

The 1776 Declaration of Independence proclaims:

*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.*

In 1858, while running for the US Senate, Abraham Lincoln implored listeners to return to the founding document:

...if you have been taught doctrines conflicting with the great landmarks of the Declaration of Independence; if you have listened to suggestions which would take away from its grandeur, and mutilate the fair symmetry of its proportions; if you have been inclined to believe that all men are not created equal in those inalienable rights enumerated by our chart of liberty, let me entreat you to come back. *(August 17, 1958; Lewiston, Illinois)*

Now, in 2021, we ask you to focus on “the unalienable rights” in the Declaration by answering the following prompt:

***Choose one issue that you think demonstrates how our nation either is or is not honoring the ideal that all people have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Give three examples to support your position. Finally, suggest one step that could either further strengthen our course or get our nation back on track and explain why this step would be effective.***

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For the past fourteen years, Hildene has administered the Lincoln Essay Competition informed by our mission: Values into Action. Using Abraham Lincoln’s legacy as touchstone, Hildene seeks to inspire young people to tackle important issues, underscoring the responsibility each of us has to help make our world a better place. The competition is open to all eighth graders in the state of Vermont, whether they enter as part of a class assignment or on their own. Essays will be judged on the student’s understanding of the subject, as well as by their ability to convey that understanding through good writing.

**PLEASE NOTE:** This competition is divided into four regions. There will be a first, second, and third place winner from each region. The judges may also select up to four essays for honorable mention from anywhere in the state. As always, the judging is blind. Students enter the competition according to the region in which their school is located. Home-schooled students will enter according to the region they live in. The regions are listed in the FAQ section.

**Winners will receive certificates and cash prizes, as follows:**

First Place Winners:	\$500 each	Third Place Winners:	\$300 each
Second Place Winners:	\$400 each	Up to four Honorable Mentions:	\$200 each

**Awards Luncheon:** Each winner will be invited to an awards luncheon, along with their parents, teacher and principal as our guests. In order to receive their checks and certificates, **all winners/honorees must attend the luncheon**, at which time all first-place essays will be read aloud. The celebration will be at Hildene on **Sunday, May 16, 2021**. In the event that the luncheon is cancelled due to the COVID pandemic, we will ask each student to video record their essay and we will post their readings on Hildene’s YouTube channel. To see last year’s videos, visit: <https://bit.ly/3nI01vg>

**Deadline for submissions:** All essays and application forms must arrive at Hildene by mail or by hand no later than 4:00pm on Friday, February 26, 2021. Hildene is currently open 10:00am to 4:00pm Thursday - Monday. This year, we will also accept submissions via email to this address: [lec@hildene.org](mailto:lec@hildene.org). All emailed submissions must arrive by 11:59pm, February 26. Please note: Faxed, and late entries will **not** be accepted.

**Notification:** All winners will be notified by April 10 and announced on Hildene’s website.

**Attached materials: Please read the entire packet before submitting entry.**

- FAQ's: Rules, Guidelines and Tips
- Judges' Assessment Rubric
- Application Form, to be signed by student, teacher and parent/guardian

All materials may be downloaded from our website, [hildene.org/learning/lincoln\\_essay](http://hildene.org/learning/lincoln_essay), where you can also find examples of winning essays from previous years.

**Questions?** Contact Stephanie Moffett-Hynds at [stephanie@hildene.org](mailto:stephanie@hildene.org) or 802.367.7960.

## FAQ's • Rules, Guidelines & Tips

In his speech, Abraham Lincoln is referencing the heart of the Declaration of Independence. While he was focused on the issue of slavery in 1858, his impassioned plea to go back to this founding document could just as easily be addressed to Americans today. The purpose of this year's prompt is to invite you to examine the relevance of "that immortal emblem of humanity," as he called it, by applying it to one of any number of current issues that test its premise.

### **Who is eligible to participate?**

The competition is open to all eighth-grade students who live in Vermont or go to public, private, or home schools in the state of Vermont. Each entrant is permitted to submit one entry. (There are a few schools in neighboring states which are the designated schools for some Vermont eighth graders. Those Vermont residents are also eligible to participate. Please check with Hildene to verify eligibility.)

### **What are the four regions?**

Students should enter the competition according to the region in which their school is located. Home-schooled students should enter according to the region where they live. Regions are comprised of counties:

Region One: Grand Isle, Franklin, Orleans, Essex, Lamoille, Caledonia, Washington  
Region Two: Chittenden  
Region Three: Addison, Rutland, Bennington  
Region Four: Orange, Windsor, Windham

### **What are the essay format requirements?**

Essays must:

- not exceed 500 words
- have a title (not included as part of the word count)
- be written in English
- be typewritten in 12pt font (Times New Roman or Calibri preferred)
- be on **one** side of a single page (just the essay on one side)
- include **only endnotes and bibliography on back** of essay
- not have name or any other identifier of applicant or applicant's school on essay or within the text of the essay

**How do I cite my sources?**

If you attribute a quote or idea to someone or to a group, please do not use footnotes. Rather, include your attribution(s) in the form of endnotes on the back of your essay. Your bibliography should be included there, as well, which will list any sources you examined in researching the topic. (Please remember that Wikipedia is not an acceptable source.) For citation style, we suggest you use the Style Guide of the Modern Language Association.

**May others write my essay or parts of my essay?**

No. The essay must be the original work of the submitting student. While editorial comment or guidance from fellow students, teachers, parents or other advisers is permissible, the actual writing and editing decisions must be the student's own work and reflect their own voice. It is possible for others to cross the line from what is considered acceptable guidance into what we would consider unacceptable collaboration. Teachers, parents and any other advisors should keep this in mind while guiding their students. For example, it is okay to ask students to come up with sources, but not okay to pick the sources out for the students. It is okay to indicate where there are grammatical errors, but not okay to tell the student specifically how to correct them. While teachers guide the process, it must remain primarily student-driven and result in an essay that truly reflects each student's thoughts and ability. To this end, the student, teacher and parent/guardian must each sign the oath on the attached application form. If the teacher is unable to sign student application forms due to COVID restrictions, they must send an email to [lec@hildene.org](mailto:lec@hildene.org) certifying each student's compliance.

**How do I submit my essay?**

Essays and application forms may be submitted 1) by mail, 2) in person, or 3) via email.

By mail or by hand, no later than 4pm, February 26th, 2021, to:

Hildene, The Lincoln Family Home  
Attention: Lincoln Essay Competition  
PO Box 377  
Manchester, VT 05254

Via one email, with two attachments: application form and separate anonymous essay (essays are reproduced for judging purposes, and must not include the name of the student, school, or teacher).  
Name files: "firstname\_lastname\_LEC\_application" and "Hildene\_LEC\_Essay"  
Email to: [lec@hildene.org](mailto:lec@hildene.org) by 11:59pm, February 26, 2021.

**Is it okay if my essay is a little late?**

No. The essay and application form must arrive by mail or by hand, or via an email as above. Hildene is currently open 10am - 4pm, Thursday - Monday, for hand deliveries. Please Note: Faxed and late entries will not be accepted.

**How will my essay be judged?**

Essays are judged on overall effectiveness, organization and development, use of language, mechanics, grammar and factual accuracy. Essays that do not answer all parts of the prompt will not advance to the final round. Please refer to the attached Judges' Assessment Rubric which should serve as a writer's guideline for you.

**Who will judge my essay?**

The judges come from a variety of backgrounds, ethnicities, geographical locations, vocations, religions, genders, etc., and include a mix of new and repeat judges every year. The judges never see anything that identifies the student, their address or the school they attend.

**When and how will the announcement of winners take place?**

Winners will be notified by April 10th, and will be announced on our website. Non-winners will receive a letter and guest passes to Hildene. Make certain that the mailing address that you provide is accurate and legible. Announcements to the press will be made in May.

**If my essay wins an award, do I need to attend the luncheon?**

Yes! In order to receive the awards, all winners, including honorable mention, must attend the awards luncheon at which time all first-place essays will be read aloud. The winners, their parents, teachers and principals will be Hildene's guests at this special event held annually to honor Abraham Lincoln's legacy. The awards luncheon will be at Hildene on Sunday, May 16, 2021, following a tour of The Lincoln Family Home. In the event that we need to cancel the luncheon due to the COVID pandemic, we will ask winners and honorable mentions to video record a reading of their essay. A compilation of recorded submissions will be available for viewing through Hildene's YouTube channel.

**Are there any disclaimers?**

Hildene reserves the right to use all submitted pieces in future publications and there will be no compensation to the author for such use.

**Does Hildene offer any additional tips for how I can best go about writing my essay?**

Yes! So glad you asked...

**TIPS ON WRITING A WINNING ESSAY: WHAT WE'VE LEARNED**

- Enjoy the process of researching. The Hildene essay question changes every year and provides an opportunity for students to speak with an expert on the topic, view online podcasts or video, take a field trip, read a variety of related materials and so forth. Brainstorm with other students about places where you can locate reliable and relevant information.
- Break the prompt down into each of its parts and check that your essay addresses all aspects of the assignment. **One of the biggest reasons an essay does not advance to the final round is because the student has not fully answered every element of the question.** Teachers can help you to understand exactly what is being asked by analyzing the prompt. This will guide your research as well as your writing. There is also a checklist on the back of your application form to help you with this.
- Assess and strengthen your essay using the attached rubric as a tool. Did you support your position with relevant examples, facts and logic? Do you have a strong beginning, middle and end? Many essays start out with a strong introduction and make excellent points, but then fizzle out at the end. Give some thought to how you'll bring your essay to a compelling conclusion.
- Check your grammar and mechanics (sentence structure, spelling, capitalization, punctuation). Essays with these problems almost never make it to the final round.
- Seek ongoing appropriate feedback from your language arts teacher, history teacher, reading specialist, parent, school or town librarian or other knowledgeable persons for improving your grammar, punctuation, historical accuracy, thinking process and syntax. They may give guidance (point out where there might be a problem), as long as you are the one who determines the adjustments and makes the editing decisions.
- Read your essay aloud, or have someone else read it aloud to you, to see if it flows logically and to hear if there are any awkward or incomplete sentences.
- Set deadlines for research, submitted notes and drafts, and feedback from parents and/or teachers to ensure you have enough time to complete the entire process.
- If you are mailing your essay to Hildene, please postmark your entry at least a week before the deadline to ensure it arrives on time. Faxed or late submissions will not be accepted.

**What is Hildene, The Lincoln Family Home?**

For 70 years, Hildene was home to three generations of direct descendants of Abraham and Mary Lincoln. It was built in 1905 by presidential son, statesman and successful industrialist Robert and his wife Mary Harlan Lincoln, with the intention that it be their ancestral home.

Annually, over 40,000 guests from far and wide visit the 412 acre estate's Welcome Center and The Museum Store; historic home and gardens; Lincoln exhibit; 1903 Pullman car, Sunbeam; goat dairy and cheese-making facility; wetland; floating boardwalk and sustainable agriculture and education programs at Dene Farm, and more than 12 miles of four-season walking trails. While rooted in Lincoln's values, Hildene is focused on 21st century social, environmental and educational goals as seen through the lens of history, preservation, conservation and sustainability.

Hildene's mission, Values into Action, is about making a difference. No matter how people interact with Hildene, our goal is for them to leave thinking about the world in a deeper way. The core values attendant to Hildene's mission are integrity, perseverance, and civic responsibility, all of which are manifest in venues and programming across our 412 acres and beyond.

We believe people are hungry for meaningful involvement with their community, their state, their country and the world. Hildene works to inspire them to act.

**Whom may I contact, if I have questions?**

Stephanie Moffett-Hynds, Programming Director, 802.367.7960 or [stephanie@hildene.org](mailto:stephanie@hildene.org) ***\*Please do not use this email address when submitting essays and applications. Be sure to use: [lec@hildene.org](mailto:lec@hildene.org).***

**JUDGES' ASSESSMENT RUBRIC**

ESSAY # \_\_\_\_\_

Place an "X" on the number that best describes this work.  
 GRADING: 1 - 4 (4 = High Score, 1 = Low Score)

<p><b>OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS</b></p>	<p>Answers prompt fully: addresses all parts of the assignment; includes relevant supporting information and reflects depth of thought.</p>	<p>Answers prompt fully: addresses all parts of the assignment; includes supporting information, some of which is too general and/or irrelevant but reflects depth of thought.</p>	<p>Answers most but not all of the assignment; provides mostly relevant supporting information; lacks sufficient depth of thought.</p>	<p>Answers some but not all of the assignment; supporting information is irrelevant and/or inadequate, lacks depth of thought.</p>
<p><b>ORGANIZATION &amp; DEVELOPMENT OF ESSAY</b></p>	<p>Careful, logical progression with clear beginning, middle and end; transitions connect ideas effectively and lead to a very strong conclusion.</p>	<p>Logical progression with clear beginning, middle and end; some awkward transitions; and a strong conclusion.</p>	<p>Gaps in logical progression with some redundancy; ineffective transitions; and a weak or unsubstantiated conclusion.</p>	<p>Random or weak progression; lacks clear beginning, middle and end; transitions and conclusion are ineffective or missing.</p>
<p><b>USE OF LANGUAGE</b></p>	<p>Rich, expressive, accurate language and vocabulary used throughout.</p>	<p>Effective use of language and vocabulary.</p>	<p>Frequently imprecise use of language and vocabulary.</p>	<p>Ineffective use of language and vocabulary.</p>
<p><b>MECHANICS &amp; GRAMMAR</b></p>	<p>No errors in sentence structure; syntax is varied and effective; punctuation is solid. No errors in spelling.</p>	<p>Few errors in sentence structure or mechanics. 1 - 2 errors in spelling.</p>	<p>Imprecise, confusing sentence structure; some problems with mechanics. Several errors in spelling.</p>	<p>Little sentence structure; many grammatical errors. Many errors in spelling.</p>
<p><b>OBVIOUS FACTUAL ACCURACY</b></p>	<p>No errors in obvious factual accuracy.</p>	<p>One error in obvious factual accuracy.</p>	<p>Several errors in obvious factual accuracy.</p>	<p>Many errors in obvious factual accuracy.</p>

<p><b>COLUMN TOTALS</b></p>	<p><input type="text"/></p>	<p><input type="text"/></p>	<p><input type="text"/></p>	<p><input type="text"/></p>	<p>+ + + + = <b>GRAND TOTAL</b></p>
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**APPLICATION FORM**

Applicant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Region: One \_\_\_\_ Two \_\_\_\_ Three \_\_\_\_ Four \_\_\_\_  
 Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Current Grade: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Home Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Home Mailing Address: Street \_\_\_\_\_ P.O. Box \_\_\_\_\_  
 City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Are you submitting this essay as a Home Study student?: Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_  
 Name of School: \_\_\_\_\_  
 School Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
 School Mailing Address: Street or PO Box \_\_\_\_\_  
 City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Teacher's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Teacher's Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Extension: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Principal's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Essay Question:**

***Choose one issue that you think demonstrates how our nation either is or is not honoring the ideal that all people have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Give three examples to support your position. Finally, suggest one step that could either further strengthen our course or get our nation back on track and explain why this step would be effective.***

**Student Pledge:** By signing below, I certify that I live or go to school in Vermont and that the submitted essay is my own work. I authorize Hildene to use my work in all future related events and publications without compensation and I understand that if I am a winner, I must attend the luncheon in order to receive my prize, at which time my essay will be read aloud. *\*In the event that the luncheon is cancelled due to the COVID pandemic, students will be asked to video record the reading of their essay, and recordings will be published on Hildene's YouTube channel.* I have also completed the checklist on the back of this form.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Print your name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Teacher/Advisor Pledge:** I certify that I have read all the contents of the competition packet, that the essay is the student's original work and that it meets all the requirements of Hildene's Lincoln Essay Competition. *\*Teachers/Advisors - if you are unable to sign student forms due to COVID restrictions, please send an email to [lec@hildene.org](mailto:lec@hildene.org) certifying each student's compliance.*

Teacher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Print your name: \_\_\_\_\_ Is this your first time participating? \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent/Guardian Pledge:** I certify that I have read all the contents of the competition packet, that the essay is the student's original work and that it meets all the requirements of Hildene's Lincoln Essay Competition.

Parent's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Print your name: \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Submission Deadline: Friday, February 26, 2021.** Essay and application form must arrive at Hildene before 4:00pm if by mail or by hand, and 11:59pm if via email. Please note: Faxed, or late entries will not be accepted. Please be sure the address used for applicant on this application form is that used for U.S. mail delivery.

### CHECKLIST

Complete this check list before submitting your essay and application form:

\_\_\_ I read the entire application packet.

\_\_\_ I identified one issue that I think demonstrates how our nation either is or is not honoring the ideal that all people have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

\_\_\_ I gave three examples to support my position.

\_\_\_ I suggested one step that could either further strengthen the course of our nation or get our nation back on track.

\_\_\_ I explained why I think this step would be effective.

\_\_\_ I checked my essay using the Judges' Assessment Rubric to make sure I have satisfied all the requirements for writing a strong essay.

\_\_\_ I typed my essay on **one** side of a page **only**, included a **title**, and put all citations on the reverse side of the essay (one sheet, two-sided).

\_\_\_ I made sure not to include my name on or in the essay, nor did I include the name of my school.

\_\_\_ I will mail my essay at least one week in advance. If I am submitting via email (lec@hildene.org), I will send one email with two attachments: anonymous essay and completed application form

### What is Hildene's hope for participants?

While it is always fun to win, the reality is that not everyone will win a prize. We cannot emphasize enough that it is the process of examining a tough issue and endeavoring to articulate a well thought-out and compelling response to it that is the most important aspect of this competition. We hope you'll nurture a sense of pride in developing this skill which will surely be useful throughout your lives. Whether you win an award or not, this competition is very challenging and you are to be commended for making your best effort to offer a genuine response. All participants will receive a letter of acknowledgement, along with guest passes to Hildene. Do plan a visit!