripts or letters from the school principal
- A Release Form must be signed by contestant and parent or guardian

Last Year's Winning Entry

Past winners have documented the experience of immigrants who have left their homelands in search of a more promising future in America, spoken of their immigration experiences or reflected on their ancestors or parents.

The Land of Opportunity

Charlotte Leigh, The Carrollton School, Coral Gables, Florida

*He knew there was no hope in his land of fears,
He left behind all sobs and tears,
To start a new life in a brand new place,
To see if America could solve his case,
He brought his daughters with hearts of gold,
And his wife, who was so very bold,
He wanted America, the land of opportunity,
To give his family the gift of immunity,
Away from the place of bomb and hate,
To America, which he felt, would give him a new fate,
He wanted his family to work so hard,
To really go that extra yard,
His daughters had dreams he wanted to make a reality,
But they needed to get away from all the brutality,
They were not allowed to set foot in any schools,
To do that would have broken all the rules,
So he asked the immigration officer: "Let me in your country
If you please,
I'm begging you here, on my knees
America is a kind land of democracy,
Away from my land of hypocrisy,
Everyone should have a right to freedom,
Everyone should be accepted without reason,
So for that I say my friend, please let me in and put my misery to an end."*

*Ten years have passed for our family,
It's a different story,
They are settled in America and living in glory,
Their minds have cleared of nightmares past,
They are living their dreams at long last,
The daughters are in college with brains full of knowledge,
One wants to be a teacher, the other wants to be a preacher,
Dad went to night school to become a lawyer,
Mum is working as an apprentice joiner,
Who would have thought this family with such a terrible start
Could live their dreams and become extremely smart?
This story could only have happened in the United States,
Where dreams come true without a wait,
We have seen how America can change lives,
And let ambitions thrive,
Every person is truly the same,
No matter what the gender, race or name,
This land of the brave with liberty and justice for all,
No matter how big, no matter how small,
This poem has taught me to live with gratitude,
And have a very positive attitude.*

How You Can Get Involved

If you are interested in engaging your classroom in a thoughtful dialogue on immigration, contact your local contest coordinator by visiting www.celebrateamericawritingcontest.org.

Teachers should mark their calendars and set aside time this fall or winter to allow contest coordinators to visit your classrooms. Teachers can also sign up to receive updates on the "Celebrate America" Fifth Grade Creative Writing Contest by www.celebrateamericawritingcontest.org.

The American Immigration Council's Community Education Center will keep teachers updated throughout the year on contest guidelines, deadlines and general contest information. The Community Education Center will also keep teachers up to date on the latest in immigration curriculum as well as other programming.

About The Community Education Center and The American Immigration Council

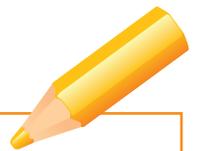
The **American Immigration Council** is a tax-exempt, not-for-profit educational, charitable organization. The mission of the American Immigration Council is to be a leader in strengthening America by honoring our immigrant history and by shaping how the public thinks and acts toward immigration now and in the future.

The **Community Education Center** strives to promote a better understanding of immigrants and immigration by providing educational resources that inspire thoughtful dialogue, creative teaching and critical thinking. Dedicated to the American values of fairness, social justice and respect for all people, the Center is committed to making immigration an everybody issue. The Center also highlights the positive contributions immigrants have made and continue to make to American society through its programmatic work.

For additional information, lesson plans and classroom resources, please visit our website at www.communityeducationcenter.org.

Contact Your Contest Coordinator

If you would like to enter the contest or learn more please contact your local coordinator:



Coordinator's Name: _____

E-mail: _____

Phone: _____