

NEWS FROM THE THIRD JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

JANUARY 18, 2022

Philadelphia – The Courts, Community, and Rule of Law Committee of the Judicial Council of the Third Circuit announced today that it is hosting an essay contest for 5th and 6th grade classes focused on civics, citizenship, and the concept of the “Rule of Law.” The essay prompt is: “What does the Rule of Law mean to you and to our country?”

The Third Judicial Circuit is comprised of the U.S. Court of Appeals as well as the Federal District Courts of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The latter are trial courts, which include bankruptcy courts. Chief Circuit Judge Michael A. Chagares noted that “We think it is only fitting that we launch this program in connection with Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, as we celebrate the life and legacy of Dr. King, an example of how individual citizens can advance the notion that our society should recognize the dignity of each and every citizen.” The Rule of Law plays a key role in that effort by ensuring the consistent and predictable application of law to each person.

The Committee and its members are partnering with bar associations, civic organizations, and educational institutions across the geographical reach of the Third Circuit to promote and oversee the essay contest. Class essays must be submitted on or before Friday, March 18, 2022. Classes submitting the best essays in each district (District of Delaware, District of New Jersey, Eastern District of Pennsylvania, Middle District of Pennsylvania, Western District of Pennsylvania, and the District of the Virgin Islands) of the Third Circuit will be invited to one of the nine courthouses in the Third Circuit to present their essays during the first weeks of May, in celebration of Law Day. The essays and presentations will be evaluated based on focus, content development, organization, and style and prizes will be awarded.

Judge D. Brooks Smith, who chairs the Courts, Community, and Rule of Law Committee overseeing the contest, urged that “It is important, now more than ever, that

the citizenry realize that our courts are an integral part of the community. An understanding of what we do as the third branch of government in promoting the rule of law will help students appreciate the importance of our independent judiciary.”

For more information about the essay contest, please visit the Third Circuit Court of Appeals website at <https://www.ca3.uscourts.gov/> or contact 267-299-4306.

Announcing Class Essay Contest

“What does the Rule of Law mean to you and to our country?”

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 classes in Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and U.S. Virgin Islands schools.

Questions for class discussion to develop the essay can include:

- *What is the rule of law? Where does it originate?*
- *Is the rule of law important? If so, why?*
- *How does the rule of law impact what goes on in our courts?*
- *How does the rule of law affect our daily lives?*
- *What would happen if we did not follow the rule of law?*
- *Are there court cases that demonstrate the importance or meaning of the rule of law*

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

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

2022 Essay Contest Rules

ENTRY DEADLINE: Essay Contest opens January 18, 2022.
Entries must be submitted by 11:59 pm, March 18, 2022.
Finalists will be selected in April.

PRIZES: Winners of the top three essays will be invited to participate in Law Week programs with federal judges and practitioners in area courthouses, covid conditions permitting.

HOW TO ENTER: Entry information can be accessed at <https://www.ca3.uscourts.gov>
Essays, in PDF format, must be submitted electronically to the mailbox for the courthouse closest to your school:

edpa_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (Philadelphia and surrounding counties)
mdpa_harrisburg_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov
mdpa_scranton_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov
mdpa_wilkes_barre_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov
mdpa_williamsport_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov
wdpa_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (Pittsburgh and western counties)
dnj_camden_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov
dnj_trenton_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov
dnj_newark_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov
dde_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov (Delaware)
dvi_st_thomas_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov
dvi_st_croix_essay_contest@ca3.uscourts.gov

LENGTH AND FORMAT: Essays should be submitted by the class teacher as PDFs and include the teacher's email and telephone. Essays should be typewritten and no longer than 500 words.

JUDGING: Essays will be judged on four criteria:

Focus, Content Development, Organization, and Style
Each criteria will be worth 25 points.

CONTACT US: [Courts Community Rule of Law@ca3.uscourts.gov](mailto:Courts_Community_Rule_of_Law@ca3.uscourts.gov)
or 267-299-4306

Suggested Resources

Defining the Rule of Law

1. UNITED STATES COURTS: RULE OF LAW: <https://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/overview-rule-law>
2. United States Courts: Judges Explain Rule of Law, Why It Matters: https://www.uscourts.gov/news/2019/08/08/judges-explain-rule-law-why-it-matters?utm_campaign=usc-news&utm_medium=gmail&utm_source=govdelivery
3. AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION: https://www.americanbar.org/advocacy/rule_of_law/what-is-the-rule-of-law/
4. ANNENBERG PUBLIC POLICY CENTER: https://www.annenbergclassroom.org/glossary_term/rule-of-law/
5. CSPAN CLASSROOM: <https://www.c-span.org/classroom/document/?17683> (video resources – perspectives on the rule of law)
6. NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER <https://constitutioncenter.org/>

Relevant U.S. Cases

1. *United States v. Nixon*, 418 U.S. 683 (1974); available at <https://h2o.law.harvard.edu/cases/3307>
2. *Gideon v. Wainwright*, 372 U.S. 335 (1963); available at <https://h2o.law.harvard.edu/cases/3896>
3. *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1955); available at <https://h2o.law.harvard.edu/cases/884>

Writings on the Rule of Law

1. Alexander Hamilton or James Madison, *Federalist No. 51* (February 8, 1788); available at <https://guides.loc.gov/federalist-papers/text-51-60#s-lg-box-wrapper-25493427>

“If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.”

2. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (April 16, 1963) https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html

“How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? [. . .] An unjust law is a code that a numerical or power majority group compels a minority group to obey but does not make binding on itself. This is difference made legal. By the same token, a just law is a code that a majority compels a minority to follow and that it is willing to follow itself. This is sameness made legal. [. . .] Sometimes a law is just on its face and unjust in its application.”

3. “Giving the Devil the Benefit of the Law,” *A Man for All Seasons* (1966) available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PDBiLT3LASK> (video)

William Roper: *“So, now you give the Devil the benefit of law!”*

Sir Thomas More: *“Yes! What would you do? Cut a great road through the law to get after the Devil?”*

William Roper: *“Yes, I'd cut down every law in England to do that!”*

Sir Thomas More: *“Oh? And when the last law was down, and the Devil turned 'round on you, where would you hide, Roper, the laws all being flat? This country is planted thick with laws, from coast to coast, Man's laws, not God's! And if you cut them down, and you're just the man to do it, do you really think you could stand upright in the winds that would blow then? Yes, I'd give the Devil benefit of law, for my own safety's sake!”*