



2025/2026 BBB AKRON LAWS OF LIFE ESSAY CONTEST

The Laws of Life Essay Contest asks students in grades 9-12 to self-reflect and write about ethical principles that will help them develop leadership skills and their character. During the process, they will learn more about themselves and what they stand for after reading the *UncommonSense*® FRAMEWORK. Additionally, it gives teachers the opportunity to further know their students and encourage empathy and compassion.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

The Laws of Life Essay Contest is open to schools with students in **grades 9-12** throughout the following counties: **Ashland, Medina, Portage, Richland, Summit and Wayne**. Students can submit essays individually or with a class, school or other youth group.

BBB Akron sponsors this valuable experience for Ohio's youth because we believe that to have trustworthy businesses tomorrow, we must encourage strong character in our youth today.

IS THERE A SPECIFIC LENGTH?

Essays should be **500-1000 words** (2-3 pages), **typed, single-sided** and **double-spaced**.

HOW ARE THE ESSAYS JUDGED?

Essays are judged primarily on content. A sample judging rubric is provided on the website.

HOW DO I GET STARTED?

A local contest is as simple as one teacher and one class - or whatever works best for your community. All resources are available at BBB Akron's website.

Download them for free at: **BBB.org/local/0272/loi**

Students may enter independently if their school does not offer it as an in-class assignment.

The Teacher's Guide has suggested lesson plans, essay prompts and recommendations on how to integrate this writing assignment within state and Common Core standards.

STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?

Contact **Kimberly Ickes, Senior Director of Administration** at **kickes@akronbbb.org** or **330-564-2483** for help on how to get started.

WHAT DO THE WINNERS RECEIVE?

Students Cash Awards:

Best Overall: \$750

Best Special Theme: \$500

Gold: \$250

Silver: \$150

Bronze: \$100

Students also receive a certificate and acknowledgment on social media. In 2025, **127 essays were submitted** with **over \$6,000 in prizes** given to 38 students, teachers and contest coordinators; as well as certificates for their winning entries.



INSPIRING ETHICAL CHAMPIONS OF TOMORROW



BBB AKRON LAWS OF LIFE ESSAY CONTEST

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

- Provides teachers with the opportunity to get to know their students better, **improving classroom climate** and relationships.
- Provides an opportunity for **writing a personal narrative**, a component of academic standards.
- Provides practice for **state, SAT and ACT writing tests** as well as college entrance essays.
- Building stronger community - school ties by enabling educators and community members to work side by side on a **positive and affirming activity**.

WHAT TEACHERS HAVE TO SAY:

"I love that writing affords us the opportunity to think and create. This contest allows students a chance to be self-reflective and grow as individuals. We can use this to bridge the gap between the literature and our lives." Mr. Joel Shurance, English Department Head, Cloverleaf High School

"Allows students to think about their morals and values and how that affects their choices now and in the future." Ms. Kelly Miller, Business Entrepreneurship Instructor, Wayne County Schools Career Center

ENTERING THE CONTEST

All entries must be submitted by email to kickes@akronbbb.org or mailed to:

**Better Business Bureau
Laws of Life Essay Contest
388 S. Main Street, Suite 302
Akron, OH 44311**

DEADLINE FOR ENTRIES

All entries must be emailed or postmarked by:
March 13, 2026

Winners will be notified by May 31, 2026.



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UncommonSense® FRAMEWORK

AT A GLANCE

Ethical principles to help students develop leadership

While I will never be perfect, I will...

BE PRINCIPLED & GENUINE:

1. SEEKING WISDOM

I seek something greater than intelligence (knowing what is); I seek wisdom, knowing what is right or true.

2. TRUSTWORTHINESS

I strive to do what I say I will do.

3. INTEGRITY

I strive to do what I say I will do.

4. HONESTY

I strive to consistently speak the truth with compassion.

BE PRINCIPLED & GENUINE:

5. RESPECT

I strive to treat others as they would want to be treated.

6. COMPASSION FOR OTHERS

I strive to extend unmerited kindness to others as an act of my will.

7. FORGIVENESS

I strive to extend and receive from others, unmerited acceptance.

8. UNITY

I strive to foster oneness among those to whom I am connected to.

9. LEARNING & MENTORING

I strive to grow in wisdom and pass it on.

10. SERVING-LEADERSHIP

I strive to set the sacrificial example for others to follow.

SEEK RESULTS:

11. HONORING AUTHORITY

I strive to respect boundaries and yield to those given responsibility for others.

12. JUSTICE

I strive to uphold truth, expose error and correct wrongs.

13. COURAGE

I strive to consistently and persistently act on my strong convictions.

14. ACCOUNTABILITY

I strive to self-scrutinize and seek the critique of others.

15. STEWARDSHIP

I strive to add value to all that has been entrusted to me.

16. SEEKING COUNSEL

I strive to overcome indecision and ignorance by securing wisdom from others.

17. RESPONSIBILITY

I strive to fulfill my personal responsibilities as a good citizen.

18. EXCELLENCE

I strive to be my very best as I do my very best every day.

DISPLAY GROWTH:

19. MATURATION

I strive to accept change and seek personal improvement over time.

20. TRANSFORMATION

I strive to demonstrate constantly improving positive high character.





BBB AKRON LAWS OF LIFE ESSAY CONTEST COORDINATOR REGISTRATION

School Contest Coordinator: This completed form must be submitted with mailed entries, unless you are submitting the entries online. All communication will be through the Contest Coordinator, so please designate **one** coordinator.

Name of Contest Coordinator: _____

Title/Position: _____ County: _____

School or Organization: _____ District: _____

Address (for Coordinator): _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Fax: _____

For each school participating please list the grade levels participating and total number of essays written.

School (attach additional sheet if more than three)	Grade Level(s) Participating	Total Number of Student Essays Written

List all teachers who participated and attach an additional sheet if more than three.

Name	Email

Comment on your experience with the contest. Please include program benefits, student reactions, recommendations for improvements, etc. (use back if necessary)

NEW: Please check the box and sign.

- ☐ For each entry submitted, I have spoken to the student or student's teacher to make a reasonable attempt to verify that the essay submitted represents the student's own work and that any events implied to be real.

Contest Coordinator Signature

Date



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BBB AKRON LAWS OF LIFE ESSAY CONTEST

STUDENT ENTRY FORM

School Contest Coordinator and/or Teacher

- ✓ You must complete an entry form for each student essay.
- ✓ If the form is completed by the student, please make sure it is legible.
- ✓ Essays should be 500-1000 words (2-3 pages), typed, single-sided and double-spaced.
- ✓ If mailing, please paperclip the entry form to the student's essay.
- ✓ If emailing, please make sure this form is attached to the essay.
- ✓ The student's Parent/Guardian **must** sign the entry form.

Student Name: _____

Grade: _____ Email: _____

School: _____

School Address: _____
Street Address City State Zip

☐ I am entering independently, not part of a classroom assignment.

Teacher: _____

Essay Title: _____

Uncommon**Sense**® FRAMEWORK Theme Addressed: _____

Student Home Address (for finalist notification): _____
Street Address

City State Zip Phone Number

Student: By signing this form, you confirm that the essay is your work and that phrases taken from other sources (such as quotes) are properly cited. You (and your parent/guardian) also give BBB Akron permission to use your essay at their discretion to publicize and promote the essay contest, including posting it to BBB Akron's website. You (and your parent/guardian) also give your permission for any pictures, audio or video recordings of any awards ceremony to be used for publicity or promotion of the contest. Your personal information **will not** be given to any individual or organization outside BBB Akron.

Please select one:

- ☐ If my essay is used in any way, you may include my full name with it.
- ☐ If my essay is used in any way, you may **not** include my full name with it.

Signatures: parent/guardian **MUST** sign form

Student: _____

Parent/Guardian: _____
(If student is under 18 years old)

Parent/Guardian Email: _____

BBB USE ONLY: ASSIGNED # _____



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BBB AKRON LAWS OF LIFE ESSAY CONTEST **SPECIAL THEME**

JUSTICE

High-character people uphold truth, expose error, and correct wrongs.

Just people are diligent in weighing evidence and seeking out the truth. They analyze and evaluate individuals and information. They protect the innocent but hold the guilty accountable. They strive not to be harsh, exasperating, or manipulative. Just people try to objectively determine what outcome, however difficult or painful, is right.

Observable virtues: impartial, unbiased, diligent, decisive

Typical examples include:

- Decisions that affect people are not made hastily; facts are gathered and thoroughly considered.
- Good behavior is rewarded as often as wrong behavior is confronted.
- People do not play favorites; all operate by the same rules and have the same opportunity.
- People do not intentionally use harsh or manipulative means to gain an advantage.
- When a wrong is committed, regardless of the outcome, the offender(s) is confronted with the wrong.

We ask students to reflect on what “JUSTICE” means to them, why it is an important Law of Life, how they learned this trait, and how they have changed their behavior to live up to that law. Below are some potentially helpful prompts:

- ✓ What does justice mean to you, personally? How do you define justice in your own life? Why do you think it is an important principle to live by?
- ✓ Describe a time when you stood up for what was right, even though it was difficult. What happened? What did you risk? How did you feel afterward?
- ✓ Write about a time when you witnessed someone being treated unfairly. How did you react and what did you learn from that experience?
- ✓ Who in your life has taught you the most about justice? This could be a family member, teacher, coach, friend or even a public figure. What lessons did they teach you?
- ✓ How is being “just” different from being “fair”? Reflect on whether these words are interchangeable. How does justice require more than just treating people equally?

Students are not required to write about this topic, however, the best essay on **JUSTICE** will be awarded **\$500!**



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2025/2026 BBB AKRON

LAWS OF LIFE ESSAY CONTEST

How does the Laws of Life Essay Contest fit into a standards-based curriculum?

While many states have their own standards for the English/Language Arts curriculum, most are consistent with national standards or the “Common Core”. The Laws of Life Essay Contest complies with the Common Core, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) for English/Language Arts, and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) standards.

For example:

Common Core, English Language Arts, Writing, Text Types and Purposes, Grades 3–12

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

Standard IX Writing, NBPTS Core Standards

Accomplished Adolescence and Young Adulthood/English Language Arts teachers develop and refine students’ abilities to write effectively and independently different types of texts for a variety of purposes and audiences.

NCTE Standards:

- ✓ **Standard 4:** Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
- ✓ **Standard 5:** Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
- ✓ **Standard 11:** Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
- ✓ **Standard 12:** Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).



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