

THE GILDER LEHRMAN  
INSTITUTE *of* AMERICAN HISTORY

Dear Colleague,

The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History cordially invites your students to participate in its annual Civil War Essay Contest for high school (grades 9–12) and middle school (grades 5–8) students. This contest recognizes excellence in research and writing and is designed to enhance students' knowledge of the Civil War era through use of primary sources. Essays will be judged on originality and clarity of thesis, quality of writing, and use of primary sources, among other criteria. Top essays are not only well researched, but also well written. Therefore, we strongly encourage collaboration between Language Arts and Social Studies departments to assist students with all aspects of the writing process.

Participation is limited to Gilder Lehrman Affiliate Schools. There is no limit to the number of essays that a school may submit; however, we do encourage you to submit only the strongest essays from your classes. If you are a student or teacher at a school that is not yet a Gilder Lehrman Affiliate School and you're interested in participating in the contest, please consider applying to become a Gilder Lehrman Affiliate School. Learn more about the free Affiliate School Program at [gilderlehrman.org/affiliate](http://gilderlehrman.org/affiliate).

**Essays are due at the Gilder Lehrman Institute by Monday, February 27, 2017 by 5:00 p.m. ET.** As a research paper of this scale requires significant time for research, writing, and editing, you will need to set your own internal deadlines. Please see the supporting documentation for more information on submission guidelines, potential topics, and a scoring rubric.

Winners will be announced in the early spring, and will be notified by a letter to their home address and an email to their teachers and parents. Each of the top three student winners at the high school and middle school levels will be flown to New York City with two guests and a teacher for the annual Lincoln Prize Dinner on April 19, where they will be acknowledged for their accomplishments.

Please feel free to call (646-366-9666 ext. 27) or email us ([affiliate@gilderlehrman.org](mailto:affiliate@gilderlehrman.org)) with any questions.

Best regards,

Education Department  
The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History

## Civil War Essay Contest Rules, Regulations, and Prize Information

### Essay Requirements and Guidelines

- Word Count: Essay should be approximately 1,500 words of text for high school entries and approximately 1,000 words of text for middle school entries.
- Font and Page Style: Papers should be written and submitted in *Times New Roman – Font Size 12* with margins of approximately one inch at the top, bottom, and sides.
- Primary Sources: Top essays will use a minimum of five primary source documents. We will count a single letter, photograph, broadside, etc. as a single primary source document. See the *Civil War Essay Contest Guidelines and Scoring Rubric* for more information on the minimum number of primary sources for each score.
- Secondary Sources: Top essays will use scholarly secondary sources (three to five sources at a minimum) beyond the textbook. Textbooks can be referenced only for general background information.
- Internet Sources: Please caution your students to evaluate the validity of web content and cite their sources carefully in their references and bibliography.
- Organization: Top essays have an introduction, body, and conclusion, and a clearly stated, well-developed thesis statement with supportive historical evidence.
- Essay Topics: As a general guide, please refer to the *Civil War Essay Contest Writing Prompts* as possible suggestions to guide your selection of an essay topic. (Students are not limited to these topics and questions.) Biographies, even of obscure figures, and battle reports are usually easier to write than other types of essays. Likewise, certain topics, such as female spies, battlefield medicine, or the new medium of photography, have been covered in great detail by past contest participants. It is important to remember that all essays should feature a clearly stated, well-developed thesis statement with a variety of primary sources, a well-reasoned analysis, and supportive evidence.
- Citations: The best essays have clear, complete, and consistent citations. Students must document their sources and evidence, using any one of the following three formats: MLA, APA, or University of Chicago. Regarding Internet sources, please make sure that students provide information beyond URLs in their citations, such as the author and title of the source.
- Bibliography: Each essay is required to include a bibliography listing all sources divided into two categories – Primary Sources and Secondary Sources.

### Submission Requirements/Deadlines

- Essays are due at the Gilder Lehrman Institute by 5 p.m. ET on Monday, February 27, 2017.

- Essays **must** be submitted electronically. Word or RTF documents are preferred; scanned documents sent as PDFs will also be accepted. Essays **may not** have any grade markings, comments, or corrections. If submitting an essay that was used in class, please submit a clean copy without any grades or teacher comments.
- Essays may be submitted to our website by using the online form and with the essay attached as a PDF or Word document. Hard copies of essays are not accepted and will not be reviewed.
- To help reduce administrative processing time, please name each file accordingly: School Name\_Student Name (e.g., “Central High School\_Jane Doe”).

### **Prizes**

- High School: \$1,000 to the first-place student and \$500 to the school; \$750 to the second-place student; \$500 to the third-place student; \$100 to seven honorable-mention students.
  - In addition, the school with the most entries and the school with the highest average judges’ score (minimum 10 entries) will receive a special certificate and pack of materials.
- Middle School: \$300 to the first-place student; \$200 to the second-place student; \$100 to the third-place student.
  - In addition, the school with the most entries and the school with the highest average judges’ score (minimum 10 entries) will receive a special certificate and pack of materials.

## High School Civil War Essay Contest Guidelines and Scoring Rubric

The Civil War Essay Contest, sponsored by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, is designed to enhance students' knowledge of the Civil War era through use of primary sources. Students must identify a topic, conduct research using primary and secondary sources, document their sources in footnotes/parenthetical notations *and* a bibliography, develop a thesis statement, and write a clear, cogent essay of approximately 1,500 words. Essays will be read by a panel of judges and evaluated using the following rubric for document-based and thematic essay guidelines.

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### Score of 5:

- Thoroughly develops all aspects of the task evenly and in depth
- Is more analytical than descriptive (analyzes, evaluates, and/or creates information)
- Richly supports the theme with many relevant facts, examples, and details
- Demonstrates a logical and clear plan of organization; includes an introduction and a conclusion that are beyond a restatement of the theme
- Incorporates relevant information from at least seven primary source documents; a single letter, photograph, broadside, etc. counts as one primary source document

### Score of 4:

- Develops all aspects of the task but may do so somewhat unevenly
- Is both descriptive and analytical (applies, analyzes, evaluates, and/or creates information)
- Supports the theme with relevant facts, examples, and details
- Demonstrates a logical and clear plan of organization; includes an introduction and a conclusion that are beyond a restatement of the theme
- Incorporates relevant information from at least five primary source documents; a single letter, photograph, broadside, etc. counts as one primary source document

### Score of 3:

- Develops all aspects of the task with little depth or develops most aspects of the task in some depth
- Is more descriptive than analytical (applies, may analyze, and/or evaluate information)
- Includes some relevant facts, examples, and details; may include some minor inaccuracies
- Demonstrates a satisfactory plan of organization; includes an introduction and a conclusion that may be a restatement of the theme.
- Incorporates relevant information from at least four primary source documents; a single letter, photograph, broadside, etc. counts as one primary source document

**Score of 2:**

- Minimally develops all aspects of the task or develops some aspects of the task in some depth
- Is primarily descriptive; may include faulty, weak, or isolated application or analysis
- Includes few relevant facts, examples, and details; may include some inaccuracies
- Demonstrates a general plan of organization; may lack focus; may contain digressions; may not clearly identify which aspect of the task is being addressed; may lack an introduction and/or a conclusion
- Incorporates relevant information from at least three primary source documents. A single letter, photograph, broadside, etc. counts as one primary source document.

**Score of 1:**

- Minimally develops some aspects of the task
- Is descriptive; may lack understanding, application, or analysis
- Includes few relevant facts, examples, or details; may include inaccuracies
- May demonstrate a weakness in organization; may lack focus; may contain digressions; may not clearly identify which aspect of the task is being addressed; may lack an introduction and/or a conclusion
- Does not incorporate relevant information from primary source documents; a single letter, photograph, broadside, etc. counts as one primary source document

## Middle School Civil War Essay Contest Guidelines and Scoring Rubric

The Civil War Essay Contest, sponsored by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, is designed to enhance students' knowledge of the Civil War era through use of primary sources. Students must identify a topic, conduct research using primary and secondary sources, document their sources in footnotes/parenthetical notations *and* a bibliography, develop a thesis statement, and write a clear, cogent essay of approximately 1,000 words. Essays will be read by a panel of judges and judged using the following rubric for document-based and thematic essay guidelines.

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### Score of 5:

- Thoroughly develops all aspects of the task evenly and in depth
- Is more analytical than descriptive (analyzes, evaluates, and/or creates information)
- Richly supports the theme with many relevant facts, examples, and details
- Demonstrates a logical and clear plan of organization; includes an introduction and a conclusion that are beyond a restatement of the theme
- Incorporates relevant information from at least five primary source documents; a single letter, photograph, broadside, etc. counts as one primary source document

### Score of 4:

- Develops all aspects of the task but may do so somewhat unevenly
- Is both descriptive and analytical (applies, analyzes, evaluates, and/or creates information)
- Supports the theme with relevant facts, examples, and details
- Demonstrates a logical and clear plan of organization; includes an introduction and a conclusion that are beyond a restatement of the theme
- Incorporates relevant information from at least four primary source documents; a single letter, photograph, broadside, etc. counts as one primary source document

### Score of 3:

- Develops all aspects of the task with little depth or develops most aspects of the task in some depth
- Is more descriptive than analytical (applies, may analyze, and/or evaluate information)
- Includes some relevant facts, examples, and details; may include some minor inaccuracies
- Demonstrates a satisfactory plan of organization; includes an introduction and a conclusion that may be a restatement of the theme
- Incorporates relevant information from at least three primary source documents; a single letter, photograph, broadside, etc. counts as one primary source document

**Score of 2:**

- Minimally develops all aspects of the task or develops some aspects of the task in some depth
- Is primarily descriptive; may include faulty, weak, or isolated application or analysis
- Includes few relevant facts, examples, and details; may include some inaccuracies
- Demonstrates a general plan of organization; may lack focus; may contain digressions; may not clearly identify which aspect of the task is being addressed; may lack an introduction and/or a conclusion
- Incorporates relevant information from at least two primary source documents; a single letter, photograph, broadside, etc. counts as one primary source document

**Score of 1:**

- Minimally develops some aspects of the task
- Is descriptive; may lack understanding, application, or analysis
- Includes few relevant facts, examples, or details; may include inaccuracies
- May demonstrate a weakness in organization; may lack focus; may contain digressions; may not clearly identify which aspect of the task is being addressed; may lack an introduction and/or a conclusion
- Does not incorporate relevant information from primary source documents; a single letter, photograph, broadside, etc. counts as one primary source document

## Civil War Essay Contest Writing Prompts

These topics and questions are meant as a guide to spark research and eventually help students hone a thesis statement. Students are not limited to these topics and questions, and advisors are cautioned not to submit all student essays on a single theme. Supporting materials from the Gilder Lehrman Institute, including primary source documents, videos, articles from *History Now*, online exhibitions, and print publications, may be found at <http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/civil-war-and-reconstruction-1861-1877>. Please note that a login is required.

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### **The coming of the war**

What were the causes of the Civil War? How did slavery evolve as an issue that led to war? How were politics involved?

### **Opinion**

How did people in the North and South form opinions on the war? How did both sides rally support? How did two presidents—Lincoln and Davis—motivate the Union and Confederacy? Examine newspapers and the press, letters to and from the field, photos, broadsides, music, plays, art, magazines, speeches, general meetings, reports from the home front, testimony, textbooks, etc.

### **Impacts**

How did the war impact America, both immediately and in the long term? What *wasn't* impacted by the war? What went on separate from it? Think about the Civil War as a unique event and in general, noting what was different about it and what changes it caused that other wars have also set in motion. Some areas to consider are technology, media, the economy, African Americans, women, children, politics, government, divisions, environment (destruction and growth), and local histories. Non-war-related: land-grants, religious beliefs, lives put on hold, dreams deferred, etc.

### **Local effects**

This topic is related to impacts. Think about what the war did to cities, towns, communities, and families. Millions of people went to the battlefields. Many millions more stayed behind. Some prospered; most suffered. Does your family have a Civil War story? What about your community? Look into narratives (stories), but also study other records—census data, population shifts, economic production, etc.

### **Women's roles**

What did women do during the war? Think about both Confederate and Union women at home and near the battlefield. Women worked as medical personnel, performed other labor on or near the battlefield, acted as spies, kept plantations and other industries going on the home front, and

formed sanitary commissions. Who were they? What are their stories? What did they do before the war? What happened to them after the war? What changed and what stayed the same?

### **African American experience**

What did African Americans do during the war? How did their experiences differ in the North and South and change over the course of the war? What impact did the Emancipation Proclamation have? Consider the work African Americans did, the roles they played and the lives they led, as well as how things differed for free blacks, slaves, freedmen and women, soldiers, and leaders.

### **Military issues**

Much has been written about battlefield tactics and generals' strategies. Less has been written about the materials, transportation systems, communications networks, supply chains, hospitals and POW camps required to keep both the Union and Confederate armies operating during the war. How did necessary material and people get to and from the battlefield? Who did the work?

### **Politics and government**

Many historians believe that the Civil War was the Second American Revolution, for it resolved some issues created in the Revolutionary and founding eras and raised others that were not resolved until the twentieth century. Consider how the Civil War expanded the powers of the federal government and how Abraham Lincoln defined his role as a wartime president. What changes did the Civil War cause? What happened to state governments? How did congressional power evolve? What happened to individual rights? How did the government mobilize its resources to care for veterans after the war?

### **International impact**

Though civil wars are fought within nations, they take place in the larger international system. Yet foreign countries kept out of the American Civil War to a surprising degree. Why? What went on internationally during the war? Who supported the Confederacy and who supported the Union? How was this support shown? What diplomatic issues did the war raise? How did it impact international trade?

### **The war remembered**

Why is there such popular fascination with the Civil War? Why have so many movies been made and books been written about the war? Why has the American public struggled with the war's causes, meaning, and legacy? How did Americans view this conflict during the Civil War years? Five years later? Fifty years later? One hundred years later? Consider re-enactments, cemeteries, the WPA slave narratives, centennial activities, and the sesquicentennial (the 150 year commemoration).