



FIRST THINGS FIRST

“I have been involved in numerous writing contests. No other contest has had such a positive effect on our young people.”

— Greg Stevens,
State Representative,
Spirit Lake, Iowa

WHAT IS THE CONTEST ABOUT?

“An attitude of gratitude creates blessings.”

“You are only as good as your word.”

“Conceive it. Believe it. Achieve it.”

“Honesty is the best policy.”

“To have a friend, be one.”

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

These are just some of the *laws of life* by which we live. Often called wise sayings or maxims, the *laws of life* transcend religions, cultures, and national borders. They reveal the core values that make up our character, and they provide us with a moral compass as we journey through life. Sir John Templeton writes about the importance of these ‘laws’:

“To be a happy and useful person, we must understand and practice the laws of life. The world operates on spiritual and moral principles just as it does on the laws of physics and gravity. It is up to us to learn what those principles are and then live by them.”

So what are your *laws of life*?

When you think about it, that is quite a challenging question. And that is exactly what young people are asked when they participate in the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest. There is no right answer or quick response. In order to succeed in this activity, contest participants need to **reflect** and **write** from the heart about what *they think* matters most in life. As young people write their essays, they must identify one or more *laws of life* that mean the most to them and explain their choices through the experiences they have had, the lessons they have learned, and the people who have served as living examples.



There is a common saying that character education is about helping young people “know the good, desire the good, and do the good.” The *Laws of Life* Essay Contest enables educators and community members to focus young people on their values and then publicly recognize them for committing their principles to writing — in the hope that this powerful experience will encourage young people to live according to their *laws of life*.



DO WHAT FITS!

A hallmark of the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest is its flexibility. More than 100 hundred local essay contests have been launched around the world, and each one is unique, because for each program, organizers followed the strategy “DO WHAT FITS!” as they were developing their own contest.

When you launch a *Laws of Life* Essay Contest, the contest becomes a part of your local community. It becomes *your* program. DO WHAT FITS means that you should tailor the contest to meet the unique needs of your schools and community — and no one knows your schools and local community better than you do.

When you DO WHAT FITS, you decide how to best organize your contest, and all aspects of the program — such as the size and type of prizes, the length of essays, the number and level of schools involved, the kind of awards ceremony you have, and even the name of your contest — are determined by *you*.

The John Templeton Foundation has attempted to create a user-friendly manual that will help you launch a successful *Laws of Life* Essay Contest. Many of the helpful strategies in this manual have already been “field tested” in schools and local communities across the United States and around the world. Remember, however, that one strategy is more important than all the rest — DO WHAT FITS!

“I work with incarcerated boys — the most violent juvenile offenders in the state — on programs designed to educate, motivate, and connect them to the community. I can honestly say that their participation this past fall in the Laws of Life Essay Contest has had an impact like nothing else that we have tried.”

— Linda Gilbert,
Volunteer Contest Director,
McMinnville, Tennessee



HOW WE CAN HELP

At the John Templeton Foundation, we are available to assist you every step of the way as you launch your own *Laws of Life* Essay Contest, and help is only a phone call away at 800-245-1285 (US only) or 610-687-8942, or feel free to email us at lawsoflife@templeton.org. At the Foundation, we provide the following support to individuals and communities:

"It was easy to adapt the Foundation's contest materials and design a program that honors our unique multicultural heritage."

— *Judy Nagasako,*
Character Education Coordinator,
Honolulu, Hawaii

- ❖ **Contest materials.** Our contest materials are **free** for your use and include the Contest Brochure, Contest Manual, Teacher's Guide, *Laws of Life* Newsletter, Contest Facts and Benefits Sheet, and *Essays from the Heart* Video. Please contact us to request these materials. We can also work closely with you to develop your own contest materials. (These materials are described later in the Manual.) Feel free to ask for our contest logo and design, available camera-ready or on diskette, which you are welcome to use on your own materials.
- ❖ **Help with fundraising and promotion.** We can help you strategize the most effective ways to secure the funds needed to start a contest, and we can offer suggestions for promoting the contest to schools, the general community, and the local media.
- ❖ **On-site presentation.** We are available to make a "Contest Presentation" to local community groups, individuals, and businesses that are interested in sponsoring the contest. We can also meet with teachers and school officials to talk about the contest.
- ❖ **Teacher workshop.** We can arrange for a teacher already involved in the contest to visit your community and share his or her experiences and knowledge about the contest with teachers and school officials.
- ❖ **Information from other contests.** We are happy to share with you examples of what has worked for sponsors and organizers in other schools and communities, as well as those materials that they have developed for their contests. We can also keep you informed of what is happening across the country and around the world when you join our *Laws of Life* Listserv (on email) and subscribe to our free newsletter, which is published three times a year. Call us so we can sign you up!