

Announcing Class and Individual Essay Contest

The first sentence of the Constitution of the United States begins: “We the People” and continues “of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” On July 4, 1776, the United States declared its independence from the British Empire. The Declaration of Independence included a list of grievances against King George III, explaining why the American colonies were separating from Great Britain. Please write an individual or class essay with the theme:

“Does the United States Constitution address the grievances listed in the Declaration of Independence? If so, explain how.”

Brought to you by the Third Circuit Courts, Community, and Rule of Law Committee



This essay contest is open to all 5th and 6th grade students and classes in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and U.S. Virgin Islands schools. The essay contest is open to 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th grade students and classes in Delaware. The essay may be an individual essay or a class essay. If a class is submitting an essay, one essay must be submitted on behalf of the class. Individual and class essays must be submitted on or before Tuesday, March 31, 2026.

Students may include up to two (2) grievances in the list below from the

Declaration of Independence per essay, ranked in importance to the writers:

- 1) Cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world
- 2) Imposing Taxes on us without our Consent
- 3) Depriving us of the benefits of Trial by Jury
- 4) Suspending our Representative Legislatures and dictating legislation for us in all cases.
- 5) Waging War against us and keeping Standing Armies among us harassing our people.
- 6) Transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences.
- 7) Making Judges dependent on the will of King George III alone for the tenure of their offices and the amount and payment of their salaries.
- 8) Plundering our seas, ravaging our Coasts, burning our towns, and destroying the lives of our people.

Teachers should feel free to contact the committee if they would like a lawyer or a judge to assist students or the class in the discussion or development of this topic.

Essay contest rules, contact information, and suggested resources follow.

2026 Essay Contest Rules

ESSAY CONTEST OPENS: Tuesday, January 13, 2026.

ENTRY DEADLINE: Entries must be submitted by 11:59 pm, Tuesday, March 31, 2026. Finalists will be selected in April.

PRIZES: One winner will be selected for the individual essay category and one winner will be selected for the class essay category. Winners will be invited to participate in Law Week programs with federal judges and practitioners in area courthouses.

HOW TO ENTER: Entry information can be accessed at

<https://ca3ccrofl.powerappsportals.us/>

Essays, in PDF format, must be submitted electronically to the mailbox (email addresses provided below) for the courthouse closest to your school:

edpa_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (Philadelphia, Berks, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Lancaster, Lehigh, Montgomery & Northampton counties)

mdpa_harrisburg_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (Harrisburg area)

mdpa_scranton_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (Scranton area)

mdpa_wilkes_barre_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (Wilkes Barre area)

mdpa_williamsport_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (Williamsport area)

wdpa_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (Pittsburgh area)

dnj_camden_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (South Jersey)

dnj_trenton_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (Central Jersey)

dnj_newark_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (North Jersey)

dde_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (Delaware)

dvi_st_thomas_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (St. Thomas)

dvi_st_croix_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (St. Croix)

LENGTH AND FORMAT: Individual and class essays should be typewritten and no longer than 500 words. If a class essay, one essay should be submitted on behalf of the class, ideally written by the class as a group effort. The class essay should be submitted by the class teacher on behalf of a class as a PDF and include the teacher's email and telephone. An individual essay should also be submitted by the student's teacher as a PDF along with the teacher's email and telephone.

JUDGING: Individual and Class essays will be judged separately and based on four criteria:

(1) Focus, (2) Content Development, (3) Organization, and (4) Style

Each criterion will be worth 25 points.

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CONTEST PLEASE CONTACT US:

Courts_Community_Rule_of_Law@ca3.uscourts.gov or 267-299-4306

Suggested Resources

Defining the Grievances in the Declaration of Independence

1. National Archives: Declaration of Independence Transcription:
<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>
2. National Constitution Center: Interactive Declaration of Independence:
<https://constitutioncenter.org/declaration>
3. Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History: Annotated List of Grievances:
<https://www.gilderlehrman.org/declaration-independence/annotated/grievances>
4. National Constitution Center: Short List of Grievances:
[https://constitutioncenter.org/media/files/2.5 Primary Source Declaration of Independence %28Short list of grievances%29 .docx .pdf](https://constitutioncenter.org/media/files/2.5%20Primary%20Source%20Declaration%20of%20Independence%28Short%20list%20of%20grievances%29.docx.pdf)
5. National Constitution Center: Grievances Against the King Video:
<https://youtu.be/Jt8PPdW03u8?si=V9VwdzdbBofOEF3F>

Text of the U.S. Constitution

1. Justia: <https://law.justia.com/constitution/us/>
2. National Archives: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution>
3. National Constitution Center: Interactive Constitution:
<https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution>