

DIVISION 3: GRADE 6 ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY PROMPT

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.