



The Fredrickia Hargrove Poster and Essay Contest

2026 – 27 Contest Manual

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A MESSAGE FROM RODNEY HOLT, CONTEST MANAGER

Dear Teachers, Administrators, Families, and Community Partners,

We are pleased to announce the 2026–2027 Fredrickia Hargrove Poster and Essay Contest, held in connection with the Paducah–McCracken County NAACP’s annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day Celebration.

This contest continues a proud local tradition of honoring Dr. King’s legacy through student voice, creativity, literacy, civic engagement, and community learning. Each year, students are invited to study an important text, think deeply about its meaning, and respond through writing or art in ways that connect Dr. King’s message to their own lives, schools, communities, and future.

We are grateful to Four Rivers Nuclear Partnership, LLC and _____ for their generous sponsorship and partnership. Their support helps ensure that this contest remains a meaningful academic and civic opportunity for students across Paducah and McCracken County.

2026–2027 THEME: “BLUEPRINT FOR TOMORROW: CONSTRUCTING YOUR CHARACTER”

This year’s theme is drawn directly from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1967 speech, “**What Is Your Life’s Blueprint?**”, delivered to students at Barratt Junior High School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on October 26, 1967.

This speech is unlike any text this contest has used before. Dr. King was not addressing lawmakers, clergy, or a national television audience. He was standing in a junior high school auditorium, speaking to students the same age as many of our contestants, and he told them that *this* was the most important and crucial period of their lives. He asked them to think of life the way an architect thinks about a building: it needs a blueprint before anyone starts building.

Dr. King gives students three things that belong in that blueprint:

1. **A principle of somebodiness** — a deep belief in your own dignity, worth, and significance.
2. **A determination to achieve excellence** — discovering your life’s work and doing it so well that no one could do it better.
3. **A commitment to the eternal principles of beauty, love, and justice** — a responsibility, however young you are, to make your nation better.

For this contest, the full speech transcript is the official required text. Students will read, annotate, quote, paraphrase, and cite the transcript as their primary source. Students may also view or listen to the speech on The King Center’s YouTube channel as listening support.

This year’s theme invites students across all grade levels to consider a serious and hopeful question: **What kind of life, school, city, state, and nation are we building?**

Students will be asked to connect Dr. King’s message to their own character, schools, digital lives, future opportunities, and civic responsibilities. They will also consider how personal character and public justice are connected. A student may believe in their own worth, but schools, communities, and governments

also have a responsibility to help remove barriers that make it harder for young people to build strong futures.

This contest connects directly to the mission of the NAACP and to the enduring work of The King Center, which teaches **Nonviolence365®** as a courageous way of life rooted in dignity, justice, love, truth, discipline, and action.

This year, student work will help The King Center gather youth insight for future student-centered **Nonviolence365®** training. Local and state civic partners are being asked to help gather student recommendations because Dr. King’s blueprint is not only personal; it is also civic. It belongs in homes, schools, neighborhoods, libraries, city halls, school boards, and the Kentucky General Assembly.

CONTEST OVERVIEW

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 organized into six divisions, each with a grade-appropriate prompt designed to challenge students at their developmental level.

Cash prizes will be awarded to the top three winners in each division.

Division	Submission Type	1st Place	2nd Place	3rd Place
Division 1 — Grades K–3	Poster	\$50	\$35	\$25
Division 2 — Grades 4–5	Opinion Essay	\$50	\$35	\$25
Division 3 — Grade 6	Argumentative Essay	\$100	\$75	\$50
Division 4 — Grade 7	Argumentative Essay	\$100	\$75	\$50
Division 5 — Grade 8	Argumentative Essay	\$100	\$75	\$50
Division 6 — Grades 9–12	Argumentative Policy Essay	\$200	\$100	\$75

SPECIAL RECOGNITION

First-place essay winners in Divisions 2 through 6 will have the opportunity to have their winning essays professionally recorded for broadcast on _____.

First-place posters will be showcased _____.

These partnerships provide a powerful public platform for students. They amplify student voices, celebrate academic achievement, and allow the wider community to hear directly from young people about dignity, excellence, justice, and the future they hope to build.

HOW THIS MANUAL CAN HELP YOU

This manual is designed to support everyone involved in the contest — administrators, teachers, students, families, and community partners. It provides background information, instructional guidance, contest expectations, standards alignment, classroom activities, and family engagement ideas.

FOR ADMINISTRATORS

This guide provides a framework for incorporating the contest into school-wide celebrations of Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Black History Month. Its alignment with the Kentucky Academic Standards and the Kentucky Summative Assessment supports teacher and student participation as part of meaningful core instruction.

The theme's emphasis on dignity, excellence, character, civic responsibility, and public justice also supports the development of students who are prepared for college, careers, citizenship, and community leadership.

FOR TEACHERS

The divisional guides are organized as instructional units. They include reading guidance, prompt analysis, civic audiences, standards alignment, writing expectations, and ready-to-use classroom activities.

These resources help students explore Dr. King's student-centered speech at increasingly sophisticated levels — from a K–3 poster about a city where every child matters to a high school policy essay about how Kentucky can help students build future-ready lives.

FOR PARENTS AND FAMILIES

The “Home & Community Connection” sections in each divisional guide provide practical activities families can do together. These activities are meant to encourage meaningful conversations about dignity, character, school, opportunity, technology, history, citizenship, and the kind of future students are building.

CONTEST FRAMEWORK

This section explains the text every division shares, the six distinct questions built from it, and the civic audiences students write to.

ONE SPEECH, SIX QUESTIONS

Although every division reads the same speech, each division is anchored in a **different passage** and asks a **different question**. This ensures that a sixth grader and an eighth grader are not writing the same essay, and it rewards students who read the entire speech closely rather than skimming for a single quotation.

Division	Grade	Anchor Passage	Essential Question
1	K–3	“Principle of Somebodiness”	What should Paducah look like if every child knows, “I am somebody”?
2	4–5	“Sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures”	What should our school teach students about work — aim for the top, do any job well, or be the best of whatever you are?
3	6	“Build, baby, build. Organize, baby, organize. Learn, baby, learn.”	When young people want to fix something wrong in their community, which comes first — building, organizing, or learning?
4	7	“I Am Black, But Beautiful” and the commitment to beauty, love, and justice	How should young people build true character in a digital world?
5	8	“Stay in school... in spite of your economic plight”	Should schools focus first on student character, equal access to opportunity, or belonging?
6	9–12	The architect’s blueprint and “Learn, baby, learn, so that we can earn, baby, earn”	How should Kentucky help students construct a future-ready life blueprint?

Three of these six questions are based on Dr. King’s actual words instead of being created for the contest — specifically, the three slogans in Division 3, his contradictory statement about remaining in school in Division 5, and the Emerson prediction in Division 6. Students are focusing on Dr. King’s words, not the contest writer’s categories.

OFFICIAL CONTEST TEXT AND LISTENING ACCESS

This year’s contest is grounded in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s speech “What Is Your Life’s Blueprint?,” delivered to students at Barratt Junior High School in Philadelphia on October 26, 1967.

For contest purposes, the full transcript of the speech is the official required text and is provided within this manual. Students will read, annotate, quote, paraphrase, and cite the transcript as their primary source.

Students may also listen to the speech on The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change’s YouTube channel:

“MLK: What is Your Life’s Blueprint?” Channel: The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmsAxX84cjQ>

Listening to Dr. King’s delivery can help students hear his tone, emphasis, pacing, and direct appeal to young people. However, written essays should use the transcript as the required text for evidence and citation.

Teachers may provide age-appropriate support as students work through the transcript. This may include reading portions aloud, guiding annotation, discussing vocabulary, and helping students locate evidence connected to each division’s essential question.

A note for teachers on the transcript. This is a transcription of a live, spoken address. It preserves Dr. King’s spoken rhythms, his opening remarks to the Barratt faculty, and a few bracketed notations where the recording is unclear. Students should be taught to read it as a *speech*, not an essay — the repetitions, the direct address, and the building cadence are part of the argument, not flaws in it.

THE 2026–2027 CIVIC PARTNERS AND AUDIENCES

A defining feature of this contest is that students create work for real civic and educational audiences.

This year, The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, commonly known as The King Center, is receiving student work to inform youth-centered learning aligned with its Nonviolence365® curriculum and philosophy.

To gather meaningful student insights, The King Center is requesting assistance from local and state civic partners whose work directly connects to each division’s topic.

Division	Civic Partner Asked to Assist The King Center	Curriculum / Civic Focus
Division 1	Paducah City Commissioners	What young children think a city where every child matters should look like
Division 2	School Site-Based Decision Making Council	What schools should teach students about work and greatness
Division 3	McCracken County Public Library Board and McCracken County Fiscal Court	Whether young people change a community best by building, organizing, or learning
Division 4	Paducah Human Rights Commission	How students practice dignity and nonviolence in digital and public life
Division 5	Paducah Independent and McCracken County Boards of Education	How schools keep students present, connected, and building
Division 6	Kentucky General Assembly, Interim Joint Committee on Education	How Kentucky can build a future-ready education blueprint grounded in dignity and justice

This structure gives students a real audience, a real civic purpose, and a real reason to write or create.

THE KSA CONNECTION: PREPARING FOR WRITING SUCCESS

A key principle of the Fredrickia Hargrove Poster and Essay Contest is its intentional alignment with the Kentucky Academic Standards for Reading and Writing and the Kentucky Summative Assessment.

The KSA On-Demand Writing assessment asks students to analyze a provided situation and source text, understand the intended purpose and audience, and create a clear, well-supported response. Each essay prompt across Divisions 2 through 6 follows this format, with increasing rigor and relevance.

TEXT-BASED EVIDENCE

Each prompt provides an authentic primary source: the full transcript of Dr. King’s “What Is Your Life’s Blueprint?” Students must use the transcript as the required text for analysis, evidence, quotations, paraphrases, and citations.

SPECIFIC AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE

Each prompt identifies a real-world audience, transforming the task from a school assignment into a meaningful act of civic engagement. Students write to The King Center and to a local or state civic partner, which requires them to consider tone, purpose, evidence, and recommendations.

ADVANCED ARGUMENTATION

Prompts for grades 6 through 12 ask students to recognize and respond to counterclaims. The prompts scaffold this skill by including competing viewpoints inside the scenario text.

Whenever possible, the competing viewpoints are drawn directly from Dr. King’s words rather than created for the contest. In Division 3, for instance, the three viewpoints correspond to the three slogans King presents to students: build, organize, and learn. Students are not selecting between categories invented by me; instead, they are evaluating Dr. King’s own perspectives.

HISTORICAL AND CIVIC SYNTHESIS

Students connect Dr. King’s speech to local Paducah–McCracken County history, Kentucky history, and national civil-rights history. They use history as evidence, not decoration.

POLICY AND FUTURE READINESS

The high school prompt asks students to propose a specific Kentucky policy that responds to technology, artificial intelligence, career readiness, civic responsibility, equity, and student dignity. This requires students to synthesize primary-source analysis, history, current data, and policy reasoning.

Key Sources for This Section

Source	Content	Link
The King Center YouTube Channel	“MLK: What is Your Life’s Blueprint?” listening support	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmsAxX84cjQ
The King Center	Nonviolence365®, King philosophy	https://thekingcenter.org
Kentucky Department of Education	Kentucky Academic Standards for Reading and Writing	https://www.education.ky.gov/curriculum/conpro/engla/
KYstandards.org	Revised Kentucky Academic Standards adopted into law	https://kystandards.org
Kentucky Department of Education	Kentucky Summative Assessment	https://www.education.ky.gov/AA/Assessments/Pages/KentuckySummativeAssessment-.aspx
Pearson	KSA writing rubrics and released items	https://ky.mypearsonsupport.com/resources/released-items/
Kentucky Department of Education	Kentucky School Report Card (attendance, graduation, readiness data)	https://www.kyschoolreportcard.com
Kentucky Department of Education	AI in Kentucky K–12	https://www.education.ky.gov/districts/tech/Pages/A.I.-in-Kentucky-Education.aspx
NAACP	Mission and vision	https://naacp.org/about/mission-vision
Notable Kentucky African Americans Database	Kentucky Black history research	https://nkaa.uky.edu

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

IMPORTANT DATES

- Submission Deadline: All entries must be submitted electronically through the Paducah NAACP website by **Friday, December 11, 2026**.
- Finalists Announced: The top three finalists in each division will be announced individually and publicly on **Friday, January 8, 2027**.
- Awards Ceremony: An awards ceremony will be held on **Sunday, January 18, 2027**, to celebrate all winners and participants. More information will be forthcoming.

ESSAY INSTRUCTIONS

- Do not include your name or school in the body of the essay.
- Use the official essay template.
- Follow the word count requirement for your grade level.

Grade Level	Word Count
Grades 4–5	100–500 words
Grades 6–8	300–750 words
Grades 9–12	750–1,000 words

HOW TO USE THE ESSAY TEMPLATE

1. Go to <https://www.paducahnaacp.com/hargrove-king-essay-poster-contest/>
2. Under “Student Resources,” download the Essay Template.
3. If your essay has a title, click inside the title box and type the title.
4. Type your essay inside the text box. The box will expand as you type. Do not type outside the text box.
5. When finished, save the document as “StudentName_Essay” — for example, “JaneDoe_Essay.”

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR ESSAY

1. Go to <https://www.paducahnaacp.com/hargrove-king-essay-poster-contest/>
2. Click “Student Resources.”
3. Go to “Essay Document Upload.”
4. Enter your name, grade, and school.
5. Click the “Choose File” button and select your essay. Confirm that it is attached.
6. Click the blue “Submit” button.

POSTER INSTRUCTIONS

- Division 1 students submit one poster.
- Poster size: maximum 22” × 28”.
- Any art materials may be used.

- A title, if included, should appear on the front.
- Student name, grade, and school should appear on the back.

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR POSTER

1. Scan or take a clear photograph of your poster.
2. Go to <https://www.paducahnaacp.com/hargrove-king-essay-poster-contest/>
3. Click “Student Resources.”
4. Go to “Poster Document Upload.”
5. Enter your name, grade, and school.
6. Click the “Choose File” button and select your poster image. Confirm that it is attached.
7. Click the blue “Submit” button.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

On behalf of the Paducah–McCracken County NAACP, I sincerely thank our sponsors, partners, educators, families, students, and community members for their steadfast support of the Fredrickia Hargrove Poster and Essay Contest.

This contest is more than an academic competition. It is an invitation for young people to study Dr. King’s words, reflect on their own dignity and purpose, and imagine the kind of future they want to help build. Their voices matter, and this contest gives our community an opportunity to listen.

We wish every student the very best as they read, create, write, and consider the blueprints they are building for their lives, schools, communities, state, and nation.

Respectfully,



Contest Manager

Paducah–McCracken County NAACP

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