FLORIDA EDUCATION FUND LAWS OF LIFE ESSAY CONTEST

THEME. *"Laws of Life"*

PURPOSE. The *Laws of Life* are core values and ideals by which we live. Honesty, perseverance, and the Golden Rule all are examples of these universal "laws" that transcend religions, cultures, and national borders. The *Laws of Life* Essay Contest offers a young person the opportunity to think about and communicate the principles that guide his or her life. As a participant writes his or her essay, the participant must select the quotation below that expresses a key value and/or ideal by which he or she lives and explain why the chosen value/ideal is important to the way he or she lives his or her life by discussing experiences, lessons learned, and people who have served as living examples of the chosen value/ideal.

1. *You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them.*
   –**Maya Angelou**–author, poet, essayist, civil rights activist, Grammy Award winner, Spingarn Medal, National Medal of Arts, and Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient, Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award nominee

2. *The world is before you and you need not take it or leave it as it was when you came in.*
   –**James Baldwin**–novelist, playwright, essayist, poet, activist, Guggenheim Fellow, Eugene F. Saxton Memorial Trust Award, Foreign Drama Critics Award, and George Polk Memorial Award recipient, MacDowell Fellow, French Government: Commander of the Legion of Honor designee

3. *We can push ourselves further. We always have more to give.*
   –**Simone Biles**–most decorated gymnast in world championship history, winner of 25 world championship and seven Olympic medals, first woman to win five world all-around titles, winner of multiple ESPY Awards, Laureus World Sportswoman of the Year (2017, 2019, 2020), Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient

4. *Be the hardest working person you can be. That's how you separate yourself from the competition…Being a superstar means you've reached your potential, and I don't think I've reached my potential as a basketball player and as a leader yet.*
   –**Stephen Curry**–National Basketball Association (NBA) (Golden State Warrior) point guard, four-time NBA Champion, two-time NBA Most Valuable Player, NBA All-Star, Olympic gold medalist

5. *There is in this world no such force as the force of a person determined to rise. The human soul cannot be permanently chained.*
   –**W. E. B. Dubois**–educator, sociologist, historian, author, editor, civil rights activist, Pan-Africanist, first African American to earn Ph.D. from Harvard University

6. *You may be the first to do many things, but make sure you are not the last...Dream with ambition, lead with conviction… And we will applaud you every step of the way.*
   –Vice President of the United States **Kamala Harris**–first female, African American and Asian American vice president of the United States of America, highest ranking female official in American history, author, former United States Senator from California (2017-2021), former attorney general of California (2011-2017)

7. *In a world filled with hate, we must still dare to hope. In a world filled with anger, we must still dare to comfort. In a world filled with despair, we must still dare to dream. And in a world filled with distrust, we must still dare to believe.*
   –**Michael Jackson**–internationally renowned professional singer, songwriter, dancer, philanthropist, Grammy Award winner, World Music Award winner, Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Songwriter Hall of Fame, Dance Hall of Fame

8. *The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.*
   –**Martin Luther King**–minister, author, Nobel Peace Prize winner, civil rights leader

9. *Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.*
   –**Nelson Mandela**–President of South Africa (1994-1999), attorney, anti-apartheid revolutionary, philanthropist, author, Nobel Peace Prize winner, Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient

10. *Where you see wrong or inequality or injustice, speak out, because this is your country. This is your democracy. Make it. Protect it. Pass it on.*
    –Former Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court **Thurgood Marshall**–first African American United States Supreme Court Justice (1967-1991), founder of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Spingarn Medal winner, Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient

11. *You can't let your failures define you. You have to let your failures teach you.*
    –Former President of the United States **Barack Obama**–President of the United States (2009-2017), attorney, author, Noble Peace Prize winner

12. *Success isn't about how much money you make. It's about the difference you make in people's lives.*
–Former First Lady of the United States **Michelle Obama**–First Lady of the United States (2009-2017), attorney, author, winner of the Grammy Award for Best Spoken Word Album; recipient of several NAACP Image Awards, Women of the Decade Award recipient

13. *Character is power.*
–**Booker T. Washington**–Founder and President of Tuskegee Institute, educator, author, orator, adviser to United States presidents

14. *Those who have no record of what their forebearers have accomplished lose the inspiration which comes from the teaching of biography and history.*
–**Carter G. Woodson**–"Father of Black History," established Black History Month; American historian, author of numerous history books *(The Negro in Our History; The Mis-Education of the Negro*), journalist, founder of Association for the Study of African American History, second African American to earn Ph.D. from Harvard University, Dean at Howard University

15. *Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today.*
–**Malcolm X**–Sunni Muslim minister, author, human rights activist

ELIGIBILITY. Members of the Centers of Excellence Program (i.e., National Achievers and Believers) in grades 3 through 12 may participate. There are three divisions: Grades 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12.

REQUIREMENTS. Essays of 100-300 words **must** be submitted to the Center Director no later than 4:00 p.m., January 30, 2026. Attach this application to the essay.

Center Directors will submit all essays to the Florida Education Fund by February 16, 2026, and will be notified of the essay winners for each division by March 16, 2026. The winners will be expected to read a portion of their winning essays (no more than one minute) at the Florida National Achievers Society Summit to be held in March 2026.

JUDGING. The following criteria will be used for judging an essay: Content = 5 points; Presentation = 3 points; and Grammar and Spelling = 2 points. Judges will be selected who understand the writing levels of the essay participants, i.e., the writing skills taught to meet and defined by the Florida State standards: an elementary professional for 3th-5th graders, a middle school professional for 6th-8th graders, and a high school professional for 9th-12th graders.

APPLICATION FORM (PLEASE PRINT)

Director's use only: ASSIGNED NUMBER_____

Student's Name *Age* *Grade*

Home Address *City* *State* *Zip*

Parent or Guardian *Home Phone*

School *Center of Excellence*

FLORIDA EDUCATION FUND LAWS OF LIFE ESSAY CONTEST

JUDGE'S FORM

PURPOSE: The *Laws of Life* are core values and ideals by which we live. Honesty, perseverance, and the Golden Rule all are examples of these universal "laws" that transcend religions, cultures, and national borders. The *Laws of Life* Essay Contest offers a young person the opportunity to think about and communicate the principles that guide his or her life. As a participant writes his or her essay, the participant must select the quotation below that expresses a key value and/or ideal by which he or she lives and explain why the chosen value/ideal is important to the way he or she lives his or her life by discussing experiences, lessons learned, and people who have served as living examples of the chosen value/ideal.

1. *You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them*. –Maya Angelou
2. *The world is before you and you need not take it or leave it as it was when you came in.* –James Baldwin
3. *We can push ourselves further. We always have more to give.* –Simone Biles
4. *Be the hardest working person you can be. That's how you separate yourself from the competition…Being a superstar means you've reached your potential, and I don't think I've reached my potential as a basketball player and as a leader yet.* –Stephen Curry
5. *There is in this world no such force as the force of a person determined to rise. The human soul cannot be permanently chained.* –W. E. B. Dubois
6. *You may be the first to do many things, but make sure you are not the last...Dream with ambition, lead with conviction… And we will applaud you every step of the way.* –Vice President of the United States Kamala Harris
7. *In a world filled with hate, we must still dare to hope. In a world filled with anger, we must still dare to comfort. In a world filled with despair, we must still dare to dream. And in a world filled with distrust, we must still dare to believe.* –Michael Jackson
8. *The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.* –Martin Luther King
9. *Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.* –Nelson Mandela
10. *Where you see wrong or inequality or injustice, speak out, because this is your country. This is your democracy. Make it. Protect it. Pass it on.* –Former Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court Thurgood Marshall
11. *You can't let your failures define you. You have to let your failures teach you.* –Former President of the United States Barack Obama
12. *Success isn't about how much money you make. It's about the difference you make in people's lives.* –Former First Lady of the United States Michelle Obama
13. *Character is power.* –Booker T. Washington
14. *Those who have no record of what their forebearers have accomplished lose the inspiration which comes from the teaching of biography and history.* –Carter G. Woodson
15. *Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today.* –Malcolm X

ELIGIBILITY: A judge must be someone who appreciates the ideals of the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest. A judge **cannot** be a parent or immediate family member of a current contest participant.

CRITERIA: Students must be able to demonstrate the writing process and communicate ideas and information effectively. The following criteria should be met: **Content** - the student was able to explain his or her *law of life*. **Presentation** - the essay is clearly written and easy to read. **Grammar/Spelling** - the essay was written with few grammatical and spelling errors.

SCORING: Essays will be scored in three categories on a scale from 1 - 5. The highest overall score for an essay is 10 points.

ESSAY ID NUMBER	**STUDENT'S GRADE**	**CONTENT** (maximum pts. = 5)	**PRESENTATION** (maximum pts. = 3)	**GRAMMAR/SPELLING** (maximum pts. = 2)	**TOTAL SCORE**

Judge's Signature *Date* *Center of Excellence*

SUBMIT THIS FORM WITH THE ESSAYS TO THE CENTER DIRECTOR.