



# PitchIt! Allegheny Student Essay Contest

April 2023

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

For this reason, the Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU3), in partnership with the News Literacy Project, is hosting a writing contest to empower students in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, 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 compose an essay in response to one of the writing prompts, discussing how it relates to a local, national or international news article of their choice. They should form a thesis based on their chosen prompt and aim to convince their audience that the thesis is accurate and valid.

## Eligibility

This contest is open to middle and high school students in Allegheny County, participating with support from a teacher. Schools are encouraged to conduct their own internal essay competition to coordinate, and teachers submit their top five essays per grade (6-8 and 9-12).

**EXTENDED CONTEST DEADLINE**  
Monday, April 24,  
11:59 p.m. ET

## To Enter

Schools/teachers should submit their top five winning essays per grade with cover letter via email to:

**Deborah Domingues-Murphy**, news literacy ambassador, at [domingues-murphy@cityhigh.org](mailto:domingues-murphy@cityhigh.org)

## 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 (either from the false statements or from the fact checking)?
- 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 a 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

\$100 gift cards (for teacher and student winner)

### FIRST PLACE

\$75 gift card  
(teacher and student)

### SECOND PLACE

\$50 gift card  
(teacher and student)

### THIRD PLACE

\$25 gift card  
(teacher and student)



Finalists must participate in the PitchIt! Allegheny Grand Prize event via Zoom in May (date TBD), during which they will share their essays and receive feedback from the journalists. The grand prize winners will be chosen at this time.

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## 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! Grand Prize event** on **May 15, 2023**.

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## 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.
- This project challenges students to develop their 21st century civics and media literacy skills (see our [Google Drive](#) documents, academic contexts and connections).
- Finalists virtually 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.

**Step 2.** Students work with their teacher to select a news article/topic of their choice and to select one of the prompts to follow in writing the essay. Encourage students to use the student planning document\* as an outline before submitting a final draft.

**Step 3.** Teachers select up to five student essay finalists per grade, per school, and submit them to Deborah Domingues-Murphy, [domingues-murphy@cityhigh.org](mailto:domingues-murphy@cityhigh.org).

**Step 4.** NLP's educator panel selects six essays (three from middle school and three from high school) to advance to the Grand Prize round.

**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 and state legislators during the PitchIt! Grand Prize Event. Panelists choose the first-, second- and third-place champion titles for middle school competitors and high school competitors, who will be awarded during the event.

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