

4th Grade Student Essay Contest – “This Place Matters”

For the 2022 Archaeology & Historic Preservation Month, the South Dakota State Historical Society sponsored a statewide essay contest for all students in the 4th grade, the year in which South Dakota history is taught. The purpose was to enable students to achieve a better appreciation of their historic resources, the stories they tell, and why they should be maintained.

Students were asked to write a 100-400 word essay using this year’s theme of “This Place Matters.” It could be about any South Dakota location that is at least 50 years old, why it is a favorite place for them, and why it should be saved. It did not need to be a historic site.

There were 118 entries received. The participants were from 11 different schools in 12 different towns from across the state, one was homeschooled. Entries were judged on quality of writing, content and theme, and originality of thought. The names of the winners and copies of their essays, as submitted, are below.

1st Place Winner: Jack Hern of Rapid Valley Elementary in Rapid City

“Spokane Mine and Ghost Town”

Spokane Mine Near Custer State Park

Can you imagine going to see abandoned houses? Have you ever been to a ghost town? Spokane is a mine and ghost town from 1890 that is located 16 miles from Custer State Park. When you get there, you walk down a forest service road. When you get to the bottom you will feel the cool breeze on your skin, and you will see all kinds of trees all around you. You will also see a lot of abandoned buildings. Those buildings are part of what is called a ghost town. Ghost towns are places that have been left with no one to take care of them. They are where people used to live. You will see tall grass and you will see a lot of old cars. You will also see all kinds of animals, like horses and cows. It is cold there and a nice time to spend the day in the summer where you can enjoy the cool air. Spokane is a place to explore the old buildings and the big holes in the ground that are left over from when they used to mine gold and silver. In 1908 a miner died, from an argument about gold and silver, and that man is buried with a nice headstone and a lot of things like coins.

I think this place matters because it was the first ghost town I went to when I was eight years old. This place matters because it was the place I got to play catch with my dog. I also got to spend time there with my friends when we went to look at the old houses and take photos. Spokane matters because people learn about the history of Spokane and what they had back then, like what they used to make houses, beds, food and more. They had to make their houses by hand. They had some tools and they had dynamite, pickaxes, and shovels.

I think that Spokane should be preserved because people can learn about Spokane history. Currently, the buildings are falling apart, and it is not safe to be in them. You can get hurt if you fall in a hole because the holes are deep. There is old glass and metal that is 120 years old. If you like ghost towns you should go to Spokane.

2nd Place Winner: Liv Knopp of Rapid Valley Elementary in Rapid City

“The Learning Library”

Rapid City Public Library in Rapid City

The Rapid City Public Library is such a quiet and beautiful place. When you go to the kids' area, they have birds. They have the chirp of a dove singing its beautiful song. You can hear the typing of people searching for book on the computer. The library is downtown. They have over 260,000 books, which is a lot! You can learn about anything you want to. Anything you want to know about books, just ask the front desk. The library has six sections: the board game section, the 3-D printing section, the teen books, the computer section, the little kids' section, and the adult section. The library was built in 1886. Did you know that they have teaching rooms where your tutor can teach you as well? The library has all sorts of things you can do.

The library is my favorite place. The library is not just for reading, it's for learning too. You can search for anything. The library has nice people there. You can see wonderful views. There is a view of mountains and another view of buildings. It's just so so pretty there. Books let kids go wild with their dream so they can be what they want to be. The library is such a wonderful place.

My sister and I would spend hour after hour in the library, she would read books to me, and we would laugh and laugh. The library changes lots of hearts. Another moment is my grandma would take me there and we would have a blast. You just don't know what will happen at the library.

The library should be preserved because people are learning to read and reading to learn. The library is filled with the joy of kids that want to read. Kids love watching the little birds. It is an exciting place for learning. They have books for everyone. I know that the library will keep standing. I just know it. The library is an amazing place. Kids learn and adults do too. When you check out you have a smile on your face and I don't know what I would do without it.

3rd Place Winner: Faith Roehrich of Clark Elementary School in Clark

“A Mistake that Matters to Me”

Water tower in Bowdle

My dad teases me by saying, “we are celebrating a mistake!” I smile at him and say, “well maybe!” Let me tell you why! Bowdle, South Dakota is a small town of 500 people and is the place where my Grandpa Doug and Grandma Linda still live. My mom grew up and went to school in Bowdle, South Dakota and Bowdle is known to have the tallest water tower in South Dakota. It is 150 feet tall and was delivered many years ago to Bowdle, South Dakota by mistake. You see, the water tower was supposed to be delivered to Timber Lake, South Dakota. Big mistake! After realizing that it had been delivered to Bowdle and the cost of trying to move it, Bowdle, South Dakota decided to keep it. So, in honor of having the tallest water tower, every year the last weekend in June, Bowdle, South Dakota celebrates “Tower days.” Our family decorates a float every year and my cousins and myself get to ride on it! After the parade, our parents take the float apart and my cousins and myself go uptown. We have rootbeer floats, do the hula hoop contest, try to win at the minnow races and eat free popcorn. At night, we get to stay overnight at Grandpa Doug and Grandma Linda’s house and have Buster Bar dessert before we go to bed. It is so much fun to celebrate the mistake! The next day as we drive out of town, I look out the window of our SUV and I see the 150-foot Bowdle, South Dakota water tower. It is painted true blue and the Bowdle letters in black are smudged a little. This may have been a mistake, but Bowdle, South Dakota and the tallest water tower is a place that matters to me!