



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.

- How will I recognize students? (certificates, pat on the back, student recognition assembly, note to parents?)
- Will I offer prizes? If yes, where will I get them?
- How will students share their essays?

Once you have thought through these questions, you are ready to begin!



Creating a contest timeline

Some contests can be successfully held in one or two weeks, especially in small classrooms where the teacher is the sole judge. Most contests, however, will take a little longer. Much depends on whether you are having students write their essays in class, how much class time you are devoting to peer editing, and whether you are using outside judges. A sample timeline is presented below that allows about a month for students to write their essays and peer edit. Obviously this can be shortened if needed.

Allow a few days after the essay deadline to assign essay numbers and copy essays if you are using outside judges. A good rule of thumb is to give outside judges 10 days to 2 weeks to read their assigned essays, depending on how many you give them.

After you have received the judges scores, allow 2-3 days to total the scores and select the winners, especially if you have a larger number of essays.

Sample Contest Timeline

Contest Announced	February 1
Writing time, solicit judges	February 1-28
Essays due	March 1
Number, copy and distribute essays to judges	March 4
Judging	March 5-19
Judges scores due	March 19
Compile scores and select winners	March 20-23
Announce winners	March 24
Recognition celebration	March 31 (or end of year assemblies)