Judging the Laws of Life Essays

To select the best essays to submit to the Central Ohio BBB® Laws of Life Essay Contest, teachers or those coordinating the contest for a school, district or youth group (contest coordinators) may select the best essays on their own, or convene a group of outside readers (other teachers, community members, business people, etc.) to judge the essays. As with every other step in the contest, do what fits!

Many options exist for judging the essays. The simplest is a rubric like the one in the box below. This rubric is similar to many school writing assessment tools, so if other teachers are assisting with judging, they would find this easiest to use. You will need to devise a procedure for tie-breaking, as there may be a number of “5’s”. One suggestion is to have a small committee of the judges discuss all the 5’s and select your winners.

Laws of Life Essay Judging Rubric

5 - This positive and life-affirming essay clearly articulates a law of life which has universal appeal. The reader learns something compelling about life as the author has captured a value or ideal uniquely. The essay uses specific examples which encourage readers to both think and feel about the topic. The writer demonstrates stylistic maturity through effective command of sentence structure, diction, and organization. The essay need not be without flaws, but reveals an ability to choose from and control a wide range of elements of effective writing.

4 - This essay also responds effectively to the laws of life but does so less fully or effectively than the essays in the top range. The development may be less thorough and less specific. This essay is well-written in an appropriate style but reveals less maturity and skill than the top essays. Some lapses in diction or syntax may occur, but writing demonstrates sufficient control over the elements of composition to present the writer’s ideas clearly.

3 - This essay responds to the laws of life but the content may be imprecise, generalized, vague or less developed. This essay is adequately written, but may demonstrate inconsistent control over the elements of composition. Organization is attempted, but may not be fully realized or particularly effective.

2 - This essay attempts to respond to a law of life but does so without support or specific evidence. The writing may show some understanding but reveals weak control over diction, syntax and organization. This essay may contain excessive and distracting errors in spelling and grammar. Statements are seldom supported with specific examples or persuasive evidence or quotations may replace supporting analysis.

1 - This essay fails to respond adequately or discuss a law of life. The thinking may contain misunderstandings or confusion. This essay may be unacceptably brief or poorly written. Generally, this essay compounds the problems of lower scoring essays and distracts a reader from understanding the basic message of the essay.
Judging Criteria used in the BBB® Laws of Life Essay Contest

Teachers and students wonder how judges in the contest score the essays. It is a difficult and imperfect process, because the judges are not looking just for writing ability. A Laws of Life Essay is “writing from the heart”, thus judges are looking for that “aha” moment when the student shows he or she truly understands, values and lives by a particular law of life.

The rubric below is used by judges to score the essays, and the ranking of “top 3” is used for tie breaking situations. However since each judge reads only some of the essays, once all essays are scored, all the top scoring essays are then read by a selection panel who make the final selections for prizes.

Compelling Content (15 total points possible)

Law of Life (score 1-5; 5 is best) _______
Does the essay include a clearly articulated law(s) of life or other moral message that would make the world a better place if everyone practiced it? Is the essay positive and life affirming and does it have universal appeal? Would most people agree that this is an important law of life?

Depth of Understanding (score 1-5; 5 is best) _______
Does the author relate the law(s) of life to their experiences? Did the essay make you both think and feel? Is there evidence of the author’s self-reflection and genuine learning – does it capture an “epiphany” or a moment when the “light bulb went on”?

Originality (score 1-3; 3 is best) _______
Did you learn something special and compelling about the author? Did the essay capture a value or ideal in a unique and special way? Was the essay moving?

Presentation, Grammar & Spelling (3 total points possible; score 1-3; 3 is best) _______
Is the essay easy to read? Is it clearly written? Were you able to tell exactly what the author was trying to share? Do ideas and paragraphs flow smoothly? Unless there are many glaring mistakes that suggest a sloppy and hurriedly written essay, proper grammar and spelling are less important criteria. Judges should determine to what extent poor grammar and spelling distract a reader from comprehending the basic message of the essay.

Total Points (out of 16) _______

Would you rank this essay as one of the top 3 essays you read? Yes or No?