

# 2026–27 FREDRICKIA HARGROVE POSTER AND ESSAY CONTEST

## DIVISION 3 — GRADE 6 ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY PROMPT

**Theme: “Blueprint for Tomorrow: Constructing Your Character”**

**Anchor Passage: “Build, baby, build. Organize, baby, organize. Learn, baby, learn.”**

### READING PASSAGE

Students will read the full transcript of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s speech “What Is Your Life’s Blueprint?”

As they read, students should pay special attention to the final section of the speech, where Dr. King turns from personal character to public action. He tells students that in the struggle for freedom and justice “there are many constructive things that we all can do and that we all must do.” He then rejects one slogan — “Burn, baby, burn” — and replaces it with three of his own: **“Build, baby, build.” “Organize, baby, organize.” “Learn, baby, learn,”** so that **“we can earn, baby, earn.”**

*Official contest text: the full transcript, printed in this manual. Listening support and the full source note appear under “Official Contest Text and Listening Access.”*

### SCENARIO

Something in the community is not right.

Perhaps it's a park neglected by upkeep, or a neighborhood lacking a safe after-school area for children. It could be a rule that feels unfair, or a community group that is consistently excluded. You've observed these issues and want to see them addressed.

Dr. King knew that feeling, and in 1967 he stood in front of students your age and told them exactly what to do about it — and what *not* to do.

At the time, some people in America were angry enough to burn buildings, and their slogan was “Burn, baby, burn.” Dr. King told the students at Barratt Junior High that this would not work. He said he believed in a method that “can be militant but at the same time does not destroy life or property.” *Militant* means forceful and determined. He was not telling students to be quiet or patient. He was telling them to be powerful in a way that builds instead of destroys.

Then he gave them three slogans instead of the one he rejected:

**“Build, baby, build.” “Organize, baby, organize.” “Learn, baby, learn,”** so that **“we can earn, baby, earn.”**

Three verbs. Three ways to change something that is wrong. Dr. King listed all three — but he did not tell the students which one to do first.

**Paducah answered that question three different ways, and all three worked.**

**Oscar Cross built.** As Paducah’s first African American juvenile officer, he saw children with nowhere safe to go after school. He did not write a report about it. In 1949, he built a club for them. It is still open today, and it carries his name.

**W.C. Young organized.** He was a labor and civil rights leader from Paducah who understood that one person asking politely gets ignored, but many people standing together get answered. He organized workers; he pushed for civil rights, and the community center in Paducah bears his name.

**Dr. Dennis H. Anderson taught.** When Black students in western Kentucky were shut out of higher education, he founded the West Kentucky Industrial College in Paducah so they would have somewhere to learn. He didn't wait for the door to be opened; instead, he constructed a school right behind it.

A builder, an organizer, and a teacher — from the same town, all facing the same wall, all choosing a different tool.

The King Center is asking the **McCracken County Public Library Board** and the **McCracken County Fiscal Court** to help gather student recommendations about how our community should invest in young people who want to make things better. This is a real question for them: the library is where a community *learns*, and the Fiscal Court decides what a community *builds*.

**This raises a critical question: When young people want to fix something wrong in their community, which should come first — building, organizing, or learning?**

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#### VIEWPOINT 1: BUILD, BABY, BUILD

Supporters argue that the fastest way to change something is to make what is missing. Complaining about a problem does not fix it; constructing the solution does. Oscar Cross did not campaign for a youth center — he opened one. Supporters point out that Dr. King put “build” first in his list, and that a finished building, garden, program, or club is something no one can argue with. It simply exists, and children walk into it.

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#### VIEWPOINT 2: ORGANIZE, BABY, ORGANIZE

Supporters argue that one person building one thing cannot fix a problem that affects thousands. What lasts is people. W.C. Young knew that a single worker asking for fair treatment gets dismissed, but an organized group gets a meeting. Supporters note that Dr. King's own movement won through organizing — boycotts, marches, and meetings — not through one person's individual project. Buildings fall down. Organizations elect people, change laws, and keep going after the founder is gone.

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#### VIEWPOINT 3: LEARN, BABY, LEARN

Supporters argue that you cannot build or organize what you do not understand. Dr. King connected learning directly to power: “Learn, baby, learn, so that we can earn, baby, earn.” He spent much of the speech telling students to study hard, to burn the midnight oil, and to stay in school. Dr. Dennis H. Anderson believed a college would outlast any single protest. Supporters argue that knowledge is the one tool nobody can take back, and that an educated community can build and organize anything it wants.

## YOUR TASK

The McCracken County Public Library Board and the Fiscal Court have limited time and money, and they want to invest in young people trying to improve the community — but they can only lead with one thing. Write an argumentative essay to them and The King Center that answers one question:

**When young people want to fix something wrong in their community, which should come first — building, organizing, or learning?**

Take a clear position on one and convince them:

1. **Build, baby, build** — make the thing that is missing.
2. **Organize, baby, organize** — bring people together so the change lasts.
3. **Learn, baby, learn** — gain the knowledge that makes real change possible.

Be sure to:

- State your claim clearly in the introduction.
- Support your claim with reasons and evidence from Dr. King’s speech transcript.
- Use facts and details from the scenario.
- Include evidence from local Paducah history.
- Include evidence from Kentucky or national civil-rights history.
- Acknowledge and respond to a counterclaim.
- Recommend one specific thing the Library Board or Fiscal Court could actually do.
- Organize your essay with an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion.
- Use a formal tone appropriate for The King Center and public officials.

**Word Count:** 300–750 words.

*A note on this question: Dr. King rejected only one slogan — “Burn, baby, burn.” He kept all three of the others. So, this is not a question about which one is right. All three are his. It is a question about which one comes **first**, and you must explain why starting there makes the other two possible.*

## RESEARCH EXTENSION OPPORTUNITIES

### Local History

- Oscar Cross and the founding of the Boys Club of Paducah (1949) — *the builder*
- W.C. Young, Paducah labor and civil rights leader — *the organizer*
- Dr. Dennis H. Anderson and West Kentucky Industrial College — *the teacher*
- Hotel Metropolitan

### Kentucky History

- Lyman T. Johnson and the University of Kentucky
- Kentucky Civil Rights Hall of Fame

### National History

- The Montgomery Bus Boycott — an example of organizing
- Highlander Folk School — an example of learning
- The Freedom Schools of 1964
- Booker T. Washington, whom Dr. King names in the speech

### Civic Resources

- McCracken County Public Library — [mclib.net](http://mclib.net)
- McCracken County Fiscal Court — [mccrackencountyky.gov](http://mccrackencountyky.gov)
- Notable Kentucky African Americans Database — [nkaa.uky.edu](http://nkaa.uky.edu)
- The King Center, Nonviolence365® — [thekingcenter.org](http://thekingcenter.org)

## KSA ALIGNMENT FOR DIVISION 3

| KSA Focus Area         | What It Means                                                                | How to Show It                                               |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Clarity & Coherence    | Compose arguments supporting claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence | “Young people should begin by ____ because...”               |
| Support/Development    | Introduce claims and organize evidence clearly                               | Use specific evidence from King’s speech and Paducah history |
| Counterclaims          | Acknowledge an opposing view and respond                                     | “Some may argue that _____. However, _____.”                 |
| Organization           | Organize ideas using comparison, contrast, and cause/effect                  | Use introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion            |
| Audience & Purpose     | Establish and maintain a formal style                                        | Write respectfully to The King Center and civic partners     |
| Language & Conventions | Vary sentence patterns for meaning and effect                                | Use clear grammar and varied sentences                       |

## TEACHER'S TOOLKIT FOR DIVISION 3

### Activity 1: “Find the Slogans” — Close Reading

*Objective:* Anchor the whole prompt in King’s exact words.

1. Students locate the final section of the transcript and highlight every slogan King uses.
2. Ask: “Which one does he reject? Why? What word does he use to describe the method he *does* believe in?” (*Answer: “militant” — a word students will not expect.*)
3. Discuss: “King says his method can be militant but must not destroy life or property. What does that tell you about what he means by nonviolence?”

*KAS Alignment:* RI.6.1.

### Activity 2: Three Paducah Heroes, Three Tools

*Objective:* Connect each viewpoint to a real local figure.

Expert groups research and report back:

- **Group 1 — Build:** Oscar Cross and the Boys Club (1949)
- **Group 2 — Organize:** W.C. Young and Paducah labor/civil rights
- **Group 3 — Learn:** Dr. Dennis H. Anderson and West Kentucky Industrial College

Each group answers: *What wall did this person hit? Which tool did they pick? What would have happened if they had picked a different one?*

*KAS Alignment:* RH.6.2.

### Activity 3: “The Problem Is Real” — Local Problem Inventory

*Objective:* Give students a genuine problem to argue about.

1. Students list problems they actually notice in McCracken County.
2. The class picks three.
3. For each, students sketch what *build*, *organize*, and *learn* would look like as a response.
4. Discuss: “Does the best tool change depending on the problem? Is that an argument for or against picking one to start with?”

*KAS Alignment:* SL.6.1.

### Activity 4: Counterclaim Sandwich

*Objective:* Teach counterclaim structure.

Use this frame:

Some may argue that \_\_\_\_\_. This concern matters because \_\_\_\_\_. However, \_\_\_\_\_.

The middle line is the graded one. A student who cannot say why the other side has a point has not understood it.

*KAS Alignment:* W.6.1.

### **Activity 5: “One Real Ask”**

*Objective:* Turn an argument into a recommendation.

Each student must finish this sentence and include it in the essay: “*Therefore, the Library Board or Fiscal Court should \_\_\_\_.*” Vague asks (“support youth more”) are returned. Specific asks (“fund a Saturday maker space at the main branch”) are accepted.

*KAS Alignment:* W.6.1b.

### **Activity 6: Mock County Hearing**

*Objective:* Practice civic speaking.

Students present two-minute statements to a mock panel of Library Board members and magistrates about which investment should come first. Panelists must ask one question about cost or feasibility.

*KAS Alignment:* SL.6.1.

## **HOME & COMMUNITY CONNECTION: A PARTNER’S GUIDE FOR GRADE 6**

### **Family Activity: Build, Organize, or Learn?**

Think of something your family or neighborhood wanted to change. Ask:

- Did we build something, bring people together, or go learn how first?
- Did it work?
- What would Dr. King have suggested?

### **Community Activity: Visit or Explore the Library**

Ask:

- What does the library help people *learn*?
- Could a person organize a group here? Could they build something here?
- What would make it easier for a student to start something?

### **Local History Activity**

Research Oscar Cross, W.C. Young, or Dr. Dennis H. Anderson. Ask:

- What did this person actually make?
- Is it still here today?
- What does that tell us about which tool lasts?