



PitchIt! New York

Student Essay Contest

April 2023

Student voice is a catalyst for positive change in schools and communities.

For this reason, the News Literacy Project is hosting a writing contest to empower students to be civically informed and engaged.

Learning Task and Essay Topic

News literacy is the ability to determine the credibility of news and other content. Students will write an essay about a local, national or international event that would have benefited from news literacy skills being applied to stop misinformation from being spread about it. They will answer one of the prompts from the list.

Eligibility

This contest is open to middle and high school students in New York State, participating with support from a teacher. Teachers may choose to adapt the competition curriculum for individual classes or hold a schoolwide event. Each participating school may submit up to five entries per grade band (6-12).

CONTEST DEADLINE
April 17, 2023,
9 p.m. ET

To Enter
Schools/teachers should submit their top five winning essays per grade with cover letter via email to:
Alesha Smith, NLP’s New York City news literacy ambassador, at Aleshasmith292@gmail.com

Prompts

- The First Amendment has five freedoms, and in many ways they are dependent on one another. Explain how other freedoms of the First Amendment are required to protect the freedom of the press.
- What steps should someone take to fact-check false statements by a well-known figure and what problems might arise as a result?
- People have responsibilities – things that they should do but are not required to by law. Why would providing reliable information be a responsibility?
- Imagine you heard a rumor about public figure, but you’re not sure if it is true or not. What are the potential consequences if you share it online?



AWARDS
for each grade band
6-8 and 9-12

GRAND PRIZE
\$200 gift card

FIRST PLACE
\$150 gift card

SECOND PLACE
\$100 gift card

THIRD PLACE
\$50 gift card

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NYC Finalists will participate in the PitchIt! Grand Prize event on Zoom in May (date TBD), where they will “pitch” their idea and receive feedback from the journalists. The grand prize winners will be chosen at this time.

Criteria

- Essays must be the original, unpublished work of one student.
- Essays must be 500-1000 words, clearly addressing one of the prompts.
- Essays must be typed in 12-point, Times New Roman, double-spaced with 1" margins and numbered pages.
- All essays and presentations must have a title.
- Students must include at least three credible sources to support their thesis.
- Essays must use MLA formatting, complete with in-text citations and a Works Cited page (not included in the word count). See [Purdue Owl MLA Guide](#).
- Organization: students must include an introduction with a thesis statement, multiple body paragraphs and a conclusion. See [Purdue Owl Argumentative Essays](#).
- Essays must be proofread and should follow the rules for standard English (grammar, punctuation, mechanics) in writing. See [Purdue Owl Grammar](#).
- Plagiarism: any submission that is in part or wholly plagiarized will be disqualified from the PitchIt! competition. See [Purdue Owl Plagiarism](#).
- A cover page MUST be included with the following information: title of essay, student name, grade level, student's complete mailing address, student's email address, school's name, principal's name, teacher's name, and best phone number and email address for the teacher.
- Only five essays from each grade may be submitted per school.
- Finalists must be able to virtually participate in the **PitchIt! New York Grand Prize event** at the end of **May (TBD), 2023**.

Teaching and Learning Goals

- Teachers have an authentic and engaging writing assignment that amplifies student voices and explores issues aligned to district curricula, standards and required topics, such as the First Amendment.
- Students analyze different types of misinformation and show the ability to think critically about what is and is not verifiable information.
- Students apply their news and media literacy skills to solve the misinformation problem.
- Finalists receive real-time feedback from journalists in the field who report on these issues every day.

Process

*Click [here](#) for the Google Drive folder with PitchIt! educator resources.

Step 1. Teacher introduces the writing assignment to their class, the rubric* and the process by which the top essays will advance. News literacy topics are explored with students as they relate to the curriculum.

Teachers can explore the free educator resources on [NewsLitNation®](#) or the [Checkology®](#) virtual classroom on topics like the First Amendment. See resources from the [New York Public Library](#), which includes access to The New York Times, or any other available news sources.

Step 2. Students work with their teacher to select a news article/topic of their choice and to select one of the prompts below to follow in writing the essay. Share a copy of the student essay planning document* as an outline and encourage them to review before submitting a final draft.

Step 3. Teachers select up to five student essays per grade, per school, and submit.

Step 4. NLP's educator panel selects six essays (three per each grade band, 6-8 and 9-12), to advance to the Grand Prize phase.

Step 5. Panel notifies the teacher at the end of April. The selected students then begin creating a visual presentation of their essay (PowerPoint or Google Slides), to compete in the final phase of the contest.

Step 6. Essay finalists make their presentation (the "pitch") to a panel of journalists during the PitchIt! New York Grand Prize event on Zoom and receive personalized feedback and a certificate. Panelists choose the Grand Prize winners, who are awarded during the event.

Consult the [complete contest rules](#) and student tips before entering.