

# STUDENT ESSAY CONTEST



## **Overview**

This essay contest uses the history of the Holocaust to educate students about the ramifications of present-day stereotyping, prejudice, racism and antisemitism. The Holocaust provides a context for exploring the dangers of remaining indifferent and silent in the face of the oppression of others. In addition, this essay contest invites the writer to learn about moral courage and the personal and societal benefits that may be realized by standing up to injustice.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this contest is for you to (i) explain how historical or present-day events illustrate or command an act of moral courage, and (ii) express **your** connection with, or thoughts regarding, such events or acts. Your research and writing should focus on how one person can make a positive impact.

**The Essay Topic:** Describe a person who acted with moral courage. What can be learned from his/her actions and how do the lessons relate to you?

During the Holocaust, it is estimated that eleven million people were killed by the Nazis and their collaborators. Fortunately, there were many who survived. Many survivors were rescued by “ordinary” people who took extraordinary risks to become an ally.

**Moral courage** is the ability to take a strong stand on a specific issue based on one’s personal beliefs or convictions and to defend it regardless of danger or threats to personal safety. Rescuers during the Holocaust, such as Miep Gies, Carl Lutz, Vladka Mead, Oskar Schindler, Chiune Sugihara, and Raoul Wallenberg, exemplify both courage and moral courage. They displayed courage in their ability to face difficulty, danger, and/or pain without fear; they exhibited **moral courage** when they acted on their own values and beliefs to spare the lives of others at the risk of jeopardizing their own. Their actions serve as a model of personal triumph over adversity and inspire others to act accordingly.

## **Step 1: Contextual Research**

Learn more about the history of the Holocaust and *investigate at least two of the stories of the rescuers mentioned above to inspire you to research and write your own essay on moral courage*. The following are suggested websites to visit, and be sure to use your digital literacy skills to find other reliable sources on the web:

- **Introduction to the Holocaust, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum:**
  - <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/introduction-to-the-holocaust>
- **Coming of Age During the Holocaust, Museum of Jewish Heritage:**
  - <https://education.mjhnyc.org/coming-of-age-during-the-holocaust/>
- **The Righteous Among the Nations, Yad Vashem Museum:**
  - <https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous/about-the-righteous.html>
- **Echoes and Reflections:**
  - [www.echoesandreflections.org](http://www.echoesandreflections.org)
- **Shoah Foundation I-Witness:**
  - <http://iwitness.usc.edu/SFI/>



## Step 2: Complete the Reflection Sheet

On a separate sheet of paper to be attached to the mailed-in application (visit <http://mountainstates.adl.org/initiatives> for instructions on how to submit all items online), complete this pre-writing exercise, which will help you formulate thoughts for your essay. After reading at least two of the stories of rescue in Step 1, respond in complete sentences to the following questions:

- Write your own definition of moral courage and, if you desire, why you think your definition is better than the sample definition (hint: We want your definition to be better!)
- Given the testimonials and stories you have just read, what aspects of their stories are inspirations to you? Why? Based on your contextual research, briefly explain what was meaningful to you.
- In what ways might you make a difference in your community and how can you apply the lessons from the readings?

## Step 3: Specific Research

Select and research a **historical or contemporary event in which** moral courage is highlighted. *Although some students may be tempted to skip Step 1, it will be impossible to write a successful essay for this contest without having the necessary contextual background. It will be apparent in your submission.*

Choose and research a person that demonstrates **moral courage**, either from the Holocaust or during another time, contemporary or historic. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Lech Walesa, and Ida B. Wells are a few examples, but there are many more. Be sure to discuss your selection with your teacher. Here are some other topics you can research to find other examples of moral courage:

- Rescuers of the Holocaust
- U.S. Civil Rights Movement
- Gender Equity
- LGBTQ+ Rights
- A literary subject dealing with moral courage
- A local community leader
- The Rwandan, Bosnian and/ or Cambodian genocides
- Current examples of genocide or human rights crises, including Darfur, Chechnya, Sudan, the Congo, etc.

Specifically, identify (i) the individual or group highlighted in your essay, (ii) an example of how such individual or group exhibited moral courage, and (iii) the manner in which such acts have meaning to you.

## Step 4: Write

Utilizing your research and your best writing skills, write a personal reflective essay that addresses the following:

- A **summary** of how the individual or group selected by you exhibited moral courage. **Avoid a lengthy bio.** Unless the biographical information is important to the specific situation in which they exhibited moral courage, the information is likely irrelevant.
- How their actions have impacted the world, and
- **Most importantly, share a personal story or describe how this act of moral courage influences your actions today.**

## Rules & Guidelines

1. Writers must be a Colorado, New Mexico or Wyoming student in grades 7-12.
2. All essays must have a word count between 750-1,000 words.
3. All submissions must (i) have a title, (ii) be typed, and (iii) be double-spaced (preferably Times New Roman, 12-point font).
4. Two to five references must be cited in a **bibliography**. Only one source may be from a non-academic Internet source (see *Websites* below). Internet sites are copyrighted and must be cited. Wikipedia and Google **will not** be accepted as sources; use only academic sources.

**NOTE:** Regarding the use of Internet sources for your essay and bibliography, below is some guidance:

### • **Academic Databases:**

It is fine to use **one or more** articles, essays, book chapters, etc. from various published sources (e.g., *The New York Times*; *Contemporary Black Biography*) that can be accessed via academic databases (i.e. *Biography in Context*). A citation would include both the original source publication information and the database used to access the material.

For example:

"Elie Wiesel." *Encyclopedia of World Biography*. Detroit: Gale, 1998. *Biography in Context*. Web. 3 Feb. 2015.

### • **Websites:**

Regarding the rule "only one [reference] may be from the Internet," students may use only one Internet-accessed source that is a specific website wherein content is largely produced/published by a single organization (i.e. the website of The Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity – <http://www.eliewieselfoundation.org/eliewiesel.aspx>).

### • **eBooks:**

One or more Internet-accessible eBooks may be used as references.

5. Complete and sign the Application Form; be sure the form is also signed by the writer's parent or guardian.
6. Submission must include a completed Reflection Sheet.
7. Staple Application Form and Reflection Sheet and submit with **two copies** of your Essay and **two copies** of your Bibliography.
8. DO NOT write your name or school anywhere on the essay. Your application/entry form will include this information.
9. DO NOT plagiarize.
10. DO NOT submit more than one entry.

Your essay submission will be **automatically disqualified** if you violate or fail to meet any of the above Rules & Guidelines (e.g., failure to meet the bibliographical requirements).

**For Teachers:**  
**Common Core – Colorado, New Mexico and Wyoming State Standards**

As a classroom assignment, this essay can meet several Colorado, New Mexico and Wyoming State Standards in Reading, Writing and Social Studies, such as:

- RH 11-12.7, requiring students to Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- RH 9-10.9, requiring students to compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.
- RH 6-8.10, requiring students to be able to read and comprehend history/social studies texts, independently and proficiently.
- W.7, requiring students to conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

**Essay Awards**

| Award                 | Division 1<br>Grades 7-9 | Division 2<br>Grades 10-12 |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Place | \$500                    | \$500                      |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Place | \$250                    | \$250                      |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> Place | \$100                    | \$100                      |

**Submission:**

• **MAIL:**

1. Application Form
2. Reflection Sheet (on separate sheet of paper)
3. Original Essay (2 copies)
4. Bibliography (2 copies)

**Mail to: (NO faxed, scanned or emailed copies)**

ADL - Mountain States Region  
Attn: A Tribute to Moral Courage  
1120 Lincoln Street, Suite 1301  
Denver, CO 80203  
Tel. 720.799.9676

• **ONLINE:**

1. Visit [A Tribute to Moral Courage – 2023](#) for instructions on how to submit required materials 100% online.

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**DEADLINE: Monday, March 6, 2023**



**NOTIFICATION:** Winners will be notified in late March 2023  
**AWARD CEREMONY:** April 19, 2023 – Temple Emanuel, Denver  
The *A Tribute to Moral Courage: Standing Up Against Injustice*  
Student Essay Contest is supported by a Generous Donor.

