


2024 Constitution Essay Contest Entry Form

September 17, 2024 marks the 237th Anniversary of the signing of our U. S. Constitution. To mark this historic occasion, we invite you to enter Solano County's Thirteenth Annual Constitution Essay Contest

 Constitution
Literacy
Advocates
Sponsors: Constitution Essay Contest
Email: Constitution 225@gmail.com



&
Constitution Discussion
Group of Solano

- * **GRAND PRIZE AWARD:** \$700. Mini-Grant
- * **BEST of SCHOOL AWARDS:** \$100. Mini-Grants presented to ONE STUDENT from EVERY SCHOOL submitting 30+ student essays
- * **FOUNDERS' CHOICE AWARDS:** \$50. Mini-Grants as merited

Contest is open to ALL Solano County students in grades 10 - 12

Teachers and Schools of the Grand Prize and Best of School recipients will also receive awards.

- * Awards will tentatively be presented at the Awards Presentation Dinner, Date and Location to be determined
- * (Complimentary dinners for Award Recipients, their parents and teachers will be provided by the *Constitution Literacy Advocates*, sponsors of the annual essay contest.)

2024 Constitution Essay Contest Topic and Rules

Who is Eligible: Solano County Students, grades 10 – 12 currently enrolled in public, private, or are Home Schooled within Solano County

ESSAY TOPIC:

“Why is it imperative that our elections are legally valid?”

***** **BEFORE YOU BEGIN** *****

* **READ:** “Writers’ Tips & Judges’ Criteria” and “Suggested Reading & Resources,” pp 2-3

CONTEST RULES:

1. Essay must be 500 words or less and include a “Title” reflecting Your Main Idea
2. Entry must be an original work (not plagiarized) or previously appeared in any medium. Entries will be judged primarily on strength of the content (however, poor grammar, punctuation, spelling will not help your chances.) Any quotations or copyrighted material used in the essay must be properly identified.
3. Completed essays are to be submitted in either **Word** or **PDF format** via e-mail to: constitution225@gmail.com and must include the following affidavit and information:
“I certify that I am a student at _____ in the _____ grade and that I am the sole author of this submission.” The affidavit must also include your full name, **Include your teacher’s name and email address.**
** **Please CC your teacher as proof that you have entered the contest.**
4. Entry Deadline: **All entries must be submitted by NOON, Friday, October 25, 2024**
5. Entries not meeting these submission guidelines will be automatically disqualified.
6. No entry fee is required.
7. Decisions are at the sole discretion of the judges.
8. Award recipients will be notified by email, or through your teacher.

**Grant Awards are made from the Constitution Education Project Fund, a component fund of the Solano Community Foundation, a 501(c)(3). www.solanocf.org. Questions about the contest? Please Contact: constitution225@gmail.com

Writers' Tips & Judges' Criteria (YOUR ESSAY SHOULD INCLUDE)

Judges will look for the following:

1. How did the U.S. Constitution create a government deriving its 'just powers from the consent of the governed? What does that mean?
2. What constitutes a 'legally valid election'?
3. What factors put our elections at risk, and what are the consequences of compromised elections?
4. How can citizens help protect our elections?
5. **Essay Development:** Be sure to include a "Title." Pay attention to sentence structure, topic sentences, introduction, body, and conclusion. Check grammar and spelling. Proofread your work!

**** Suggested Reading ****

Food for Thought and Discussion

Think Before You Write

Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness—That to secure these rights, **Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed**, . ." (How does the Constitution do this?)

<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>

Preamble of the U.S. Constitution: "**We the People 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.**"

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

Article I Section 1 of the U.S. Constitution: "The Times, Places and Manner of holding Elections for Senators and Representatives, shall be prescribed in each State by the Legislature thereof; **but the Congress may at any time by Law make or alter such Regulations**, except as to the Places of choosing Senators."

Bill of Rights: The first Ten Amendments to the United States Constitution

"The **Bill of Rights**, the first 10 Amendments to the Constitution, spells out Americans' rights in relation to their government. **It guarantees civil rights and liberties to the individual**—like freedom of speech, press, and religion. It sets rules for due process of law **and reserves all powers not delegated to the Federal Government to the people or the States**. And it specifies that "the enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people."

<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights/what-does-it-say>

Thomas Paine. 1776: "The **right of voting for representatives is the primary right** by which other rights are protected."

More Food for Thought

Supreme Court Justice, Hugo Black: “No right is more precious in a free country than that of having a voice in the election of those who make our laws under which, as good citizens, we must live. Other rights, even the most basic, are illusory if the right to vote is undermined.”

Supreme Court Justice, Hugo Black in *Wesberry v Sanders*, in 1964.

Reynolds v. Sims, 1964: “And the right of suffrage (the right to vote) can be denied by a debasement (reducing the value of) or dilution of the weight of a citizen’s vote just as effectively as by wholly prohibiting the free exercise of the franchise.”

Edmund Burke:

“We in America do not have government by the majority—we have government by the majority *who participate*. . . All tyranny needs to gain a foothold is for people of good conscience to remain silent.” https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/edmund_burke_136431

Thomas Jefferson:

“In questions of power, let no more be heard of confidence in man, **but bind him down from mischief by the chains of the constitution.**”

<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/85042-in-questions-of-power-let-no-more-be-heard-of>

John Adams:

“We should be unfaithful to ourselves if we should ever lose sight of the danger to our liberties if anything partial or extraneous should infect the purity of our free, fair, virtuous, and independent elections. **If an election is to be determined by a majority of a single vote, and that can be procured by a party through artifice (trickery) or corruption, the Government may be the choice of a party for its own ends, not of the nation for the national good.**”

In Re Coy, (1888): “Congress seeks. . .to guard the election of members of Congress against any possible unfairness by compelling. . .everyone concerned in holding the election to a strict and scrupulous observance of every duty developed upon him while so engaged. . . The evil **intent consists in disobedience to the law.**”

Four Tenets of a Valid Election: Follow established laws

- 1 **The Voter Rolls Must be Accurate** (National Voter Registration Act, 1993)
- 2 **Votes Counted Must be from Eligible Voters** (U.S. Constitution, Fourteenth Amendment, Section Two) provide an effective way of determining voter citizenship and eligibility to vote.
- 3 **The number of Votes Counted Must Equal the Number of Voters Who Voted.**
- 4 **There Can be no more than one in 125,000 ballots in error by the Voting System** (Help America Vote Act, 2002) Use equipment that complies with the law and security standards, and allows legally required transparency.

John Philpot Curran and many others: “Eternal vigilance is the Price of Liberty”

<https://www.monticello.org/research-education/blog/eternal-vigilance>

More Food for Thought

Constitution of the United States of America, 1787

Amendment XIV 1868

Section 1.

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

Section 2.

Representatives shall be apportioned among the several States according to their respective numbers, counting the whole number of persons in each State, excluding Indians not taxed. **But when the right to vote at any election for the choice of electors for President and Vice-President of the United States, Representatives in Congress, the Executive and Judicial officers of a State, or the members of the Legislature thereof, is denied to any of the male inhabitants of such State, being twenty-one years of age,* and citizens of the United States, or in any way abridged,** except for participation in rebellion, or other crime, the basis of representation therein shall be reduced in the proportion which the number of such male citizens shall bear to the whole number of male citizens twenty-one years of age in such State.

* Note: section 1 of the 26th amendment modified this section

Amendment XV 1870

Section 1.

The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of **race, color, or previous condition of servitude--**

Amendment XIX 1920

The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of **sex.**

Amendment XXIV 1964

Section 1.

The right of citizens of the United States to vote in any primary or other election for President or Vice President, for electors for President or Vice President, or for Senator or Representative in Congress, shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State by reason of **failure to pay any poll tax or other tax.**

Amendment XXVI 1971

The right of citizens of the United States, who are eighteen years of age or older, to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of **age.**

Benjamin Franklin:

"If there is a lesson in all of this it is that our Constitution is neither a self-actuating nor a self-correcting document. **It requires the constant attention and devotion of all citizens.** There is a story, often told, that upon exiting the Constitutional Convention Benjamin Franklin was approached by a group of citizens asking what sort of government the delegates had created. His answer was: **"A republic, if you can keep it."** The brevity of that response should not cause us to under-value its essential meaning: **democratic republics are not merely founded upon the consent of the people, they are also absolutely dependent upon the active and informed involvement of the people for their continued good health.**"

Dr. Richard Beeman University of Pennsylvania

<http://constitutioncenter.org/learn/educational-resources/historical-documents/perspectives-on-the-constitution-a-republic-if-you-can-keep-it>