

America 250 Essay Contest

Yavapai County Free Library District (YCFLD) is hosting an essay contest as part of our commemoration of America's Semiquincentennial (250th anniversary)! Students are invited to dive into our nation's history, explore its values, and celebrate its achievements by writing an essay in response to one of our prompts.

America 250 Essay Contest Rules

The America 250th Essay Contest is open to all Yavapai County residents in grades 4-12.

Submission Categories:

- Grades 4–6
- Grades 7-9
- Grades 10–12

Essay Prompts (please choose one):

- **America will celebrate its 250th birthday in 2026. Choose one story from the past that has shaped life in your community today—this could be an event, an invention, a local decision, or a tradition.** Explain what happened, how it changed everyday life for people where you live, and what lessons it offers for how people in your community can work together to build a better future.
- **What is a typical day like for you in Yavapai County in 2026?** Write a journal entry or blog post highlighting a day in the life of a student living in Yavapai County today.
- **What do you imagine life will be like in 50 years?**

Submission Requirements: To be considered, all submissions must meet the following criteria. Failure to adhere to these requirements will result in disqualification:

1. The essay must be the participant's own creation. No AI-generated, plagiarized, or previously published essays.
2. The essay must fit within the following wordcounts:
 - i. Grades 4-6: 300-500 words
 - ii. Grades 7-9: 500-750 words
 - iii. Grades 10-12: 500-750 words
3. Typed, double-spaced, 12-point font (Times New Roman or Arial preferred)
4. Each participant may submit (1) entry.
5. Content must be appropriate for general audiences.
6. All submissions must include the following information on a cover page:
 - i. Author's full name and grade level
 - ii. School (if applicable)
 - iii. Contact information: phone number and/or email address
7. Late or incomplete submissions will not be considered.

For questions or additional information about the contest, please email: library.district@yavapaiaz.gov.

Note: Yavapai County Free Library District (YCFLD) will not share your personal information. Winners will be asked to submit a Work and Photo Release allowing the Library District to publish their essays in print or on their websites and to use their photographs in contest-related promotional materials, which may include photographs taken at USA250 events. or use it for promotional purposes. Contact information will only be used to reach contest winners.

Submissions will be accepted from **March 2 to April 10, 2026**. Winners will be announced by **May 1, 2026**, as determined by a panel of judges selected by Library staff.

Judging Criteria: Winners will be selected, at the Library District's sole discretion, based on the following:

- Relevance to the chosen prompt
- Quality of writing, relative to the author's grade level
- Appropriateness of content
- Relevance to the theme
- Originality and creativity
- Clarity and organization
- Historical insight or personal reflection
- Grammar, spelling, and mechanics
- Originality and personal reflection
- Clarity and impact of the writing

Submission Instructions: Participants can submit their entries via email. Due to the intent to publish the essays, entries must be in a digital format.

1. Email: Send your digital entry to library.district@yavapaiaz.gov
 - a. Subject line: "USA 250 Essay Contest – Your Name"
 - b. Word Document of Essay
 - c. Completed and signed *Authorization Form* from the next page.

Prizes

- There will be three winners in each category. Winners will receive:
 - **\$50 Gift certificate**
 - **Commemorative America 250 Certificates of achievement**
 - **Publication opportunities (such as placement in the time capsule, library displays, USA 250 book, or online)**
 - **Recognition at an America 250 community event**

For questions or additional information about the contest, please email: library.district@yavapaiaz.gov.

By submitting an essay to the Yavapai County Free Library District (also referred to herein as “YCFLD” or “Library”) as a part of this contest, you acknowledge and agree to the following terms:

- 1. Ownership and Usage Rights:** All submitted essays, regardless of winning status, become the sole property of YCFLD. By submitting your essay, you irrevocably release and transfer all rights to YCFLD for any usage deemed appropriate, including but not limited to: inclusion in the USA250 Yavapai County time capsule, digital or physical marketing materials, social media platforms, press releases, and other promotional uses.
- 2. Attribution Permission:** You grant YCFLD permission to use your name and submitted essay for publicity and promotional purposes without compensation.
- 3. Originality of Writing:** You represent and warrant that the submitted writing is your child’s original creation, does not infringe upon the rights of any third party, and has not been previously published or entered into another contest.
- 4. Liability Release:** You release YCFLD from any claims, demands, or liabilities related to the use of the submitted essay.
- 5. Eligibility:** To participate, all entrants must complete and sign this release form. Participants under the age of 18 must provide a signature from a parent or legal guardian to be eligible.
- 6. Alterations:** YCFLD reserves the right to modify, adapt, or edit any submitted essay as Library sees fit in its sole discretion, for any use or purpose that Library in its sole discretion may determine is desirable to Library.
- 7. Selection of Winners:** Selection of winners is in the sole discretion of Library, is final, and is not subject to any reconsideration, review, or appeal.
- 8. Discretion re: Use of Winning Essay(s):** Library, in its sole discretion, and at any time, may choose to limit the use of winning essay(s), to cease the use of winning essay(s), or to decline to utilize winning essay(s) at all, for purposes of including in the USA250 Yavapai County time capsule, or if Library determines in its sole discretion that such action is in the best interests of Library, library patrons, or the community. Library may take such action to limit, cease, or decline to utilize winning essay(s) without notice, and such action does not affect the transfer of Ownership and Usage Rights as set forth in paragraph 1 above.

**By signing this form, I confirm that I have read, understood, and agree to all terms outlined above.
(If the author is under 18, a parent or guardian must sign on their behalf).**

Author Information

- Full Name: _____
- Age: _____
- Phone Number: _____
- Email Address: _____

Parent/Guardian Authorization (if author is under 18)

- Full Name: _____
- Signature: _____ Date: _____