

Laws  
of  
Life



THE GEORGIA  
ROTARY CLUBS  
LAWS OF LIFE  
ESSAY CONTEST



Bridge  
to the  
Future

The Essay as a  
Pathway

“A #2 pencil and  
a dream can take  
you anywhere.”

-Joyce Meyer

2024-2025

Georgia Rotary Districts  
Character Education  
Program, Inc.

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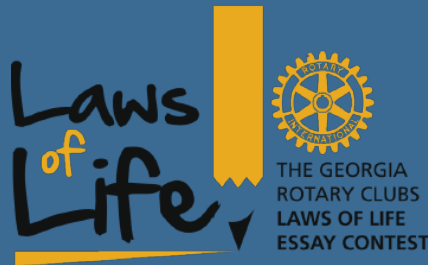
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*“The future belongs to those  
who believe in the beauty of  
their dreams.”*

**— Eleanor Roosevelt**

With excitement and pride, we are happy to share the 2024 - 2025 Georgia Laws of Life Essay Collection, a tribute to the power of character and the voices of Georgia's youth.

Each year, we are moved and inspired by the profound reflections of high school students who write about the life lessons that shape who they are and who they hope to become. This year, more than 30,000 students from across the state took part in that journey, writing essays and sharing stories of resilience, love, courage, kindness, and purpose. From that extraordinary group, 190 students were recognized as school-level winners - and among them, eight remarkable young people were named our 2024–2025 state winners.

The essays are powerful reminders that no matter the challenges we face, character matters. Whether writing about perseverance through personal struggle, the quiet strength of empathy, or what it means to give back, these students demonstrate the meaningful thought and heart that define the Laws of Life.

One student shared, *“My Laws of Life essay was more than just a school paper—it was the story of me and the story of my becoming.”* Another wrote, *“Writing helped me look back on my life’s experiences and realize how many powerful lessons I have learned.”*

We also celebrate the many people who make the Contest possible. We are grateful to the educators who guide students through the process and to the donors, volunteers, and partners who support this work with generosity and vision.

Thank you for standing with us to champion character, building a strong foundation for Georgia's youth, and investing in future generations.

With gratitude,



**Mike Berg**  
Board Chair, GRDCEP  
PDG 6910  
Rotary Club of Dawsonville



**Carol Gray Walker**  
Executive Director, GRDCEP  
Rotary Club of Midtown Atlanta



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The Georgia Rotary Clubs Laws of Life Essay Contest is the sole program of the Georgia Rotary Districts Character Education Program, Inc (GRDCEP), a 501 (c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit organized exclusively for charitable and educational purposes.

Tax ID# 27-1203817





# State Winner

## Alphonsa Joby

Denmark High School, 11th Grade

*"It's Not What You Got, It's What You Give"*

Growing up, my father always seemed to be on a mission. His acts of service were like the threads of an intricate tapestry—subtle, persistent, and woven with purpose. Whether it was organizing food drives or managing a charity for underprivileged communities in India, he moved with quiet conviction. Watching him was like observing a sculptor at work, each action deliberate and full of meaning. But to me, it was all a blur, a puzzle. Why dedicate so much of yourself to people you didn't even know?

"You'll understand one day," he'd say, his voice steady with certainty. I wasn't convinced. Years later, I found myself gripping a box of sandwiches and toiletries as I walked through the streets of downtown Atlanta with my Church youth group. The city's hum seemed louder that day, each sound punctuating the unease gnawing at me. I wasn't entirely sure how I'd ended up there. Perhaps out of curiosity, or perhaps something deeper pulling me forward. The crisp air carried an unfamiliar energy, a mix of anticipation and unease, but as we neared a group gathered near a shelter, something shifted. The people we approached weren't just individuals; they were stories etched into faces marked by time and circumstance. I handed a sandwich to a man named James. His hands, cracked and calloused, held the sandwich as though it were a rare gem. "Thank you," he said softly, his words deliberate and full of weight. In his eyes, I saw a reflection of something I couldn't yet name, a depth of gratitude that felt far larger than the act itself. The day unfolded in snapshots: a child clinging to her mother, a young man sharing a laugh with one of our volunteers, an elderly woman smiling through tears. Each encounter felt like a brushstroke on an unfinished canvas getting more colorful with each interaction, vivid and deeply human. By the time we packed up, I was silent, a tangle of thoughts swirling in my mind.

"So, what did you think?" one of the volunteers asked as we loaded the last box into the van. It was a simple question, but the answer wasn't.

"It's like... giving fills a space I didn't know was empty," I said finally. She nodded, her knowing smile speaking volumes. That night, I found myself replaying the day's events.

The world often encourages us to accumulate—possessions, achievements, accolades. But giving had an intangible power. There's a quiet truth that often goes unnoticed. The more you give, the fuller your life becomes. It felt expansive, like opening a window in a stuffy room. I thought of my father and his unwavering commitment to others. His late nights and tireless efforts weren't about duty or obligation. They were about something far more profound—a joy that comes only when you place others before yourself. My father's actions weren't isolated acts. They were the threads that shaped the fabric of my own life. His unwavering dedication to giving became a part of me, guiding my actions and anchoring my values. The tapestry he began is one I now continue, each act of kindness adding its own color and texture. Now, I see that truth clearly: giving transforms. It doesn't just alter the lives of those you help; it shifts something within you. It makes you more aware, more connected, more whole. I think back to my dad's words—"It's not what you got, it's what you give." At the time, they seemed simple. Now, they resonate with the force of a revelation. They've become my compass, guiding me toward a life filled with purpose and light. In every act of kindness, there's a chance to create something larger than yourself and that's a lesson worth living.



# 1st Runner Up

## Moatapari Agbere

Chattahoochee County High School, 12th Grade

*“Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better, it’s not.” - The Lorax*

The first culture shock I experienced when stepping on American soil from Ghanaian soil was how huge the food portions were. The second was how accessible knowledge was.

Everywhere I looked, there was an opportunity to learn—libraries in every city, reliable public schools, and an endless stream of educational videos on YouTube. It was a stark contrast to where I had come from. In Ghana, libraries were a thing of the imagination, and books were a luxury only the wealthy could afford. The quality of the school system depended not on the students' potential but on how much money their families had.

At the end of senior year, every student in Ghana takes a test called the WASSCE to determine university placement. With limited access to education, few people passed, and a cycle emerged—students failed the test and turned to low-paying labor jobs. These jobs became so oversaturated that even those positions were hard to find resulting in many young people ending up homeless.

I had always known that education was the key to breaking this cycle, but I was never the kind of person to take the first step. I was content with completing other people's sentences instead of starting my own. In first grade, I never wanted to be the line leader. I would stand behind trees, waiting for someone else to sit behind the cone so I could follow. I was afraid of what would happen if I made a mistake. What if I took the wrong path to class? What if everyone saw me mess up? So, I stayed comfortable in my number-two spot.

But suddenly, this problem hit close to home. My best friend called me after failing her practice tests. She had lost all hope, convinced she was going to end up on the streets. I was devastated. We had the same intelligence, the same drive—yet because of where we were born, our futures looked completely different. It wasn't fair to her, and it wasn't right for me to sit back and watch the cycle continue.

That night, I watched “The Lorax” while making a list of things I wished existed. What if there were an online database of past WASSCE exams so students could study on their own? What if someone recorded lectures and posted them online like American YouTubers did? I sat there wishing—until a line from the movie struck me: “Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better, it’s not.” I realized then that wishing wasn't enough. I had to act.

I had some basic coding experience from online courses, so I opened a file and started typing. I created a database of past WASSCE exams with detailed answers to help students prepare. I started recording short video lessons explaining difficult concepts, hoping to make studying easier.

At first, there was no traction. A few people from my school viewed my videos, but it felt like I was shouting into the void. Then, after two weeks, I got a comment: “Thank you, this helped so much.”

Then another: “Can you make a video about quadratic equations? I’m struggling with that.”

With every person who asked for help, I felt my fear fading. This wasn't just a project anymore—it was a responsibility, so, I kept going. I built my database, expanded my video lessons, and eventually, I started a virtual classroom. Every week, I tutor students for free, guiding them through the same challenges I had once faced.

I had spent my whole life avoiding being the first. But now, I had become the person I once looked for—the one who stepped up when no one else did.

As I look at the world now, I no longer see problems as issues to report to someone else. I see them as opportunities to create change—change that I will lead. Every step I take—even a small, hesitant one—can set off a chain reaction of empowerment and transformation.

And now, I don't wait for someone to start the chain. I will be the first.



# 2nd Runner Up

## Kelly Stewart

Midtown High School, 10th Grade

*Treat People the Way You Want to Be Treated*

When I think back to first grade at KIPP Austin Comunidad School in Austin, Texas, a particular memory stands out. A time when I faced bullying but chose to lead with kindness. It wasn't easy, but this experience taught me the value of treating others the way I wanted to be treated, a lesson that continues to shape how I approach people and challenges today.

Antonio, my classmate, was my first bully. He always found ways to make me feel small, whether it was through teasing, snatching my things, or making loud comments to embarrass me. One particular moment that stuck with me was when he took my pencil box—my favorite one with bright red with lightning mcqueen drawings and dumped it on the floor for everyone to see. The sound of pencils and crayons flying everywhere felt like an explosion of embarrassment, and I stood in silence as my classmates stared. Instead of picking a fight, I knelt down, collected my supplies, and quietly told myself to stay calm.

At home, my mom had always emphasized the importance of kindness. "Kelly," she'd say, "treat people with the respect you want, even if they don't deserve it right now." I didn't fully understand what she meant back then, but I tried to live by it anyway. Even though Antonio's behavior hurt, I made a decision; I wasn't going to let him turn me into someone bitter or mean.

The turning point came during recess one sunny afternoon. Antonio was running across the playground when he tripped and fell hard on the concrete. I saw him sit up, clutching his knee, his face scrunched up in pain. Kids nearby paused but didn't move to help—they just stared. For a split second, I thought about walking away too. After all, this was the same kid who had made my life miserable. But something inside me wouldn't let me.

I walked over to him, ignoring the tightness in my chest. "Are you okay?" I asked, extending my hand to help him up. Antonio looked at me, his eyes wide with surprise. He didn't say anything, but he let me help him to his feet. I walked with him to the nurse's office, staying quiet the whole way. It wasn't a big moment by any means, but it felt significant.

After that, something shifted. Antonio didn't stop being Antonio overnight, but he started to soften. The teasing became less frequent, and eventually, it stopped. A few weeks later, during a group activity, he apologized. "I am sorry for picking on you all the time," he said awkwardly, avoiding eye contact with me. I remember nodding, unsure of what to say, but feeling a small weight lift off my shoulders.

Looking back now, I realize that Antonio wasn't just being mean for no reason. Maybe he was struggling with things I didn't know about. Maybe he didn't know how to express himself in a better way. Whatever the case, I'm glad that I chose to treat him with kindness rather than anger or resentment.

This experience taught me that kindness isn't just about making others feel good, it's about staying true to who you are, even when it's hard. It's easy to let someone else's negativity drag you down, but it's much more powerful to rise above it. By treating Antonio the way I wanted to be treated, I not only stayed true to myself but also changed how he treated me. Now, as a high school sophomore, I carry this lesson with me. Whether it's in group projects, everyday interactions, or moments of conflict, I remind myself to lead with kindness. You never know what someone else is going through, and a small act of compassion can make a bigger impact than you realize.

At KIPP Austin Comunidad, I didn't just learn about reading and writing, I learned about empathy, resilience, and the power of staying kind. For that, I'll always be grateful.



# 3rd Runner Up

Om Patel

Columbus High School, 11th Grade

*"The good physician treats the disease; the great physician treats the patient who has the disease." - William Osler*

## The Pulse of Healing

The antiseptic scent of the hospital hung thick in the air, blending with the relentless hum of machines and the hurried shuffle of nurses' shoes. As a high school volunteer, my scrubs felt like a uniform for a world beyond my own—a world of urgency, life, and death. In this environment, I was tasked with small, seemingly insignificant duties: transporting patients, restocking supplies, offering a smile. Yet, these moments taught me something far greater than I ever expected. I learned that true healing was not just about curing; it was about caring.

One patient, a man battling a chronic illness, became an unexpected teacher. His body, fragile and worn, bore the marks of years of struggle, yet his spirit radiated a quiet strength. I remember adjusting his wheelchair as I escorted him through the hospital halls. He thanked me with genuine warmth, as though I had performed some grand gesture. In that brief exchange, I realized that healing was not only about fighting disease—it was about preserving a person's dignity, offering them a sense of worth even in the face of illness. I understood at that moment what William Osler meant when he said, "The good physician treats the disease; the great physician treats the patient who has the disease." Medicine, I learned, was as much about understanding the human condition as it was about combating physical illness.

Another patient, a young girl recovering from a severe injury, offered me another important lesson. Though her body was fragile, her spirit was unshaken. She found joy in the simplest things—a coloring book, a kind word, or the presence of someone sitting with her. Her laughter, light and full of hope, filled the room and reminded me that healing is not just about the body. Emotional recovery—nurturing the soul—is just as crucial. It was through her that I realized the deep interconnectedness of mind and body in the healing process.

Then, there was the boy undergoing chemotherapy. His small frame was dwarfed by the hospital bed, but his smile was contagious, filling the sterile room with a sense of hope. As we spoke, he told me stories of his favorite superheroes, laughing despite his weariness. In his resilience, I saw the truth of something I had begun to understand: healing often involves far more than just medical treatment. It requires companionship, encouragement, and a belief in one's ability to endure. The power of human connection was as important as the medical care he was receiving. It was this realization that solidified my desire to pursue a career in medicine—not just to heal the body, but to offer comfort, hope, and strength in the most challenging of times.

These experiences were transformative. They taught me that medicine is not a cold, clinical process; it is an art—an art that requires empathy, listening, and understanding. While the science of medicine is important, it is the compassion behind the treatment that makes the greatest impact. Every small act of kindness, every moment of connection, ripples outward, affecting not just the patient but their family, the medical staff, and the entire healing environment.

Reflecting on these moments, I realize that my time in the hospital did more than simply affirm my desire to pursue medicine—it taught me the essence of true healing. It is not only about curing the body but also about comforting the soul. As I move forward in my journey toward becoming a doctor, I carry with me the profound understanding that healing is far more than a physical process. It is about offering care in its most holistic form, providing both the skill of a physician and the compassion of a human being.



# 4th Runner Up

## Kinley Carr

Bremen High School, 12th Grade

*"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."  
- Mahatma Gandhi*

### Called to Care

"And the color will look great against your royal blue robe."

Yes, the color contrast. I added this perk to my mental "pros list" of earning a red service cord. Service hour log in hand, I walked out of the counselor's office and across the unfamiliar campus to my ninth-grade English class.

When I began high school, I wrote a list of accomplishments I hoped to achieve by graduation. A major goal was earning the red cord awarded to students who complete 300 hours of service. It is through this pursuit that I found a connection to Mahatma Gandhi's wisdom: "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." Over time, I have realized serving others means so much more to me than red thread—it is a calling. The impact of my experiences helping others has created in me a passion for service I plan to pursue for the rest of my life.

While each and every service project has touched my life in unique ways, one stands out as a particularly special opportunity.

One winter break, I rode with a friend to volunteer at the local soup kitchen. It was an early February morning as we drove to the white metal building. It was small and unassuming, with one simple sign hanging by the entrance to indicate its purpose. The building seemed to prioritize one mission: providing for those who walk through its door.

Inside, a few friendly faces were already at work. The smell of seafood met me at the door, and I noticed hundreds of fried fish patties lining the wall. I was assigned to baking the chocolate chip cookies, and by the time the ovens were full, nearly forty of us were there working.

The following process was simple enough; we fried fish, mixed sauces, and assembled sandwiches. We placed one of each item in Styrofoam compartment containers and sealed the lids. Once finished, we all gathered together, joining hands to bless the food and those who receive it.

The turnout was overwhelming more than I expected. Just minutes after opening, a mile-long line of vehicles down the street as families patiently waited for their meals. Looking down the ever-growing stream of cars, I realized how fortunate I was to play even a minor role in such a larger cause. Greater still, was the impact the organization had on its recipients. The locals who stayed to eat in the kitchen, soaking in the warmth and comfort of the place, shared stories and laughter with one another and with us. I wish I could say those smiles and stories were always present—even outside the kitchen—but I knew it was a truly a gift to witness them in that moment.

With the meals given out, it was time to say goodbye to this wonderful group. The volunteers in that small metal building were the most welcoming, kind-hearted people I have ever had the privilege to work alongside. The guests who ate with us were equally warm, and the wisdom these individuals had to offer me far outweighs any service I could have offered them.

Before we left, the manager asked if I had any forms for her to sign.

"No ma'am, thank you."

In my heart, I had been paid in full.

Looking back, my time volunteering has left a mark on my life unmatched by any other experience to date. What began as a pursuit to gain a red cord became an opportunity for personal growth that redefined my understanding of what it means to serve. I decided long ago to stop logging my hours for credit and crossed the red cord off my freshman list. This allowed me to fully embrace the wonder that is serving others without worrying about receiving any physical reward in return. Though I expected nothing, I have been more than repaid in the form of sweet memories made along the way with people who have touched my life forever.



# 5th Runner Up

## Taylor Colwell

Jackson High School, 11th Grade

### *Love goes beyond words*

My family does foster care through an organization called Faith Bridge, and a few years ago a little girl named Kail lived with us. This day that I'm sharing with you was the day she taught me that love goes beyond words.

"Taylor, can you go play outside with Kali for a while?" my mom asked me one day during summer vacation just as I was finishing up my lunch. It was dino nuggets and a banana, that was all I would ever eat for lunch back then.

"Sure", I told her, "Just let me finish my lunch real quick." After I finished I went to get Kali ready to play outside. "Hey Kali, do you want to go play outside with me?" She looked up from her tablet with an excited expression on her face. She didn't say anything, but I didn't expect her to since she is autistic and could not speak. But even then, no one could deny that she had her own ways of talking to you. I got her off the couch and went to her bedroom to get on her tennis shoes. They were pink Minnie Mouse shoes with glitter on them. She tried to put up a fight about having to wear socks, but I just told her, "If you don't wear socks with your shoes then we are not going outside." After she heard that, she got a sad look on her face but put them on anyway.

When we got into the front yard she immediately ran straight past the trampoline and to the swingset. I, on the other hand, almost turned right back around and went inside because the yard was muddy from the rain. The swing set was an older one with yellow plastic over the chain and a dark green seat. She loved that thing so much that she would spend all day on it if she could. The only problem is that she can't swing by herself. She had one of the most beautiful smiles I have ever seen as I pushed her on the swing set. She was giggling and laughing the entire time, her hair going everywhere from the wind. Even though she could not say the words, anyone who watched would be able to tell that in that moment in time she was the happiest five year old in the world. She didn't need words to tell others how she felt. I played with her outside that day for almost two hours before she got tired. When it was time to go back inside she let me know by grabbing my hand and walking with me to the front door.

Once we got inside she ran to the couch and handed me the remote for the T.V. She wanted me to put on her favorite show, Mickey Mouse. While the show was playing she came up to me and asked me in her own unique way to go sit on the couch with her. I sat down on the couch next to her and she laid down in my lap. This was her main way of showing love, just sitting down with you and holding your hand. She still had that amazing smile on her face as I sat with her, that smile that conveyed how she felt far better than any words ever could. We sat on the couch like that for around an hour, her watching Mickey Mouse on the T.V and me reading a book on my phone.

Days like this one had played out many times before, but this one in particular stands out. I can't quite put it into words how that day was different, but that is kind of the point, isn't it? Words don't always work. I did not have to hear the words come from her mouth to know that she loved me, just as she did not need to fully understand the words from me to know that I loved her. Just because she could not use words never stopped her from conveying her emotions, and the love she has for her family. Her love went beyond words.





*George A. Stewart Jr.*  
*Character in Action Award*

**Kynedi Trent**

St. Teresa's Catholic School, 11th Grade

***"Success is not final, failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts." - Winston Churchill***

At 17, my life has been full of both opportunities and challenges. However, it is this quote that has reminded me that neither success nor setbacks define you entirely—it's your determination to keep going, learn, and grow that paves your future. Winston Churchill's words truly speak to the heart of perseverance. My journey through academics, especially when I faced challenges in reading, was daunting. When expectations are high, struggling in any subject can feel overwhelming, almost defining. But this quote reminded me that neither success nor failure is permanent—they're moments, not destinations. Therefore, I changed my challenges to opportunities. This quote is about the courage to push forward despite setbacks, using each experience as a stepping stone.

Specifically, this determination became a driving force in my journey to improve my reading skills. Back in elementary school, I struggled tremendously; while my classmates were diving into novels and passing comprehension tests with ease, I found myself falling behind. I was sad, I wanted to cry every time I fell behind while my very smart classmates went ahead. My pace was slower, and reading felt challenging and often discouraging. To keep up, I received extra help from a tutor and devoted my summer breaks to trips to the library. There, I would listen to books on tape, burying myself in stories in hopes of strengthening my skills and building my confidence.

One year, the school's media specialist announced a new book club, and despite my challenges, I decided to join. The experience was intimidating at first, but I realized that each hurdle, each difficult passage, was an opportunity to push forward rather than hold back. Every time I stumbled over a word or struggled with comprehension, I reminded myself of why I started and used it as motivation to improve. Rather than letting setbacks discourage me, I turned them into reasons to keep striving.

With this consistent effort and courage to continue, what once felt like a barrier in reading slowly transformed. Over time, I saw progress, and reading, which once felt like an area of weakness, became an area of growth and accomplishment. This journey showed me that progress doesn't always come easily, but with courage and persistence, even the most challenging obstacles can become stepping stones toward your strengths.

As my reading skills improved, I began to realize how powerful perseverance and support can be in overcoming academic struggles. Remembering how challenging reading once felt for me, I wanted to use my experience to help others who faced similar difficulties. I started by volunteering to assist younger students in reading, offering tips, encouragement, and understanding that only comes from having faced those challenges myself. Whether it's helping them sound out words or guiding them through comprehension exercises, I can empathize with their frustrations and offer reassurance that progress is possible with time and effort. Whenever I have the opportunity, I remind others that, "Success is not final, failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts". Thank you Winston Churchill.



*Susan G. Mason Founder's Award*

## Katherine Yang

Northview High School, 10th Grade

***"Appreciation is a wonderful thing. It makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well." -Voltaire***

My father always cut the lotus root. Every Lunar New Year, the crack, crack, crack of his knife set the rhythm of our preparations. One by one, the slices fell into water to stay crisp, their holey exteriors peering up like little eyes. Later, he'd pat them dry, stuff them with minced pork and scallion, and fry them until golden brown.

I never ate them. They were too crunchy, too oily, too strange. I'd wrinkle my nose. My father just laughed, patting my head with his starchy hands. I'd groan and wipe flour from my hair, sticking to my mother's side of the kitchen instead.

That fall, my father left for China to visit my grandmother. "I'll be back before New Year's," he said, stroking my hair one last time. I should have been sad. But beneath the sadness was a drop of relief-relief that the house might grow quieter, that I wouldn't have to rid my hair of the pasty flour on my father's hands as I squirmed away, that I'd finally have a peaceful dinner where I wouldn't have to dodge his chopsticks piling food onto my plate.

But then the borders closed.

At first, the virus was just whispers-something distant. But then it spread, and everything shut down: airports, borders, entire countries. My father called one evening. "It's just for a short while," he said. "Don't worry-bié dānxīn."

But weeks turned into months, and New Year's crept closer. The house felt heavier without him. My mother folded spring rolls in silence, and my younger brother sulked. "We won't have the lotus root pockets," he said, staring at the empty countertop where my father used to work. That night, I found myself in the kitchen, staring at a cold lotus root. The first cut was harder than expected. The stalk didn't yield the way it had for my father, and the knife skittered across the board. Crack. The sound wasn't light or steady like his-it was sharp, uneven, wrong. I sighed and kept cutting, dropping each slice into water. Their holes stared back with unblinking eyes.

By the time I finished, my hands were trembling. I grabbed the jar of pickled radishes—his secret ingredient—and twisted the lid. It didn't budge. For a second, I almost called out, "Baba!" out of habit. He would've opened it in one twist, laughing at my struggle. But he wasn't here.

I gripped the jar tighter and tried again. The lid popped with a faint hiss, and I nearly flinched, like I'd won a battle I didn't ask for. My father once told me that pickling was about persistence.

"The brine has quiet strength," he'd said, "jué xīn. Like... it doesn't give up."

Back then, I'd laughed. But now, I understood. My father had always been like the brinesteady, determined, transforming bitterness into sweetness.

Mixing the filling-minced pork, scallions, soy sauce-I worked clumsily. My father's pockets were perfect crescents; mine were lopsided lumps threatening to burst. Still, I pressed on.

When the pockets hit the oil, they sizzled loudly, filling the kitchen with their greasy aroma. I plated them, their edges too browned, their shapes uneven. My brother picked one up, took a bite, and said, "They're not the same."

"I know," I said. "At least you have pockets this year."

"They're good, though," he added softly.

Two years later, my father finally came home. At the airport, I spotted him-thinner, grayer, but the same duck walk. When he saw me, his face broke into a smile.

I pulled out a container of lotus root pockets I'd made the night before-perfectly sliced, tightly folded. "They look good," he said, inspecting one.

"I've practiced," I said.

"Will we eat them when we get home?"

"Yeah," I whispered. "I'll finish all the food you give me this time."

He laughed and reached for my hair, his familiar hand stroking it the way he always used to. This time, I didn't flinch or pull away. This time, I let him.

"Appreciation is a wonderful thing," Voltaire once said. "It makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well." My father's quiet persistence had become my own, and I couldn't be more grateful.

# Congratulations

## School Winners 2024-2025

**Alpharetta High School**  
Mohit Karthik, 9th Grade

**Bainbridge High School**  
Kenton Jordan, 12th Grade

**Barrow Arts & Sciences Academy**  
Abigail Welborn, 9th Grade

**Bremen High School**  
Kinley Carr, 12th Grade

**Cairo High School**  
Alejandro Adams, 12th Grade

**Carrollton High School**  
Erick Castro, 12th Grade

**Central High School (Carrollton)**  
Sadie Rogers, 9th Grade

**Chattahoochee County High School**  
Moatapari Agbere, 12th Grade

**Cherokee Bluff High School**  
Eva Scali, 9th Grade

**Cherokee High School**  
Aleera Rainey, 12th Grade

**Columbus High School**  
Om Patel, 11th Grade

**Dawson County High School**  
Kiarelys Albandoz, 10th Grade

**Deerfield-Windsor School**  
Jennings Curington, 9th Grade

**Denmark High School**  
Alphonsa Joby, 11th Grade

**Fannin County High School**  
Georgia Hasson, 9th Grade

**Forest Park High School**  
Hen'Nasia Graves, 9th Grade

**George Walton Academy**  
Ashton Grossman, 12th Grade

**Georgia Cyber Academy**  
Adibah Rahman, 10th Grade

**Gilmer High School**  
Jamison Payne, 11th Grade

**Greenville High School**  
Daliyah Ellison, 11th Grade

**Griffin High School**  
Taylor Griner, 11th Grade

**Haralson County High School**  
Nevaeh Traylor, 12th Grade

**Hart County High School**  
Charles Brown, 12th Grade

**Heritage High School**  
Jahni McAlister, 12th Grade

**Independence High School**  
Daniela Hernandez, 12th Grade

**Jackson High School**  
Taylor Colwell, 11th Grade

**LaFayette High School**  
Aarna Patel, 9th Grade

**Lamar County High School**  
Tessa Walls, 10th Grade

**Lassiter High School**  
Lauren Porter, 11th Grade

**Lovejoy High School**  
Zaniyah Foster, 12th Grade

**Lumpkin County High School**  
Matthew Pruett, 9th Grade

**McIntosh High School**  
Zanae Williams, 11th Grade

**Midtown High School**  
Kelly Stewart, 10th Grade

**North Paulding High School**  
Saniyya Hunt, 10th Grade

**North Springs High School**  
Maria Valentina Rodriguez,  
10th Grade

**Northside High School (Columbus)**  
Abbey Buckner, 11th Grade

**Northview High School**  
Katherine Yang, 10th Grade

**Pickens High School**  
Tessa Clark, 11th Grade

**Putnam County High School**  
Jaycee Maddox, 10th Grade

**Rockdale County High School**  
Oluwadarasimi Bamidele, 12th Grade

**Rome High School**  
Owen Hard, 9th Grade

**Shaw High School**  
David Gage, 9th Grade

**South Forsyth High School**  
Sanjana Diddige, 11th Grade

**Spencer High School**  
Matthew Cherry, 11th Grade

**St. Teresa's Catholic School**  
Kynedi Trent, 11th Grade

**Thomasville High School**  
Mia Young, 12th Grade

**Thomson High School**  
Nadya Williams, 9th Grade

**West Hall High School**  
Nyliveyah Harris, 9th Grade

**Wheeler High School**  
Harmony Canidate, 11th Grade

**We would also like to thank the following schools whose students received Honorable Mentions:**

Atlanta Classical Academy  
Banks County High School  
Decatur High School  
Dunwoody High School  
Eastside High School  
Etowah High School  
Flint River Academy  
Forsyth Central High School  
Furlow Charter School  
Martha Ellen Stilwell School of the Arts  
Mountain Laurel Academy  
Oak Mountain Academy  
Redan High School  
Salem High School  
Spalding High School  
Stephens County High School



# 2024-2025

## *Georgia Laws of Life Teachers of Distinction*

We salute the School Contest Chairs who achieved an 80 percent or higher student participation rate.

Bremen High School, Jessica Allen  
Carrollton High School, Hunter Spurlock  
Central High School, Megan Wooten  
Chattahoochee County High School, Tanya Jones  
Columbus High School, Mrs. E. Hagan Jenkins  
Dawson County High School, Lindsey Luchansky  
Forest Park High School, Shellie Taylor-Rogers  
George Walton Academy, Carolyn Steele  
Greenville High School, Patisia Childs  
Haralson County High School, Valerie Yearta  
Jackson High School, Kelly White  
Lamar County High School, Shaunasee Holder  
Northside High School, Sonya Trepp-Fuller  
Rome High School, Amanda B. Howell  
St. Teresa's Catholic School, Tye Beck



### *Congratulations*

**English Teacher of our State Winner:**

Victor Lane, Denmark High School

**English Teacher of the George A. Stewart, Jr. Character in Action Award Winner:**

Tye Beck, St. Teresa's Catholic School

**English Teacher of the Susan G. Mason Founder's Award Winner:**

Ashley Ulrich, Northview High School

**School Contest Chairs with 100% Student Participation**

Shellie Taylor-Rogers, Forest Park High School  
Carolyn Steele, George Walton Academy  
Patisia Childs, Greenville High School  
Valerie Yearta, Haralson County High School  
Tye Beck, St. Teresa's Catholic School



# Champions of Character Leadership Circle

**The Leadership Circle recognizes generous supporters whose lifetime giving has significantly impacted the Georgia Laws of Life Essay Contest.**

#### **Foundation Circle**

Bob Hagan  
Ed and Denise Outlaw

#### **Power of the Pen Society**

Lata and Manjeet Chinnan  
George Granade  
Susan and Gardiner Mason  
Amy and George Stewart  
Stephanie Windham  
Jennifer Yanulavich

#### **Templeton Fellow**

Jeff Downing  
Don Griffing  
Elizabeth and James Irvin  
Judy McMillan  
Jane and Randy Merrill  
John L. Mills  
Renee Welch

#### **Laws of Life Fellow**

Anonymous  
Jim Bailey  
Carol Bradshaw  
Mike Berg  
Darlene Drew  
Fran Farias  
Julie Goldberg  
Linda B. Hatten

Ray Huebschmann  
Anna and Steve Ivory  
Natalie Marshall  
Beth and Michael McIntyre  
John Neill  
Donna O'Neal  
James D. Porter  
Leslie and Lloyd Prince  
Mary and Don Robinson  
Ankur and Neha Saijpal  
Pam Shropshire  
Laura and John Stowell  
Kimberly Swaak-Maleski and  
Ewoud Swaak  
Gerry Taylor  
Carol Gray and Alex Walker  
Carleen and Gary Webb

#### **Champion**

Leah Adams  
Selena Blankenship  
Donna and Bruce Cook  
Sid Disher  
Dean Free  
Lee Hollingsworth  
Alicia Michael  
Anu and Chaitanya Narula  
Suraiya Razzak  
Susan and Robert Schwall  
Alexander Smythe  
Donna and Jim Squire  
Ken Townsend  
Charles Watterson  
Renee Weese

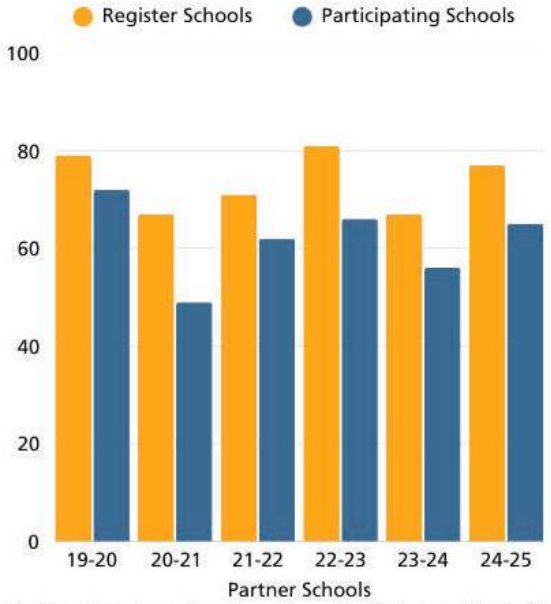
#### **Lata & Manjeet Chinnan Legacy Society**

**Individuals who have included Georgia Laws of Life in their estate plans through bequests and other deferred giving arrangements. Their commitment ensures a lasting legacy of character- building for future generations.**

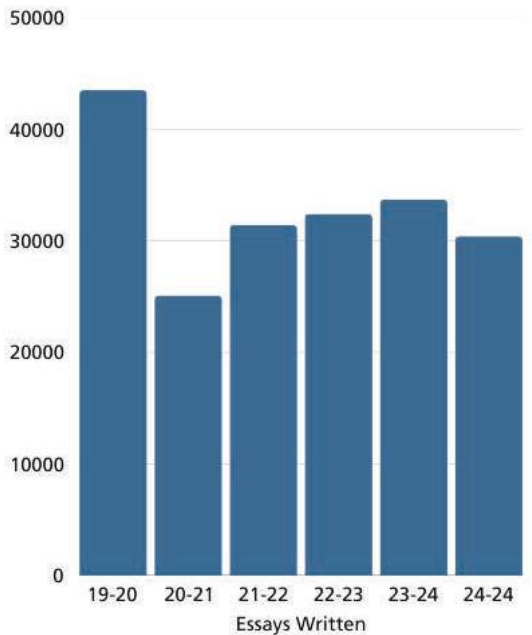
Lata & Manjeet Chinnan  
Judy McMillan



# 2024-2025 *Contest Highlights*

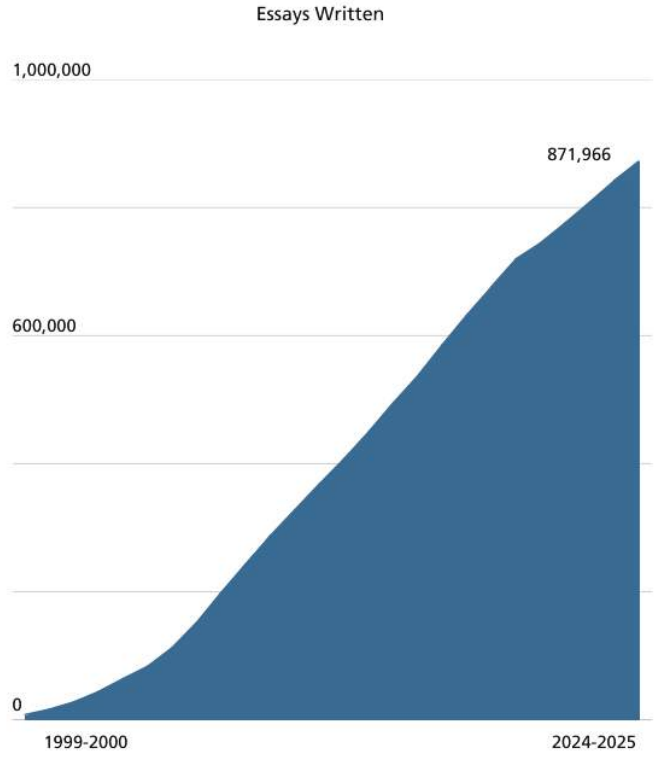


Registered schools may face circumstances that limit students' submitting essays for participation in the judging process.



**65**  
 Rotary Clubs  
 Partners

**\$19,150**  
 Cash  
 Awards



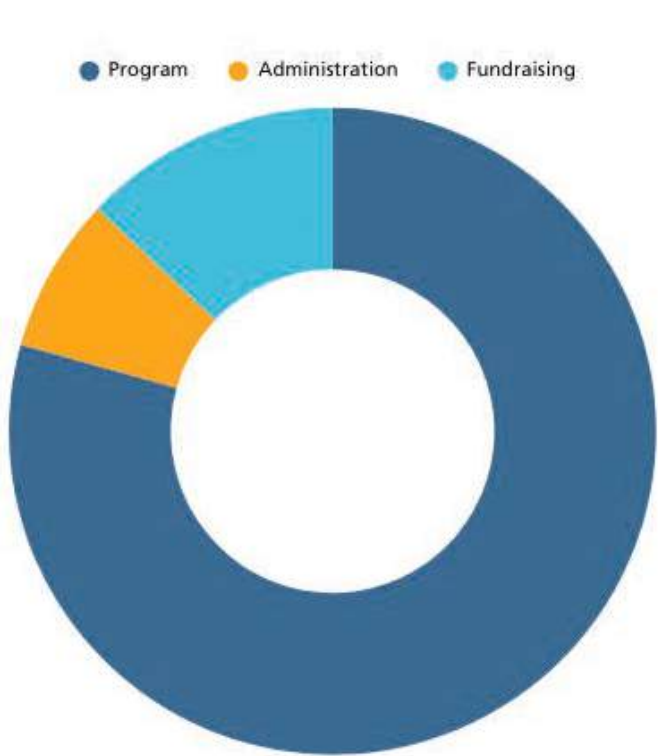


**136**  
Essay  
Judges

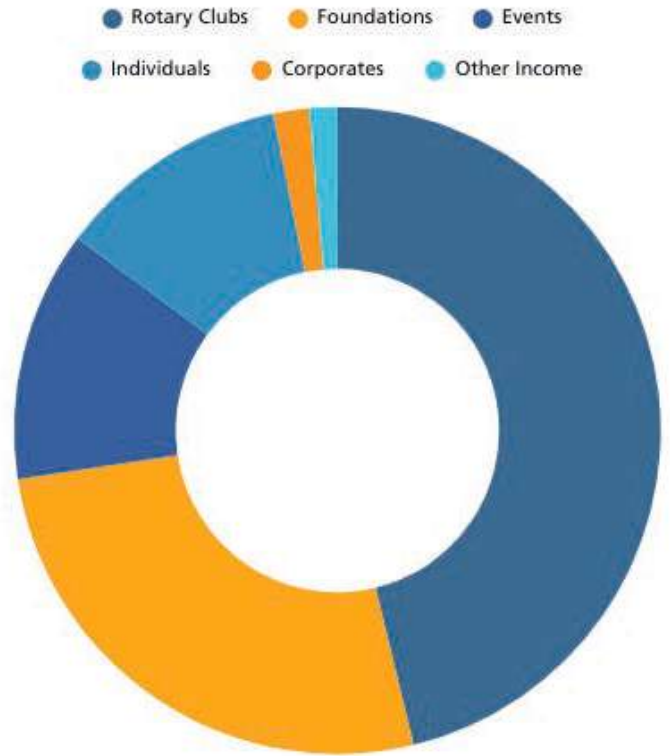
**65**  
Schools  
Partners

**30,394**  
Student  
Essayist

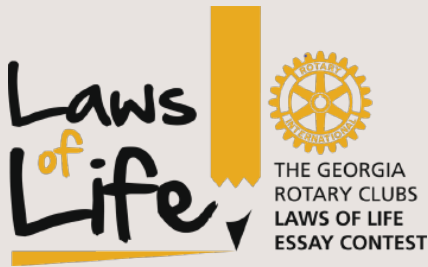
**141**  
Student  
Awards



FY24 EXPENSES



FY24 REVENUE



# 2024 - 2025 Champions of Character

We are grateful for the generosity of our donors, whose annual support empowers students to reflect on their values, embrace positive character traits, and grow into their best selves. Thank you for your contributions April 1, 2024 to April 1, 2025.

## Rotary Club Contest Sponsors

**We appreciate our Rotary Club Contest Sponsors for their support, connecting schools statewide, and making the contest possible.**

### Platinum

Rotary Club of Buckhead  
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Rotary Club of Barrow Area  
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Rotary Club of South Forsyth  
Rotary Club of Thomasville  
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Rotary Club of Alpharetta  
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Rotary Club of Bremen  
Rotary Club of Columbus  
Rotary Club of Greene and Putnam Counties  
Rotary Club of Griffin Daybreak  
Rotary Club of Hartwell  
Rotary Club of Jackson-Butts County  
Rotary Club of Lake Spivey/Clayton County  
Rotary Club of Peachtree City  
Rotary Club of Sandy Springs  
Rotary Club of Sugarloaf

### Bronze

Rotary Club of Albany  
Rotary Club of Americus  
Rotary Club of Bainbridge  
Rotary Club of Banks County  
Rotary Club of Barnesville  
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Rotary Club of Johns Creek North Fulton  
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Rotary Club of North Cobb  
Rotary Club of North Columbus  
Rotary Club of North Fulton  
Rotary Club of Rockdale County  
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Rotary Club of Stone Mountain  
Rotary Club of Thomson  
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Rotary Club of Winder

### Friends

North Metro Rotary Council  
Rotary Club of Carpe Diem  
Rotary Club of LaFayette  
Rotary Club of Rome Seven Hills

### Individual Donors

**Georgia Laws of Life pays tribute to the individuals whose generous contributions empower students today and tomorrow's future leaders.**

### Platinum

Lata and Manjeet Chinnan  
Jeff Downing  
Jane and Randy Merrill  
Ed and Denise Outlaw  
Jennifer Yanulavich

### Gold

George Granade  
Bob Hagan

### Silver

Anonymous  
Jim Bailey  
Julie Goldberg  
John L. Mills  
Donna O'Neal  
Kimberly Swaak-Maleski and Ewoud Swaak

### Bronze

Mike Berg  
Selena Blankenship  
Sid Disher  
Ray Huebschmann  
Anna and Steve Ivory  
Natalie Marshall  
Leslie and Lloyd Prince  
George and Amy Stewart  
Laura and John Stowell  
Gerry Taylor  
Carol Gray and Alex Walker  
Renee Weese  
Renee Welch  
Stephanie Windham

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**We gratefully acknowledge the following organizational partners for their commitment to tomorrow's leaders.**

### Presenting

The John Templeton Foundation

### Silver

Bear Manor Media

### Bronze

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Constellation Community  
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