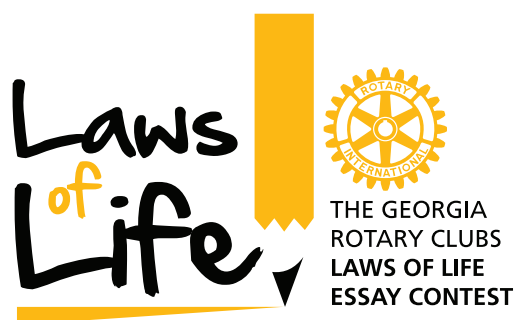


A Guide for Starting a *Laws of Life* Essay Contest

**For Rotary Clubs and Rotary Districts
Outside the State of Georgia**

Prepared and distributed by

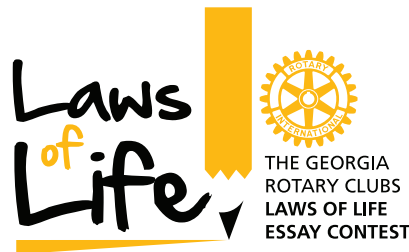


The *Laws of Life* Essay Contest program is a non-sectarian, academic activity that encourages a dialogue between students and teachers, parents, and community members to advance positive, ethical principles, such as perseverance, forgiveness, honesty, respect, and love.

The Georgia Rotary Districts Character Education Program provides this contest manual with step-by-step guidelines for launching a *Laws of Life* Essay Contest in your school, district, or state. Much of the information appeared in the John Templeton Foundation's original Laws of Life contest manual.

This on-line booklet was prepared by the Georgia Rotary Districts Character Education Program, Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, with resources provided by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation.

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June 2017

THE GEORGIA ROTARY CLUBS LAWS OF LIFE ESSAY CONTEST: A REPLICABLE MODEL

“You are only as good as your word.”

“Honesty is the best policy.”

“To have a friend, be one.”

“Never give up”

Often called wise sayings or maxims, laws of life reveal the core values that make up a person’s character and provide individuals with a moral compass to help guide them on their life journey. The late Sir John Templeton – a pioneering genius in global investments and mutual funds – was fond of such pithy sayings and collected them throughout his life.

In 1987 – the same year he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth – Templeton started a Laws of Life writing competition in his hometown of Winchester, Tennessee. At the time, Templeton wrote:

To be a happy and useful person, we must understand and practice the laws of life. The world operates on spiritual and moral principles just as it does on the laws of physics and gravity. It is up to us to learn what those principles are and then live by them.

The contest was a huge success, and the Templeton Foundation helped replicate the program in communities across the world. The Georgia *Laws of Life* Essay Contest started in 1999, and in 2009, Rotarians in Georgia came together to make the contest a Rotarian-run, Rotary club-branded character education and youth outreach program. With the permission of Rotary International, the nonprofit Georgia Rotary Districts Character Education Program, Inc., was incorporated to operate the contest.

Shortly thereafter, the contest adopted the tag line *“Changing Lives, One Essay at a Time.”* That’s more than just a tag line – it is our reality. Since the Georgia contest began, thousands of students’ lives have been changed for the better, and over a million students, teachers and parents have been introduced to Rotary as a service-based organization that is committed to ethics, education and advanced literacy.

As a program for high school students in grades 9-12, the contest asks students to select a saying or Law of Life (such as “Slow and steady wins the race” or “Kind words conquer”) and to use that saying to reflect upon and write about their own life experiences and values – values such as loyalty, generosity, courage, compassion, and perseverance.

Through their writings, students have discovered meaning in simple everyday acts, found the proverbial silver lining in a cloud, recognized their own inner strengths, and learned to value relationships they once took for granted. The essays give students confidence in their potential to live meaningful and purposeful lives, and also help students discover the power of the written word.

Although hundreds of *Laws of Life* essay contests have been launched by teachers, school districts, businesses, and civic groups (including Kiwanis and Lions clubs as well as Rotary clubs), the largest *Laws of Life* essay contest in North America – and perhaps in the world – is the Georgia Rotary Clubs *Laws of Life* Essay Contest. We hope that the Georgia Rotary Clubs’ contest will inspire you to create a *Laws of Life* contest of your own.

To help Rotary clubs and districts outside of Georgia launch a successful *Laws of Life* Essay Contest, the Georgia Rotary Clubs *Laws of Life* contest is providing this manual. All Georgia Rotary clubs within the state of Georgia are asked to participate in the existing Georgia essay contest, either as a general contest sponsor or as a school-specific sponsor. Contact The Georgia Rotary Clubs’ *Laws of Life* at 404.590.8039.



“Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my story with others. Without this contest, many students’ inspirational tales would not be heard.”

Jessica R, Georgia Rotary Clubs *Laws of Life* Essay Contest High School State Finalist; Oglethorpe University Graduate; *Atlanta Business Chronicle* “Thirty Under Thirty” award winner.

Selwyn’s Story

When Selwyn’s high school teacher introduced the *Laws of Life* contest in her classroom, Selwyn said that he had nothing to write about. After much encouragement on the part of his teacher, he agreed to write his essay. The essay became a grade level winner for his school, and with that came a small \$50 award.

At the time, Selwyn, a senior, had not taken the SAT college entrance exam because he didn’t think he would do well. But with the new confidence he gained from being a grade level winner in the *Laws of Life* contest, and with the urging of his teacher, he was motivated to take the SAT. He received the highest SAT score in his graduating class and went on to receive a scholarship from Emory University as a first-generation college student. That little push, that little bit of encouragement from the Rotary clubs’ *Laws of Life* Essay Contest, undoubtedly changed his life and the future of his entire family.

“I discovered, while writing my Laws of Life essay, that writing has an inherent worth, and that discovery was the most valuable prize any contest could ever offer.”

Godfrey I., Georgia *Laws of Life* High School Essayist,
Harvard University Graduate



BENEFITS OF THE *LAWS OF LIFE* CONTEST

A *Laws of Life* essay contest provides many benefits to students, teachers, parents, and the entire community. The contest:

- Provides schools with a proven, easy-to-implement character education program that gives students an authentic purpose for writing
- Provides teachers with an engaging writing activity that helps them get to know their students better while improving classroom climate and relationships.
- Inspires young people to discover for themselves the core values, principles, and ideals that will guide them wherever they go and whatever they do in life.
- Honors students from all academic ability levels. Student winners typically include “average students,” academically talented students, and students who struggle with classwork.
- Helps students develop empathy, compassion, and confidence.
- Gives students the opportunity to write a “personal narrative,” a component of many academic writing standards.
- Provides practice for students’ state, SAT, and ACT writing tests and for their college entrance essays.

“You have no idea how this contest has changed this young man’s life . . . This honor is so absolutely unexpected and appreciated. His mother can hardly contain herself. I am just so overjoyed! As a teacher, I had no idea that being part of the Laws of Life contest would completely change my outlook and my spirit. I just cannot adequately express the blessing.”

Mandy C., Teacher, Atlanta, GA

By creating a *Laws of Life* Essay contest, a Rotary Club can:

- Introduce an effective character education and literacy program in high schools in your community.
- Receive excellent publicity with educators, students, parents, and other Rotarians.
- Demonstrate its commitment to the ethics and education of your area’s future workforce.
- Build stronger community–school ties by enabling educators and Rotarians to work side by side on a positive and life-affirming activity.
- Implement an effective, turn-key youth outreach program that promotes the values in Rotary’s 4-Way test.

“This contest encourages young people from all walks of life to reflect on a character-building life experience. It allows students of all academic abilities—from C students to valedictorians—to be recognized together in front of their peers, parents, and community.”

Mark Ellis, Rotarian

HOW TO START A ROTARY-BASED *LAWS OF LIFE* ESSAY CONTEST

Single Rotary clubs or Rotary Districts can start a local or regional *Laws of Life* essay contest, freely using the sample teacher guidelines, judging templates, rubrics, and other contest materials herein.

Most contests will operate as follows:

- A Rotary Club or other Rotary entity interested in launching a contest downloads the free contest materials from the website: www.georgialawsoflife.org/start.
- The club decides to either fund the contest on its own or to secure outside funding.
- The club works with school officials, and provides contest materials and teacher training to schools that register. (Schools should be invited to participate free of charge.)
- Teachers introduce the contest to their students.
- Students turn in their essays by the deadline.
- Judges from the Rotary club or district, and/or judges from other sponsors, read, and rank the essays
- The student prize winners are announced, rewarded, and recognized, along with their teachers.

- Before starting a *Laws of Life* contest, a Rotary Club or district should determine if there is already a local or regional *Laws of Life* contest in the area.
- If there is a *Laws of Life* contest operated by an organization such as the Better Business Bureau or a Kiwanis Club in your area, consider approaching that organization about a collaboration. Do not start a Rotary club *Laws of Life* program that directly competes with another organization's *Laws of Life* contest.
- If your club is in the state of Georgia, contact the Georgia Rotary Clubs *Laws of Life* Essay Contest (www.georgialawsoflife.org).

DO WHAT FITS!

A hallmark of *Laws of Life* essay contests is their flexibility. Hundreds of *Laws of Life* essay contests have been launched around the world by various groups, and each is unique because the organizers followed the Templeton Foundation's "DO WHAT FITS" strategy.

When you launch a *Laws of Life* essay contest, the contest becomes *your* program. "DO WHAT FITS" means that you should tailor the contest to meet the needs of your schools and community.

A Rotary club or district will need to decide how to best organize the contest and all aspects of the program — such as the size and type of prizes, the length of essays, the number of schools involved, the kind of awards ceremony you will have, and the name of your contest. *In naming your contest, please make sure you are following Rotary International's Brand Central Guidelines and gain approval from RI if required.*

Whereas the Georgia Rotary Clubs *Laws of Life* Essay Contest is a state-wide character education program that stretches across all three Rotary districts in Georgia, most new *Laws of Life* contests started by clubs will be smaller and will start on the local level.

Rotary districts may implement a regional contest in which individual clubs operate their own *Laws of Life* contests, and the top student winner from each club's contest competes for the top regional prize.

The Georgia Rotary Clubs *Laws of Life* Essay Contest is designed to be implemented in school classrooms. Rotary clubs are urged to use this classroom-based model when creating their own *Laws of Life* contest. *Laws of Life* contests that publicize the contest exclusively through newspapers and bulletin boards, and ask students to submit essays directly to the contest, are rarely successful. The "secret sauce" is in the student-teacher relationship as the essay is being developed, the opportunity for peer-to-peer review among students, and the development of a school-Rotary tie.

Michael's Story

Michael wrote his Laws of Life essay about his grandmother who was facing a terminal illness. Shortly after he wrote his essay, the entire family gathered around the grandmother as she died. Michael read aloud his essay about the bravery, courage, and selflessness his grandmother had shown during her illness and how he had learned from her example. Michael's mother said that the essay "eased his grandmother's passing," and that the Georgia Laws of Life contest had made a difference in the life of the entire family.

CONTEST CHECKLIST

The following checklist can help you organize your own Rotary club's or district's *Laws of Life* Essay Contest. Not all items will apply to your contest, so skip items as needed.

Getting Started

- Assemble a contest committee
- Develop a contest timeline
- Decide on prizes and awards
- Develop a contest budget

Budgeting and Fundraising

- Identify potential corporate and individual sponsors
- Prepare fundraising materials
- Consider hosting a fundraising event
- Ask for contest sponsors!

Contest Administration: Working with Schools

- Get “buy-in” from the school administration
- Identify a school coordinator
- Create & distribute a Teacher's Guide
- Hold a “teachers' meeting”
- Distribute bookmarks or flyers, if applicable

Judging the Essays

- Recruit judges
- Select judging criteria
- Distribute instructions and essays to judges
- Select winning essays
- Thank the judges

Recognitions and Celebrations

- Prepare certificates and awards
- Hold a celebration event

Publicity

- Promote the contest in your local media
- Write a press release

Publishing the Essays

- Publish and distribute the award-winning essays

CONTEST TIP

Get input on your timeline from teachers or administrators first. Teachers manage a variety of required activities throughout the school year, such as standards testing programs, and they will greatly appreciate a contest timeline that is school-friendly.

CONTEST TIP

Account for “block scheduling” in a school, if applicable, in which half of the students take their English classes in the fall and the other half takes their English classes in the spring. For those schools, allow time for students in both blocks to write their essays.

GETTING STARTED

Assess Needs and Resources

The following questions can help a Rotary club or district start a Laws of Life contest and determine what resources will be needed:

- Who will participate in the contest? One or more classrooms? One or more schools? One or more districts? City-wide?
- Which ages or grade levels do you want to include? The Georgia contest is designed for high schools, but middle school and college level contests have been successful.
- Will you present awards? How many? Awards can be cash prizes, gift cards, printed certificates or medallions. Consider awards for teachers as well as for students.
- What type of awards celebration will you have? These can range from a school recognition assembly to a formal banquet.

Assemble a Contest Committee

The contest committee may be composed exclusively of Rotarians from your club or district, although you may want to solicit advice from a wide range of individuals, such as school officials (principals, teachers, or representatives of the superintendent), public officials, business leaders, and others. Regardless of how your committee is composed, you should keep the following in mind: Planning and implementing a *Laws of Life* Essay Contest takes **leadership** and **teamwork**. Committee members should be committed to the ideals of the contest, willing to pitch in, and enthusiastic to work together to achieve the success of the contest.

Committee work tends to progress more smoothly when individuals are assigned specific tasks. When it is time for committee members to take on different roles, you may want to consider the following questions:

- Who will work directly with the schools and teachers?
- Who will be responsible for developing the contest materials (posters, flyers, certificates, etc.)?
- Who will organize the judging process?
- Who will coordinate the awards event?
- Who will take care of publicity for the contest?
- Who will be responsible for fundraising?

“Working with the Laws of Life essay contest is an incredibly meaningful experience. Oftentimes, students who are facing challenging experiences in their personal lives or who are overcoming adversity are recognized as winners. The fact that these students are honored gives them encouragement to succeed, which in the end creates a more successful community.”

– Beth McIntyre, Librarian

Develop a Contest Timeline

The length of time between the start and the finish of a Laws of Life contest depends on the number of classrooms, schools and students that will participate. It is also not unusual for a school to spread the contest over many months so as to allow plenty of time for each step of the process. Seven to eight months (roughly coinciding with the school year) is a reasonable timeline for larger contests. Two to three months is usually adequate for a smaller contest.

“I wish all students would have the privilege of doing this essay each and every year! What a remarkable chance to reach down, dig deep, and see where you have grown. Sometimes that very pondering alone is what fosters a tiny mustard seed to grow. The winners are not merely the students who win prizes, but ALL students who take the time to do serious soul searching. As for my family, I believe we are all winners. That is how far-reaching the effects of the Laws of Life can be.”

– Carol L., Mother of a *Laws of Life* Student Essayist



Robert Hall, Rotary International Director, Zones 33 & 34 (2014 -2016) and PDG 6900, with Duane Carver, former state winner, Georgia Rotary Clubs *Laws of Life* Essay Contest, at Duane’s graduation ceremony from Georgia Institute of Technology. PDG Hall says of their friendship, *“I would never have met Duane had I not been a Rotarian. I am so blessed!”*

Develop a Contest Budget

Many contests can be held with little or no fundraising. However, many contests desire to secure extra funds for prizes, a recognition celebration, or to publish the essays.

When designing your budget, your contest committee should give careful thought to the prizes. Not all contests award cash prizes, although monetary awards tend to be universal motivators. Also, decide if it is more important to you to offer a few large cash prizes or more small cash prizes.

Outlined are two contest budgets, ranging from a “bare bones” contest, to a large contest with a broad base of support. New contests may want to start small and increase their budgets in subsequent years as the contest grows in stature and size. In the beginning, the budget formulated should reflect your optimism — but we also encourage you to be fiscally prudent.

**Sample Budget
"Shoestring"**

Assumptions: This is a district-wide contest operated mostly on donated time and materials, including 4 high schools, with one school winner and one 1st runner up per school, with approximately 2,000 total essays written.

| Expenses | Description | Cost |
|--|--|---|
| Student Awards: | | |
| School Winners (total of 4) | \$25 cash or gift card each | \$100 |
| 1st Runner-Up per school (total of 4) | \$15 cash or gift card each | \$60 |
| Overall Contest Winner | \$50 cash or gift card | \$50 |
| Teacher Awards: | | |
| | \$20 cash or gift card to a bookstore or office supply store to each of the four contest chairs | \$80 |
| Student and Teacher Recognition Event: | | |
| Reception in school cafeteria (OR breakfast or lunch at a regular Rotary Club meeting) | | |
| Reception Refreshments | Cake, cookies, juice, water | Refreshments donated by school district's food service (or extra food service at a club meeting) (Extra food service at club—minimal cost) |
| Certificates | Printed at school on special paper | \$10 |
| Programs | Printed at school or by a Rotarian | Paper donated |
| Essay Publication/Display: | | |
| Essay Publication | Print in student newsletter or on website, verifying that the students and their parent(s) or guardian(s) (if students are under the age of 18), have given written permission to post/publish | |
| TOTAL CONTEST COST | | \$300 |

**Sample Budget
"Elaborate"**

Assumptions: This is a large, city-wide, district-wide, or state-wide contest operated by a Rotary entity which has received donations from businesses or charitable foundations. The contest involves 14 area high schools and generates 10,000 essays.

| Expenses | Description | Cost |
|--|---|-----------------|
| Student Awards: | | |
| Best Overall | \$1,500 (1) | \$1,500 |
| Overall 2nd Place | \$750 (1) | \$750 |
| Overall 3rd Place | \$500 (1) | \$500 |
| Best of Shool | \$200 (14) | \$2,800 |
| 2nd Place (each school) | \$100 (14) | \$1,400 |
| 3rd Place (each school) | \$50 (14) | \$700 |
| | TOTAL STUDENT AWARDS | \$7,650 |
| Teacher Awards: | | |
| Contest Chair – Highest percent of student participation (minimum of 100 student essays) | \$250 (1) | \$250 |
| Contest Chair – Most Essays Submitted | \$250 (2) | \$500 |
| School Contest Chairs that achieve 20% or more student participation | \$50 (14) | \$700 |
| | TOTAL TEACHER AWARDS | \$1,450 |
| PR Materials: | Student bookmarks or flyers | \$600 |
| Awards Reception: | | |
| | Catered dinner at hotel or college–150 guests | |
| Dinner | \$150 @ \$30 each | \$4,500 |
| Certificates | Specialty paper and holders | \$50 |
| Programs | Color printing | \$100 |
| Miscellaneous | Centerpieces, AV, etc. | \$300 |
| | TOTAL BANQUET COSTS | \$4,950 |
| Essay Publication/Display: | | |
| Essay Publication | 500 booklets printed and mailed to students, sponsors, judges | \$1,500 |
| | TOTAL CONTEST COST | \$16,150 |

Fundraising

There are many potential sources of contest funding. Sometimes a single individual hears about the contest and decides to personally donate the funds needed to start a contest. Or, a local business may decide to sponsor a contest. Of course, your Rotary Club or District should make a financial commitment to the contest before you seek outside donors.

When you are approaching a potential sponsor:

- Emphasize that this is a meaningful way to associate themselves with positive values, high academic standards, ethics, character, and accountability.
- Be prepared to give examples of the impact the contest has had on students' lives and the positive message it promotes. Consider showing them the videos on the www.georgialawsoflife.org site. After Year 1, invite potential funders to your awards ceremony and provide them with several student essays.

Most sponsors will prefer to make a donation to a nonprofit entity, so that they can receive a tax receipt for their contribution. Many Rotary clubs or districts already have charitable foundations that can serve as a contest's fiscal agent, or a local university or other nonprofit may be willing to serve as your fiscal agent. Please seek advice from a tax specialist or certificated accountant before doing so.

Eventually, as your contest grows, you might wish to incorporate the contest as its own nonprofit 501(c)(3) entity, with Rotarians as board members. Before doing so, contact Rotary International.

FUNDRAISING TIP #1:

If possible, seek a major underwriting gift from a single individual or family. The amount of money needed for the contest is modest enough that there may be an individual or family in your community who can underwrite a large portion or the entire cost of the *Laws of Life* contest.

FUNDRAISING TIP #2:

Link specific contest activities to individual funding sources. For example, in one community a local bank dedicated its financial contribution to the design, printing, and distribution of a handsomely bound collection of the winning essays. The collection was widely distributed throughout the community, and the bank was proud of its unique contribution to the contest.

FUNDRAISING TIP #3:

If you publish the winning essays, provide a copy to potential sponsors. That and other contest materials effectively convey the benefits of the contest and are wonderful promotional tools.

FUNDRAISING TIP #4:

Don't forget to follow up! It often takes several visits, e-mails, or phone calls before you get a donation. Persistence pays off!

Finding Contest Sponsors

Because the contest is a positive educational and character values activity that benefits young people, families, and the entire community, there is an unlimited number of potential sponsors.

Organizations that may be willing to sponsor a Rotary entity's *Laws of Life* program include:

BUSINESSES

- Banks
- Newspapers
- Pizza shops and restaurants
- Printing companies
- Law firms
- Retail stores and shopping malls
- Tutoring companies
- Office or art supply companies; athletic equipment suppliers; companies that provide school pictures, yearbooks or class rings, etc.

SCHOOL-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

- College or university ethics departments
- Local school boards
- PTOs (Parent-Teacher Organizations)

FOUNDATIONS

- Community foundations
- Family foundations
- Private foundations

OTHER COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

- Chambers of Commerce
- Community centers
- Faith-based groups
- Merchant, business, or professional associations

Contest Administration: Working with Schools to Implement the Contest

Gaining the support of the English or Language Arts faculty and the administrators is a key factor in the contest's success, because schools and teachers will be the ones introducing the contest to the students.

Identify a School Contest Chair

The School Contest Chair (or "school coordinator") will serve as liaison between your contest committee and the school's teachers. **It is almost always best to have an English department faculty member as the contest chair.** Each school should have its own coordinator, who is responsible for promoting and implementing the contest within his or her school. Although it is not required, if your budget allows a small stipend for the school coordinator, it is a thoughtful way to recognize their efforts and to show your support of educators.

Create and Distribute a Teacher's Guide

The Sample Teacher's Guide has been designed specifically for English classes. The Guide includes step by step directions on conducting a *Laws of Life* contest in a classroom. The guide reinforces a process, or multi-draft, approach to writing, and it contains sample handouts, lesson plans, tally forms, rubrics, and tips. Thanks to the Guide, teachers are able to seamlessly integrate the contest into their existing curriculum.

We suggest that you freely borrow from the sample Teacher Guide in the Appendix to create your own guide, tailored to your contest. We recommend that each teacher who participates in the contest has access to a print or online copy.

"I find this contest to be invaluable in assisting our young adults in their own 'heroic journeys.' As I read many of this year's papers, tears were streaming...Thank you for your continued support of young adults."

– Alan R., English Department Chair, DeKalb County, Georgia

"Far too often, we jump from assignment to assignment without giving students time to reflect and realize that they are learning important lessons through their personal experiences. The Laws of Life contest is simple enough for all students to relate to and respond to. Some of the most memorable stories I have read as a teacher have been essays from this assignment."

-- Mary T., Language Arts teacher, Gwinnett County, Georgia

Hold a "Teacher's Meeting"

Host a teacher's meeting to introduce the contest, to hand out printed materials, and to let the teachers know of your support. As teachers learn about the contest, they will grow more and more enthusiastic and will be convinced that the contest will greatly benefit their students and themselves.

Plan the meeting at a time convenient to the teachers and invite school administrators as well. After the first year of the contest, invite a teacher who participated in the contest in the past to help answer questions.

If your contest is in only one or two schools, you may not need to host a formal meeting, but may be allotted time to speak at a staff meeting. For larger contests, you may wish to hold an "off campus" breakfast or luncheon meeting for the school contest chairs and your club's contest committee.

"It has been one of the highlights of my career as an educator to be affiliated with the Georgia Laws of Life Essay Contest. This has been the best character education avenue for students that I know of in the nation...I know that every effort made to help students will not only benefit them, but our nation and world as well."

– Dr. Sandra Grant

Encouraging Schools to Participate

- Review benefits and share the Teachers Guide.
- Emphasize relationship building and the creation of a positive classroom climate.
- Emphasize the self-reflective process. Research shows this to be associated with better learning.
- Reiterate that the contest is for students of all ability levels. C-students and A-students alike receive awards and positive feedback.
- Explain that the contest can be used to meet Language Arts standards and that it is easily incorporated into the curriculum. (See additional information in the Sample Teachers' Guide.)
- Share some of the teacher testimonials in this publication, or show the contest video on the www.georgialawsoflife.org website.

How the Georgia Contest Drives Student Participation

The mere act of writing a *Laws of Life* essay and reflecting on important personal values is intrinsically worthwhile, which is why every student who writes a *Laws of Life* essay is a winner. The Georgia contest's belief in the value of the essay program drives its commitment to reaching as many students as possible.

To this end, the Georgia contest urges teachers to have **all** their students write a *Laws of Life* essay. We honor and recognize teacher contest chairs who generate a certain number of essays or a certain percentage (typically 25% or higher) of student participation. The contest also presents an honorarium to the teacher of the overall student winner.

It is easier and more cost effective to give 1,000 students the benefits of writing a *Laws of Life* essay by having 500 students from two schools write an essay, than by having 100 students from ten schools write an essay. Therefore, we focus on high levels of student participation at each school, rather than on the number of participating schools. We also encourage teachers to make the essay a **required** class assignment, rather than an optional assignment.

Create and Distribute Promotional Materials

Posters, flyers, or *Laws of Life* bookmarks help advertise the contest and provide a summary of the key contest details. Money is always a motivator, so reminding students of the awards which they may be eligible to receive is a good idea. Flyers and bookmarks can also serve as an excellent public image tool for a club or district.

Promotional materials can be aimed at teachers, students, parents, or potential sponsors. The Georgia Rotary Clubs *Laws of Life* contest has had great success with student bookmarks. The bookmarks are given to the school's contest chair, who then distributes them to the students.

Entry Forms

Student essays should be submitted to the contest with no names or identifying information **on the essay itself**, but with an attached student entry form that can be removed prior to judging.

Either when you first receive the essays (or for a larger contest, after the initial screening to weed out essays that don't meet basic eligibility requirements), you will need to create a numbering system to link each essay with its entry form so that once the winning essays are selected, you will know who wrote them. In contests with multiple schools or classrooms, some contests use several numbers – one that indicates which school (or classroom) and one for the entry. For example, Essay #10-15 could indicate the 15th essay from school #10. Contests that will award grade level awards as well as school level awards will want to include that information as well. Devise a numbering system that will help you manage your essays. If the essay has multiple pages, the number should be placed on all pages, in case they get separated during copying.

We have included a sample contest entry form in the Appendix on page 35. If you design your own, this information should be included:

- Student name
- Student grade
- Contact information (home address, e-mail (optional), phone number (optional) , etc.)
- School
- Teacher's name
- The *Law of Life* selected
- A "permission section," in which students and their parents or guardians authorize you to use the essays to promote and publicize the contest.

Prizes and Awards

One of the important decisions you will need to make is whether you will award prizes to the winners. If yes, what kind of prizes and how many? Obviously this decision has budget implications.

We recommend that you present the greatest number of awards that you can. Having multiple winners encourages participation and provides valuable recognition to students.

We also recommend that, under normal circumstances, your contest should give cash awards to students only if their school has submitted a minimum number of essays, either as a percent of a school's total enrollment or a total number. This will encourage participation and will prevent a school with an extremely low student participation rate from garnering all the awards.

Below are suggestions for naming the awards and suggestions for prizes. Please adjust according to your contest's size.

Sample Award Nomenclature for a Multi-School Contest

- First Place (Best Overall)
 - Second Place
 - Third Place (and Fourth Place, etc.)
 - Honorable Mention (A contest can name multiple Honorable Mentions; Honorable Mentions do not typically receive a cash award.)
 - Best in School – award for the best essay from each school
 - Best in Grade – award for the best essay for each grade level that participates
 - Best essay on a particular theme (for example: “compassion” or “integrity”)
-

AWARD TIP

For a multi-school contest, make sure the awards are consistent among all the schools. If School A has a \$100 top student award in a district-wide contest, then School B should have a \$100 top student award in the contest. To present different dollar level awards to schools participating in the same contest creates a perception of unfairness.

TAX TIP

The U.S. Internal Revenue Service treats scholarships differently than it does cash awards, so you may wish to talk with an accounting professional before using the term “scholarship” vs. “cash award.”

SCREENING AND JUDGING THE ESSAYS

Rotary clubs typically ask members to serve as volunteer screeners and judges. A club may also invite its district's leadership to serve as finalist judges, or prominent members of the community, such as mayors, business leaders, sports figures, or newspaper editors, to take part in the judging. The participation of notable individuals generates good publicity for the contest and encourages others to get involved.

Although there is not one type of person who is best suited to be a judge, a judge must be someone who can:

- appreciate and have in mind the ideals of the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest when reading the essays
- judge the essays primarily for their overall content, not solely for correct grammar or spelling
- be impartial, objective, unbiased, and principled

A judge who is a parent or immediate family member of a current contest participant (a student who is submitting an essay) should recuse himself or herself.

There are multiple ways to organize the judging process, depending on the contest timeline and the number of essays submitted. For smaller contests (several classrooms or one school), you can accomplish the judging in one or two short steps. For larger contests with multiple schools or large numbers of essays, you may need several rounds of judging before you make the final selections.

The School Contest Chair should collect the essays and give them to you, along with a completed School Tally Form, by the deadline. A good rule of thumb is to allow at least 3 weeks after the deadline for the screening and judging period before you plan to announce the winning essays, perhaps less for a small contest and longer for a large, multi-school program.

Essay Screening

Before going to the judges, all essays should be screened using the following criteria:

Sample Screening Check List

(Adjust for your own contest)

Does the essay meet the following minimum requirements? (Essays that don't meet those requirements should be set aside.)

- ___ Is the essay within the [500 to 700] word count?
- ___ Does the essay clearly state a *Law of Life*, expressed as a saying or quote?
- ___ Does the essay relate to the student's life experiences or personal observations? (Essays that focus exclusively on a historical figure, for example, are not potential winners.)
- ___ Does the essay have a Student Entry form attached?
- ___ Is the student entry form signed by the student, and – if the student is under 18 years of age – by a parent or guardian?

Teachers can serve as screeners by submitting only the top 10, 20, or 40 essays per grade level. Teachers have the advantage of recognizing – in most cases – if an essay is “authentic” (i.e., not plagiarized and not fabricated.) **However, the selection of the winning essays should never be left to teachers, but is a responsibility that your Rotary Club or district should assume.**

Essay Judging

Depending on the size of the contest, you may need to go through multiple rounds of essay screening and judging. For each round of judging, each of the essays should be read and ranked by the same group of people in order to avoid an “apples-to-oranges” comparison. For the finalist round, have each essay read by at least 6 or 7 judges so that their scores or rankings can be averaged.

We suggest asking judges to rank order the essays, with essays ranked from best (#1) to last (#8) if there are 8 essays being judged; 12 being the last if there are 12 essays being judged, etc.)

Sample E-mail or Letter to Semi-Finalist or Finalist Essay Judges

Dear Rotarians and Friends,

Thank you for volunteering to be a finalist judge for the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest.

Please read the attached set of 12 essays, each of which is marked by a letter of the alphabet, then use the attached tally sheet to rank the essays from 1 to 12, with 1 being the best.

When making your decisions, remember that the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest seeks to challenge students to examine and reflect upon core values, such as generosity, courage, grit, or loyalty, and to reward those students who are willing to take a stand for their values.

The extent to which the student illustrates his or her chosen “law of life” and the demonstration of good character are the most important criteria. **Overall essay quality** and **compelling content** are also important.

When judging, please give no regard to the neatness of the essay’s typing, whether the Law of Life is handwritten or typed, to any marks on the paper, or to the randomly assigned letter on the top corner of the page.

The best essays are those that make you both THINK and FEEL. A winning essay can be about anything – from a traumatic experience in a student’s life to a simple everyday experience that the student, through creative reflection, has turned into a life lesson. Additional tips on judging are enclosed.

Most judges take 2 to 3 hours to read and judge the essays.

Please return your results by [time] on [date]. You may:

- 1) scan and email the enclosed tally sheet to [email@email.com],
- 2) fax your tally sheet to XXX-XXX-XXXX, or
- 3) take a photo of your tally sheet and text it to XXX-XXX-XXXX.

If you have any questions, please call me at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely

Your Name & Title Here.

Sample Judge's Tally Form

CONTEST NAME & LOGO HERE

Your Name _____

Your Phone Number: _____

- **Please rank essays from 1 to 12, with 1 being the best**, and place your ranking number on the line next to the letter (see below).
- Return this tally sheet with your rankings by [date]. (Scan & email the sheet to me@email.com, or FAX this sheet to 666.444.77xx Questions? Call us at. 666.444.77xx)

Essay letter Your ranking (#1 = best)

| | |
|----|-------|
| A. | _____ |
| B. | _____ |
| C. | _____ |
| D. | _____ |
| E. | _____ |
| F. | _____ |
| G. | _____ |
| H. | _____ |
| I. | _____ |
| J. | _____ |
| K. | _____ |
| L. | _____ |

Comments: _____

Judges' Comments

These essays exhibited exceptional compassion that was manifested by personal sacrifice and commitment. I was uplifted reading all the essays. Thank you for the opportunity to participate as an essay judge. – Russ D., Rotarian

I'm always stunned by the vulnerability in these essays. Each one moved me. Thank you for allowing me the honor of reading them. – Debbie C., Rotarian

Selection of Winning Essays

After each round of judging, the next step is to compile the judges' rankings.

Because judging *Laws of Life* essays is very subjective, the rankings you receive from the judges will likely be quite variable. It is not uncommon to have an essay rated highly by one judge and much lower by another.

It is helpful to enter the rankings on an Excel, Numbers, or similar spreadsheet to facilitate calculating averages, medians, and means from the rankings.

Tips for Selecting Winning Essays

- Be aware of the limits of statistical analysis. Do not select the overall student winner based solely on the lowest average ranking if the difference between the average rankings is so small as to be statistically insignificant. In “close calls,” consider the mean, the median, and the number of judges who thought the essay was the best in the group.
- Having a small group (3 to 4 people) of individuals discuss the top dozen or so essays before making final decisions often helps clarify the merits of each essay and eases the selection of the top winners.
- Before naming the top winners, verify with each potential winner’s English teacher that the essay reflects the student’s actual life experiences. All essays submitted should have had a signed student statement stating that the essay is true to life and is not plagiarized (see sample Essay Entry Form), **but verifying this for the top winners is always prudent.** Discovering after the fact that a student has plagiarized or stretched the truth is not pleasant for the contest sponsors, the student, or the school.

Planning the Recognition Event

One of the most exciting and rewarding activities of the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest is the recognition event. Contest organizers have remarked that this event celebrates the ideals of the contest in a very special way. An awards ceremony honors the young people who have written award-winning essays, and it recognizes the hard work and dedication of all of the volunteers, teachers, and school officials who made the contest possible.

Awards ceremonies can be simple or grand, but they should always make the students feel special. Events have been held in hotels, banquet facilities, country clubs, school libraries, Rotary club meetings, and Rotary district assemblies. Because these events can have such a big impact on students, this is a good place to splurge. However, even with small budgets, you can plan a nice event, one that students, parents, and teachers will appreciate and feel honored to attend.

Reward Event Formats

Awards Banquet – This is the most expensive and elaborate choice, and can include a sit-down dinner, the reading of student essays, and a guest speaker or entertainment. Some contest organizers believe that a “banquet-like” dinner elevates the importance of the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest, especially for the contest finalists and their families. For many of the young people who have authored a prize-winning essay, this may be the first time they have ever won anything! A banquet creates that special atmosphere. An added benefit of an awards banquet is that for many students it is the first time they have attended a formal dinner.

Awards Reception – An awards reception does not include a sit-down dinner but provides light refreshments. A reception enables winning student essayists to read their essays aloud, and gives guests the opportunity to mingle and get to know each other better. Receptions are less expensive than a dinner banquet and can range from a “coffee and donuts” breakfast in the school cafeteria, to punch and cookies after school in the media center, to an afternoon tea at a local hotel.

School Awards Assembly – Many clubs save their contest awards for the end-of-year Honors Night at the school. For student winners who have never received public recognition before, it can be a true confidence booster to be honored in front of all their teachers and peers. It is also a good way for a Rotary club to receive recognition, too!

Rotary Club Meetings or Other Rotary Assemblies – Rotarians in Georgia often say that their favorite meeting of the year is when student winners read their *Laws of Life* essays aloud at a meeting. It is always moving – and sometimes eye-opening – to hear young people reflect on their challenges, their struggles, their victories, and their most joyful moments in life. Asking winning students and their parents and/or guardians to attend a Rotary meeting and to read their essay aloud is a true “win-win” for everyone in attendance.

Who Should Be Invited to An Awards Event?

The awards celebration is an excellent way to publicize and promote your *Laws of Life* essay contest. The event allows you to attract more people to the contest, especially potential funders. Prospective donors are often so moved by the ceremony that they offer to support the contest even before the banquet or reception is over! Every attempt should be made to invite as many people as possible. Be sure to invite:

- students who will receive a contest prize, as well as two guests of their choosing (parents, guardians, or friends)
- the teacher contest chair for each participating school
- contest sponsors.

Also, consider inviting:

- school officials (principals, superintendents, school board members)
- teachers who participated in the contest
- contest judges and their spouses
- contest committee members and their spouses
- potential contest sponsors
- community and political leaders
- members of the media.

As a general rule, students, parents, school officials, and community leaders should not have to pay to attend the awards banquet/reception. Remember, the event is designed to honor the young people who have written award-winning essays, as well as everyone else who has contributed in some way to the contest. The only exception might be if a winning student wanted to include more members of their family beyond the 2 guests that have been invited free of charge. In that instance, it is reasonable to ask that the additional family members pay for the cost of the extra meals (this is not an issue if hosting a reception).

If you cannot afford to host all the potential invitees, pare back the event so that all may attend without a charge.

“I attended our local awards ceremony for the Laws of Life winners, and it was incredibly inspirational. We all had tears in our eyes and walked away better for having been there.”

-- Carol F., Teacher, Columbus, GA

Awards Ceremony Agenda

At the ceremony, winners are usually presented with a cash award, contest certificate, or medallion. The awards ceremony is also the time to recognize the teachers, school administrators, and anyone else whose hard work made the contest a success.

The top student winners should be invited to read their prize-winning essays at the ceremony. The essays are the “heart” of the contest, and giving students the opportunity to share their life lessons with others is invaluable. It is helpful to let students know in advance that they will have the opportunity to read their essays. Ask the student’s English teacher or contest chair, or the school’s drama coach, to practice with the student so that he or she will have confidence in front of the podium. (Alternatively, a Rotarian who has experience in public speaking may volunteer to work with the winning students before the ceremony.) Some students’ essays are very private, so if a student does not want to read his or her essay in front of crowd, please respect the student’s decision.

Some contests also include entertainment (student quartets or vocal groups) or a keynote speaker in their ceremonies. Often, the best guest speakers are teachers (usually a *Laws of Life* School Contest chair) who talk about the value of the essay contest in the classroom.

Award Ceremony Programs

Most student recognition events have some type of printed program for attendees. Programs are easy to design on the computer and print on a color printer. The following are examples of what type of information to include in your program. Select those applicable to your contest.

- Names, grade (and schools if different) of all student finalists
- Names of judges
- Sponsor recognition (if any) for both cash and donated services (such as photography or printing)
- Teacher names for winning students
- School contest chair (“coordinator”) names
- Location and date of the event
- If multiple schools, include school names and school officials (principal, superintendent)
- Information about the contest (what it is about, brief history, etc)
- Contest Committee and contest volunteers

Certificates

Even if you plan to give students cash awards, it is nice to present students with a certificate, medallion, or other tangible memento of their accomplishment. Depending on the size of your contest, you may wish to give every student who writes a *Laws of Life* essay a certificate of accomplishment, or give a certificate only to the finalists and honorable mention students. Here are suggestions for what information can be included:

- Student's name
- School
- Award place (1st, Honorable Mention, etc)
- Name of your contest
- Date

A nice touch is to have the certificate signed by a local or state dignitary. Consider asking your school district superintendent, mayor, or even your governor to sign the certificates.

Publicity

A well-publicized contest generates excitement in schools and in the community, and coverage of the awards ceremony and the student essays provide an excellent public image opportunity. Contact your local media, and take advantage of other avenues to get the word out:

- School newsletters and websites
- Public libraries
- Chambers of Commerce
- Teacher association newsletters
- Rotary club and district newsletters and social media sites, district conferences.

Writing a Press Release

One way to build support for your Laws of Life Essay Contest is to develop a partnership with local media (newspapers, cable and local television, and radio). Writing press releases and having key FAQs about the contest available can help this effort. You can write a press release with the goal of encouraging schools to participate, recruiting volunteers and sponsors, recognizing students and teachers, or creating positive public image for your club or district.

Display the Essays at the Awards Event

If possible, display the essays in some way at your awards ceremony. This can be as simple as enlarging the essays and hanging them on the wall at the event. Students and parents are proud to see their work displayed.

Another idea is to enlarge essays and mount them on foam-core board with the student's picture and display them around the banquet room on tables or easels. Allow 15-30 minutes of the event time for attendees to view the essays – it is a wonderful way to honor each of the finalists.

Publishing an Essay Booklet

Publishing the essays in a booklet is another way to showcase students' accomplishments, as well as create an effective marketing tool. The essay publication can be handed out at the awards event or mailed afterwards to students, teachers, judges, and sponsors. The compilation is a wonderful and enduring memento of the contest, and the essays are so moving that reading them often convinces potential sponsors that they too should participate in the contest.

Sometimes a local business will underwrite the cost of the essay publication or local printing companies will offer their services at a discounted rate.

The first few pages of the essay publication often include a letter (or several letters) from the contest sponsor(s), a local public official, the school superintendent, etc. Most important, the publication contains the essays of the winning students. The finished publication can be professionally printed and bound, or simply copied and stapled.

The essay publication may be widely distributed to schools, libraries, firehouses, police stations, hospitals, retirement centers, YMCAs, etc. In addition to promoting the contest, the collection helps change the perception that young people are without values and principles. The essays are testimonies to the many parents, teachers, and adults who have worked hard to provide young people with a moral compass.

TIP: Always make sure you have written permission of the student and his or her guardian to print the essay. Even though the student entry form gives such permission, it is best to secure the permission a second time.

Publishing Essays on the Web

If your budget does not permit publication of the essays in a booklet form, considering publishing the essays on a school or Rotary club or district website. You can send the link to students, parents, judges, and sponsors to highlight the winning essays. When posting student work on the web, it may be advisable to use only first names and last initials, even if you have permission to use the student's full name.

Thank Yous and Follow-Up

Close each contest year with thank yous to everyone involved. Letters, e-mails, short videos, bulletin notices—even polished apples for the teachers—are nice. Be creative and nurture the new community ties you have made.

The Georgia Rotary Clubs Laws of Life Essay Contest trusts that you have found this publication to be helpful. If your Rotary club or district starts a local Laws of Life contest, we would appreciate hearing from you.

lawssoflife@georgialawssoflife.org

APPENDIX 1

Sample *Laws of Life* Teacher's Guide

This sample *Laws of Life* Teacher's Guide
was prepared by the Georgia *Laws of Life* Essay Contest.

For a Georgia Rotary Clubs *Laws of Life* Essay Contest Teacher's Guide, contact
lawsoflife@georgialawsoflife.org
404.590.8039

The Georgia Laws of Life Essay Contest is owned and operated by the Rotary Districts Character Education Program, Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit organized exclusively for charitable and educational purposes.

www.georgialawsoflife.org

The *Laws of Life* Essay Contest

Quick Facts

What is the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest?

The *Laws of Life* Essay Contest is a classroom-based writing and character education program for students. Students are asked to select a maxim or “Law of Life” (such as “Honesty is the best policy” or “Kindness is the highest form of wisdom”) and to write an essay explaining how the maxim applies to the students’ lives.

The essay contest gives students an opportunity to reflect on important life lessons while working on critical writing skills. The contest fits into ELA Core Curriculum Standards and allows schools to easily implement their state-mandated character education requirements.

Does the *Laws of Life* contest meet the state mandated character education requirements?

The *Laws of Life* Essay Contest is a free, easy-to-implement way for high schools to meet most state’s or school district’s character education mandate and to support the school’s language arts curriculum.

What makes the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest different from other essay contests?

The *Laws of Life* Essay Contest rewards students of all achievement levels. The essays are judged primarily on the degree to which the essay writer shows that he or she has earnestly reflected on a law of life and applied it to his or her life.

How does the *Laws of Life* contest fit in with Core Curriculum standards?

The contest is operated through a school’s English or Language Arts department. The essay assignment works well with Core Curriculum and other writing standards, including:

- RC 3 - Acquires new vocabulary in each content area and uses it correctly.
- W 1 - Establishes appropriate organizational structure, sets a context and engages the reader, maintains a coherent focus throughout, and signals closure.
- W 4 - Practices both timed and process writing and, when applicable, uses the writing process to develop, revise, and evaluate writing.
- C 1 - Demonstrates understanding and control of the rules of the English language, realizing that usage involves the appropriate application of conventions and grammar in both written and spoken formats.
- C 2 - Demonstrates understanding of manuscript form, realizing that different forms of writing require different formats.

“The Laws of Life contest makes young people think about their life’s values and articulate them in a way that is meaningful to them. It is not just another contest on creativity and essay-writing capabilities. Writing a Laws of Life essay challenges, me and makes me realize things about myself that I might never know otherwise. Thank you, Laws of Life!”

– Maylene K., former Parkview High School student

LAWS OF LIFE TIMELINE

| | |
|-------|---|
| _____ | Essays due _____ |
| _____ | School Winners are announced |
| _____ | Regional or State Winners are announced (if applicable) |
| _____ | Student awards and teacher honoraria are presented |

CONTEST AWARDS (Sample Only)

The **Laws of Life** Essay Contest has significant student and teacher awards. For 20XX-20XX, the awards are as follows: (Adjust as needed.)

City-wide or District-wide Student Awards

- \$1,000 - First place contest winner
- \$750 - Second place winner
- \$500 - Third place winner
- \$250 - Fourth place winner

School Level Student Awards (Sample Only)

Each school that submits a minimum of [X number of essays] is guaranteed to have at least one [\$100 / \$50 / \$20] student winner. A school that generates a minimum of 100 essays per grade level (9-12) will have four (4) cash winners: a \$XX School Winner and three \$X Grade Winners. For schools that generate fewer than 200 essays, the award levels are modified. Please contact for details.

Teacher Awards and Honoraria

- **\$100 award** to the English teacher of the overall First-Place Student Winner.
- **\$100 honorarium** to each Teacher Contest Chair who generates essays from at least **25 percent** of a school's total enrollment (or a minimum of 250 essays, if the school enrollment is less than 1,000 students).

SCHOOL CONTEST CHAIR RESPONSIBILITIES

The School Contest Chair is the liaison between the *Laws of Life* contest organizer and the school. Contest Chairs should:

- Promote the contest within the English/Language Arts department, and to the school administration.
- Make current contest materials (Teaching Tips, Student Pointers, etc.) available to everyone, as needed. **(Do not use materials from prior years' essay contests and do not use sample forms downloaded from national websites.)**
- Distribute student bookmarks supplied by the Laws of Life contest.
- Submit X number of essays per participating grade level to _____ by [DATE]. (Note to contest organizer: For small essay contests, you may ask teachers to submit all essays written. For large contests, you may want teachers to prescreen the essays and only submit the top contenders to you.)
- Keep track of the total number of essays written from each grade level and record that information on the School Tally Form. Submit the School Tally Form along with the essays.
 - **Tip: Have each English teacher count the number of essays written in his/her classes, then tally these numbers for the total.**

Even though you may not be submitting all essays per grade, the total number of Laws of Life essays written by your school is a key factor in the continued success of the contest.

Please encourage as wide a participation in the contest as possible.

- **NEW!** In addition to the honorarium mentioned, Contest Chairs who generate essays from **80 percent** or more of a school's total enrollment will be named a "**Laws of Life Teacher of Distinction.**" Those teachers may list the honorary title on their resumé, email signature block, etc.

ESSAY REQUIREMENTS

When writing a *Law of Life* essay, students should be original and should "write from the heart."

- **Essays should be 500 to 700 words in length, typed, and double-spaced.** Students should include a word count, if possible.
- **Essays should be based on a student's personal experience or observations.** The essay should show how a Law of Life applies to a student's life. Essays that focus on a historical character or that read like a book review are not winning essays.
- **Essays should contain a "Law of Life" expressed as a maxim, saying, or quote.** ("Honesty is the best policy" is a Law of Life; the word "honesty" is not. Essays that do not contain a saying or quote are not eligible to win prizes.)

SUBMITTING ESSAYS TO THE LAWS OF LIFE CONTEST

Please complete the School Tally Form and submit with the essays by [DEADLINE] to _____. Schools that do not indicate the number of essays written per grade on the School Tally Form will not be eligible to receive cash prizes.

SELECTING YOUR SCHOOL'S TOP ESSAYS

If you are asked to select only a portion of the essays written from your school to submit to the contest, please follow these tips in deciding which essays to select.

In selecting their top essays, some schools rely on teacher decisions, some schools use peer input from students, and other schools ask retired teachers or other “outside” sources to read and select the essays.

GUIDELINES

Give your students the best chance to win awards by following these guidelines.

- Top winning essays may be published in our essay brochure, and school level winning essays sometimes appear in local newspapers. Therefore, essays that are potentially libelous, or which reflect negatively on other named or easily identifiable individuals, will not be selected as contest winners by the Laws of Life program. We cannot print unproven accusations or negative comments against people in your community.
- Do not submit essays from only your most academically advanced students. Students of all academic abilities and levels are eligible to win. Laws of Life judges primarily look at content and the application of a Law of Life. Coherence and basic writing skills are important, but perfect grammar and perfect spelling are not the judges' top criteria.
- Avoid the temptation to have all of your submitted essays about tragedies. The *Laws of Life* Essay Contest seeks to showcase a variety of essays, so variety in your submissions is encouraged.

CHECK LIST

In addition to the above, check to make sure that the essays submitted meet the following requirements:

- ___ Is the essay within the 500 to 700 word count?
- ___ Does the essay clearly state a Law of Life, expressed as a saying or quote?
- ___ Does the essay relate to the student's life experiences or personal observations? (Essays that focus exclusively on a historical figure, for example, are not potential winners.)
- ___ Does the essay have a Student Entry form attached (stapled, not paper-clipped)?
- ___ Is the student entry form signed by the student, and – if the student is under 18 years of age – by a parent or guardian?

WRITING A LAWS OF LIFE ESSAY

Student Tips

- A *Law of Life* is a wise saying or quote that contains words of truth, lasting meaning, or inspiration. Examples of *Laws of Life* include:
 - “An attitude of gratitude creates blessings.”
 - “You are only as good as your word.”
 - “To have a friend, be one.”
 - “Honesty is the best policy.”
 - “When it is dark enough, you can see the stars.”
 - “Smile and the world smiles with you.”
- Think about a true personal experience that has taught you about a *Law of Life*. The experience may have been a major event in your life, or it may have been a small, private moment when you came to understand something profound about life. Perhaps the experience was something traumatic, such as when you or family members were in a car wreck. Or perhaps the experience was something that makes you smile every time you think of it – the time your grandmother taught you how to bake a blueberry pie, or the time that you and a friend discovered that laughter was the best medicine.
- Write an essay that relates your experience to a *Law of Life*. Be sure to clearly state the *Law of Life* in your essay!
 - Remember that the best essays include lots of details. These details make the reader feel as though he or she was right there with you when the event occurred. Let the reader know exactly how you felt, and why.
- Your essay should be between 500 and 700 words. Essays that are shorter or longer than this will be disqualified from the contest. Please place the essay’s word count at the beginning or end of the essay.
- Complete the Student Entry Form and staple it to the top of your essay.
- Make a copy of your essay to keep; the copy that is sent to the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest will not be returned to you.

“Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart.” -William Wordsworth

LAWS OF LIFE ESSAY CONTEST

Teaching Tips

- Explain to students that the essay is an opportunity to write and reflect on their own life and values, and an opportunity to win cash prizes. The essay can be a personal narrative or an explanatory/informative essay that uses the students' experiences or personal observations.

LIST YOUR CONTEST AWARDS HERE

- Remind students that many prize-winning essays have been written by students who first thought they had nothing to write about. Stress that prize-winning essays come from students of all abilities and grades.
- Clearly explain the meaning behind the phrase *Laws of Life*.

A *Law of Life* is a wise saying or quote that contains words of truth, lasting meaning, or inspiration. Examples of *Laws of Life* include:

- “An attitude of gratitude creates blessings.”
 - “You are only as good as your word.”
 - “To have a friend, be one”
 - “When it is dark enough, you can see the stars.”
 - “Smile and the world smiles with you.”
- Consider handing out copies of the *Laws of Life* Sample Maxims sheet, or brainstorm with your students to create a list of maxims.
 - You may want to jumpstart your discussion by asking students several of the following questions:
 - What three qualities do you value in a friend, a teacher, or a parent?
 - Describe an incident or an event from which you learned a lesson “the hard way.”
 - Describe an event in which you went out of your way to help someone.
 - Describe a situation in which someone went out of their way to help you.
 - Do you have a parent, grandparent or teacher who often says a quote such as “A penny saved is a penny earned?” or “Anything worth doing is worth doing well?” What does that saying mean?
 - Remind students that the *Laws of Life* essay should be about a personal experience or personal observation. It might be about something traumatic or serious (a car wreck, a parents' divorce, a move from another state or country), or an ordinary event which gave a student a special insight into the meaning of life (an afternoon football game, a ride on a bus, or a heart-to-heart talk with a friend).
 - If your students have written a *Laws of Life* essay in the past, encourage them to look at this year's essay in a new light: If a student wrote about a sad and difficult life experience for last year's essay, he or she may want to write about something more light-hearted this year. Or if last year's essay was about an event that still has a repercussion in his or her life, ask the student to “dig deeper” and revisit the experience again – the student may be surprised by new insights and new meanings.
 - Remember that each *Law of Life* essay should:
 - 1) include a Law of Life or maxim
 - 2) relate to a student's personal experience
 - 3) be 500 to 700 words (approximately 1 ½ to 2 pages typed double-spaced)
 - 4) have a completed Student Entry Form stapled on top of the essay

- The student's name should not be written on the essay itself.
- IMPORTANT: Count the number of essays written by your students, and keep a record of the total number, by grade level. Your School Contest Chair will need this information to submit to the *Laws of Life* Contest.
- The essays will not be returned, so have students keep a personal copy of the essay in their files or make a copy for your files.
- See attached handouts, sample lesson plans, and sample rubrics.

Adapted in part from the Teachers Guide developed by The John Templeton Foundation.

LAWS OF LIFE ESSAY CONTEST

Student Entry Form

PLEASE PRINT LEGIBLY - Attach with a staple to the top of your essay.
DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ON THE ESSAY ITSELF

High School: _____

Grade: _____

Law of Life (This is the maxim or quote that you have written about, and it should appear in your essay):

Your Name: _____

Home Address: _____

City: _____ Zip Code: _____

E-mail _____

Parent's or Guardian's Name(s): _____

First & Last Name of Your English Teacher: _____

By signing this document, you and your legal guardian hereby give the Georgia Laws of Life Essay Contest the right to use this information, your essay, and your photograph and/or video image at its discretion and without limitation to publicize and promote the Georgia Laws of Life Essay Contest and/or its sponsors. By signing, you are also certifying that the essay is your own original work and truthfully reflects your personal life experiences.

Signatures: Essayist: _____ Date: _____

Parent or Guardian: _____ Date: _____

Students 18 years of age and older do not require a parent's or guardian's signature. If you are 18 or older, please check here: _____

LAWS OF LIFE ESSAY CONTEST

SCHOOL TALLY FORM

Name of School: _____

Name of Contest Chair: _____

E-mail Address of Contest Chair: _____

Total School Enrollment: _____

Total Number of Essays written by students from your school: _____

Percentage of Student Participation _____
(# of essays written divided by total school enrollment)

Total number of essays submitted to *Laws of Life* for judging: _____

Number of essays written by grade:

| | Total number of essays written | Total grade enrollment | Percentage | Total # of essays submitted for judging |
|----------|--------------------------------|------------------------|------------|---|
| Grade 9 | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Grade 10 | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Grade 11 | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Grade 12 | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

Signature: _____

By signing below, you are verifying that the numbers stated above are correct, to the best of your knowledge.

Contest Chair: _____ Date: _____

*** THIS FORM MUST BE SUBMITTED WITH THE ESSAYS***
*** THE ESSAY DEADLINE IS XXXX***
*** Mail to: Laws of Life Essay Contest, 001 Anystreet, Anytown, ***

Contest's phone number or email here

Sample Maxims

A “Law of Life” or maxim can be a quotation from a famous person, or a simple saying that you have heard.

A “law of life” should be short and easy to remember.

1. “The highest form of wisdom is kindness.” – The Talmud
2. “What is success? To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived.”
– *Ralph Waldo Emerson*
3. “Strength is a matter of a made-up mind.” – *John Beecher*
4. “Slow and steady wins the race.” – *Anonymous*
5. “Loving someone deeply gives you strength, while being deeply loved gives you courage.” – *Laotzu*
6. “Share a smile with other people and a smile will return to you.” – *Anonymous*
7. “Fall seven times; stand up eight.” – *Japanese proverb*
8. “Love is patient, love is kind.” – *I Corinthians 13:4*
9. “Beauty is a light in the heart.” – *Kahil Gibran*
10. “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.” – *William Hickson*
11. “Out of adversity comes opportunity.” – *Anonymous*
12. “Failure is not falling down, but refusing to get up.” – *Anonymous*
13. “No one knows what he can do until he tries.” – *Publilius Syrus*
14. “Mistakes are doorways to discovery.” – *Anonymous*
15. “To listen, when nobody else wants to listen, is a very beautiful thing.” – *Mother Teresa*
16. “The important thing is this: to be able at any moment to sacrifice what you are for what you could become.” – *DuBois*
17. “One does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore.” – *Andre Gide*
18. “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and he’ll eat forever.” – *Chinese Proverb*
19. “Good example is the best sermon.” – *Benjamin Franklin*
20. “Stop and smell the roses.” – *Anonymous*
21. “Strangers are just friends waiting to happen.” – *Anonymous*
22. “Bloom where you’re planted.” – *Anonymous*
23. “Courage is not the absence of fear; it is the conquest of it.” – *William Danforth*

LAWS OF LIFE ESSAY CONTEST

Quotations from frequently assigned books in ELA high school studies

The quotations below from authors Maya Angelou, Jane Austen, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Paulo Coelho, Harper Lee, William Golding, Alice Walker, William Shakespeare, Christina Baker Kline, and Bram Stoker could be used as a basis for a *Laws of Life* essay.

Teaching Tip:

Challenge your students to find a quotation from one of their assigned reading books.

“Instead, pursue the things you love doing, and then do them so well that people can’t take their eyes off you.” — Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

“Life is going to give you just what you put in it. Put your whole heart in everything you do, and pray, then you can wait.” — Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

“It’s such a happiness when good people get together.” — Jane Austen, *Emma*

“Success supposes endeavour.” — Jane Austen, *Emma*

“There are few things - whether in the outward world, or to a certain depth, in the invisible sphere of thought - few things hidden from the man who devotes himself earnestly and unreservedly to the solution of a mystery.” — Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*

“It is the peculiar nature of the world to go on spinning no matter what sort of heartbreak is happening.” — Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees*

“It’s...your time to live. Don’t mess it up.” — Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees*

“The hardest thing on earth is choosing what matters.” — Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees*

“The thing is—fear can’t hurt you any more than a dream.” — William Golding, *Lord of the Flies*

“Time moves slowly, but passes quickly.” — Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

“It’s the possibility of having a dream come true that makes life interesting.” — Paulo Coelho, *The Alchemist*

“The simple things are also the most extraordinary things, and only the wise can see them.” — Paulo Coelho, *The Alchemist*

“When each day is the same as the next, it’s because people fail to recognize the good things that happen in their lives every day that the sun rises.” — Paulo Coelho, *The Alchemist*

“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.” — Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

“It is good to test your limits now and then, learn what the body is capable of, what you can endure.” — Christina Baker Kline, *Orphan Train*

Template for Personal Narrative

source: <http://www.wikihow.com>

I. Set the scene

- a. Include a hook of some sort to pull readers into your narrative.
- b. Set the scene for your story. Avoid giving too many details, as you want your audience to keep reading.

II. Describe the problem or event

- a. Provide baseline information for your narrative, give details about the other characters in your story, or describe the feelings you were having while the events were happening.

III. Go into detail

- a. Help the reader connect with your narrative by describing the events and providing details about what was happening and how you were feeling.

IV. Talk about what you learned

- a. Share what you got from the experience, how it helped you, or why it was significant.

SAMPLE LESSON PLAN: Personal Narrative

Note: There are many different ways to incorporate the Laws of Life essay assignment into the classroom. Each school or each teacher should use the approach that best suits his or her students' learning needs. The sample plan provided below may be used or not, and its adoption will not affect the chances of your students winning a Laws of Life award.

Topic: Narrative Writing

Essential Question: How can I describe or explain a situation?

Standard(s):

W3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

- W 3a: Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.
- W 3b: Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
- W 3c: Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.
- W 3d: Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.
- W3e: Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative

W5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

Skills: The student will be able to:

W3a: Narrative:

- a. Describe or explain a problem, situation, or observation.
- b. Establish 1+ point(s) of view.
- c. Introduce narrator and/or characters.
- d. Use transitions to create smooth progression of experiences/events.

W3e: Narrative

- a. Reflect on what is experienced, observed, or resolved within the narrative.
- b. Write a conclusion that incorporates the reflection.

W5:

- a. Determine the purpose of a writing assignment.
- b. Identify the intended audience for an assignment.
- c. Create a new/unique approach.

Plan, write, edit, and rewrite the writing to match the audience and purpose.

Vocabulary Essential to This Lesson: intended audience, aphorism, maxim

Day 1: Warm-Up: Daily Grammar Practice - Conventions

- Review standards and vocabulary.
- Activating Strategy: Introduce students to the Laws of Life essay contest.
- Students choose a maxim and begin brainstorming—three reasons or examples that support their point.

Day 2: Warm-Up: Daily Grammar Practice - Conventions

- Review standards and writing task.
- Model thesis writing for students.
- Have students write their own statements that reflect the main idea of their essay.
- Students begin the rough draft of the introduction in class.

Day 3: Warm-Up: Daily Grammar Practice - Conventions

- Review writing task and monitor that students are on task with their writing.
- Review intended audience with students.
- Students will continue their rough drafts of the body and conclusion in class.

Day 4: Warm-Up: Daily Grammar Practice - Conventions

- Review writing task and monitor that students are on task with their writing.
- Have students read through their rough drafts and begin the editing process.
- Have students swap essays with a peer. Students will need to provide two peer reviews.

Day 5: Warm-Up: Daily Grammar Practice - Conventions

- Students will complete first drafts and submit for teacher review.

Laws of Life Sample Rubric #1 for W.11-12.12: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: Explanatory/Informative Writing

A *Laws of Life* essay can be a narrative essay or an explanatory/informative essay. This rubric is for explanatory/informative writing.

| Writing: Text Types and Purposes: Explanatory/Informative Writing | Exceeds | Proficient | Meets | Approaches | Does not meet |
|---|---|---|---|--|--|
| Introduction (W.11-12.2a) Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes it to create a unified whole. | A full and strong command of the component. Engages reader with a maxim and cites its source. | A consistent and moderately strong control of the component. Includes a maxim and gives its source. | A sufficient and average control of the component. Includes a maxim. | A minimal and moderately weak control of the component. Does not include a maxim. | Weak control or no control of the component. Does not include a maxim. |
| Develop Topic (W.11-12.2b) Develop topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic. | A full and strong command of the component. Fully explains why the maxim is important and how it has influenced the student. | A consistent and moderately strong control of the component. Explains why the maxim is important and how it pertains to the student. | A sufficient and average control of the component. Gives an adequate explanation of the maxim and why the student selected it. | A minimal and moderately weak control of the component. Explanation of the maxim is cursory. | Weak control or no control of the component. Does not explain the maxim. |
| Transitions/Links (W.11-12.2c) Use appropriate and varied transitions and syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts. | A full and strong command of the component. All sections are very well linked and links are varied. | A consistent and moderately strong control of the component. All sections are linked and links are varied. | A sufficient and average control of the component. Most selections are linked and links are varied. | A minimal and moderately weak control of the component. Only a few sections are linked. | Weak control or no control of the component. No sections are linked. |
| Precise Language & Jargon (W.11-12.2d) Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic. | A full and strong command of the component. Includes one or more appropriate metaphor, simile or analogy, plus precise language. | A consistent and moderately strong control of the component. Includes a metaphor, simile or analogy, and precise language. | A sufficient and average control of the component. Includes a metaphor, simile or analogy, but vocabulary is weak. | A minimal and moderately weak control of the component. Includes a poorly-chosen metaphor, simile or analogy. | Weak control or no control of the component. Does not include a metaphor, simile or analogy. |
| Conclusion (W.11-12.2f) Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g. articulating implications or the significance of the topic). | A full and strong command of the component. Conclusion refers to the selected maxim and provides a strong finish. | A consistent and moderately strong control of the component. Conclusion refers to the selected maxim and provides a defined ending. | A sufficient and average control of the component. Conclusion creates a discernable ending to the essay. | A minimal and moderately weak control of the component. The essay has a weak ending. | Weak control or no control of the component. The essay ends abruptly with no conclusion or summary. |

Laws of Life Sample Rubric #2

| | Excellent | Very Good | Meets the Standard | Needs Some Work |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| <p>Law of Life and Introduction (A 'law of life' is a maxim, saying or quotation that summarizes an ideal, a character value, or a principle about life. If followed by everyone, the <i>Law of Life</i> would make the world a better place.)</p> | <p>You have clearly stated a <i>Law of Life</i> in a captivating introduction. The <i>Law of Life</i> is short and pithy and can be easily remembered and repeated.</p> | <p>You have clearly stated a <i>Law of Life</i> in an interesting introduction.</p> | <p>You have a <i>Law of Life</i>, but the <i>Law of Life</i> is excessively long or wordy, and the introduction lacks sparkle or authority.</p> | <p>You did not include a maxim or <i>Law of Life</i>, or your <i>Law of Life</i> is vaguely implied, but not stated.</p> |
| <p>Personal Relevance of Your Selected Law of Life</p> | <p>You convincingly and fully explain how the maxim pertains to or has influenced your life.</p> | <p>You fully explain how the maxim pertains to or has influenced your life.</p> | <p>You adequately explain how the maxim relates to your life.</p> | <p>Your essay is vague and does not relate to your life or experiences.</p> |
| <p>Organization and Development of Essay</p> | <p>Your essay flows very smoothly from beginning to end, with transitions and a strong conclusion. It includes well-chosen facts and relevant details.</p> | <p>Your essay flows from beginning to end, with transitions and a conclusion. Significant facts and details are included.</p> | <p>Your essay has a beginning and an end, and a middle section that ties the two together. Facts and details are included, but could be better explained.</p> | <p>The essay does not have an obvious beginning or end. The reader cannot easily follow your narrative.</p> |
| <p>Precise Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use precise language and varied vocabulary • Employ a metaphor, simile or analogy to manage the complexity of the topic. | <p>Word choices are precise and varied. You used one or more imaginative metaphor, simile or analogy. Your essay is a pleasure to read.</p> | <p>Word choices are precise and varied. You used at least one metaphor, simile or analogy.</p> | <p>Word choices are adequate, but not inspired. You used a metaphor, simile or analogy, but it could have been more original.</p> | <p>Word choices seem hurried and awkward, and you did not use a metaphor, simile or analogy.</p> |
| <p>Meets Specified Essay Requirements: 500 to 700 words, with word count; typed and double spaced; completed student entry form.</p> | <p>Yes to all.</p> | <p>Yes to all.</p> | <p>Yes to all.</p> | <p>No to one or more of the requirements.</p> |