

Connecticut's

Laws of Life

2019 - 2020 Essay Program Handbook



Celebrating 20 Years!



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Laws of Life 2019 – 2020 Timeline	
Activity	Date
Registration Period	Present – January 30, 2020
Essay Submission Period	September 1, 2019 – March 3, 2020
Essay Judging Period	March 4, 2020 – March 25, 2020
Winning Students Announcement	First week in April 2020
Character Celebration RSVP Due	April 10, 2020
Character Celebration	Wednesday, May 6, 2020 6:30PM – 8:45PM at Amarante’s Sea Cliff in New Haven

Endorsing Organizations
 National Association of Secondary School Principals
 National School Boards Association
 Connecticut Association of Schools Approved List of Activities
 The John Templeton Foundation

Laws of Life Overview

The School for Ethical Education organizes *Laws of Life* as a two-tiered program in Connecticut. SEE invites schools and districts to register and provides these local organizations with program guidelines and consulting to administer their own local *Laws of Life* Essay Program.

Local Laws of Life Programs

Local programs follow the steps and complete a process that is suggested to include:

- Students introduced to think about their own *laws of life* with a prompt from literature, history, personal reflection, or quotes/maxims.
- Teachers use a writing process which includes pre-writing, outlining, drafting, editing, peer and family review, final writing and presentations to complete *Laws of Life* essays.
- Final essays are evaluated by readers outside of the class using a *Laws of Life* essay judging rubric.
- A class/community celebration provides closure for the local process with opportunity for students to share essays and local winners are recognized for their essays.
- The school submits one essay (for every 50 participants) to SEE for entry into Connecticut's statewide *Laws of Life* program for judging.

All the preceding steps **are not** required to host a local *Laws of Life* program. The main goal is to have students **reflect and write from the heart about their values**. Schools and districts are encouraged to **“do what fits”** for their program to benefit their students while recognizing the value of students discussing their *laws of life* with others.

Statewide Laws of Life Program

At the statewide program level, SEE accepts essays from the local contests and completes the following steps:

- Each essay submitted to SEE is copied with only a numeric identifier and then judged by two professional readers.
- Scores for all essays are compiled and the top ten essayists are invited to a statewide *Laws of Life* essay celebration.
- The *Laws of Life* essay celebration is usually held in early May at a central location in Connecticut and includes a dinner for the students, two guests, and their teacher.
- Selected student essays are presented along with a keynote speech by a respected guest speaker.
- Student winners are awarded certificates and a gift bag.

Laws of Life Essay Scoring Criteria

As you begin a *Laws of Life* Essay Program, it is helpful for teachers and students to know the judging criteria for a *Laws of Life* essay. The following scoring rubric is used by statewide judges and should be clearly understood by teachers and students. An example judge's scoring form is available online. As these criteria are used, an essay could earn a total of 24 points as follows.

Content (1-10 Points)

The essay is positive and life-affirming. The author clearly articulates one or more *laws of life* (ethical values such as but not limited to-- integrity, caring, responsibility, perseverance, fairness and respect) that would make the world a better place if everyone practiced it. Reasonable people would agree that the author's *laws of life* are important. The essay makes one both think and feel. The essay captures a *law of life* in a unique and special way.

Presentation (1-8 Points)

The essay is easy to read and is clearly written. The reader can tell exactly what the author was trying to communicate. The ideas and paragraphs flow smoothly in the essay.

Grammar and Spelling (1-6 Points)

The essay has been clearly edited for grammar and spelling.

Tips for Coordinators

Build a team or committee to support a *Laws of Life* program. The team can include student leaders, other faculty, administrators, parents and community organizations. The purpose in team formation is to expand the size of the community that works with students to reflect and discuss the values associated with *Laws of Life*. Connect teachers to *Laws of Life* website resources (<https://www.ethicsed.org/laws-of-life-essay-contest.html>) and highlight the About *Laws of Life* tab to access Writing Prompts, a Suggested Lesson Outline, Sample Essays and Sample Lessons.

Parental Involvement

Encourage teachers to have students share their essays and discuss their *laws of life* with their parents/guardians during the drafting/revising phase of the writing process.

Student Essays

Writing a *Laws of Life* essay can evoke powerful emotions and experiences for your students. The essays are meant to focus students on life-affirming and positive values. In rare cases, a student may write about something that raises a concern about the student's well-being. Should this situation arise, we recommended that you consider the following options: 1) Discuss your concerns with the student and 2) Make a referral to an appropriate school professional.

In some cases, students have revealed challenging life experiences that might compromise the reputation of others and should not be made public in the *Laws of Life* essay contest. Teachers' professional judgment is requested here to support students with appropriate resource referrals and protect the reputation of others who might be revealed in essays.

The *Laws of Life* essay writing contest is by design a public process that seeks to highlight *Laws of Life* as aspirational goals to be shared with teachers, family and peers. SEE will not forward to judges or publish essays that might harm the reputation of those cited in essays even when students are articulating an important Law of Life.

Student Recognition and Celebration

Hosting a celebration at the end of the writing program is a great way to recognize the wonderful stories, student effort, and value of the *Laws of Life* program. The celebration is also another way the *Laws of Life* message can be disseminated into the broader community. Celebrations can take place during the school day while inviting guests, parents, judges and media into the school or as an afterschool event. For examples, in the past SEE has learned that Barnes & Noble Super Stores have offered to host celebration events. Additionally, other ways to celebrate student writing can include announcing winners during school-wide announcements, assemblies, on the school Web site, the school newsletter, bulletin boards, board of education meetings, and school yearbooks and local newspapers.

Press Release Template

[INSERT DATE HERE]
[COORDINATOR NAME,
ADDRESS, E-MAIL, PHONE]

Contact: [INSERT SCHOOL NAME]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[School name] Students Write and Celebrate their *Laws of Life*

Students in grades ____ at _____ School wrote from their hearts as they took part in a *Laws of Life* Essay Program. The *Laws of Life* Essay Program encourages students to reflect and write about the values they believe will help them live successful and productive lives. Students wrote and edited their *Laws of Life* essay during ____ [month].

Laws of Life essays were written as part of their ____ [subject] class. _____ [coordinator's name and position] coordinated the contest. [Could add names of participating teachers] The essays were evaluated by a panel of judges that included _____, _____ and _____ [names of judges and positions].

____ [student winner] and ____ [student winner] were the authors of the top essays and were awarded _____ [what prizes were]. _____ [All the essay writers? Or winners?] were/will be recognized at _____ (how, where, when they were/are to be recognized).

“ _____ [quote from coordinator/principal about why school participating in *Laws of Life*],” said _____ [quote from a teacher who participated about the experience or why he/she participated].”

Among the topics the students wrote about were _____ [topics]. ____ [student winner]'s essay was entitled “ _____,” and ____ [student winner]'s essay was called “ _____.” _____ [student winner] and ____ [student winner] will be recognized at _____ [where, when, how].

____ [student winner] and ____ [student winner]'s essays have been submitted to the School for Ethical Education (SEE) of Milford, CT to be entered into a statewide judging of essays. Students whose essays are selected as the top essays in the statewide competition will be honored at an awards ceremony in the spring.

The *Laws of Life* Essay Program was created by Sir John Templeton in 1987 and has spread throughout the United States to more than 30 countries around the world. SEE is a non-profit, non-sectarian organization that encourages learning experiences that foster positive character. For more information about *Laws of Life* visit www.ethicsed.org.

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