

2025 – 26
FREDRICKIA HARGROVE
POSTER AND ESSAY
CONTEST MANUAL

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PADUCAH/MCCRACKEN COUNTY NAACP

Dear Teachers, Administrators, and Community Stakeholders,

The theme for the 2025-2026 contest year is "**Empowering Our Youth to Be Agents of Change**". This theme challenges students across all grade levels to move beyond passive learning and consider their active role in shaping a more just and equitable world. It connects directly to the core mission of the NAACP and the enduring vision of Dr. King, who believed that everyone, regardless of age, has the power and responsibility to contribute to the creation of a "Beloved Community."

This effort is supported by the generous sponsorship and partnership of the Paducah/McCracken County NAACP, Four Rivers Nuclear Partnership, LLC., and 91.3 WKMS. Their dedication ensures that this contest remains a leading academic event in our community, providing a platform for student voices and offering cash prizes to winners in each division.

This manual serves as a comprehensive resource for all stakeholders involved in the contest, providing clarity, guidance, and support throughout the process.

- **For Administrators:** This guide provides a framework for incorporating the contest into school-wide celebrations of Martin Luther King Day and Black History Month. Its clear alignment with Kentucky Academic Standards (KAS) and the Kentucky State Assessment (KSA) helps justify encouraging teacher and student involvement as an essential part of the core curriculum.
- **For Teachers:** Part II's divisional guides are organized as comprehensive instructional units, including detailed prompt analysis, evaluation rubrics, standards alignment, and a toolkit of ready-to-use classroom activities. These resources aim to streamline preparation and enhance the educational value of the contest.
- **For Parents & Families:** The "Home & Community Connection" sections in each divisional guide provide practical activities families can do together. These ideas aim to encourage meaningful conversations, promote learning beyond the classroom, and support parents in fostering their child's creative and intellectual growth.

On behalf of the Paducah/McCracken County Chapter of the NAACP, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to our sponsors, partners, and community members for their unwavering support. I wish all competitors the best of luck in this inspirational contest.

Respectfully,



Rodney D. Holt
Contest Manager

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PART I: CONTEST FRAMEWORK AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

CONTEST OVERVIEW AND STRUCTURE

The Fredrickia Hargrove Poster and Essay Contest is open to all K-12 students within the Paducah Independent School District and McCracken County Public School District. The competition is structured into six distinct divisions, each with a unique, grade-appropriate prompt designed to challenge students at their developmental level.

- **Division 1:** Grades K-3 (Poster)
- **Division 2:** Grades 4-5 (Opinion Essay)
- **Division 3:** Grade 6 (Argumentative Essay)
- **Division 4:** Grade 7 (Argumentative Essay)
- **Division 5:** Grade 8 (Argumentative Essay)
- **Division 6:** Grades 9-12 (Argumentative Essay)

In each division, first, second, and third-place winners receive cash prizes in recognition of their outstanding work.¹ A key feature of this contest is its prestigious partnership with **WKMS 91.3 FM**, Murray State University's public radio service. First-place essay winners have the unique opportunity to record their winning essays for broadcast across the region professionally. First-place posters are showcased on the WKMS website. This partnership provides an unmatched public platform for our students, amplifying their voices and celebrating their academic achievements with the entire community.

THE KSA CONNECTION: PREPARING FOR ON-DEMAND SUCCESS

A key principle of the Fredrickia Hargrove Contest is its intentional alignment with the Kentucky State Assessment (KSA), especially the On-Demand Writing section. The 2025-2026 prompts are carefully designed to be a genuine and effective tool for preparing students for academic success, offering more than just practice by simulating the KSA's cognitive challenges.

The KSA On-Demand Writing assessment's structure involves students analyzing a provided situation and source text, understanding the intended purpose and audience, and creating a well-supported response. Each essay prompt across Divisions 2 to 6 follows this format, with increasing rigor and relevance.

- **Text-Based Evidence:** Each contest prompt starts with a detailed "Scenario" that offers extensive background, historical context, and multiple viewpoints, similar to a KSA passage set. Students are explicitly instructed to use reasons, examples, and evidence from the text to back up their claims. For instance, the Grade 7 prompt asks students to draw on historical case studies, such as the NAACP's "The Crisis" magazine or Dr. King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail," to argue for the most effective strategy for social change. This directly engages the fundamental KSA skill of citing and analyzing textual evidence.
- **Specific Audience and Purpose:** Each prompt recognizes a real-world audience, transforming the task from just a school assignment into a meaningful act of civic engagement. Students are asked to write to the Paducah City Commission, the Board of Directors of The King Center in Atlanta, or the Kentucky General Assembly's Juvenile Justice Oversight Council. This requires students to adapt their tone, style, and content accordingly—a critical aspect of KSA evaluation that assesses a writer's rhetorical awareness.

- **Advanced Argumentation:** Prompts for grades 6 to 12 specifically ask students to recognize and counter a counterclaim, a key indicator of advanced argumentative writing in the KSA. The prompts support this skill by including opposing viewpoints directly in the “Scenario” text. For example, the Grade 6 prompt about renaming a park presents three different perspectives, giving students the choice to argue against one, showing their capacity to handle complex and multi-dimensional topics.
- **Data Synthesis:** The high school prompt presents a level of analysis that closely matches the highest standards of college and career preparedness. Students must synthesize quantitative data—such as the statistic that Black youth in Kentucky make up 52% of cases transferred to adult court despite being only 11% of the youth population—with philosophical arguments and historical examples. This task of integrating different types of evidence into a clear argument is a vital skill for success on the KSA and beyond.

By participating in the Hargrove Contest, students experience a full cycle of the on-demand writing process in a supportive, meaningful setting. They analyze a prompt, plan a response, draft an essay using textual evidence, and write for a specific audience—skills that are directly applicable to the high-stakes environment of the KSA. This contest provides a low-stakes, high-impact opportunity to develop the confidence and skills necessary for on-demand success.

PART II: DIVISIONAL GUIDES FOR EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

CHAPTER 1: DIVISION 1 (GRADES K-3) POSTER PROMPT

THE PROMPT IN DETAIL

2025-26 Theme: ENCOURAGING OUR YOUTH TO BE AGENTS OF CHANGE

SCENARIO

Have you ever imagined what the perfect neighborhood would look like? Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. did. He called it the “Beloved Community”—a place where every single person feels safe, happy, and knows they belong. It’s a community where people are kind to each other, lend a helping hand, and work together to solve problems peacefully.

One of the best ways to build this kind of community is by making the places we share—like our parks and community centers—more beautiful and fun for everyone. Think about the parks where you love to play, like Noble Park or Robert Coleman Park, or community centers like the W.C. Young Community Center. For years, heroes in Paducah have been working to make our community a better place for kids. Imagine a hero like Oscar Cross, who started the Boys and Girls Club in Paducah to give kids a safe and positive place to go, or the members of the Paducah/McCracken County NAACP, led today by President J.W. Cleary, who work to make sure our community is fair for every family.

Right now, people all over Paducah are inspired by this idea! A new garden, the Southside Community Gardens, has been planted to grow fresh food for local families. Other groups give awards to people who plant beautiful flowers to brighten up our town. This has everyone talking: what’s the best way to make our community spaces even better?

- Some people think planting more flowers, trees, and gardens is the secret. They believe nature helps everyone feel calm and happy.
- Others think the magic is in art! They envision colorful murals on walls and cool sculptures that showcase our community’s creative spirit.
- A third group believes it’s all about fun for kids! They dream of new playgrounds, awesome spray parks, or even outdoor stages for concerts and shows.

All of these are wonderful ideas for building a Beloved Community. Now, it’s your turn to be an agent of change and share your dream!

YOUR TASK

Create a poster that shows your big idea for making a park or public space in Paducah/McCracken County more beautiful and welcoming for everyone. Your poster should be so full of color and imagination that it inspires your friends, family, teachers, and city leaders to say, “Let’s do that!”

Your poster should be a picture that answers two important questions:

1. What is your amazing idea for improving a local park or public space?
2. How would your idea help make our town a true “Beloved Community,” where every kid and every family feels welcome and joyful?

UNPACKING THE PROMPT: BUILDING A "BELOVED COMMUNITY"

This prompt encourages our youngest students to imagine themselves as city planners and community visionaries. The main idea is Dr. King's concept of the "Beloved Community." For this age group, it's important to explain this in simple, clear terms: a place where everyone feels safe, kind, and welcome. The prompt helps by linking this big idea to the students' own everyday experiences.

The task is closely connected to the students' local environment, making it both tangible and meaningful. It highlights well-known landmarks, such as Noble Park, Robert Coleman Park, and the W.C. Young Community Center, which children may have visited. Additionally, it introduces local heroes and organizations, encouraging civic awareness. Mentioning Oscar Cross, the founder of the Boys and Girls Club of Paducah, and J.W. Cleary, the current NAACP president, illustrates that community building is an ongoing story featuring heroes from both past and present.

By connecting the abstract concept of a "Beloved Community" to familiar places and people, and providing clear, relatable ways to improve through nature, art, or play, the prompt encourages students to see themselves as active contributors to their community's journey of positive change.

PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS: EVALUATION CRITERIA

The K-3 poster will be evaluated on its creativity, clear message, and connection to the theme. The following table breaks down the criteria from the official scoresheet and aligns with the Kentucky Academic Standards (KAS) for Visual Arts, Social Studies, and Writing.

CRITERIA	WHAT IT MEANS	HOW TO SHOW IT (STUDENT-FRIENDLY GOALS)	KAS ALIGNMENT
Addresses the Prompt	Your poster clearly answers the prompt's questions.	Show your big idea for a park or public place. Show how your idea makes people feel happy and welcome.	VA:Cn10.1.K-3
Communication	Your poster effectively communicates a message or story.	Use big, clear pictures so everyone can understand your idea. Your poster should tell a story about how you are making our community better.	VA:Re.7.2.K-3
Originality & Creativity	Your poster displays unique and creative ideas.	Think of a new and exciting idea! Use your imagination to make your poster special and different.	VA:Cr1.1.K-3
Poster Technique	You use art materials well to create your poster.	Use bright, bold colors.	VA:Cr2.1.K-3

CRITERIA	WHAT IT MEANS	HOW TO SHOW IT (STUDENT-FRIENDLY GOALS)	KAS ALIGNMENT
		Try different ways to draw, color, or even use collage to make your poster stand out.	
Critical Thinking	Your poster shows you thought carefully about your idea.	Think about why your idea is good for the community. Does it help kids? Does it make the park more beautiful? Does it make everyone feel welcome?	C.K-3.1, 2.G.HI.1
Cultural/Historical Context	Your poster connects to the idea of a "Beloved Community" and helping others.	Your poster should convey kindness and teamwork, just as Dr. King and local heroes like Oscar Cross taught us.	K.C.RR.1, 1.C.RR.1

CLASSROOM INTEGRATION: A TEACHER'S TOOLKIT

- **Activity 1: "Beloved Community" Circle Time & Anchor Chart:** Begin by reading a picture book about community, kindness, or teamwork. Ask students, "What makes our classroom a good place to be?" Chart their answers (e.g., "we share," "we help," "we are friends"). Introduce the term "Beloved Community" from the prompt and explain it's like their classroom, but for the whole city. This builds a foundation of understanding.
- **Activity 2: "Paducah Places" Virtual Tour:** Show students pictures of the local places mentioned in the prompt: Noble Park, Robert Coleman Park, and the W.C. Young Community Center. Discuss what these places are for and what students do there. This provides visual context and helps them choose a specific place for their poster idea.
- **Activity 3: "Idea Incubator" Stations:** Set up three stations around the room based on the ideas in the prompt:
 - **Nature Station:** With green and brown construction paper, flower stickers, and drawing materials for ideas about gardens and trees.
 - **Art Station:** With colorful paints, clay, and collage materials for ideas about murals and sculptures.
 - **Play Station:** With building blocks, pipe cleaners, and craft sticks for ideas about new playgrounds and fun activities.

Students can rotate through the stations to explore different possibilities before settling on their own "big idea." This aligns with KAS standard VA:Cr1.1.K-3 (Engage in exploration and imaginative play with materials).¹
- **Activity 4: "Poster Presentation Practice":** Once posters are complete, have students practice explaining their idea to a partner or small group. Encourage them to use the sentence stem: "My idea is... and it will help our community by..." This reinforces the communication aspect of the task and aligns with KAS for Reading and Writing.¹

HOME & COMMUNITY CONNECTION: A PARTNER'S GUIDE

- **Family Activity: A "Park Exploration Day":** Take your child to a local park, perhaps one mentioned in the prompt. As you walk, be an "idea detective" together. Use these conversation starters:
 - "What is your favorite thing about this park? Why?"
 - "If we were in charge of making this park even better, what is one thing you would add?"
 - "Look at the trees and flowers. How do they make you feel?"
 - "Do you see any art here? What kind of art would you like to see?"
 - "How can we make sure everyone feels welcome and can have fun here?"
- **Community Idea: Visit a Community Project:** If possible, take a drive or walk by the Southside Community Gardens or look for a public mural downtown. Talk about how these projects were created by people working together to make something beautiful and helpful for everyone. This provides a real-world example of the prompt's theme in action.

CHAPTER 2: DIVISION 2 (GRADES 4-5) OPINION ESSAY PROMPT

THE PROMPT IN DETAIL

2025-26 Theme: ENCOURAGING OUR YOUTH TO BE AGENTS OF CHANGE

SCENARIO

Have you ever seen something that just wasn't fair and felt a fire inside you to do something about it? That feeling is powerful. And guess what? History shows that students, just like you, have used that exact feeling to change the world.

Long before the famous protests of the 1960s, the NAACP recognized that students possessed a unique passion and spirit. That's why, way back in 1936, they created the NAACP Youth & College Division to help young people become influential leaders. These weren't adults in suits; they were students, some not much older than you, who decided to be brave. The members of the NAACP Youth Council didn't just talk about problems—they took action. In Oklahoma City, they organized one of the very first sit-ins at a lunch counter to protest segregation. In Louisville, Kentucky, they led the "Nothing New for Easter" boycotts, convincing stores to hire Black employees by refusing to shop there. They proved you don't need to be a grown-up to lead your community toward justice.

Today, the conversation about how young people can be agents of change is more important than ever. There are many ideas about the best way to make a difference.

- **Be the Voice That Speaks Out.** One view is that young people should follow in the footsteps of the youth councils by taking direct action. This means participating in peaceful protests, writing letters to leaders, and using your voice to call attention to issues that matter. Supporters believe that making noise is the best way to get adults to listen and demand change.
- **Be the Hands That Help.** Another view is that the most powerful change comes from community service. This means volunteering your time to help others at places like the Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club or the W.C. Young Community Center. It could also mean starting your own project, like planting a garden at your school or organizing a cleanup day at a local park. People who believe in this path feel that building a stronger community by helping one another is more effective than engaging in protests.
- **Be the Example That Inspires.** A third perspective is that young people should focus on becoming their best selves through personal excellence. The NAACP created a program called ACT-SO ("The Olympics of the Mind") based on this very idea, to celebrate students who excel in science, art, and writing. Supporters argue that by working hard in school and sharing your unique talents, you become a powerful role model. They believe this kind of success is the ultimate way to break down barriers and create lasting change for the future.

All of these are powerful ways to be an agent of change. Now it's time for you to decide which path you believe in most.

YOUR TASK

The leaders of our school systems—the Paducah Independent and McCracken County Boards of Education—are holding a special meeting because they want to hear from the real experts: you. They want to know how they can best support students who wish to make a difference.

Write an opinion essay for the members of the school board. In your essay, give your opinion on which of the three methods you've read about—being the voice that speaks out, the hands that help, or the example that inspires—is the most effective way for students your age to create positive change in our community.¹

UNPACKING THE PROMPT: CHOOSING YOUR PATH TO CHANGE

This prompt challenges 4th and 5th-grade students to engage in a sophisticated debate about civic strategy. The core task is to evaluate three distinct, valid pathways to becoming an "agent of change" and argue for the one they believe is most effective for their age group. The prompt's structure is a key to its educational value: it does not ask students to invent ideas from scratch but to analyze, evaluate, and select from a set of well-defined options, using textual evidence to justify their choice. This is a foundational skill for critical thinking and persuasive writing.¹

The scenario provides rich historical and local context for each viewpoint, making the options tangible and meaningful:

- **Direct Action/Protest:** This is linked to the heroic actions of the NAACP Youth Councils in Oklahoma City and Louisville, providing concrete examples of what "speaking up" looks like in history.¹
- **Community Service:** This is grounded in local institutions that students may be familiar with, such as the Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club and the W.C. Young Community Center, making the concept of "helping others" a familiar one.¹
- **Personal Excellence:** This is connected to a specific NAACP national program, ACT-SO ("The Olympics of the Mind"), which frames academic and artistic achievement as a powerful form of activism.¹

The specified audience—the combined Paducah and McCracken County School Boards—requires students to adopt a respectful and well-reasoned tone, further enhancing the authenticity of the writing task.¹

PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS: EVALUATION CRITERIA & KSA ALIGNMENT

This task is a classic On-Demand Opinion Writing prompt. Success depends on clearly stating and maintaining an opinion while supporting it with logical reasons and textual evidence. The evaluation will focus on the KSA domains of Clarity, Support, Organization, and Language/Conventions. The following table, adapted from the official score sheet, provides a roadmap for students and teachers.

KSA FOCUS AREA	WHAT IT MEANS	EXAMPLE FROM THE PROMPT (HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR OPINION)	KAS ALIGNMENT
Clarity & Coherence	You state your opinion clearly in the introduction and stick to it throughout the essay.	"In my opinion, community service is the most effective way for 4th and 5th graders to be agents of change."	C.1, C.4
Support/Development	You use specific reasons, facts, and details from the "Situation" text to prove your point.	If you choose community service , you can support your opinion by mentioning the	C.1, 5.H.CH.1

KSA FOCUS AREA	WHAT IT MEANS	EXAMPLE FROM THE PROMPT (HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR OPINION)	KAS ALIGNMENT
		positive impact of helping at the "Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club." If you choose direct action , you must reference the "Oklahoma City sit-ins" or the "Nothing New for Easter" boycotts."	
Organization	Your essay is easy to follow, with an introduction, body paragraphs for each reason, and a conclusion. You use transition words.	Start with your opinion. In the next paragraph, give your first reason. Use a transition like "Another reason is..." to start the next paragraph. End by restating your opinion.	C.4
Language & Conventions	You use grade-appropriate language, and your grammar, spelling, and punctuation are correct.	Your writing is clear and easy for the school board members to read and understand. You check your work for errors.	L.1
Audience & Purpose	Your writing shows you know you are writing to the school board to persuade them.	Maintain a respectful tone. Explain your ideas clearly so that adults can understand your perspective on how they can best support students.	C.4, 4.C.RR.1

CLASSROOM INTEGRATION: A TEACHER'S TOOLKIT

- **Activity 1: "Text Detectives - Evidence Hunt":** Provide students with a three-column chart labeled "Be the Voice," "Be the Hands," and "Be the Example." In small groups, have them re-read the "Scenario" and list all the facts, examples, and details that support each of the three viewpoints. This becomes their evidence bank for the essay.¹
- **Activity 2: "Four Corners" Debate:** Label the four corners of the classroom: 1) The Voice is Most Effective, 2) The Hands are Most Effective, 3) The Example is Most Effective, and 4) Undecided. After reviewing the evidence, students move to the corner that represents their opinion. Students in each corner discuss why they chose that position, using evidence from their charts to support their reasoning. This verbal processing helps solidify their arguments before writing.
- **Activity 3: "Opinion Essay Blueprint":** Use a graphic organizer to help students structure their essays. The organizer should include:
 - **Introduction:** Hook + "In my opinion, ___ is the most effective way because ___ and ___."
 - **Body Paragraph 1:** Reason 1 + Evidence from the text.
 - **Body Paragraph 2:** Reason 2 + Evidence from the text.
 - **Conclusion:** Restate opinion + Final thought.

This structured approach ensures logical organization and the use of textual support, aligning directly with KSA expectations.¹

- **Activity 4: "Peer Review for Persuasion":** Once drafts are written, have students partner up. The reviewer's job is to read the essay and answer one question: "Was I persuaded?" They should point to the specific reasons and evidence that were most convincing. This focuses feedback on the core purpose of opinion writing.

HOME & COMMUNITY CONNECTION: A PARTNER'S GUIDE

- **Family Activity: "Dinner Table Debate":** Use the three viewpoints from the prompt as a topic for family conversation. Ask your child which path they think is best and why. Share your perspective. This is a great way to practice forming and defending an opinion in a supportive environment. Ask questions like: "What are the good things about speaking up? What are the good things about helping out?".¹
- **Community Idea: Exploring Local Action:** Help your child find examples of the three strategies in your community.
 - **Direct Action:** Look for letters to the editor in the local newspaper or news about peaceful community advocacy.
 - **Community Service:** Visit the website for the Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club or another local charity to learn about their work. Consider volunteering as a family.¹
 - **Personal Excellence:** Attend a school play, art show, or academic competition to see how students share their talents with the community. Discuss how this can be inspiring and create change.

CHAPTER 3: DIVISION 3 (GRADE 6) ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY PROMPT

THE PROMPT IN DETAIL

2025-26 Theme: ENCOURAGING OUR YOUTH TO BE AGENTS OF CHANGE

SCENARIO

Every day, you walk or ride past streets, parks, and buildings with names on them. Robert Coleman Park. The W.C. Young Community Center. Have you ever stopped to think about who these people were? The names we choose for our public places tell a story about who we are and what we believe in as a community. They are a public announcement of the people we consider heroes.

Sometimes, that story needs a new chapter. For years, the park we now know as Robert Coleman Park was called Blackburn Park. In 2009, the city chose to rename it to honor Mr. Coleman, a civil rights activist and Paducah's longest-serving city commissioner. That decision demonstrates that a community can evolve and choose to celebrate new heroes whose legacies reflect contemporary values.

Right now, cities all over America are having conversations just like that one, and they can be complicated. In coffee shops, at dinner tables, and in city halls, people are debating what to do.

- One perspective is that we must **preserve history by keeping the original names**, even if they are tied to a painful past. People with this view worry that changing names is like erasing history. They believe we should keep the names to remember our whole story—the good and the bad—and perhaps add a sign explaining the complete history rather than changing the name itself.
- A second view is that our public spaces should **honor the heroes who reflect our values today**. People who hold this view believe it's vital to celebrate leaders who stand for diversity, justice, and equality. They think renaming a park after someone like Curlee Brown Sr., the Paducah NAACP president who sued to integrate our local college, or Helen LaFrance, the brilliant artist from Graves County who preserved Black life in her paintings, sends a powerful message about who we want to be. They argue it's a way to correct past oversights and inspire a new generation.
- A third perspective suggests that instead of arguing over old names, we should **focus our energy on creating new memorials**. Supporters of this idea believe that building a new statue, a community garden, or a monument is a more positive way to honor our unsung heroes. They argue this approach unites the community by adding something new and celebratory, rather than creating conflict by taking something away.

This is an honest and important discussion about the story our community wants to tell about itself.

YOUR TASK

This isn't just a school assignment; it's a chance to speak directly to the people who make decisions for our city. The Paducah City Commission is currently debating the future of "Founders' Park," a historic park downtown. A proposal is on the table to rename it to honor a major local African American leader who doesn't yet have a public landmark. This has sparked a community-wide conversation.

Write an argumentative essay to the Paducah City Commission. In your essay, argue for the position you believe the Commission should take. Choose one of the three perspectives from the "Situation" text to build your argument:

1. The city should keep the original name of the park to preserve its history.

2. The city should rename the park to honor a local African American hero.
3. The city should keep the name, but commit to building a new park or memorial to honor an unsung hero.¹

UNPACKING THE PROMPT: THE STORIES OUR LANDMARKS TELL

This prompt marks the critical transition from opinion to argumentative writing. Students are no longer just stating a preference; they are building a logical case for a specific course of action and, crucially, defending it against an opposing view. The scenario employs a hypothetical yet realistic debate over "Founders' Park" to examine the complex issue of historical memory and public commemoration.¹

The prompt is rich with local context that makes the debate immediate and relevant:

- **Named Landmarks:** The W.C. Young Community Center and Robert Coleman Park serve as positive examples of honoring community leaders.¹
- **A Precedent for Change:** The specific detail that Robert Coleman Park was renamed from Blackburn Park in 2009 is a powerful piece of evidence. It shows that changing names is not a new or radical idea in Paducah but part of the community's living history.¹
- **Potential Honorees:** The prompt offers examples of deserving local African American leaders who could be honored, such as Curlee Brown Sr. (NAACP president and activist) and Helen LaFrance (a celebrated artist), providing students with concrete figures to consider.¹

The most significant academic leap in this prompt is the requirement to acknowledge and respond to a counterclaim. This aligns with advanced KAS for Writing standards and is a hallmark of sophisticated argumentative writing. The prompt brilliantly scaffolds this skill by not only asking for a counterclaim but also by providing potential counterclaims within the text (preserve history, rename, or build new). This structure guides students to select one of the provided opposing views and dismantle it using evidence from the text, a critical step toward mastering complex argumentation.¹ The audience—the Paducah City Commission—demands a formal, respectful, and evidence-based style.¹

PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS: EVALUATION CRITERIA & KSA ALIGNMENT

Success in this argumentative task requires a clear claim, strong textual evidence, and the skillful handling of a counterclaim. The evaluation mirrors the KSA rubric for argumentative writing.

KSA FOCUS AREA	WHAT IT MEANS	EXAMPLE FROM THE PROMPT (HOW TO BUILD YOUR ARGUMENT)	KAS ALIGNMENT
Clarity & Coherence (Claim)	You establish a clear, arguable claim in your introduction and maintain that focus.	"The Paducah City Commission should rename Founders' Park to honor a local African American hero because public spaces must reflect our current values of justice and equality."	C.1
Support/Development	You use specific reasons and evidence from the "Situation" text to support your claim logically.	To support renaming, you could cite the example of Robert Coleman Park, which was successfully renamed to "honor Mr. Coleman's lifetime of service."	C.1, 6.H.CO.1

KSA FOCUS AREA	WHAT IT MEANS	EXAMPLE FROM THE PROMPT (HOW TO BUILD YOUR ARGUMENT)	KAS ALIGNMENT
Counterclaims	You fairly acknowledge an opposing viewpoint and then effectively respond to or refute it.	"Some may argue that we should keep the original name to preserve history. However, honoring figures who represent justice, like Curlee Brown Sr., does not erase history; it tells a more complete and inspiring version of it."	C.1.c
Organization	Your argument is structured logically with an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Transitions connect your ideas.	Dedicate a full paragraph to introducing and refuting the counterclaim. This shows you have thought deeply about the issue.	C.4
Language & Conventions (Style)	You use a formal style appropriate for the City Commission and demonstrate command of grammar and mechanics.	Avoid slang or casual language. Use precise words to make your argument. Address the Commission respectfully (e.g., "The Commission should consider...").	L.1, C.4

CLASSROOM INTEGRATION: A TEACHER'S TOOLKIT

- **Activity 1: "Local History Detectives":** Before tackling the prompt, have students research one of the local figures mentioned: W.C. Young, Robert Coleman, Curlee Brown Sr., or Helen LaFrance. Have them create a short "bio-card" to share with the class. This front-loads the historical context, giving them a deeper connection to the people involved in the debate.¹
- **Activity 2: "Mock City Commission Debate":** Divide the class into three groups, one for each perspective on renaming Founders' Park. Give them time to prepare their arguments using evidence from the text. Then, stage a mock commission hearing where each group presents its case. Crucially, require each group to address the arguments of the other two groups in their presentation. This provides active practice in forming counterclaims and rebuttals.
- **Activity 3: "The Counterclaim Sandwich":** Teach students a simple structure for their counterclaim paragraph:
 - **Top Bread:** Introduce the opposing view fairly. ("Some people believe that...")
 - **The Filling:** Provide a strong rebuttal with evidence. ("However, this view overlooks the fact that...")
 - **Bottom Bread:** Conclude by restating why your original claim is stronger. ("Therefore, it is more important to...") Have students practice writing just this paragraph before incorporating it into their full essay.

- **Activity 4: "Formal Tone Word Sort":** Create a list of words and phrases. Have students sort them into two columns: "Formal Tone (for the City Commission)" and "Informal Tone (for a friend)." This helps them internalize the concept of audience-appropriate style. Examples: "I think" vs. "The evidence suggests"; "It's a bad idea" vs. "This approach is problematic."

HOME & COMMUNITY CONNECTION: A PARTNER'S GUIDE

- **Family Activity: "What's in a Name?" Walk:** Take a walk or drive through your neighborhood or downtown Paducah. Pay attention to the names of streets, buildings, and parks. Discuss them with your child: "Who do you think that street is named after? Why do you think they were chosen? Are there people from our community's history who you think should have something named after them?"
- **Community Idea: Attend or Watch a Public Meeting:** To understand the essay's audience, watch a recording of a Paducah City Commission meeting online with your child. Point out how people present their arguments, the formal language they use, and how the commissioners listen and ask questions. This demystifies the process of civic engagement.¹
- **Family Discussion: Weighing the Options:** Use the three perspectives from the prompt as a framework for a family discussion. There is no single right answer. Encourage your child to articulate the pros and cons of each option: preserving names, renaming, or building new memorials. This helps them see the complexity of the issue before choosing their own argumentative stance.

CHAPTER 4: DIVISION 4 (GRADE 7) ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY PROMPT

THE PROMPT IN DETAIL

2025-26 Theme: ENCOURAGING OUR YOUTH TO BE AGENTS OF CHANGE

SCENARIO

In a world overflowing with TikToks, news headlines, and viral videos, stories are everywhere. But have you ever considered that a story can be one of the most powerful tools for changing the world? To be an agent of change, you often have to win over people's hearts and minds—and that starts with the story you tell.

From its very beginning, the NAACP knew that changing unfair laws wasn't enough; they also had to change the story America told itself about race. One of their first tools was a magazine, *The Crisis*. Founded in 1910, it was a megaphone for civil rights, refusing to let the nation ignore the horror of lynching and injustice. It also showcased the brilliance of Black writers and artists, demonstrating that a different narrative was indeed possible. The NAACP also fought back against hateful stories. In 1915, they organized nationwide protests against the film *The Birth of a Nation*, which glorified the Ku Klux Klan, holding mass media accountable for spreading racism.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was also a master storyteller. In 1963, after being thrown in a Birmingham jail for protesting, he didn't just wait. He picked up a pen. His "Letter from Birmingham Jail" was a direct response to white clergymen who called his protests "unwise." In his letter, published across the nation, he powerfully defended the need for nonviolent action, famously writing, "For years now, I have heard the word 'Wait!'... This 'Wait' has almost always meant 'Never.'" With that letter, he seized control of the narrative and explained the moral urgency of the movement to the entire country.

Telling the right story could even be a matter of life and death. Here in Paducah, the Hotel Metropolitan was a safe place for Black travelers during the dangerous Jim Crow era. It was listed in *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, a travel guide that provided information on where it was safe for African Americans to eat, sleep, and purchase gas in a segregated America.

This leads to a significant debate that is still raging today: What is the most effective way to fight for justice?

- One viewpoint is that **changing hearts and minds with a powerful story is the ultimate strategy**. Supporters argue that true, lasting change only happens when a majority of people believe in a cause. They believe the most effective modern tools are viral social media campaigns, documentaries, and articles that educate the public and win their support—the 21st-century versions of *The Crisis* and Dr. King's letter.
- Another perspective argues that **direct action is mightier than words**. These advocates believe that protests, boycotts, and lawsuits are the most effective means of forcing powerful systems to change. They would point to the NAACP's legal victory in *Brown v. Board of Education* or the brave sit-ins by the NAACP Youth Council as proof that creating disruption is necessary to achieve results, arguing that public opinion often follows bold action, not the other way around.
- A third perspective says it's a false choice—**you need both**. This view suggests that action creates the events, but stories give those events meaning. Without the Birmingham protests, Dr. King would have had no reason to write his letter. But without the letter, the demonstrations might have been misunderstood or ignored. They believe true power comes from combining bold action with a compelling story.

YOUR TASK

The McCracken County Public Library and the Paducah/McCracken County NAACP are collaborating on a new exhibit for students titled "Agents of Change: Strategies for Justice." They're not just looking for any ideas; they're looking for your ideas. They want to know what you, a young person living in this world today, think is the most powerful way to make a difference.

Write an argumentative essay to the Library Board and the NAACP Executive Committee. In your essay, argue which strategy young agents of change should focus on: shaping public opinion through media and storytelling, taking direct action and legal challenges, or a combined approach where both are essential.¹

UNPACKING THE PROMPT: THE POWER OF WORDS AND ACTIONS

This 7th-grade prompt elevates the debate from a local issue to a question of national strategy for social change. Students must analyze the relationship between two fundamental tactics: shaping public opinion (the "narrative war") and direct action (the "ground war"). The scenario is rich with powerful historical examples that serve as the primary evidence for the essay.¹

- **Shaping Public Opinion:** The NAACP's magazine *The Crisis*, the protest against the film *The Birth of a Nation*, and Dr. King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" are presented as master classes in controlling the narrative.¹
- **Direct Action:** The prompt references the NAACP's legal victory in *Brown v. Board of Education* and the NAACP Youth Council sit-ins as proof of the power of direct confrontation.
- **Local Connection:** The inclusion of Paducah's Hotel Metropolitan and *The Negro Motorist Green Book* provides a crucial local anchor. It demonstrates that shaping narratives wasn't just about grand national debates; it was a matter of survival, providing life-saving information to Black travelers in a hostile world. This frames storytelling not just as persuasion, but as a protective and empowering act.¹

The task is to write a recommendation to the McCracken County Public Library Board and the NAACP Executive Committee for a new student exhibit. This audience of respected community leaders requires a formal, well-researched, and persuasive argument. Students must select one of the three strategic options—media, direct action, or a combined approach—and justify their choice using the provided historical case studies.¹

PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS: EVALUATION CRITERIA & KSA ALIGNMENT

This argumentative essay will be assessed holistically using the KSA rubrics, with an emphasis on the strength of the claim, the evidence employed, the management of counterclaims, organization, and formal style. The table below highlights core skills for success by demonstrating how students should analyze evidence rather than list it.

KSA FOCUS AREA	WHAT IT MEANS	EXAMPLE FROM THE PROMPT (HOW TO USE EVIDENCE)	KAS ALIGNMENT
Clarity & Coherence (Claim)	You make a clear, specific claim about which strategy is most important for young activists to prioritize.	"For today's young activists, a combined approach is the most effective strategy, as historical evidence shows that powerful actions and compelling narratives must work together to achieve lasting justice."	C.1, C.4

KSA FOCUS AREA	WHAT IT MEANS	EXAMPLE FROM THE PROMPT (HOW TO USE EVIDENCE)	KAS ALIGNMENT
Support/Development	You develop your claim with logical reasoning and relevant evidence from the historical examples in the text.	To support a combined approach, argue that action creates the event, but stories give it meaning. For example, "the Birmingham protests (direct action) created the crisis that Dr. King's 'Letter from Birmingham Jail' (shaping opinion) then explained to the world."	C.1, 7.H.CO.1
Counterclaims	You acknowledge and refute an opposing claim, organizing the reasons and evidence in a logical manner.	"While some argue that direct action alone is what truly compels change, the NAACP's protest of <i>The Birth of a Nation</i> shows that fighting negative stereotypes in the media is also a crucial form of action that prevents harm."	C.1.c
Organization	Your essay is logically structured with effective transitions that clarify the relationship between your claim, reasons, and evidence.	Use transitions to show cause and effect. "Because the NAACP Youth Councils bravely held sit-ins, they created a story of injustice. The media then shared that story, which helped change public opinion."	C.4
Language & Conventions (Style)	You use precise language and a formal style appropriate for addressing the Library Board and NAACP Committee.	Use terms from the text like "transform the national narrative," "nonviolent direct action," and "control of the narrative" to show your understanding.	L.1, C.4

CLASSROOM INTEGRATION: A TEACHER'S TOOLKIT

- **Activity 1: "Historical Case Study Jigsaw":** Divide the class into five "expert groups," one for each historical example: 1) *The Crisis* magazine, 2) *The Birth of a Nation* protest, 3) "Letter from Birmingham Jail," 4) *Brown v. Board of Education*, and 5) *The Green Book* and Hotel Metropolitan. Each group reads the relevant part of the scenario and answers: What was the problem? What strategy was used? What was the result? Then, rearrange the students into new "jigsaw" groups, with one expert from each case study, to share their findings. This ensures all students master the evidence.¹
- **Activity 2: "Strategy Spectrum":** Draw a long line on the board. Label one end "Shaping Public Opinion is Most Important" and the other "Direct Action is Most Important." Label the middle "Combined Approach is Best." Have students place a sticky note with their name on the line where their opinion falls. This creates a visual representation of the class's views and serves as a springboard for a debate where students defend their position on the spectrum.
- **Activity 3: "Evidence Integration Practice":** Provide students with sentence frames to help them integrate textual evidence smoothly into their writing.
 - "The effectiveness of shaping public opinion is clear in the example of..."
 - "The text highlights the power of direct action when it describes..."

- "Dr. King demonstrated a combined approach when he..." This practice moves students beyond simply dropping in facts to analyzing and explaining the evidence.
- **Activity 4: "Formal Writing Clinic":** Focus a mini-lesson on maintaining a formal tone. Review the prompt's audience (Library Board, NAACP Committee) and discuss why a respectful, academic tone is necessary. Practice revising informal sentences into formal ones (e.g., "It's all about getting on social media" becomes "The modern equivalent involves leveraging social media platforms to disseminate information and galvanize support.").

HOME & COMMUNITY CONNECTION: A PARTNER'S GUIDE

- **Family Activity: "Media Detectives":** With your child, look at a current news story or social issue. Discuss how different groups are trying to create change. Ask: "Who is trying to change people's minds with articles, videos, or social media posts? Who is organizing events like protests or boycotts? Do you see them working together? Which approach seems to be working better?"
- **Community Idea: Visit the McCracken County Public Library:** The prompt is about creating an exhibit for the library. Visit the library with your child. Look at the current displays. Talk about what makes an exhibit interesting and educational. This helps your child connect with the real-world context of their essay and its audience.¹
- **Family Movie/Documentary Night:** Watch a film or documentary about a key moment in the Civil Rights Movement or another social justice campaign. Afterward, discuss the strategies you saw. Pause the film to ask questions like, "Was that an example of direct action or shaping public opinion? How did the leaders use the media to their advantage?"

CHAPTER 5: DIVISION 5 (GRADE 8) ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY PROMPT

THE PROMPT IN DETAIL

2025-26 Theme: ENCOURAGING OUR YOUTH TO BE AGENTS OF CHANGE

SCENARIO

As you get ready for high school, the questions get bigger. It's no longer just about what is right or wrong, but how do you fight for what's right, especially when you're up against powerful systems that don't want to change? This was a question that the greatest agents of change wrestled with their entire lives. One of the most profound and difficult parts of that struggle is understanding how nonviolence actually works.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. built his entire philosophy on the concept of *agape* love. This wasn't a mushy, sentimental feeling. He defined it as an "understanding, redeeming goodwill for all"—a love that sees the humanity in everyone, even your opponent. He believed this "soul force" was a powerful weapon. By enduring suffering without fighting back, activists could awaken the conscience of the oppressor and build the "Beloved Community."

But other brilliant thinkers, like the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, challenged Dr. King. Niebuhr's "Christian realism" warned King that while you might be able to appeal to a single person's heart, influential groups and systems don't have hearts to change. They are driven by self-interest and only understand the concept of power. This created a deep tension: can you truly "love" a system into changing, or must you force it to change?

The history of the NAACP is filled with this tension. While the organization consistently promoted dignity, its most significant victories often stemmed from a strategic application of power. The landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision wasn't a plea to the hearts of segregationists; it was a legal knockout punch that compelled states to obey the law. Likewise, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed because leaders skillfully built the political power needed to force it through Congress.

Think about what happened right here in our local history. In 1951, when former Paducah NAACP President Curlee Brown Sr. was denied entry to Paducah Junior College because he was Black, he filed a lawsuit. The court's ruling forced the college to integrate. Was that an act of *agape* love designed to transform the college's leaders morally? Or was it a strategic power move, using the force of law to make an unjust institution bend to his will?

This leads to a critical debate about how nonviolence truly functions:

- Is nonviolence a tool for **moral transformation**? This view holds that *agape* love is the key to understanding. The goal is to awaken the conscience of your opponent, leading to true reconciliation and a "Beloved Community." From this perspective, lasting change can only come from a change of heart.
- Is nonviolence a method for **applying coercive power**? This more realist view argues that powerful systems don't change because it's the right thing to do; they change when they are forced. Nonviolent actions, such as boycotts, strikes, and lawsuits, are practical because they inflict economic and political pain, making it more costly for the powerful to maintain injustice than to concede to change.
- Or is it a **combination of both**? In his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," Dr. King said direct action is meant to "create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation." From this angle, nonviolence is a moral strategy that uses tactical pressure and disruption to force a power structure to face its own hypocrisy, creating an opening for both a shift in power and a change of heart.

YOUR TASK

The King Center in Atlanta, the organization that carries Dr. King's global legacy, is creating a new national curriculum for students titled "The Philosophy of Nonviolence in the 21st Century." They want to ensure they teach nonviolence in the most honest and effective way for your generation. They are asking for your help.

Write a formal argumentative essay to the Board of Directors of The King Center. In your essay, argue for the interpretation of nonviolence that you believe is most critical for today's young activists to understand. Should the curriculum primarily teach nonviolence as a method of moral transformation, a strategy for applying coercive power, or a combination of both? ¹

UNPACKING THE PROMPT: THE HEART AND MUSCLE OF NONVIOLENCE

This 8th-grade prompt represents a significant intellectual challenge, asking students to move beyond historical events and into the realm of philosophy and political theory. The central task is not simply to recount what happened, but to analyze *how* and *why* it happened by examining the internal mechanics of nonviolent resistance. The prompt frames a sophisticated debate: is nonviolence primarily a moral appeal to the conscience (love) or a strategic application of pressure (power)? ¹

The scenario masterfully sets up this complex debate by introducing two competing ideas that influenced Dr. King himself:

- **Agape Love:** The idealistic belief in "understanding, redeeming goodwill" and the power of "soul force" to transform the heart of the oppressor. ¹
- **Niebuhr's Realism:** The pragmatic recognition of "collective evil" and the idea that power structures respond to force, not just moral pleas. ¹

This philosophical tension is then illustrated with concrete historical examples that students must analyze through these competing lenses. The NAACP's legal victory in *Brown v. Board of Education* and the local lawsuit by Paducah's own Curlee Brown Sr. to integrate Paducah Junior College are framed as acts of compelling change through legal force—or coercive power. In contrast, Dr. King's concept of the "Beloved Community" represents the ultimate goal of reconciliation and changed hearts—moral transformation. ¹

The audience, the Board of Directors of The King Center in Atlanta, is the most prestigious in the contest. This requires students to write with exceptional clarity, intellectual rigor, and a formal, academic tone. They are not just completing an assignment; they are contributing to a national curriculum development project, a task that demands their most thoughtful and well-reasoned analysis. ¹

PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS: EVALUATION CRITERIA & KSA ALIGNMENT

For this advanced argumentative essay, students must demonstrate a nuanced understanding of abstract concepts and support their claims with a sophisticated analysis of the provided text. The evaluation will be based on the KSA argumentative rubric, with a high premium placed on the depth of reasoning. ¹ The table below outlines the path to excellence by modeling how to make abstract philosophical analysis concrete.

KSA FOCUS AREA	WHAT IT MEANS	EXAMPLE FROM THE PROMPT (HOW TO ANALYZE EVIDENCE)	KAS ALIGNMENT
Clarity & Coherence (Claim)	You establish a sophisticated, arguable claim about the most accurate and proper interpretation of nonviolence for today's youth.	"A curriculum for young activists must teach nonviolence as a dual strategy, combining coercive power with moral transformation, because history shows that pressure is necessary to bring powerful institutions to the negotiating table where hearts and minds can be changed."	C.1
Support/Development	You support your claim by analyzing, not just summarizing, the philosophical ideas and historical examples in the text.	Instead of saying "Curlee Brown Sr. filed a lawsuit," analyze it: "The case of Curlee Brown Sr. exemplifies the coercive power perspective; his lawsuit did not seek to persuade college leaders with <i>agape</i> love, but to compel them with the force of law to change their unjust policy."	C.1
Counterclaims	You demonstrate a deep understanding of an opposing interpretation and provide a thoughtful, well-reasoned refutation.	"While the ideal of nonviolence as pure moral transformation is appealing, this view is, as Niebuhr warned, a 'superficial optimism.' The NAACP's victory in <i>Brown v. Board</i> was not won by changing hearts, but by a strategic legal battle that forced a change in the system."	C.1.c
Organization	Your argument progresses logically, with clear transitions that connect abstract ideas to concrete examples.	Use transitions to show the relationship between ideas. "Dr. King's philosophy was rooted in <i>agape</i> love. However, his strategy was also informed by the realism of Niebuhr, leading him to..."	C.4
Language & Conventions (Style)	You use precise philosophical and academic language and maintain a formal tone appropriate for The King Center.	Incorporate key terms from the text like " <i>agape</i> love," "collective egoism," "moral transformation," and "coercive power" correctly and effectively in your sentences.	L.1, C.4

CLASSROOM INTEGRATION: A TEACHER'S TOOLKIT

- **Activity 1: "T-Chart of Tensions":** Create a large T-chart on the board with "Moral Transformation (*Agape* Love)" on one side and "Coercive Power (Realism)" on the other. Have students re-read the scenario and populate the chart with all the names, ideas, and examples that fit under each heading. (e.g., "Beloved Community" goes under Moral Transformation; *Brown v. Board* goes under Coercive Power). This helps them visually organize the central conflict of the prompt.¹
- **Activity 2: "The Curlee Brown Sr. Case Study":** Dedicate a lesson to a deep analysis of this local example. Ask students to debate the question posed in the prompt: "Was this an act of *agape* love... or was it a strategic use of legal power?" This focused discussion on a single, powerful example helps students grapple with the abstract philosophical ideas in a concrete context.¹

- **Activity 3: "Thesis Workshop":** This prompt requires a more nuanced thesis than previous grades. Conduct a workshop where students practice crafting claims that reflect one of the three perspectives. Provide models:
 - **Moral Transformation Claim:** "The King Center's curriculum should prioritize teaching nonviolence as a tool for moral transformation because..."
 - **Coercive Power Claim:** "To be effective, young activists must understand nonviolence as a strategy for applying coercive power because..."
 - **Combined Approach Claim:** "It is essential to teach nonviolence as a combination of moral appeal and coercive power because..."
- **Activity 4: "Academic Voice Clinic":** Focus on elevating writing style. Provide students with a list of "everyday" phrases and have them "translate" them into a more formal, academic voice. (e.g., "King wanted to change their minds" becomes "King's objective was to facilitate a moral transformation in his opponents.") This prepares them for the high expectations of the audience.¹

HOME & COMMUNITY CONNECTION: A PARTNER'S GUIDE

- **Family Activity: A "Letter from Birmingham Jail" Read-Aloud:** This foundational document is mentioned in the prompt. Please find a copy online and read excerpts of it together as a family. The prompt specifically quotes the line about creating a "crisis-packed" situation. Discuss what Dr. King meant. Does that sound more like changing hearts or applying pressure?¹
- **Community Idea: Researching Local Legal History:** The prompt highlights the lawsuit of Curlee Brown Sr. With your child, visit the McCracken County Public Library's local history section or search online to see if you can find more information about this landmark case or other civil rights legal battles in Paducah's history. This connects the abstract idea of "legal power" to your own community's story.¹
- **Family Discussion: A Modern Dilemma:** Pose a hypothetical modern problem to your child (e.g., "Imagine our city wants to build a factory that will pollute a local park."). Ask them: "What would be the 'agape love' approach to stopping this? What would be the 'coercive power' approach? What might a combined approach look like? Which do you think would work?" This helps them apply the philosophical frameworks to a current issue.

CHAPTER 6: DIVISION 6 (HIGH SCHOOL) ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY PROMPT

THE PROMPT IN DETAIL

2025-26 Theme: ENCOURAGING OUR YOUTH TO BE AGENTS OF CHANGE

SCENARIO

Imagine a classmate makes a mistake—a serious one. What should happen next? Should their life be derailed forever, or should they get a real chance to learn, grow, and become a better person? This isn't a hypothetical. It's a real and urgent question at the heart of a national debate about justice for young people, and the answers will shape the world you and your peers inherit.

For decades, the NAACP has fought to reform a juvenile justice system that too often creates a "school-to-prison pipeline," especially for youth of color. The statistics are stark, and behind each number is a human life. Nationally, Black youth are 4.6 times more likely to be incarcerated than their white peers for similar offenses. Here in Kentucky, the disparity is even more pronounced: Black youth make up just 11% of the state's youth population but account for a staggering 52% of all cases transferred to the adult court system. The NAACP argues that this approach is not only unjust but also ineffective, as youth tried in adult courts are 34% more likely to re-offend, making our communities less safe.

This national crisis has deep roots in our own community, where local leaders have long wrestled with the best way to respond. Long before the term "school-to-prison pipeline" was coined, Oscar Cross, Paducah's first African American juvenile officer, saw young people heading for trouble and chose a philosophy of prevention. In 1949, he founded the Boys Club of Paducah, believing that the best way to prevent kids from entering the justice system was to invest in their potential from the start. Shirley Bunch, a lifelong NAACP member and the first Black female deputy in the McCracken County Police Department, dedicated herself to mentorship. She knew that for kids navigating the harsh realities of segregation, what they often needed most was a trusted adult who believed in them and could offer personal guidance.

Today, Kentucky is at a crossroads. Reforms like Senate Bill 200 have tried to reduce youth incarceration by using more diversion programs—community-based alternatives like counseling and job training that are proven to lower re-offending rates. Yet, the racial disparities persist, fueling a debate over the fundamental purpose of justice. Three main philosophies have emerged:

- **A Focus on Accountability and Public Safety.** This view argues that the system's primary role is to protect the public by holding individuals responsible, regardless of age. Supporters worry that reforms are too lenient and believe that for serious crimes, adult courts and punishments are necessary deterrents. This perspective prioritizes consequences as the central pillar of justice.
- **A Focus on Rehabilitation and Restorative Justice.** This view, strongly endorsed by the NAACP, insists that the juvenile system must be fundamentally different from the adult one. It points to brain science, which shows that young people are still developing and have a greater capacity for change. Advocates support expanding diversion and providing robust mental health, education, and substance abuse services to address the root causes of behavior, believing that restoring young people to their communities is the surest path to long-term public safety.
- **A Focus on Prevention and Upstream Investment.** This view, which embodies Oscar Cross's life's work, contends that by the time a young person enters the justice system, society has already failed them. Supporters argue that the only real solution is to invest heavily in "upstream" community solutions

that prevent delinquency in the first place, such as fully funded schools, after-school programs, youth mentorship, and job training. Their goal is to fix a broken system by making it as unnecessary as possible.

YOUR TASK

Lawmakers on the Kentucky General Assembly's Juvenile Justice Oversight Council are reviewing the state's policies, and they believe you—the students most affected by these decisions—have a critical perspective they need to hear.

Write a formal argumentative essay to the members of the Juvenile Justice Oversight Council. In your essay, argue for the philosophical approach you believe Kentucky should prioritize to create a more just, fair, and effective juvenile justice system: a focus on accountability, a focus on rehabilitation, or a focus on prevention.¹

UNPACKING THE PROMPT: ARCHITECTING A JUST SYSTEM

This high school prompt is the capstone of the contest, challenging students to step into the role of policy analysts. They must synthesize statistical data, philosophical arguments, and local history to make a formal recommendation to state lawmakers on a complex and urgent social issue: juvenile justice reform. This prompt is not merely an academic exercise; it is a simulated act of civic apprenticeship, empowering students to engage in an honest and ongoing legislative debate.¹

This prompt represents the culmination of all the skills developed in previous years. It requires students to:

- **Analyze Data:** They must understand and use the stark statistics on racial disparities in Kentucky's juvenile justice system (e.g., Black youth are 11% of the population but 52% of cases moved to adult court).¹
- **Evaluate Philosophical Approaches:** They must weigh the competing values of accountability, rehabilitation, and prevention.¹
- **Integrate Local History:** They must connect these philosophies to the real-world work of Paducah heroes, such as Oscar Cross, whose founding of the Boys Club exemplifies the prevention model, and Shirley Bunch, whose mentoring work also represents an "upstream" investment in youth.¹
- **Understand Policy Context:** The prompt mentions specific state-level contexts, such as Senate Bill 200 and the success of diversion programs, grounding the debate in current Kentucky policy.¹

The task is to write to the Kentucky General Assembly's Juvenile Justice Oversight Council, an audience of policy experts and state officials. This demands the highest level of formality, objectivity, and evidence-based reasoning in the entire contest. Students must construct a cogent, data-driven argument that can withstand scrutiny from a critical and informed readership, thus fulfilling the contest's theme of empowering youth to be true agents of change.¹

PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS: EVALUATION CRITERIA & KSA ALIGNMENT

This essay will be scored holistically based on the 11th-grade KSA argumentative rubric, which expects a sophisticated analysis of a substantive topic, valid reasoning, and sufficient, relevant evidence.¹ A thorough refutation of a counterclaim is essential. The following table details the requirements and models the high-level synthesis of disparate information types required for success.

KSA FOCUS AREA	WHAT IT MEANS	EXAMPLE FROM THE PROMPT (HOW TO SYNTHESIZE EVIDENCE)	KAS ALIGNMENT
Clarity & Coherence (Claim)	You establish a clear, insightful, and defensible claim that directly answers the policy question posed.	"To create a truly just and effective system, the Kentucky General Assembly should prioritize a philosophy of prevention, as this approach addresses the root causes of delinquency and reflects the proven, community-based wisdom of local leaders like Oscar Cross."	C.1
Support/Development (Evidence)	You skillfully synthesize data, philosophical principles, and historical examples from the text to support your claim with valid reasoning.	To support prevention, synthesize philosophy, local history, and data: "The prevention model is not a new theory; it is the proven, half-century-long legacy of Paducah's own Oscar Cross. Adopting this upstream approach is the most logical way to address the shocking racial disparities revealed in the data, where Black youth are vastly overrepresented in transfers to adult court."	C.1, R.8
Counterclaims	You acknowledge an opposing view with insight and refute it thoroughly using logic and evidence.	"Proponents of an accountability-focused model argue that strict consequences are necessary for public safety. However, this perspective ignores the data showing that youth tried in adult courts are 34% more likely to re-offend, which ultimately undermines long-term public safety."	C.1.c
Organization	Your argument is logically structured, and you use sophisticated transitions to clarify the complex relationships between your claim, data, and reasoning.	Use transitions to link data to your argument. "The alarming statistic that Black youth constitute 52% of transfers to adult court underscores the failure of the current system. Therefore, a new philosophical approach focused on prevention is urgently needed to address this disparity."	C.4
Language & Conventions (Style/Tone)	You maintain a formal, objective tone appropriate for state officials, using precise policy and legal language.	Use an objective tone. Instead of "I feel it's wrong," write "The data indicates a significant racial disparity that challenges the system's fairness." Use terms like "overrepresentation," "diversion programs," and "upstream investment."	C.4, HS.I.U.E.4

CLASSROOM INTEGRATION: A TEACHER'S TOOLKIT

- **Activity 1: "Data Dive and Infographic":** Have students work in small groups to analyze the statistics presented in the prompt. Their task is to create a small infographic that visually represents the key data points (e.g., a pie chart showing the 11% vs. 52% disparity in Kentucky). This ensures they understand the data's gravity before they begin writing.¹
- **Activity 2: "Policy Roundtable":** Assign student groups to one of the three philosophies: Accountability, Rehabilitation, or Prevention. Each group must prepare a 2-minute "policy pitch" to the "Juvenile Justice Oversight Council" (the rest of the class). They must use evidence from the text, including data and

examples of local leaders, to make their case. This helps students articulate their arguments and hear the strengths of the opposing views.¹

- **Activity 3: "The Art of the Rebuttal":** Focus an entire lesson on the counterclaim and rebuttal. Provide students with a sample paragraph arguing in favor of the "Accountability" model. As a class, deconstruct the argument. Then, have students work in groups to write a paragraph that refutes it, using evidence like the 34% re-offense rate or the success of diversion programs. This targeted practice builds the most difficult argumentative skill.¹
- **Activity 4: "Objective Tone Workshop":** Give students a paragraph written in a passionate, informal, first-person voice. Their task is to revise it into a formal, objective, third-person voice suitable for policymakers. This workshop hones their understanding of tone and style. (e.g., "I can't believe they lock up so many Black kids!" becomes "The significant overrepresentation of Black youth in the incarcerated population raises serious questions about systemic equity.")

HOME & COMMUNITY CONNECTION: A PARTNER'S GUIDE

- **Family Activity: "Following the News":** Juvenile justice is often in the news. With your high schooler, follow a current story related to juvenile justice reform in Kentucky or nationally. Discuss the various perspectives you observe. Do they align with accountability, rehabilitation, or prevention? This connects the prompt to ongoing, real-world policy debates.
- **Community Idea: "A Conversation with a Community Leader":** Help your student connect with a local professional who works in or around the justice system—a lawyer, a social worker, a law enforcement officer, or someone from a youth organization like the Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club. A brief interview about their perspective on juvenile justice can provide invaluable real-world insight for their essay.
- **Family Discussion: "What is Justice?"** This prompt raises deep philosophical questions. Have a mature conversation with your student about the purpose of a justice system. Is it to punish? To heal? To protect? To prevent future harm? Use the three philosophies from the prompt as a guide. There are no easy answers, and exploring this complexity together is a powerful educational experience.

PART III: APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: MASTER EVALUATION RUBRICS

(The following pages contain the official, full-page scoring rubrics for the Poster Contest, the Grades 4-7 Essay Contest, and the Grades 8-12 Essay Contest. These documents are provided for use by judges, educators, and students to ensure a clear and transparent evaluation process.)¹

Fredrickia Hargrove Contest: Poster Scoresheet (Grades K-3)

CATEGORY	1 (Beginning)	2-4 (Developing)	5-7 (Accomplished)	8-10 (Exemplary)
ADDRESSES THE PROMPT	Artwork does not effectively address the given prompt.	Artwork minimally addresses the prompt.	Artwork somewhat addresses the prompt.	Artwork effectively addresses the prompt.
COMMUNICATION	Artwork does not effectively communicate a message or story.	Artwork minimally communicates a message or story.	Artwork somewhat communicates a message or story.	Artwork effectively communicates a message or story.
ORIGINALITY	Artwork lacks unique and creative ideas.	Artwork shows minimal unique and creative ideas.	Artwork displays some unique and creative ideas.	Artwork demonstrates many unique and creative ideas.
POSTER TECHNIQUE	Artwork demonstrates minimal understanding and application of basic art techniques.	Artwork shows some understanding and application of basic art techniques.	Artwork demonstrates adequate understanding and application of basic art techniques.	Artwork displays exceptional understanding and application of basic art techniques.
CRITICAL THINKING	Artwork lacks evidence of thoughtfulness and intention.	Artwork shows minimal evidence of thoughtfulness and intention.	Artwork displays some evidence of thoughtfulness and intention.	Artwork demonstrates exceptional evidence of thoughtfulness and intention.
CULTURAL/HISTORICAL CONTEXT	Artwork lacks understanding and incorporation of cultural or historical influences.	Artwork minimally demonstrates understanding and incorporation of cultural or historical influences.	Artwork somewhat demonstrates understanding and incorporation of cultural or historical influences.	Artwork effectively demonstrates understanding and incorporation of cultural or historical influences.
OVERALL IMPRESSION	Artwork does not meet the criteria and lacks overall impact.	Artwork minimally meets the criteria with limited overall impact.	Artwork somewhat meets the criteria with moderate overall impact.	Artwork effectively meets the criteria with strong overall impact.

Fredrickia Hargrove Contest: Essay Scoresheet (Grades 4-7)

COMPONENT	1 (Beginning)	2-4 (Developing)	5-7 (Accomplished)	8-10 (Exemplary)
Opinion/Thesis Statement	Opinion/thesis is unclear, irrelevant, or unconnected to the prompt.	Opinion/thesis is somewhat clear and aligned with the prompt.	Opinion/thesis is moderately clear, relevant, and aligned with the prompt's purpose.	Opinion/thesis is very clear, highly relevant, and strongly aligned with the prompt's purpose.
Idea Development / Support	Ideas are underdeveloped and lack depth. Points are unclear and unsupported by the text.	Ideas are somewhat developed with moderate depth. Points are somewhat clear and supported by the text.	Ideas are moderately developed with some depth. Points are moderately clear and well-supported by the text.	Ideas are very well-developed with significant depth. Points are very clear and highly supported by the text.
Idea Transition / Organization	Ideas transition poorly, disrupting understanding. Organization is illogical.	Ideas somewhat transition smoothly, but with some disruption. Organization is somewhat logical.	Ideas moderately transition smoothly, with minimal disruption. Organization is moderately logical and clear.	Ideas transition very smoothly with no disruption. Organization is highly logical and effective.
Purpose & Audience	Purpose is unclear. Essay neglects the audience's needs and perspective.	Purpose is somewhat clear. Essay somewhat considers the audience but lacks effectiveness.	Purpose is moderately clear. Essay moderately considers the audience and communicates effectively.	Purpose is very clear. Essay effectively considers the audience and communicates with them.
Voice/Tone & Persuasive Strategies	Voice is unengaging. Persuasive techniques are ineffective.	Voice is somewhat engaging. Persuasive techniques are somewhat effective.	Voice is moderately engaging. Persuasive techniques are moderately effective.	Voice is strongly engaging. Persuasive techniques are highly effective.
Historical/Cultural Context	Historical/cultural context from the text is absent or irrelevant.	Historical/cultural context is somewhat integrated but lacks effectiveness.	Historical/cultural context is moderately integrated and supports the argument.	Historical/cultural context is effectively integrated and strongly supports the argument.

COMPONENT	1 (Beginning)	2-4 (Developing)	5-7 (Accomplished)	8-10 (Exemplary)
Grammar, Spelling, & Capitalization	Essay is riddled with errors, hindering understanding.	Essay contains some errors, affecting readability.	Essay is mostly free of errors, enhancing readability.	Essay is impeccably written with no errors.
Sentence Variety & Vocabulary	Writing is monotonous. Vocabulary is limited and inappropriate.	Limited sentence variety. Vocabulary is somewhat appropriate but lacks impact.	Moderate sentence variety. Vocabulary is moderately rich and appropriate.	Rich and varied sentence structures. Vocabulary is highly rich and appropriate.
Conclusion/Call to Action	Conclusion is unclear or ineffective.	Conclusion is somewhat clear and effective.	Conclusion is moderately clear and effective.	Conclusion is very clear and highly effective.

Fredrickia Hargrove Contest: Essay Scoresheet (Grades 8-12)

COMPONENT	1 (Beginning)	2-4 (Developing)	5-7 (Accomplished)	8-10 (Exemplary)
Argument/Thesis Statement	Argument/thesis is unclear, irrelevant, or unconnected to the prompt.	Argument/thesis is somewhat clear and relevant.	Argument/thesis is moderately clear and relevant.	Argument/thesis is very clear and highly relevant.
Idea Development / Support	Ideas are underdeveloped. Points are unclear and unsupported by evidence from the text.	Ideas are somewhat developed. Points are somewhat clear and supported by evidence.	Ideas are moderately developed. Points are moderately clear and well-supported by evidence.	Ideas are very well-developed. Points are very clear and highly supported by evidence.
Opposing Views & Rebuttal(s)	Opposing views are ignored or dismissed. Rebuttals are absent or weak.	Opposing views are somewhat acknowledged. Rebuttals are somewhat effective.	Opposing views are moderately acknowledged. Rebuttals are moderately effective.	Opposing views are fully and effectively acknowledged. Rebuttals are very effective.
Idea Transition / Organization	Ideas transition poorly. Organization is illogical.	Ideas somewhat transition smoothly. Organization is somewhat logical.	Ideas moderately transition smoothly. Organization is moderately logical and clear.	Ideas transition very smoothly. Organization is highly logical and effective.
Purpose & Audience	Purpose is unclear. Essay neglects the audience's needs and perspective.	Purpose is somewhat conveyed. Essay somewhat considers the audience.	Purpose is moderately clear. Essay moderately considers the audience.	Purpose is very clear. Essay effectively considers the audience.
Voice/Tone & Persuasive Strategies	Voice is unengaging. Persuasive techniques are ineffective.	Voice is somewhat engaging. Persuasive techniques are somewhat effective.	Voice is moderately engaging. Persuasive techniques are moderately effective.	Voice is strongly engaging. Persuasive techniques are highly effective.
Historical/Cultural Context	Historical/cultural context from the text is absent or irrelevant.	Historical/cultural context is somewhat integrated but lacks effectiveness.	Historical/cultural context is moderately integrated and supports the argument.	Historical/cultural context is effectively integrated and strongly supports the argument.
Grammar, Spelling, & Capitalization	Essay is riddled with errors, hindering understanding.	Essay contains some errors, affecting readability.	Essay is mostly free of errors, enhancing readability.	Essay is impeccably written with no errors.
Conclusion/Call to Action	Conclusion is unclear or ineffective.	Conclusion is somewhat clear and effective.	Conclusion is moderately clear and effective.	Conclusion is very clear and highly effective.

APPENDIX B: PADUCAH'S LEGACY OF CHANGE - A GLOSSARY OF LOCAL HEROES AND LANDMARKS

The prompts for the Fredrickia Hargrove Contest are intentionally rooted in the history of Paducah and McCracken County. This glossary provides additional context on the local leaders and landmarks mentioned, transforming the contest from a simple writing exercise into a curriculum of local history.¹

LEADERS

- **Shirley Bunch:** A lifelong member of the Paducah/McCracken County NAACP, Shirley Bunch was the first Black female deputy in the McCracken County Police Department and a dedicated mentor who provided essential guidance and support to Black children navigating the immense challenges of segregation. Her work represents the vital, "upstream" investment in youth that builds strong communities.¹
- **Curlee Brown Sr.:** A courageous and strategic leader, Curlee Brown Sr. served as the president of the Paducah NAACP. In 1951, after being denied admission to Paducah Junior College due to his race, he filed a landmark lawsuit. The court ruled in his favor, forcing the college to integrate. His story is a powerful local example of using legal power to compel systemic change.¹
- **J.W. Cleary:** The current President of the Paducah/McCracken County NAACP. His leadership demonstrates that the historic mission of the NAACP to fight for fairness and equality is alive and well in our community today.¹
- **Robert Coleman:** A civil rights activist, veteran, and Paducah's longest-serving city commissioner. His lifetime of public service was so impactful that in 2009, the city renamed Blackburn Park in his honor, creating Robert Coleman Park. This act serves as a key local precedent for how communities can evolve to honor heroes who represent their modern values.¹
- **Oscar Cross:** A pioneering figure in Paducah's history, Oscar Cross was the city's first African American juvenile officer. Recognizing that prevention was the best cure for delinquency, he founded the Boys Club of Paducah in 1949. He led the organization, now the Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club, for 50 years, creating a safe haven and a place of opportunity for generations of young people. His legacy is a testament to the power of upstream, community-based investment in youth.¹
- **Helen LaFrance:** A celebrated artist from nearby Graves County, Helen LaFrance (1919-2020) was a memory painter whose work beautifully and powerfully captured the lives, work, and faith of Black Kentuckians. She is presented as an example of an unsung hero who could be honored for her immense cultural contributions to the region.

LANDMARKS

- **Hotel Metropolitan:** Located in Paducah, the Hotel Metropolitan was a vital safe haven for Black travelers, including famous musicians like Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and B.B. King, during the Jim Crow era. It was listed in *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, an essential travel guide that shared information on which establishments were safe for African Americans. The hotel stands as a monument to Black entrepreneurship and resilience in the face of segregation.¹
- **Paducah Junior College:** The predecessor to West Kentucky Community and Technical College, Paducah Junior College was the site of a significant civil rights victory when Curlee Brown Sr. successfully sued for its integration in the 1950s.¹

- **Robert Coleman Park:** A park in Paducah named in 2009 to honor the city's longest-serving city commissioner. It was formerly named Blackburn Park. Its renaming is a key example of a community choosing to update its public symbols to reflect its values.¹
- **Southside Community Gardens:** A new garden established in Paducah's Walter Jetton neighborhood. It is an example of a modern community project designed to improve a shared space and provide a tangible benefit (fresh food) to local families.
- **W.C. Young Community Center:** A vital community hub in Paducah named for a local leader who fought poverty and injustice. It is referenced as a place where students can engage in positive community service.

APPENDIX C: OFFICIAL CONTEST INFORMATION

This manual is intended as a comprehensive educational guide. For the most current official contest rules, deadlines, and submission procedures, all participants are advised to consult the Paducah/McCracken County NAACP website.

- **Official Website:** <https://www.paducahnaacp.com/hargrove-king-essay-poster-contest/>
- **Submission Deadlines:** All entries must be submitted electronically via the NAACP website by **Friday, December 5, 2025**.
- **Prizes and Awards:** Cash prizes are awarded for the top three winners in each of the six divisions. First-place winners also have their work featured by WKMS radio. An awards ceremony is held annually in January to celebrate all winners and participants.
- **Word Count and Formatting:**
 - 4th-5th Grade: 100-500 words
 - 6th-8th Grade: 300-750 words
 - 9th-12th Grade: 750-1000 words

All essays must be submitted using the official template available on the NAACP website. Do not include your name or school in the body of the essay.
- **Contact Information:** For any questions regarding the contest, please contact:
 - Rodney Holt, Tournament Coordinator, Email: rodney.holt@wkec.org
 - Paducah/McCracken County NAACP: (833) 622-7229 ext. 719.¹