



The New Birth of Freedom: National Youth Essay Contest

Sponsored by the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCW)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

.....	1
The New Birth of Freedom:	1
National Youth Essay Contest	1
Sponsored by the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCW)	1
Introduction	2
The Theme: "1776 Reborn"	2
Submission Categories & Prizes	2
Guidelines for Success	2
Judging Criteria:	3
Essays will be judged using the following point scale (100 points total)	3
Important Dates	3
Recommended Primary Sources: "The Bridge from 1776 to 1865"	3
Helpful Research Starting Points	3
Teacher's Tip:	4
Academic Integrity & AI Use Policy	4

Introduction

In honor of the **United States Semiquincentennial (250th Birthday)**, the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCW) invites students to reflect on how the Civil War became a pivotal moment when the survival of the American experiment hung in the balance. This contest asks young historians to bridge the gap between the founding of our nation in 1776 and its "New Birth of Freedom" in 1865.

The Theme: "1776 Reborn"

While the Declaration of Independence established the ideal that "all men are created equal," it was the Union victory in the Civil War that profoundly reshaped the nation's ability to pursue that promise.

Your essay should address:

- How the Union victory preserved the United States as a single, indivisible nation.
- The ways in which the Civil War completed the "unfinished work" of the Founding Fathers.
- What the legacy of the Union soldier means for the future of American democracy as we celebrate 250 years of Independence.

Submission Categories & Prizes

- Essays will be judged in two divisions based on the student's grade level as of the current academic year:

Division	Grade Level	Word Count Limit
Junior	Grades 6–8	800 – 1200 Words
Senior	Grades 9–12	1,500 – 2,000 Words

Prizes will be awarded for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place in each division, including certificate.

Guidelines for Success

To ensure your essay stands out to the judging committee, please adhere to the following:

- **Historical Accuracy:** Utilize primary sources (letters, speeches, government documents) from both the Revolutionary War and Civil War eras.
 - **Originality:** We are looking for your unique voice. How do *you* see the connection between 1776 and 1865?
 - **Formatting:** * Typed, double-spaced, in 12pt Times New Roman font.
 - Include a cover page with your name, grade, school, and contact information.
 - Citations must be included (MLA or Chicago style preferred).
 - **A Note on Perspective:** Remember that the SUVCW is dedicated to preserving the memory of the Grand Army of the Republic. Essays should analyze the significance of the Union victory and its impact on the survival and development of the United States.
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Judging Criteria:

Essays will be judged using the following point scale (100 points total)

- Historical Accuracy & Use of Evidence – 30 points
- Analysis & Argumentation – 30 points
- Use of Primary Sources – 20 points
- Organization & Clarity – 10 points
- Mechanics & Citations – 10 points

Important Dates

- **Submission Deadline:** [Insert Date], 2026
- **Winners Announced:** July 4th, 2026 (The 250th Anniversary of the United States)

Recommended Primary Sources: "The Bridge from 1776 to 1865"

We suggest students analyze at least one document from the "Founding" column and one from the "Fulfillment" column to show how the Union victory refined the American experiment.

The Promise (Founding Era)	The Fulfillment (Civil War Era)
The Declaration of Independence (1776): Specifically the stated ideal that "all men are created equal."	The Gettysburg Address (1863): Where Lincoln explicitly references the Declaration of Independence with his opening, "four score and seven years ago" to redefine the war as a test of 1776, and his line about.
The U.S. Constitution (1787): Specifically the Preamble's goal to "form a more perfect Union."	The 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments to the US Constitution (1865-66): The legal realization of the Declaration’s promise by ending the institution of slavery and granting full citizenship to formerly enslaved Americans.
Washington’s Farewell Address (1796): His warnings about the dangers of sectionalism and the importance of national unity.	Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address (1865): His reflection on the "scourge of war" as a communal penance for the sin of slavery.
Articles of Confederation (1777): The failed first attempt at a "perpetual union" that lacked a strong central authority.	Frederick Douglass: What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?”1852): Where he acknowledged the greatness of the Founders and the principles of liberty expressed in the Declaration of Independence, but sharply condemned the nation for celebrating freedom while millions remained enslaved.

Helpful Research Starting Points

To assist students in finding these and other sources, we recommend the following digital archives:

- **The Library of Congress (LOC.gov):** Search for "Civil War Primary Source Sets."

- **The National Archives (Archives.gov):** Specifically the "Milestone Documents" section.
 - **The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History:** Excellent collections on both the Revolution and the Civil War.
 - **The SUVCW National Website:** For history on the Grand Army of the Republic and their post-war efforts to preserve the Union's legacy.
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Teacher's Tip:

Encourage students to look for **letters from ordinary Union soldiers**. These often contain moving passages where young men explain to their families that they are fighting to ensure that "government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

Academic Integrity & AI Use Policy

Original Work Required

All essays must represent the student's own original thinking and writing. Plagiarism (including copying from books, websites, other students, or previously published essays) will result in disqualification.

Use of Sources

Students must properly cite all quotations, ideas, and primary or secondary sources using MLA or Chicago style. Failure to cite sources appropriately may result in disqualification.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools

Limited use of AI tools (such as ChatGPT or similar programs) is permitted only for:

- Brainstorming ideas
- Organizing outlines
- Grammar or proofreading assistance

AI may not be used to generate full paragraphs, draft essays, or rewrite substantial portions of the student's work.

If any AI tool is used in the writing process, students must include a brief disclosure statement on the cover page describing how it was used.

Certificate of Commendation