



5th Grade Student Essay Contest



Guidelines

2026 Archaeology & Historic Preservation Month

“This Place Matters”

Sponsored by the South Dakota State Historical Society, Historic Preservation Office.

Deadline for the 2025 Essay Contest is Friday, March 13th

Please read closely:

- The participant must be a resident of and a student in the state of South Dakota.
- The participant must be in the 5th grade or, if home schooled, at the age associated with the 5th grade as submitted to the SD Department of Education.
- The subject matter of the essay should be a structure (building, house, bridge, tower, etc.) or landscape (park, farm, mountain, etc.) located in South Dakota and at least 50 years old. It should be a favorite place the student has been to, not necessarily historic.
- Why does this place matter to you? The essay should have three components: the participant must describe the location, state why it is a favorite place of theirs, and tell why it should be preserved. A history of the site is not necessary.
- The essay may be handwritten or typed on a computer.
 - If handwritten, it must be **double-spaced** on 8-1/2” by 11” **wide-ruled white paper**, written in pencil or ink **only on the front** of each page, and written neatly with **no cross-outs**.
 - If done on a computer, it must be **double-spaced** on 8-1/2” by 11” plain white paper using a **12 point Arial font**, printed **only on the front** of each page.
- **The participant’s name should not be written anywhere on the front of the essay. This is to ensure that all essays can be judged anonymously.**
- The **title** of the essay should be written at the **top left margin of the first page**.
- **Single-spaced, on the line below the title**, write the name and location of the site being discussed in the essay. Examples are “My Grandpa Johnson’s farm in Turner County” or “The Capitol Building in Pierre.”
- There should be a **double space** between the name/location line and the body of the essay.
- **The essay should have no less than 100 words and no more than 400 words.**
- Please do **not** include any pictures, photos, drawings, etc. The essay should be text only.
- **The final page of the essay should include only three single-spaced lines.** At the top left margin, handwrite or type the student’s first and last name. On the line below that, write the name of the school and the name of the town where the school is located. The third line should have the teacher’s name.
- **One completed entry form with all necessary signatures must be submitted with the essay.**

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- There should be a **minimum of 4 front-only pages**, more if the essay is over 1 page. The 2-page entry form must be on top followed by the essay and finally the back page with the student's name. All the pages should be **paper clipped** together – **no staples!**
- **Home-school** participants do not need to complete the school information section of the entry form. **A parent should sign as teacher on page two of the entry form.**
- Entries will be judged by volunteers based on quality of writing, content and theme, and originality of thought.
- The essay must be the student's original work.
- Only one entry per student may be submitted.
- Entries may be mailed via the U.S. Postal Service. They may also be scanned or saved as an Adobe pdf document and e-mailed. Both addresses for submission are located at the bottom of the entry form.
- By entering this contest, the student gives the South Dakota State Historical Society unrestricted rights and permissions for use of the essay.

As the Student Essay Contest is transitioning this year from 4th Grade students to 5th Grade students to reflect the change of when South Dakota history is taught, we have developed the following policy for this transitional year to address potential questions that may arise.

Eligibility & Awards Policy for the Transitional Year

1. **All fifth-grade students are eligible to submit essays**, regardless of prior participation or awards.
2. **Judging remains fully blind**, with:
 - No student names
 - No school identifiers
 - No tracking of past winners
3. **No prior performance will be taken into consideration.**
4. **Awards are determined solely on the merit of the current submission.**

For more details, including an entry form, please visit our website at history.sd.gov/preservation or contact Katie Wasley at 605-773-2906 or katie.wasley@state.sd.us.

Entries must be postmarked no later than Friday, March 13, 2026, to the address on the registration form.
E-mailed entries must have a date & time stamp no later than 11:59 p.m. on March 13, 2026.
Winners will be notified by April 10, 2026.