

JUDGING THE ESSAYS



- ✓ Secure essay screener(s)
- ✓ Select a committee of judges
- ✓ Distribute instructions to judges
- ✓ Forward essays to judges

SECURE ESSAY SCREENER(S)

Essay screeners help to streamline the judging process. They serve as a first step, quickly selecting those essays that have potential for the judges to read. As they read the contest submissions, screeners are often asked to look for at least one clearly articulated *law of life* in each essay. Only those essays with an easily discernible *law of life* will be passed on to the contest judges.

When selecting the essay screeners, your contest committee should look for the same qualities you are seeking in your judges, which are described on the next page. Where can you find screeners? Like judges, you can enlist the help of your friends or neighbors. You may also want to contact your local colleges and universities for help. College students make great screeners, and their involvement enables colleges and universities to participate in the contest. To find students, you should contact a department head or faculty member in an appropriate department, such as education or ethics, who can advise you as to the availability of students.



In the College of the Ozarks Contest (Point Lookout, Missouri) President Jerry C. Davis congratulates first place winner Emily Hitchings.



SELECT A COMMITTEE OF JUDGES

Some people believe that the contest judges have the best “job” of anyone associated with the contest. Reading the essays can be a very rewarding experience!

“It’s been my pleasure to judge at least five of the contests. I think I probably get more joy out of it than the children do. It’s so good to see what our young people are thinking and saying.”

— Eleanor Murray, retired teacher,
Contest Judge, Winchester, Tennessee

Who makes up the judges’ committee? Contest organizers usually enlist their friends and neighbors within the community to judge the essays. Many times, judges are retired teachers and school officials. Organizers often ask prominent members of the community, such as Mayors, business leaders, sports figures, or local celebrities, to take part in the judging. This can be a very useful strategy, because the participation of notable individuals generates good publicity for the contest and encourages others to get involved.

Although there is not one type of person who is best suited to be a judge, a judge must be someone who can:

- ❖ appreciate and have in mind the ideals of the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest when reading the essays
- ❖ judge the essays primarily for their compelling content, not for correct grammar or spelling
- ❖ be impartial, objective, neutral, unbiased, and principled
- ❖ complete the reading and ranking of the essays in a timely fashion
- ❖ represent the community in a positive manner

A judge **MUST NOT**

- ❖ be a parent or immediate family member of a current contest participant (a student who is submitting an essay)
- ❖ have an unyielding belief that only a limited number of qualities or characteristics constitute the *laws of life*, since young people write about a wide range of values and beliefs



DISTRIBUTE INSTRUCTIONS TO JUDGES

Please feel free to photocopy and hand out the “Note to Judges,” which we have included on page 42 of the Appendix. You are also welcome to make use of the Judges’ Tally Form and Final Tally Form on pages 43-44 of the Appendix. While many contests have used the tally forms, some contest committees have revised the judging process and developed their own forms.

FORWARD ESSAYS TO JUDGES

You should determine the system you are going to use for collecting the essays and distributing them to the screener(s) and judges. If you are working with a school coordinator, he or she can collect the essays and turn them over to you for distribution. If you are working directly with a school, make sure you are clear about how and when the essays will be collected, allowing the screener(s) and judges a reasonable amount of time to read them.

You will need to discuss with school officials and teachers whether the judges are to see the names of the contest participants. Many times, teachers assign numbers to their essays, and these numbers are written on the students’ entry forms (see page 41 of the Appendix for a sample entry form). Teachers keep master lists of the participants, which match the numbers to the students’ actual names. Make sure that the teachers give you their master lists along with the entry forms and essays. Once the judging is completed, you will use the lists to determine the authors of the prizewinning essays.

