

# 2017 BENJAMIN M. KING HUMAN RIGHTS ESSAY CONTEST

2017 Topic: "Advocating for Others"



A picture of protesters taking part in a rally to show support for and to protect undocumented students at Harvard University taken by Keith Bedford from *The Boston Globe* on November 22, 2016.

**"First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out - Because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out - Because I was not a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out - Because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me - and there was no one left to speak for me."**

**- Martin Niemöller, Protestant pastor who spent seven years in Nazi concentration camps**

## TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

The Human Rights Commission is sponsoring an essay contest in each division for the students in Bartholomew County in **grades 5 through 12**. The purpose of the contest is to **create an awareness and appreciation of our community's diversity and for human rights**.

There will be a winner for the contest from each division.

Division 1: Elementary (grades 5 -6);  
Division 2: Middle (grades 7 - 8); and  
Division 3: High (grades 9 - 12).

You are invited to share this information with your students and encourage their participation. You may want to include the essay topic in your classroom or youth group curriculum or you may want to leave it as an enrichment or special project for individual students.

**1. ENTRY FORM:** Each student must submit his/her essay with an attached, completed entry form. Judging is anonymous; therefore it is imperative that the student's name appears ONLY on the entry form and NOT on his/her essay. The information on the entry form is necessary for us to contact contest winners.

**2. CRITEREA:** Essays: Students must recognize key human rights values and where appropriate, relate these values to the world according to the student. Historical perspectives, current events, personal experiences, and creativity and concise writing are ideal. Essays should be no longer than **one thousand (1,000) words**.

**3. DEADLINE:** **Tuesday, February 28, 2017**. No entries will be accepted after that date.

**Delivery to the Commission:**

Students or teachers may either hand deliver or mail essays directly to the Human Rights Commission. All entries must be received by **5:00 p.m. on February 28**.

**OR**

**Pickup at Schools:**

First, students or teachers should call the Human Rights Commission (812-376-2532) to arrange to have the entry picked up at the school by **Monday, February 27 at 5:00 p.m.** Then, on or before February 27 at 9:00 a.m., take the entry to the school's main office. Inform office staff that you are leaving an entry for pick up by the Human Rights Commission. Make sure to mark the entry(ies) with the following: "ATTENTION HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION: ESSAY CONTEST."

**4. JUDGING & AWARDS:** A panel of community members will judge the essays. We will notify essay contest winners, their teachers, and their schools in the days following the judging. Winners will receive a \$75 award, a book, and complimentary tickets to the **Commission's Annual Dinner** where the students will be recognized. Annual Dinner information will be forthcoming. Winning essays will be published on the Commission's website and in the annual report.

## 2017 Human Rights Commission Essay Topic: "Advocating for Others"

### BACKGROUND:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances." (*U.S. Constitution*. Amend. I). The First Amendment of the United States Constitution allows individuals the right to speak freely and come together in groups, as well as make their government aware of important issues. The amendment also gives the media the right to publish content without the fear of government restriction. Even you as a student have freedom of speech rights! For instance, in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, 393 U.S. 503 (1969), students who wore black armbands in protest of the Vietnam War sought relief after being suspended by their school for passively protesting the war. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the students since the students did not interfere with other students' rights, there was no evidence that prohibiting armbands interfered with the discipline of other students, and the court observed that the First Amendment was applicable to both students and teachers alike. Justice Fortas wrote in the opinion of the court, "It can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate." Since this Supreme Court decision in 1969, several different courts have applied the rule in *Tinker* to other freedom of speech issues for students, such as whether schools can prohibit students from wearing controversial images, such as the Confederate flag.<sup>1</sup>

Although the Supreme Court has ruled that freedom of speech is a guaranteed right for students, the court has also ruled that the constitutional amendment is not unlimited, particularly when it pertains to speech in school-sponsored publications and events. For instance, in *Hazelwood School v. Kuhlmeier*, 484 U.S. 260 (1988), students in a journalism class at Hazelwood High School in Missouri were not allowed to publish two articles in their school's student newspaper about teen pregnancy and divorce rates because the principal deemed that the content of their stories was inappropriate for younger students. The case reached the Supreme Court, where the court decided that, because the newspaper was part of the educational curriculum and a limited forum for journalism students, the school had an interest in monitoring the content of the articles. In another Supreme Court case, *Bethel School Dist. No. 403 v. Fraser*, 478 U.S. 675 (1986), the court ruled in favor of the Bethel School District after a student made graphic and vulgar comments during a largely-attended school assembly about another student running as a candidate for student government. The student was punished by the school as a result of his remarks and his father sued the school on behalf of his son alleging a violation of his son's freedom of speech. In the court's opinion, Chief Justice Burger wrote, "The First Amendment does not prevent the school officials from determining that to permit a vulgar and lewd speech such as [the student's] would undermine the school's basic educational mission."

Although schools have the ability to limit students' speech in certain instances, students can use their freedom of speech rights to highlight particular contemporary issues that they believe are important. Students can form clubs and groups that inspire dialogue, create an advocacy community, and work to promote awareness of social issues. One example is the students who

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<sup>1</sup> Luetkemeyer, Lucinda Housley. "Silencing the Rebel Yell: The Eighth Circuit Upholds a Public School's Ban on Confederate Flags." *Missouri Law Review*, vol. 75, issue 3, article 14, 2010, pp. 1—26, [scholarship.law.missouri.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3894&context=mlr](http://scholarship.law.missouri.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3894&context=mlr).

plan Dance Marathon as a way to raise funds for Turning Point Domestic Violence Services and who use Dance Marathon as a way to create awareness about domestic and teen dating violence.<sup>2</sup> Students have also used their school newspapers, such as Columbus North High School's *The Triangle*, to draw attention to problems that they perceive to be occurring in the school, such as unequal enforcement of dress code policies between male and female students<sup>3</sup> and the effect of potentially offensive language on students' self-esteem.<sup>4</sup> Students can use their freedom of speech to organize groups in order to challenge individuals who promote divisiveness. One example pertains to the students at Hanover College in Hanover, Indiana, who protested a rally held by the Ku Klux Klan in Madison, Indiana. Many of the Hanover College students, along with several community members, gathered to "send the message that the scenic town overlooking the Ohio River would not welcome hate."<sup>5</sup> Students can also utilize their social media accounts to stay informed of current events and promote social justice movements. One example includes students who participated in the END IT Movement, which launched in 2013 as a coalition of partners to "shine a light on slavery" throughout the world by creating awareness of modern day slavery.<sup>6</sup> In order to promote awareness of the movement, many individuals, including students, have drawn a red "X" on themselves as a symbol to end slavery and some students have hosted events on their campuses to promote the movement. Thanks to these individuals, the red "X" has been shared over 500 million times on social media according to the END IT Movement website and the coalition partners have raised over \$4 million since it launched in 2013, which they have used to help support 66 projects globally.<sup>7</sup>

*Continue to next page for essay prompt.*

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<sup>2</sup> Skirvin, Ben. "Marathon Makeover." *The Republic* [Columbus, Indiana], 09 May 2016, [www.therepublic.com/2016/02/29/marathon\\_makeover/](http://www.therepublic.com/2016/02/29/marathon_makeover/).

<sup>3</sup> "Wearing the Rules," Edited by Maddie Gaskill et. al, *The Triangle*, vol. 96, issue 21, Columbus North High School, 5 Oct. 2016, pp. 8 –13, [issuu.com/cnhsmedia.com/docs/issue2\\_2016married\\_copyfinal](http://issuu.com/cnhsmedia.com/docs/issue2_2016married_copyfinal).

<sup>4</sup> "Slurs that Hurt," Edited by Maddie Gaskill et. al, *The Triangle*, vol. 96, issue 4, Columbus North High School, 27 Nov. 2016, pp. 8 – 11, [issuu.com/cnhsmedia.com/docs/marriedcopy.use](http://issuu.com/cnhsmedia.com/docs/marriedcopy.use).

<sup>5</sup> Clark, Kirsten. "Madison residents reject Ku Klux Klan message." *Courier-Journal* [Louisville, Kentucky], 24 Sept. 2016. [www.courier-journal.com/story/news/local/indiana/2016/09/24/madison-residents-reject-ku-klux-klan-message/90934178/](http://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/local/indiana/2016/09/24/madison-residents-reject-ku-klux-klan-message/90934178/)

<sup>6</sup> *END IT Movement*. Choice Ministries, 2016, [enditmovement.com/](http://enditmovement.com/).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

**QUESTION:**

**How would you exercise your freedom of speech rights to advocate for others?**

You can use examples from your own life if applicable.

Questions to consider:

- Do words matter?
- What steps can you take to learn about other people's perspectives?
- What are some current issues that you are passionate about?
- Do you think there are voices that are not being heard in your community?
- Can you describe a historical or contemporary event where people used their freedom of speech to advocate for others?
- Could you describe a time when you stood up for something that you believed in although you were scared of potential consequences for voicing your concerns?
- Do you belong to a group and/or club that works to promote equity or inspire dialogue about particular issues that you feel are important in the community?
- Why should we advocate for others?
- Does advocating for others provide your community with any benefits?

**YOU MAY, IF YOU WISH, USE INFORMATION PROVIDED TO YOU IN THE  
"ESSAY TOOL BOX" TO ASSIST YOU IN WRITING YOUR ESSAY!**

# ESSAY CONTEST TOOL BOX

## Definitions:

**Acceptance:** The willingness to be receptive to an idea or person.

**Activism:** Persistent actions and organized efforts to achieve a particular political or social goal.

**Advocacy:** Supporting or pleading for a particular cause or policy.

**Bias:** An unfair act or policy stemming from prejudice.

**Dehumanization:** To deprive of human qualities or attributes; divest of individuality.

**Discrimination:** The exclusion of an individual from equal opportunities because of race, religion, color, sex, disability, national origin, ancestry, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, or status as a veteran.

**Diversity:** Group differences (such as race, sex, color, national origin, religion, disability, etc.).

**Freedom of Speech:** A right guaranteed in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution that allows individuals the ability to express their opinions without government censorship, with certain exceptions.

**Oppression:** The harsh and cruel power of one group of people over another.

**Prejudice:** An uninformed opinion that is negative and harmful about a particular group of people.

**Privilege:** An advantage that one small group of people enjoys and benefits from, such as wealth.

**Protest:** An action or statement that conveys an objection to or challenges something.

**Social justice:** The act of improving a situation or correcting a wrong or a social problem.

**Stereotype:** An oversimplified image or concept used to describe and categorize specific groups of people.

**Welcoming:** Behavior that is accepting and hospitable.

## Quotes:

*"I am thankful, however, that some of our white brothers in the South have grasped the meaning of this social revolution and committed themselves to it. They are still all too few in quantity, but they are big in quality. Some – such as Ralph McGill, Lillian Smith, Harry Golden, James McBride Dabbs, Ann Braden[,] and Sarah Patton-Boyle – have written about our struggle in eloquent and prophetic terms. Others have marched with us down nameless streets of the South. They have languished in filthy, roach infested jails, suffering the abuse and brutality of policemen who view them as 'dirty \*\*\*\*\*-lovers.' Unlike so many of their moderate brothers and sisters, they have recognized the urgency of the movement and sensed the need for powerful 'action' antidotes to combat the disease of segregation."* **(Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Letter from a Birmingham Jail).**<sup>8</sup>

*"I once read that there is a difference between freedom of speech and a free-for-all. The right of freedom of speech comes with responsibilities. Hurting others with hateful remarks, accusations and false statements is not freedom."* **(Larry Perkinson qtd. in The Triangle)**<sup>9</sup>

*"Having people to count on raises your faith in humanity because a community came together to show that they believe that there is a rainbow in every storm."* **(Reagan Kane, 2016 Benjamin M. King Essay Contest winner)**

*"A welcoming community is one that reacts with approval and joy towards those within, and outside of the community, accepting their differences and beliefs. This is more than being welcoming to those within the community and treating them with equity. More so, you must reach out to others, or those unwelcomed in other communities and let them know they will be treated as equals."* **(Katie Kime, 2016 Benjamin M. King Essay Contest winner)**

*"However, a few changes have ameliorated the situation, such as LGBT support groups and clubs, strong student alliances preventing religion or racial discrimination, and services to provide food, transportation, and housing for the disabled or for veterans."* **(Mila Lipinski, 2016 Benjamin M. King Essay Contest winner)**

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<sup>8</sup> King, Martin Luther. "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." 16 April 1963, Edited by Ali B. Ali-Dinar, *University of Pennsylvania*, [www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Letter\\_Birmingham.html](http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html)

<sup>9</sup> "Slurs that Hurt," Edited by Maddie Gaskill et. al, *The Triangle*, vol. 96, issue 4, Columbus North High School, 27 Nov. 2016, pp. 8 – 11, [issuu.com/cnhsmedia.com/docs/marriedcopy.use](http://issuu.com/cnhsmedia.com/docs/marriedcopy.use).

**Pictures:**



Mary Beth Tinker, sitting to left, one of the students named in the Supreme Court case *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, 393 U.S. 503 (1969), wore a black armband in protest of the Vietnam War.

Photograph of Mary Beth Tinker and her mother, circa 1965. "Tinker to appear at VSCU on Feb.18." *Valley City State University*. Vanney, Greg. 13 Feb. 2015. [www.vcsu.edu/news/news.htm?id=10416](http://www.vcsu.edu/news/news.htm?id=10416).



Students in the journalism class at Hazelwood High School in Missouri were not allowed to publish two articles in their student newspaper because the school administrators perceived the content of the articles as inappropriate for younger students.

Photograph of a student editor holding a copy of the Hazelwood High School's student newspaper *Spectrum*. *Exploring Constitutional Conflicts - Free Speech Rights of Students*, Linder, Douglass O., University of Missouri-Kansas City. [law2.umkc.edu/faculty/PROJECTS/FTRIALS/conlaw/studentspeech.htm](http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/PROJECTS/FTRIALS/conlaw/studentspeech.htm).



As a sign of solidarity, students can wear the red “X” to showcase The END IT Movement, which aims to create more awareness for slavery and fund anti-slavery initiatives.

Sutter, John D. “In praise of ‘slacktivism.’” *CNN*, 12 April 2013, [www.cnn.com/2013/04/12/opinion/sutter-slavery-end-it-movement/](http://www.cnn.com/2013/04/12/opinion/sutter-slavery-end-it-movement/)



Students from Hanover College protested a Ku Klux Klan rally held in Madison, Indiana, in September 2016.

Stone, Matt. “Gallery: Ku Klux Klan holds rally in Madison, Indiana.” *Courier-Journal* [Louisville, Kentucky], 24 Sept. 2016. [www.courier-journal.com/story/news/local/indiana/2016/09/24/madison-residents-reject-ku-klux-klan-message/90934178/](http://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/local/indiana/2016/09/24/madison-residents-reject-ku-klux-klan-message/90934178/).



Local students meet to discuss part of the planning process for Dance Marathon, a fundraiser for Turning Point Domestic Violence Services and an event to increase awareness for domestic and teen dating violence.

Jones, Chris. "Caring Students Come Together." *The Republic* [Columbus, Indiana], 11 Feb. 2015, [www.therepublic.com/2015/02/11/caring\\_students\\_come\\_together/](http://www.therepublic.com/2015/02/11/caring_students_come_together/).

**Online Resources:**

[First Amendment to the United States Constitution](#)

[What does Freedom of Speech Mean?](#)

[\*Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School Dist.\*, 393 U.S. 503 \(1969\)](#)

[\*Missouri Law Review: "Silencing the Rebel Yell: The Eighth Circuit Upholds a Public School's Ban on Confederate Flags"\*](#)

[Facts and Case Summary - Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier](#)

[\*Hazelwood School v. Kuhlmeier\*, 484 U.S. 260 \(1988\)](#)

[\*Bethel School Dist. No. 403 v. Fraser\*, 478 U.S. 675 \(1986\)](#)

[\*The Republic: "Marathon Makeover "\*](#)

[\*Courier-Journal: "Madison residents reject Ku Klux Klan Message"\*](#)

[Columbus North High School's \*The Triangle\*](#)

[END IT Movement](#)