

2023  
Lincoln Essay Competition  
Student Packet



Photograph by Matthew B. Brady. Published by Richards, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. A portrait of Abraham Lincoln & "Tad." Retrieved from the Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/lprbscm.scsm0759/>

**"A capacity and taste for reading gives access  
to whatever has already been discovered by others.**

It is the key, or one of the keys, to the already solved problem.  
And not only so, it gives a relish and facility for successfully pursuing  
the yet unsolved ones."

— *Letter from Abraham Lincoln to John M. Brockman, September 25, 1860*

## **Hildene's 2023 Lincoln Essay Competition Prompt**

Encouraging civil civic discourse, especially around difficult subjects, is a key part of Hildene's mission. In this year's competition, students will consider the delicate topic of censorship. Across the United States, the number of book challenges (attempts to remove or restrict access to a book based on its content) has increased dramatically—despite the fact that schools and libraries employ specific policies and procedures for choosing materials to include in their collections and curricula.

In 500 words or fewer, please respond to the following:

**Choose a book, in consultation with a parent or guardian, from the Shortlist of Challenged Books\* and read it, if you have not already. Imagine that there is a request to remove this book from your local public library, school library, or 8th-grade classroom and that you, as a student, have been asked to give your opinion about how the school or library should respond. First, identify at least one reason why someone might challenge this book. Second, state what action(s) you think the school or library should take in response to the challenge. Third, give two distinct, well-explained reasons why this is an appropriate response. Finally, describe what you think the potential long-term impacts of your recommendation would be if it were implemented.**

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### **Shortlist of Challenged Books**

These books are listed on the American Libraries Association website as having been challenged in the U.S. within the past two years:

*All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely  
*Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank  
*Drama* by Raina Telgemeier  
*Ghost Boys* by Jewell Parker Rhodes  
*Maus* by Art Spiegelman  
*Melissa* (previously titled *George*) by Alex Gino  
*New Kid* by Jerry Craft  
*Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson  
*Stamped: Racism, Antiracism and You* by Ibram X. Kendi and Jason Reynolds  
*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie  
*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain  
*To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

**\*You may choose a book that is not on this list, as long as you provide proof in your endnotes showing when and where it was challenged.**

### **How do schools and libraries go about creating policies and procedures?**

Libraries typically use the *Selection & Reconsideration Policy Toolkit for Public, School, & Academic Libraries* (<https://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/selectionpolicytoolkit>) provided by the American Library Association to assist in the creation of their policies. Educators can avail themselves of resources such as *Guidelines for Selection of Materials in English Language Arts Programs* (<https://ncte.org/statement/material-selection-ela/>) from the National Council of Teachers of English. The policies created should reflect the institution's guiding principles while affirming the importance of intellectual freedom. The goal is to have a fair, consistent, transparent process for selecting books, weeding collections (removing materials which are no longer in use, in favor of new items), and reconsidering books when they are challenged.

For the past sixteen 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 engage in important issues—mindful of the responsibility each of us has to help make our world a better place.

The competition is open to all eighth graders who study in the state of Vermont, whether through an institution or at home, or whose primary residence is in the state of Vermont while attending a designated public school just over the border. Essays will be judged on the student's understanding of the subject, as well as on their ability to convey that understanding through good writing.

**The competition is regional.** There will be a first, second, and third place winner from each of four regions. Occasionally there are ties. The judges may also select up to four essays for honorable mention from anywhere in the state. As always, essays remain anonymous throughout judging. Students enter the competition according to the region in which their school is located. If the student is home-schooled or their designated public school is across state lines, they should enter according to the region in Vermont 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

**Winners will receive certificates and the following cash prizes:**

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

**Essay requirements:**

**Essays must:**

- be written in English
- have a title (not included as part of the word count)
- be typewritten in Arial font, 12 pt, with 1.15 line spacing
- respond to all parts of the prompt
- **not** have entrant's name or any other identifier of applicant or applicant's school on essay or within the text of the essay (this helps to ensure that judging remains unbiased)
- be authored and edited by the student (see FAQs & TIPS)
- not exceed 500 words and fit on one side of first page; include any endnotes and relevant citations on second page, not to exceed second page (alter formatting to fit) (see FAQs & TIPS)

**Awards Luncheon:** Each winner will be invited to an awards luncheon, along with their parents, teacher, and principal as our guests. **We expect all winners/honorees to attend the luncheon.** All first-place essays will be read aloud, preferably by the entrant (although they may choose a reader other than themselves). The celebration will be at Hildene on **Sunday, May 21, 2023**. In the event that the luncheon is cancelled due to the COVID pandemic or other unforeseen circumstances, we will choose an alternate platform on which to celebrate winners.

**Deadline for submissions:** Entries are complete if they include: **1) application form** and, **2) essay**. All essays and application forms must arrive at Hildene by **4:30pm on Sunday, February 12, 2023**, in one of three ways:

- **Mail:** If you plan to mail, PLEASE mail at least one week in advance to ensure arrival. Late entries will not be accepted.  
Hildene, The Lincoln Family Home  
ATTN: Lincoln Essay Competition  
PO Box 377  
Manchester, VT 05254
- **Email:** email [lec@hildene.org](mailto:lec@hildene.org) with two attachments. The applications must be named "firstname\_lastname\_LEC\_application" and essays "firstname\_lastname\_LEC\_Essay"
- **Hand-deliver:** Deliver sealed packets to Hildene's Welcome Center front desk (1005 Hildene Road, Manchester, VT, 05254). Hildene is currently open 10:00am to 4:30pm, Thursday - Monday (closed Tuesday and Wednesday). On Sunday, February 12, 2023, Hildene will be open until 4:30 pm.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Faxed, and late entries will **not** be accepted.

**Notification:** All winners will be notified by April 12, 2023. Winners are also announced on Hildene's website by 4pm, April 12. Non-winners will be notified thereafter via mail. Be sure your address is legible and USPS-acceptable. In other words, if your family gets mail in a P.O. Box, please be sure to list that instead of a street address. We will be mailing guest passes to all participants.

**Disclaimer:** Hildene reserves the right to publish winning essays, unaltered (with the exception of formatting), on any media. Authors will be credited but not compensated.

**Where to find info:** ALL materials are either included in the paper mailing received by your school or may be found on Hildene's website: [https://hildene.org/learning/lincoln\\_essay](https://hildene.org/learning/lincoln_essay). **Please read the entire 9-page packet so that you are well-positioned to participate.**

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

**APPLICATION FORM - PLEASE PRINT LEGIBLY!**

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

**Essay Prompt, 2023:**

*Choose a book, in consultation with a parent or guardian, from the attached Shortlist of Challenged Books\* and read it, if you have not already. Imagine that there is a request to remove this book from your local public library, school library, or 8th-grade classroom and that you, as a student, have been asked to give your opinion about how the school or library should respond. First, identify at least one reason why someone might challenge this book. Second, state what action(s) you think the school or library should take in response to the challenge. Third, give two distinct, well-explained reasons why this is an appropriate response. Finally, describe what you think the potential long-term impacts of your recommendation would be if it were implemented.*

**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. If my essay wins 1st place, it will be read aloud. *\*In the event that the luncheon is cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances, 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: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Submission Deadline: Sunday, February 12, 2023.** Essay and application form must arrive at Hildene before 4:30pm. 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 FOR STUDENTS

Complete this checklist before submitting your essay and application form:

- \_\_\_ I read the entire application packet, including the FAQ's & Tips and Judges Rubric.
- \_\_\_ I consulted a parent or guardian in choosing a book.
- \_\_\_ I read the entire book that I chose for this essay.
- \_\_\_ I identified at least one reason why this book has been challenged.
- \_\_\_ I stated an action(s) that I think the school or library should take in response to the challenge.
- \_\_\_ I gave two distinct, well-explained reasons why this would be an appropriate response.
- \_\_\_ I described what I think the potential long-term impacts of my recommendation might be.
- \_\_\_ 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 (500 word or fewer) essay on **one** side of a page **only**, included a **title**, and put all citations on the **reverse side**.
- \_\_\_ I used Arial font, at 12 pt. and 1.15 pt. spacing.
- \_\_\_ I made sure not to include my name on or in the essay, nor did I include the name of my school.
- \_\_\_ For mailed entries: I am mailing it well in advance of the deadline.
- \_\_\_ For emailed entries: I am submitting via email to: lec@hildene.org. I will send one email with two attachments: the essay titled "firstname\_lastname\_LEC\_Essay," and completed application form titled "firstname\_lastname\_LEC\_application" before 4:30pm on Sunday, February 12.

### 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. Developing this skill 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!



## FAQs & TIPS

**What is plagiarism and how do I prevent it?** Plagiarism is the use of another's work, words, or ideas without giving them proper credit and is thus a form of academic dishonesty. It is fine and even encouraged to reference someone else's ideas or work, but it is not okay to pass it off as your own. The conclusions you draw from having learned from others are your own ideas. To prevent plagiarism, use citations.

**What are endnotes and citations and how do I include them?** Don't let the citation process intimidate you. Just do the best you can using the following guidelines. If, in your essay, you attribute a quote or idea to someone or to a group, you will assign a number to that reference and then provide the details in a corresponding endnote on the back of your essay. Your citations should be included there, as well, which will list any relevant sources you examined while researching the topic.

To see examples of citations in past winning essays, visit:

[https://hildene.org/sites/default/files/pdf/LEC\\_first\\_place\\_essays\\_2022.pdf](https://hildene.org/sites/default/files/pdf/LEC_first_place_essays_2022.pdf)

To learn how to include citations, use one of these resources recommended by Vermont librarians:

1. Purdue Owl Writing Lab at:

[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/mla\\_style/mla\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/mla\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_and_style_guide.html)

2. ZoteroBib, at <https://zbib.org/> (Fast, free bibliography generator - MLA, APA, Chicago, Harvard citations)

3. NoodleTools Free Tools at <https://www.noodletools.com/free/>

4. MyBib at <https://www.mybib.com/> (Free APA, Harvard, & MLA Citation Generator)

Please also feel free to use the organizer template that a recent LEC winner created to help him keep track of his sources and organize his thoughts: [https://hildene.org/sites/default/files/pdf/LEC\\_Steps\\_to\\_Success\\_student\\_organizer.pdf](https://hildene.org/sites/default/files/pdf/LEC_Steps_to_Success_student_organizer.pdf)

**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 will my essay be judged?** Essays are judged on overall effectiveness, organization and development, use of language, mechanics and grammar. Please refer to the attached Judges' Assessment Rubric which should serve as a writer's guideline for you. 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.

**If my essay wins an award, do I need to attend the luncheon?** Yes! We ask that all winners, including honorable mention, 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 21, 2023 following a tour of The Lincoln Family Home. In the event that we need to cancel the luncheon due to the COVID pandemic or other unforeseen circumstance, 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.

**Submissions by Teachers:** If you, as the teacher, are submitting one or more submissions via email, please include each student's application form and essay as individual attachments.

**Can I submit via multiple means?** Yes, if necessary, but it is not recommended. If submitting pieces of the application separately, indicate that you are doing so.

**Signatures, application form:** Protocols with regard to the COVID pandemic, or extenuating circumstances, may require teachers and/or parents and caregivers to submit emailed "signatures." Signatures may be submitted via email or mail, and in the form of a simple acknowledgement. Acknowledgments cannot come from entrants' own email address.

Home-schooled students are required one adult signature only, from a 1) teacher, or 2) parent/guardian.

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

- 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.
- 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.
- Check your grammar and mechanics (sentence structure, spelling, capitalization, punctuation). Essays with these problems almost never make it to the final round.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 Lincoln 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. 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 the property 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.



# JUDGES' ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

HIGHEST  
SCORE  
↓  
**5**

LOWEST  
SCORE  
↓  
**1**

**2**

**3**

**4**

## Answering the Prompt

Answers all prompt components fully; includes only relevant supporting information; reflects depth of thought

Answers the prompt fully but strays slightly off topic or lacks depth of thought

Answers the prompt but strays off topic and lacks depth of thought

Answers most but not all of the prompt

Barely addresses the prompt

## Organization & Effectiveness of Argument

Logical progression with clear beginning, middle, and end; cohesive internal paragraph structure; definitive thesis, compelling arguments that substantiate a strong conclusion, sophisticated transitions

Logical progression with clear beginning, middle, and end; good internal paragraph structure; clear thesis, argument, and conclusion

Logical progression with clear beginning, middle, and end; good internal paragraph structure; unclear thesis, unclear conclusion, and/or awkward transitions

Logical progression with beginning, middle, and end; weak internal paragraph structure; unclear thesis and conclusion, and awkward transitions

Gaps in logical progression or redundancies; unclear beginning, middle, and/or end; lacks thesis or conclusion

## Use of Language and Vocabulary

Effective, nuanced, expressive use of language and vocabulary throughout; clear voice

Effective use of language and vocabulary

Adequate use of language and vocabulary, but unrefined; few obvious errors

Occasional imprecise use of language and vocabulary

Largely ineffective use of language and vocabulary

## Mechanics and Grammar

No mechanical or grammatical errors; syntax is varied and effective; punctuation is appropriate

Total of 1-2 minor mechanical or grammatical errors which do not significantly affect the meaning; some syntactical variation

Total of 3-5 minor mechanical or grammatical errors which do not significantly affect the meaning; little to no syntactical variation

More than 5 minor mechanical or grammatical errors; errors do not significantly affect the meaning; little to no syntactical variation

Errors that significantly affect the meaning of the essay or impede readability