

NEWS FROM THE THIRD JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

December 10, 2024

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 elementary students focused on civics, citizenship, and the concept of “We the People” – which are the first three words of the Preamble to the United States Constitution. The essay prompt is: How did our Nation’s Founders envision ‘the People’ when they drafted the Constitution, and how should we interpret their vision in our country today?

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 “It is incumbent on us, as federal judges, to engage with our youth and to offer a robust civics education program.” 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.

The essay may be written by either an individual student or by an entire class. If a class essay, students within a participating class should work together to write the essay. That means that only one essay is submitted on behalf of the Class. Individual and class essays must be submitted on or before Monday, March 31, 2025. The best individual and class 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 individual and class essays will be judged separately based on focus, content development, organization, and style. Prizes will be awarded.

Circuit Judge D. Brooks Smith, who chairs the Courts, Community, and Rule of Law Committee overseeing the contest, stated “Our Nation’s Founders regarded “the People” as the very heart and soul of a democracy. The republic that their work brought forth is one in which “the People” rule. Our committee hopes that this year’s theme will give students an opportunity to think about Americans from all walks of life and how their different life experiences combine to shape the dynamic country we all live in today.”

For more information about the essay contest, please visit the Third Circuit Court of Appeals website at <https://ca3ccrofl.powerappsportals.us/> or contact 267-299-4306.

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.” Please write an individual or class essay with the theme:

“We the People”

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 Monday, March 31, 2025.

Consider the following questions to assist in developing the essay but the essay need not discuss all the questions:

Why did our Founders refer to “the People” in the first three words of the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution?

What did our nation’s Founders mean by the phrase “We the People” and how should we interpret this phrase today?

What does “We the People” mean to you?

How do the different life experiences of Americans from all walks of life combine to shape the dynamic country we all live in today?

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.

2025 Essay Contest Rules

ESSAY CONTEST OPENS: Tuesday, December 10, 2024.

ENTRY DEADLINE: Entries must be submitted by 11:59 pm, March 31, 2025.

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 Preamble to the U.S. Constitution

1. Annenberg Public Policy Center:
<https://www.annenbergclassroom.org/resource/our-constitution/our-constitution-preamble/>
2. iCivics: <https://youtu.be/2ANyeM5TuQ8>
3. Khan Academy Video with Jeffrey Rosen of the National Constitution Center:
<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-government-and-civics/us-gov-foundations/us-gov-ideals-of-democracy/v/preamble>
4. National Constitution Center: <https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/preamble>
5. New York Historical Society Video with Law Professor Akhil Reed Amar:
<https://youtu.be/yQmju8MGTbw>
6. Schoolhouse Rock! The Preamble:
https://youtu.be/8_NzZvdsbWI?si=9lSay7oNx0EpUtci
7. United States Courts: <https://www.uscourts.gov/about-federal-courts/educational-resources/about-educational-outreach/activity-resources/us>

Relevant U.S. Cases

1. *McCulloch v. Maryland*, 17 U.S. 316 (1819); available at
<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/17/316/>
2. *United States v. Virginia*, 518 U.S. 515 (1996); available at
<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/518/515/>

Text of the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution

Justia: <https://law.justia.com/constitution/us/preamble.html>

National Archives: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution>