



to provide exemplary programming that the 120+ Better Business Bureaus around the US and Canada can adopt in their areas. Some BBBs have already adopted the contest and sponsor regional contests for winners of local *Laws of Life* contests in their service area. The purpose of the regional contests is to encourage schools and communities to sponsor the local contests that create the character-rich dialogues and inspirational writing experiences for the youth in their area. To learn if your area BBB sponsors a regional contest go to <http://lol.centerforcharacterethics.org>.

Benefits of the Laws of Life Essay Contest

- ♥ Inspires young people of all ages to discover for themselves the core values, principles, and ideals that will guide them, wherever they go and whatever they do in life.
- ♥ Provides schools with an effective, easy-to-implement character-based program that gives students an authentic purpose for writing.
- ♥ 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 many state academic content standards.
- ♥ Provides practice for state, SAT, and ACT writing tests as well as college entrance essays.
- ♥ Builds stronger community – school ties by enabling educators and community members to work side by side on a positive and affirming activity.
- ♥ Encourages parents and children to talk about what really matters in life.
- ♥ Unlike other essay contests, the *Laws of Life* contest “winners” can be from all ability levels – and have frequently included special education or at-risk students.
- ♥ Recognition from winning a *Laws of Life* contest can be life-changing (see examples on pages 25-28).

Nancy Sizer, author of *Crossing the Stage: Redesigning Senior Year*, argues that it is critically important for adolescents to articulate (their moral) code. In the absence of an articulated code, they are easily pushed about by forces such as the peer group and popular culture. In order to be less susceptible to such influences, young people need to make explicit their own foundational values, or “laws of life”.

Lickona & Davidson,
2005,
Smart & Good
High School Report





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:

“Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.” Common Core, English Language Arts, Writing, Text Types and Purposes, Grades 3-12

“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.” Standard IX Writing, NBPTS Core Standards

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).

Getting Started

How you conduct your contest depends on the answers to the following questions. Use this questionnaire to help you get started thinking about what you want to do.

- Will the essay be a class assignment or will it be voluntary (maybe for extra credit)?
- Will I involve other teachers/classrooms or just my classroom?
- How will I inform administrators and parents? What help or support will I need from them?
- Will I ask outside judges to read the finished essays? (other staff, local business people or community members)

Some teachers require all students to write a *Laws of Life* essay, but allow students to choose whether to enter their essay in the contest.
