



"The word is mightier than the sword" - Ahiqar 500 BC

Celebrate America: a Creative Writing Contest for Fifth Graders

Racial and class inequalities are growing in our country and negative vitriol around the issue of immigration is dominating the headlines. The American Immigration Council is teaming up with schools and community groups to provide young people the resources and information necessary to think critically about immigration from both a historical and contemporary perspective.

In an effort to educate children and communities about the value of immigration to our society, the American Immigration Council developed an annual national creative writing contest for 5th graders. "Celebrate America" began 18 years ago with just a couple dozen entries. Today it has grown to over 5,000 entries annually. Since 1997 a total of over 70,000 students have participated in over two dozen cities, in nearly 800 schools and community centers, across the nation.

"Celebrate America" encourages youth, families and surrounding communities to evaluate and appreciate the effects of immigration in their own lives. The unique contest includes the following components:

- Immigration attorneys visit classrooms and give short presentations about the history of American immigration and the contributions immigrants have made over the years;
- Immigration attorneys support the educators in the local contests by soliciting local prizes, judging entries, and organizing awards ceremonies to honor the contest participants, the winners and the school community;
- Local experts, educators, business owners and celebrities judge the entries in each of the participating locales;
- Teachers compliment the contest by implementing lessons about immigration, social justice and diversity into their curriculum;
- A majority of the schools and educators that participate do so again the following year;
- The American Immigration Council provides classrooms with innovative and relevant lessons and resources;
- Communities organize events, naturalization ceremonies and other celebrations to showcase the local winners;
- The winning entry from each locale is sent to the national office and judged by well-known journalists, immigration judges and award winning authors;
- The winning entry is read into the Congressional record, a flag is flown over the Capitol in the winner's honor and the winner reads their entry at a 700+ person event that celebrates immigration; and
- In the submissions the youth voice brings hope that there will be solutions to the immigration debate.

The American Immigration Council believes that teachers, parents, and students are essential to building a movement toward a better future: in our classrooms, in our schools, and in the larger society. With the community's engagement, educators, parents and students can help bridge this divide and approach the issue of immigration with intelligence and empathy.

The nation's students are America's future citizens, voters, educators and activists. It is critical that our youth be given the tools to think critically about immigration and to learn to explore the economic *and* moral effects of immigration policy as they engage in the public debates.

For more information visit: www.celebrateamericawritingcontest.org