



NIAF NCCA Christopher Columbus Essay Contest

Since 1996, NIAF has joined with the National Christopher Columbus Association to sponsor an annual national essay contest on Christopher Columbus. The contest is open to students in grades 9 through 12 in public, private, or parochial schools, or to those who are home schooled. This contest is conducted without regard to race, religion, gender, or national origin.

For information about the National Columbus Day celebration in Washington, D.C., please visit the National Christopher Columbus Association's website, www.ChristopherColumbus.org.

2025-2026 Topic: As the United States approaches its Semiquincentennial in 2026, we reflect on the bold ideals that have shaped our nation - freedom, innovation and the pursuit of opportunity. Long before America's founding, Christopher Columbus's 1492 voyage symbolized a courageous leap into the unknown. How did Columbus's voyages and spirit of exploration reflect the values that would later define the American identity?

Essay Criteria

Essays must have a word count between 800-1,200 words and will be judged for historical accuracy, adherence to topic, organization of materials, interest, originality, spelling, grammar, punctuation, and neatness. In addition to the required length, students must include the following elements in their essay:

- A title page with an original title, name, mailing address, e-mail address, phone number, school, grade, and word count
- MLA formatted citations and bibliography
- 3 number of print/non-internet sources

Important dates:

All submissions must be sent as PDF or Word Document format via e-mail to education@niaf.org by the deadline below for consideration.

Deadline: 11:59 PM EST March 15, 2026

Notification: June 15, 2026 by 5:00 pm ET

Recognition:

First, second and third-place national winners are selected after judging on a national level. To qualify for first place, the winner must be able to go to Washington, D.C. to read his or her winning essay at the Christopher Columbus Celebration on October 12, 2026. The first-place national winner will receive a \$1,200 prize in addition to paid lodging and transportation to Washington, D.C. in October for the winner and one parent or guardian to attend the NCCA's annual Columbus Day Celebration and read their essay. The second-place national winner receives \$500, and the third-place winner receives \$300.