

WINNERS of the Hildene Lincoln Essay Competition, 2024

Hildene received 211 submissions from around the state to this year's 8th Grade Lincoln Essay Competition. A first, second, and third-place winner was chosen from each of four regions and three honorable mentions were selected from the combined pool of finalists statewide. If you are one of the applicants, whether your essay garnered an award or not, you are to be congratulated for engaging in the process. It takes perseverance and many drafts to craft a compelling answer to the LEC prompts—and in 500 words or fewer! May your efforts alone encourage you to continue writing. The world needs people who can successfully articulate complex matters, adding a human touch to analysis and creative expression. We will be sending a letter to every student who participated, along with some guest passes to Hildene. Please come visit.

The context for this year's prompt was as follows: President Lincoln had a life-long interest in technology, believing in the power of human innovation to improve lives. In his Discoveries and Inventions lecture, he reflected on some of the essential human innovations that have shaped the course of history (speech, writing, the printing press, steam-power, etc.). Today, the emergence of artificial intelligence technology (AI) has the potential to make a similarly profound impact on society.

With this in mind, students responded to the following:

Select a subject or field that interests you and explore the potential impacts of artificial intelligence (AI) within that area. Provide a specific example of how AI could positively influence this field, as well as one example of how it could be detrimental. Based on the examples you've provided, explain whether you believe the benefits outweigh the risks to your chosen area of interest.

Congratulations to the winners!

Region One: Grand Isle, Franklin, Orleans, Essex, Lamoille, Caledonia, Washington Counties

First Place, \$500

Ursa Goldenrose

Ursa wrote about the impacts of AI on the field of fan fiction, finding that the risks to this community of writers and readers outweigh the benefits.

Hazen Union School, Hardwick; Teacher: Joseph Murphy

Second Place, \$400

Helena DeVore

Helena outlined both the positive and negative impacts that AI poses for the field of journalism, finding that the risks substantially outweigh the benefits.

Peoples Academy Middle Level, Morrisville; Teacher: Ryan VanDyk

Third Place, \$300

Ava Stratman

Ava believes society will adapt and learn to use AI in education responsibly as a tool in education so that the benefits will outweigh the risks.

Peoples Academy Middle Level, Morrisville; Teacher: Ryan VanDyk

Region Two: Chittenden County

First Place, \$500

Maelyn Slavik

Maelyn wrote about the pros and cons of AI for artists and writers, finding that the risk of losing the irreplaceable element of human creativity far outweigh the benefits.

Edmunds Middle School, Burlington; Teacher: Stephen Boyle

Second Place, \$400

Hanna Schold

Hanna wrote about the loss of connection between musicians and fans, finding that the risks of AI in the music industry outweigh the benefits.

Mater Christi School, Burlington; Teacher: Katherine Fischer

Third Place, \$300

Britta Fitzgerald

Britta found that the benefits of AI in eldercare (specifically, the use of companion robots) outweigh the risks, given the shortage of healthcare workers.

Edmunds Middle School, Burlington; Teacher: Jeremy DeMink

Region Three: Addison, Rutland, Bennington Counties

First Place, \$500

Levi Stoll

Levi sees AI as a major boon to diagnostic radiology, provided human radiologists aided by it are cognizant of its inherent biases.

Maple Street School, Manchester Center; Teacher: Conor Welch

Second Place, \$400

Timmy Fitzsimmons

Timmy wrote about the risks AI poses to democracy that far outweigh its benefits, writing specifically about the dangers it poses during an election year.

Maple Street School, Manchester Center; Teacher: Conor Welch

Third Place, \$300

Madison King

Madison found that—as long as the essential human touch in healthcare is preserved—the benefits of AI to the field hold immense promise.

Mount Abraham Union Middle/High School, Bristol; Teacher: Emily Ringquist

Region Four: Orange, Windsor, Windham Counties

First Place, \$500

Declan Read-Murrell

Declan wrote that the benefits of AI in law enforcement at this time are not worth the risks that such technology poses, given its inherent biases.

Upper Valley Waldorf School, Quechee; Teacher: Devon Abbey

Second Place, \$400

Ezra Keim

Ezra writes that while AI might be a wonderful tool for some forms of writing (corporate, advertising), the risks it poses to authors and journalists far outweigh the benefits.

Hilltop Montessori School, Brattleboro; Teacher: Ani Schaeffer

Third Place, \$300

Ashton Perkins

Ashton found that, despite some of the benefits of AI in agriculture, the risks (like job loss) far outweigh the advantages.

Upper Valley Waldorf School, Quechee; Teacher: Devon Abbey

3 Honorable Mentions, \$200 each

Tegan Bushey

Tegan wrote that even though AI in the field of architecture has the potential to threaten jobs and curtail human creativity, the benefits (lowering costs for housing, detecting structural hazards, etc.) outweigh the concerns it poses.

Edmunds Middle School, Burlington; Teacher: Terrence Richards

Isa Cramer

Isa wrote about the many ways in which AI could take a tremendous toll on the entertainment industry, despite some of its benefits.

Edmunds Middle School, Burlington; Teacher: Kathy Gallagher

Elle Lipkin

Elle wrote that if AI is used in partnership with trained professionals in animal healthcare, the benefits to the field will far outweigh the risks.

Lake Champlain Waldorf School, Shelburne; Teacher: Abigail Diehl-Noble