

# National FCE Essay and Artwork Contest

## 2026 THEME: "RESPECT"

## CHARACTER COUNTS!®

"**RESPECT**" is one of Six Pillars of Character®

CHARACTER COUNTS!® and Six Pillars of Character®

are service marks of the CHARACTER COUNTS!® Coalition,

a project of Josephson Institute of Ethics

[www.charactercounts.org](http://www.charactercounts.org)

# 2026 National Essay and Artwork Contest

Based on CHARACTER COUNTS!®  
Character Value: **RESPECT**

## 2026 ESSAY and ARTWORK CONTEST CRITERIA **RESPECT**

Dear State President and Essay and Artwork Contest Chairman:

National FCE members nationwide present an annual contest for anyone eligible as a 4<sup>th</sup> grade student, i.e. in public, private, home schools, 4-H, scouts, youth or church groups, etc. National FCE's Essay and Artwork Contest promotes FCE's literacy programs, CHARACTER COUNTS!® and community involvement. The purpose of the 2026 contest is to encourage students to understand and practice **RESPECT**, one of the Six Pillars of Character!® The contest encourages students to strive for excellence and creativity in reading, writing, and drawing skills.

### TIME LINE:

#### 1. SUGGESTED COUNTY LEVEL:

- The contest will start at the county level.
- The contest can run **September 1, 2025 thru March 31, 2026**. *This date may be adjusted as long as the State entry is postmarked to National FCE by April 15<sup>th</sup>.*
- Each county is responsible for notifying its local schools, library or other network that would have access to publicizing the contest to eligible 4<sup>th</sup> grade students. It is suggested that the principal of each school be contacted and asked for approval. Contact individual teachers/leader after approval is given.
- Make sure the contact information is on the Teacher/Parent/Leader letter and the Permission Form.
- Sign and complete the information for the 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher/leader. Make a copy for each teacher/leader you visit or contact.
- If you choose to inform them of the local and state awards, type an additional paper stating what the awards are.
- Retired teachers are a good source for judging the entries. **Each judge should receive a letter stating the contest criteria and a judging sheet with instructions.** This will ensure that judges will use the same criteria on all levels.
- Local groups and counties may provide prizes and recognition to local and county winners. Obtain a permission form from the county winner. Send this form with the essay and artwork.
- Each county should forward the original copies of their first place winner to the State FCE Essay and Artwork Chairperson by the state deadline.

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## 2. STATE LEVEL:

- State FCE Associations will judge the winning entries from the counties/parishes in their state. Retired teachers are a good source for judging the entries. **Please use judging instructions and judging sheet included in this packet.** This will ensure that judges from all states will use the same criteria for all levels.
- State FCE Associations provide prizes and recognition to the state winners.
- Send the permission form and the original copy of the first-place winner for each state to the National FCE Headquarters postmarked by April 15, 2026. Please mail the winning entry in a 9"x12" manila envelope to avoid folding the Essay and Artwork.

## 3. NATIONAL LEVEL:

- The same judging criteria of creativity/content, grammar/punctuation/sentence structure, vocabulary, and presentation are used on all levels.
- The National 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, & 3<sup>rd</sup> place winners of the 2026 Essay & Artwork Contest will be announced at the National FCE Annual Conference.
- The National 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, & 3<sup>rd</sup> place winners receive visa gift card or check of \$250, \$150, \$50 respectively.
- The National 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, & 3<sup>rd</sup> place winners' entries will be recognized on the National FCE website, with approval.

## CONTEST CRITERIA:

1. Any 4<sup>th</sup> grade student, i.e. in public, private, home schools, 4-H, scouts, youth or church groups, etc. is eligible.
2. Entries are to include an essay and a hand drawn artwork. Use #2 pencil, or computer type for essay. Use #2 pencil or colored pencils for artwork.  
**You may color the artwork with colored pencils. No crayons or markers. Do not fold the artwork.**  
Essay and artwork should reflect the characteristic **RESPECT**.  
For artwork, use unlined, white paper approximately 8 ½ by 11.  
For essays, use lined, white paper approximately 8 ½ by 11. Use plain white paper if computer written.  
The essay shall be a minimum of 50 words.
3. Students should write their name, date, teacher/leader's name on the back of the artwork and the bottom of the essay.

**Thank you for your time and effort in helping make this a successful  
National Family & Community Education Project in Literacy!**

# 2026 National Essay and Artwork Contest

Based on CHARACTER COUNTS!®  
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Dear 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher/Parent/Leader:

The National Family & Community Education members in \_\_\_\_\_ (state/county) are sponsoring a nation-wide contest. The contest is based on the characteristic **RESPECT**, and we are asking students to write a short essay or short story about this trait.

The contest starts at the county level, where entries will be judged, and winners recognized from the county. The first-place county entries will be forwarded to the state level. State FCE Associations, will, in turn, judge and recognize winners for the state. First place state entries will then be judged at the national level. The same judging criteria will be used in all states at all levels. These include: creativity, content, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, vocabulary, and presentation of the handwriting.

The National 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, & 3<sup>rd</sup> place winners receive a check of \$250, \$150, \$50 respectively.

Contest criteria are as follows:

1. Any 4<sup>th</sup> grade student, i.e. in public, private, home schools, 4-H, scouts, youth or church groups, etc. is eligible.
2. Entries are to include an essay and a hand drawn artwork. Use #2 pencil, or computer type for essay. Use #2 pencil or colored pencils for artwork.

**You may color the artwork with colored pencils. No crayons or markers. Do not fold the artwork.**

Essay and artwork should reflect the characteristic **RESPECT**.

For artwork, use unlined, white paper approximately 8 ½ by 11.

For essays, use lined, white paper approximately 8 ½ by 11. Use plain white paper if computer written. The essay shall be a minimum of 50 words.

3. Students should write their name, date, teacher or leader's name on the back of the artwork and at the bottom of the essay.  
We hope you will join us in encouraging our students/children to strive for excellence in their writing and drawing skills and in the understanding of **RESPECT**, an essential characteristic. More information may be obtained by contacting the FCE member below. Mail the Essay and Artwork entry to the member below.

Sincerely,

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

2026 ESSAY and ARTWORK  
**RESPECT**  
PERMISSION FORM

(**MUST** be submitted with Essay and Artwork to be eligible for judging)

I give \_\_\_\_\_ my permission to participate in the  
Essay and Artwork Contest sponsored by the National Association for Family & Community Education.  
I also give permission for his/her photograph to be used in publications.

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

My entry is entitled, \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_. This work was completed on my own. I  
understand that the essay and artwork become property of National FCE Association.

Student's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Complete Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number: ( \_ \_ \_ ) \_ \_ \_ - \_ \_ \_ \_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Teacher or Leader's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of School/Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

School or Student mail essay and artwork by \_\_\_\_\_ to:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

County winner mailed to State President by \_\_\_\_\_

State winner mailed to National FCE Headquarters by April 15.

# 2026 National Essay and Artwork Contest

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Character Value: **RESPECT**

## PRESS RELEASE:

### 2026 Essay and Artwork Contest: RESPECT

The \_\_\_\_\_ Family and Community Education members join state/county/parish members across the nation in sponsoring an Essay and Artwork Contest for 4th grade students. This contest is held annually, and the theme this year is **RESPECT**, one of the Six Pillars of Character!®. Students are to write an essay and create a hand drawn artwork.

This FCE nationwide contest provides an opportunity for students to improve literacy skills and develop ethical values. The contest is open to any 4<sup>th</sup> grade-level student attending public, private, or home school.

***The contest runs from \_\_\_\_\_ through \_\_\_\_\_. For complete information please contact,***

\_\_\_\_\_ at ( \_ \_ \_ ) \_ \_ \_ - \_ \_ \_ \_  
FCE Contest Chairman Phone Number

Mail or fax your release 10 days in advance of the release date.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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WEBSITE PERMISSION

Please check one of the following:

\_\_\_\_\_ I give permission to National FCE to place my child's Essay and Artwork submission on National FCE's website, [www.nafce.org](http://www.nafce.org). National FCE will only use my child's first name and the state we live in, also if my child signed their original Essay and Artwork, I give National FCE permission to alter it so that only his/her first name will show.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not give permission for National FCE to place my child's Essay and Artwork submission on National FCE's website, [www.nafce.org](http://www.nafce.org).

Parent's Signature

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Send this completed form to: NAFCE Headquarters  
PO Box 642  
Florence, KY 41022-0642

## JUDGING INSTRUCTIONS

**Dear Judge,**

On behalf of the National Association Family & Community Education, we thank you for being an important part of our literacy project. It would not be a success without the time you so graciously give. If at any time during the judging process you need assistance or have questions, please feel free to contact me.

### GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS:

A judging sheet has been provided. The theme of the essay and hand drawn artwork is **RESPECT**. After scoring the entries, please attach the judging sheet to both the story and the drawing with a paper clip – please do not staple. First, second, and third place winners are to be selected. After judging and selecting the winners, please notify your local FCE representative to pick up the entries and judging sheets. **DO NOT NOTIFY THE WINNER.** The state or county will make an announcement and present the award.

### THE CONTEST CRITERIA:

1. Any 4<sup>th</sup> grade student, i.e. in public, private, home schools, 4-H, scouts, youth or church groups, etc. is eligible.
2. Entries are to include an essay and a hand drawn artwork. Use a #2 pencil, or computer type for essay. Use a #2 pencil or colored pencils for artwork.
  - a. **You may color the artwork with colored pencils. NO crayons or markers. Do not fold the artwork.**
  - b. Use 8 ½ x 11 paper for each: lined paper if using pencil for essay. Use plain white paper if computer written and for the artwork.
  - c. The essay should be a minimum of 50 words.
  - d. Essay and artwork should reflect the characteristics of **RESPECT**.
3. Students should write their name, date, and teacher or leader's name on the back of the artwork and at the bottom of the essay.

We ask that you do not write or mark on the entries as it may be judged at a higher level.

Again, we thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_



## JUDGING SHEET

Name of Student: \_\_\_\_\_

### ARTWORK

Message (10 points) \_\_\_\_\_  
Creativity (10 points) \_\_\_\_\_  
Execution (10 points) \_\_\_\_\_

### ESSAY

Ideas (20 points) \_\_\_\_\_  
Organization (8 points) \_\_\_\_\_  
Voice (8 points) \_\_\_\_\_  
Word Choice (8 points) \_\_\_\_\_  
Sentence Fluency (8 points) \_\_\_\_\_  
Conventions (8 points) \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENTATION (artwork & essay) (10 points) \_\_\_\_\_

(100 pts possible) **TOTAL SCORE** \_\_\_\_\_

Judged by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Trait Definitions

The 6+1 Trait Model of Instruction and Assessment comprises 6+1 key qualities that define quality writing. These are:

- Ideas--the main message
- Organization-- the internal structure of the piece
- Voice--the personal tone and flavor of the author's message
- Word Choice-- the vocabulary a writer chooses to convey meaning
- Sentence Fluency-- the rhythm and flow of the language
- Conventions--the mechanical corrections
- Presentation--how the writing actually looks on the page