



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

Email: rodneydholt@gmail.com

Paducah–McCracken County NAACP: (833) 622-7229 ext. 719

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE'S BLUEPRINT? (FULL TRANSCRIPT)

On October 26, 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. addressed students at Barratt Junior High School in Philadelphia. This speech is commonly known as "WHAT'S YOUR LIFE'S BLUEPRINT?"

Video from The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change (The King Center):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmsAxX84cjQ>

Speaker:

...and help welcome our honored distinguished guest, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King.

Dr. King:

Thank you very kindly. Principal [inaudible], Mr. Williams, Members of the faculty and members of the student body of Barratt Junior High School, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I need not pause to say how very delighted I am to be here today, and to have the opportunity of taking a very brief break in a pretty busy schedule in the city of Philadelphia, to share with you the students of Barratt Junior High School. And I want to express my personal appreciation to the principal and the administration for inviting me and for giving me the opportunity to see this very fine and enthusiastic group of students here at Barratt.

I guess I ought to start out with a commercial, and that is tonight we're going to have a great night in the city of Philadelphia at the Spectrum. I know you've heard of that new, impressive structure called the Spectrum, and I know you've heard of Harry Belafonte and Aretha Franklin and Nipsey Russell and Sidney Poitier and all of these other great and outstanding artists. Well, they're going to be here tonight at the Spectrum, and I hope that each of you will go home and tell your parents to be there tonight for this great freedom festival. And I hope you will come also, for it will be a great experience and, by coming, you will be supporting the work of the civil rights movement.

Now that I've gotten the commercial out of the way, I'll move on and say some things that I want to say very briefly. And I'm being very honest; I'm going to be brief because I have other engagements. I don't have a tradition of being brief all the time. You know I'm a Baptist preacher, and we can talk a long time, but I'm going to be really brief today.

I want to ask you a question, and that is: **WHAT IS IN YOUR LIFE'S BLUEPRINT?**

This is the most important and crucial period of your lives. For what you do now and what you decide now at this age may well determine which way your life shall go. And whenever a building is constructed, you usually have an architect who draws a blueprint. And that blueprint serves as the pattern, as the guide, as the model, for those who are to build the building. And a building is not well erected without a good, sound, and solid blueprint.

Now each of you is in the process of building the structure of your lives, and the question is whether you have a proper, a solid, and a sound blueprint. And I want to suggest some of the things that should be in your life's blueprint.

NUMBER 1: PRINCIPLE OF SOMEBODINESS

Number one in your life's blueprint should be: a deep belief in your own dignity, your own worth, and your own somebodiness. Don't allow anybody to make you feel that you are nobody. Always feel that you count. Always feel that you have worth, and always feel that your life has ultimate significance.

Now that means you should not be ashamed of your color. You know, it's very unfortunate that in so many instances, our society has placed a stigma on the Negro's color. You know there are some Negroes who are ashamed of themselves? Don't be ashamed of your color. Don't be ashamed of your biological features. Somehow you must be able to say in your own lives, and really believe it, "I Am Black, But Beautiful!" and believe that in your heart.

And therefore, you need not be lured into purchasing cosmetics advertised to make you lighter; neither do you need to process your hair to make it appear straight. I have good hair, and it is as good as anybody else's in the world. And we've got to believe that. Now in your life's blueprint, be sure that you have a principle of somebodiness.

NUMBER 2: DETERMINATION TO ACHIEVE EXCELLENCE

Secondly, in your life's blueprint, you must have as the basic principle the determination to achieve excellence in your various fields of endeavor. You're going to be deciding, as the days and the years unfold, what you will do in life — what your life's work will be. And once you discover what it will be, set out to do it, and to do it well.

And I say to you, my young friends, that doors are opening to each of you — doors of opportunity are opening to each of you that were not open to your mothers and your fathers — and the great challenge facing you is to be ready to enter these doors as they open.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the great essayist, said in a lecture back in 1871 that, "If a man can write a better book or preach a better sermon or make a better mousetrap than his neighbor, even if he builds his house in the woods, the world will make a beaten path to his door." This hadn't always been true — but it will become increasingly true. And so, I would urge you to study hard, to burn the midnight oil. I would say to you, don't drop out of school. And I understand all of the sociological reasons why we often drop out of school.

But I urge you, in spite of your economic plight, in spite of the situation that you are forced to live so often with intolerable conditions, stay in school. And when you discover what you're going to be in life, set out to do it as if God Almighty called you at this particular moment in history to do it.

And just don't set out to do a good Negro job but do a good job that anybody could do. Don't set out to be just a good Negro doctor, a good Negro lawyer, a good Negro school teacher, a good Negro preacher, a good Negro barber, a beautician, a good Negro skilled laborer...for if you set out to do that, you have already flunked your matriculation exam for entrance into the University of Integration. Set out to do a good job and do that job so well that the living, the dead, and the unborn couldn't do it any better.

If it falls to your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures. Sweep streets like Beethoven composed music. Sweep streets like Leontyne Price sings before the Metropolitan Opera,

and sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will have to pause and say, “Here lived a great street sweeper who swept his job well.

If you can’t be a pine on the top of the hill, be a scrub in the valley — but be the best little scrub by the side of the rill; Be a bush if you can’t be a tree. If you can’t be a highway, then just be a trail; if you can’t be the sun, be a star; it isn’t by size that you win, or you fail—be the best of whatever you are!

We always... we already have some noble examples of Black men and Black women who demonstrated to us that human nature cannot be cataloged. They, in their own lives, have walked through long, plunged against cloud-filled nights of affliction, new and blazing stars of inspiration.

And so, from an old slave cabin of Virginia’s hills, Booker T Washington rose up to be one of America’s great leaders. He lit a torch in Alabama and darkness fled in that setting. Yes, you should know this because it’s in your own city.

From a poverty-stricken area of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Marian Anderson rose up to be the world’s greatest contralto so that a Toscanini could say that a voice like this comes only once in a century, and Sibelius of Finland could say my roof is too low for such a voice.

From the Red Hills of Gordon County, Georgia, and the arms of a mother who could neither read nor write, Roland Hayes rose up to be one of the world’s great singers and carried his melodious voice into the palaces and mansions of kings and queens.

From crippling circumstances, there came a George Washington Carver to carve for himself an imperishable niche in the annals of science.

There was a star in the diplomatic sky, and then came Ralph Bunche, the grandson of a slave preacher, and he reached up and grabbed it and allowed it to shine in his life with all of its scintillating beauty.

There was a star in the athletic sky. And then came Jackie Robinson in his day and Willie Mays in his day with their powerful bats and their calm spirits. Then came Jesse Owens with his fleet and dashing feet. Then came Joe Lewis and Muhammad Ali with their [adjudicated] fists.

All of them came to tell us that we can be somebody and to justify the conviction of the poet:

Fleecy locks and black complexion cannot forfeit nature’s claim. Skin may differ, but affection dwells in black and white the same. If I were so tall as to reach the pole or to grasp the ocean at a span, I must be measured by my soul. The mind is the standard of the man.

NUMBER 3: COMMITMENT TO THE ETERNAL PRINCIPLES

And finally, in your life’s blueprint must be a commitment to the eternal principles of beauty, love, and justice. Don’t allow anybody to pull you so low as to make you hate them. Don’t allow anybody to cause you to lose your self-respect to the point that you do not struggle for justice. However young you are, you have a responsibility to seek to make your nation a better nation in which to live. You have a responsibility to seek to make life better for everybody.

And so, you must be involved in the struggle for freedom and justice. Now in this struggle for freedom and justice, there are many constructive things that we all can do and that we all must do. And we must not give ourselves to those things which will not solve our problems. You've heard the word "nonviolent," and you've heard the word "violent." I happen to believe in nonviolence.

We've struggled with this method with young people and adults alike all over the South. And we have won some significant victories. And we've got to struggle with it all over the North because the problems are as serious in the North as they are in the South. But I believe as we struggle with these problems, we've got to struggle with them with a method that can be militant but at the same time does not destroy life or property.

And so, our slogan must not be "Burn, baby, burn," it must be "Build, baby, build." "Organize, baby, organize." Yes, our slogan must be "Learn, baby, learn" so that we can "earn, baby, earn."

And with a powerful commitment, I believe that we can transform dark yesterdays of injustice into bright tomorrows of justice and humanity. Let us keep going toward the goal of selfhood, toward the realization of the dream of brotherhood, and toward the realization of the dream of understanding and goodwill. Let nobody stop us.

I close by quoting once more the man that the young lady quoted, that magnificent black bard who is now passed on, Langston Hughes. One day, he wrote a poem entitled, "Mother to Son." The mother didn't always have her grammar right, but she uttered words of great symbolic profundity.

Well, son, I'll tell you:

Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

It's had tacks in it,

And splinters,

And boards torn up,

And places with no carpet on the floor— Bare.

But all the time

I've been a'climbin' on,

And reachin' landin's,

And turnin' corners,

And sometimes goin' in the dark,

Where there ain't been no light.

So boy, don't you turn back;

Don't you sit down on the steps,

'Cause you finds it's kinder hard;

Don't you fall now—

For I've still goin', honey,

I've still climbin',

And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

But we must keep moving. We must keep going. If you can't fly, run. If you can't run, walk. If you can't walk, crawl, but by all means, keep moving!"

2026–27 FREDRICKIA HARGROVE POSTER AND ESSAY CONTEST

DIVISION 1 — GRADES K–3 POSTER PROMPT

Theme: “Blueprint for Tomorrow: Constructing Your Character”

Anchor Passage: “Number 1: Principle of Somebodiness”

NOTE: Teachers should introduce students to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s speech “What Is Your Life’s Blueprint?” by reading selected portions of the full transcript aloud and, when appropriate, playing selected portions of the speech from The King Center’s YouTube channel.

To Read Aloud to Students: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once gave a speech to students. He asked them an important question: What is your life’s blueprint?

A blueprint is a plan for building something. Before workers build a house, school, church, bridge, or park, they need a plan. Dr. King said every person needs a plan for life too.

He wanted children to know three important things:

You matter. You can do your best. You can help make the world better.

Dr. King used the word “somebodiness.” That means every person has dignity and worth. He told the students, “Always feel that you count.” Every child should know, “I am somebody.”

In Paducah, Oscar Cross believed children mattered. He helped build a safe place where children could learn, play, and grow. That place became the Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club.

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

A good city does more than build streets and buildings. A good city helps children grow.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. told students that every child should know, “I am somebody.” That means every child matters. Every child deserves care. Every child should have a safe place to learn, play, dream, and belong.

Oscar Cross believed children in Paducah mattered. He helped build a place where children could be safe, learn, play, and grow. That place became the Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club.

A city where children matter has helpers. It has schools, parks, libraries, clubs, families, teachers, neighbors, and leaders who care about young people.

The King Center wants to teach children Dr. King’s message of dignity, kindness, and nonviolence. It is asking the Paducah City Commissioners to help gather student artwork about what a child-friendly city should look like.

YOUR TASK

The Paducah City Commissioners and The King Center want to see our city through YOUR eyes. Create a poster that answers one question:

What should Paducah look like if every child knows, “I am somebody”?

Show your vision — children being cared for, included, safe, learning, playing, helping, or dreaming. You might draw a school, a park, a neighborhood, a library, the Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club, children helping one another, adults helping children, or any place where every child belongs.

KAS ALIGNMENT FOR DIVISION 1

Focus Area	What It Means	How to Show It
Responding to a Text	Connect the read-aloud to your own ideas	Your poster answers Dr. King’s question about children mattering
Communication	Share a clear message through art	A viewer can tell what your picture is saying
Originality	Use your own ideas and imagination	Draw your own vision, not a copy
Poster Technique	Use color, space, and materials with care	Fill the space; make it easy to see
Cultural & Community Context	Show a real or imagined place in your community	Include a Paducah place or helper

TEACHER'S TOOLKIT FOR DIVISION 1

Activity 1: "Every Child Matters" Anchor Chart

Objective: Help students understand Dr. King's idea of "somebodiness."

1. Create a large anchor chart titled "Every Child Matters."
2. Ask students: "What helps a child feel safe?" "What helps a child feel loved?" "What helps a child learn?" "What helps a child belong?"
3. Write student ideas on the chart.
4. Keep the chart visible during poster planning.

KAS Alignment: VA:Cn10.1.K-3 — Connecting art to personal experience.

Activity 2: "What Makes a Good City for Children?"

Objective: Help students connect the poster task to Paducah.

1. Show pictures of familiar child-friendly places: a school, library, park, neighborhood, Boys and Girls Club, or community center.
2. Ask: "What happens here that helps children?"
3. Students choose one place they may want to include in their poster.

KAS Alignment: SL.K-3.1 — Participating in collaborative conversations.

Activity 3: The Oscar Cross Story

Objective: Connect local history to the poster.

1. Tell students that Oscar Cross believed children in Paducah mattered.
2. Explain that he helped build a safe place where children could learn, play, and grow.
3. Ask: "How did Oscar Cross help children know they were somebody?"
4. Students may include a helper like Oscar Cross in their poster.

KAS Alignment: SL.K-3.1.

Activity 4: "I Am Somebody" Mirror Moment

Objective: Make somebodiness personal before it becomes civic.

1. Each child completes the sentence aloud: "I am somebody because ____."
2. The teacher writes each answer on a card and posts them together as a class wall.
3. Ask: "Our wall has every single person in this room on it. What would our *city* look like if it did that too?"

KAS Alignment: SL.K-3.1.

Activity 5: One Big Picture Poster Plan

Objective: Avoid a checklist poster and help students create one clear scene.

1. Give students a planning sheet with one large box.
2. Prompt: “Draw one place in Paducah where every child matters.”
3. Around the box, students may circle words: safe, loved, learning, playing, helping, dreaming, belonging.
4. Students then create the final poster.

KAS Alignment: VA:Cr1.1.K-3 — Engaging in exploration and imaginative play with materials.

HOME & COMMUNITY CONNECTION: A PARTNER’S GUIDE FOR DIVISION 1

Family Activity: “I Am Somebody” Conversation

Ask your child:

- What does it mean to be somebody?
- Who helps you feel loved and important?
- How can you help someone else feel like they matter?

Community Activity: “Child-Friendly City Walk”

Take a walk or drive through Paducah. Look for places that help children grow. Ask:

- Where do children learn?
- Where do children play?
- Where do children feel safe?
- What would make our city even better for children?

Family History Connection: Oscar Cross

Talk about Oscar Cross and the Boys and Girls Club. Ask:

- Why do children need safe places?
- What kind of grown-up helps children know they matter?
- What helper could you draw in your poster?

2026–27 FREDRICKIA HARGROVE POSTER AND ESSAY CONTEST

DIVISION 2 — GRADES 4–5 OPINION ESSAY PROMPT

Theme: “Blueprint for Tomorrow: Constructing Your Character”

Anchor Passage: “Sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures”

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 **Number 2: Determination to Achieve Excellence** — the section where Dr. King talks about choosing your life’s work and doing it well. It contains the most famous words in the whole speech.

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

Adults often ask children, “**What do you want to be when you grow up?**”

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. asked the students at Barratt Junior High a better question. He didn’t ask them what job they wanted. He asked them **how they were going to do it.**

Listen to what he told them. He said that if it “falls to your lot to be a street sweeper,” then you should “sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures.” Sweep streets like Beethoven composed music. Sweep streets like Leontyne Price sings at the Metropolitan Opera. Sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep them so well, he said, that everyone in heaven and earth would have to pause and say, “*Here lived a great street sweeper who swept his job well.*”

Think about that. Dr. King was standing in front of a room of kids, and he did not tell them to become famous. He told them that **a street sweeper can be great** — if the sweeping is great.

But he said something else too, in the very same part of the speech. He told the students that “doors of opportunity are opening to each of you that were not open to your mothers and your fathers,” and that “the great challenge facing you is to be ready to enter these doors as they open.” He told them to study hard and to “burn the midnight oil.” He seemed to want them to reach for something big.

And then he read them a poem:

If you can’t be a pine on the top of the hill, be a scrub in the valley — but be the best little scrub by the side of the rill; Be a bush if you can’t be a tree.

If you can’t be a highway, then just be a trail; if you can’t be the sun, be a star; it isn’t by size that you win, or you fail—Be the best of whatever you are!

Paducah has been answering this question for a long time.

Oscar Cross was a juvenile officer. That is not a famous job. Nobody makes movies about juvenile officers. But he did it so well that Paducah named a whole club after him, and children still walk through its doors today.

Shirley Bunch became the first Black female deputy in the McCracken County Police Department. She could have stopped at being first. Instead, she spent her whole life mentoring young people — work that never made headlines and changed everything.

Dr. Dennis H. Anderson did the opposite. He looked at a door that was closed to Black students in western Kentucky, and instead of doing a smaller job well, he founded an entire college.

The King Center is asking your school's Site-Based Decision Making (SBDM) Council to help gather student ideas about what schools should teach young people about work.

This leads to an important question: What should our school teach students about work?

VIEWPOINT 1: AIM FOR THE TOP

Supporters of this view say schools should push every student to reach as high as they possibly can. Dr. King said doors are opening that were closed to our parents and grandparents, and that our job is to **be ready when they open**. He told students to study hard and burn the midnight oil. People fought and even died so those doors would open—and supporters argue that walking past an open door wastes everything they paid for. Dr. Dennis H. Anderson did not settle. He established a college.

VIEWPOINT 2: DO ANY JOB WELL

Supporters of this view say greatness is not about *which* job you get. It is about **how you do it**. That is the whole point of the street sweeper. Dr. King did not say “become a painter like Michelangelo.” He said, “Sweep streets like Michelangelo painted.” Supporters argue that a town needs street sweepers, nurses, mechanics, cooks, and juvenile officers — and that a school that only celebrates the students headed for famous jobs is quietly telling everyone else they do not count. Oscar Cross had an ordinary job title and did extraordinary work with it.

VIEWPOINT 3: BE THE BEST OF WHATEVER YOU ARE

Supporters of this view say the poem Dr. King read is the real answer. Not everyone is a pine on top of the hill, and pretending otherwise makes students miserable. The poem says, “*It isn't by size that you win or you fail.*” Supporters argue that schools should help each student find out who **they actually are** — what they are good at, what they love — and then become the best version of that, instead of measuring every child against the same ruler. Shirley Bunch did not copy anyone's blueprint. She built her own.

YOUR TASK

Your school's SBDM Council — the parents, teachers, and principal who make your school's rules — is deciding what to teach students about work and success, and The King Center wants to hear from students. Write an opinion essay to them that answers one question: What **should our school teach students about work?**

Pick the one you believe in most, and make your case:

1. **Aim for the top** — be ready when the doors open.
2. **Do any job well** — sweep streets like Michelangelo painted.
3. **Be the best of whatever you are** — find who you are and become the best of that.

Be sure to:

- Open with a hook — a question, a vivid picture, or a surprising fact — that grabs your reader's attention before you state your opinion.
- State your opinion clearly in the introduction.
- Quote or paraphrase Dr. King's exact words from the transcript to support your opinion, and name him when you do.
- Support your opinion with reasons and evidence from Dr. King's speech transcript.
- Use facts and details from the scenario.
- Include at least one local, Kentucky, or national example of a person who did their work well.
- Organize your essay with an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion.
- Use linking words to connect your ideas.
- Write respectfully to your SBDM Council and The King Center.

Word Count: 100–500 words.

Key Words: *excellence* (doing something as well as it can be done) · *opportunity* (a chance to do something) · *lot* (what life hands you) · *rill* (a tiny stream) · *contralto* (the lowest singing voice for a woman)

*A note on this question: All three of these ideas are in Dr. King's speech. He said all of them, in the same three minutes. Your job is not to prove the other two are wrong. Your job is to say which one you believe **your school** should teach first — and to explain why.*

KSA ALIGNMENT FOR DIVISION 2

KSA Focus Area	What It Means	How to Show It
Clarity & Coherence	State your opinion clearly and stick to it	"In my opinion, our school should teach ____ because..."
Support/Development	Use reasons and evidence from the text	Quote or paraphrase Dr. King's speech transcript
Organization	Structure your essay with introduction, body, and conclusion	Use linking words: first, another reason, finally
Language & Conventions	Use grade-appropriate language with correct grammar and spelling	Write clearly so school leaders and The King Center understand
Audience & Purpose	Show you know you are writing to school leaders and The King Center	Maintain a respectful tone

Activity 1: “The Greatest Street Sweeper” Read-Aloud

Objective: Let the passage land before any analysis.

1. Read the street sweeper passage aloud twice. The second time, ask students to close their eyes.
2. Ask: “Who did Dr. King compare a street sweeper to?” List them: Michelangelo, Beethoven, Leontyne Price, Shakespeare.
3. Ask the real question: **“Was Dr. King serious?”** Let students argue. Most will say he was exaggerating. Push back: “He said heaven and earth would have to pause. Does he sound like he’s joking?”

KAS Alignment: RI.4.1.

Activity 2: “Great Job or Great Worker?” Sorting Game

Objective: Separate the job from the doing of it.

1. Name pairs aloud: *a lazy doctor / a wonderful bus driver; a bored famous singer / a school custodian who knows every child’s name.*
2. For each pair, students vote: who is greater?
3. Discuss: “Dr. King has an answer. What is it? Do you agree with him?”

KAS Alignment: SL.4.1.

Activity 3: “Ten Names in Two Minutes” — How King Argues

Objective: Teach argument by example.

1. Students hunt the transcript and list every person Dr. King names as an example. They will find about ten.
2. Ask: “Why didn’t he just say ‘people can do great things’? Why name ten?”
3. Then the key move: “He was in Philadelphia, so he named **Marian Anderson**, who grew up in Philadelphia. He even says you should know this because it’s in your own city.”
4. Challenge: **“You are in Paducah. Who is your Marian Anderson?”** Students should name a real local person in their essay.

KAS Alignment: RI.4.8.

Activity 4: “Community Job Walk”

Objective: Ground the debate in real work.

1. Students list every job that keeps their school running for one day — including the ones nobody thanks to.
2. Ask: “What would happen tomorrow if the custodian didn’t come? What if the principal didn’t?”
3. Discuss: “Which of these jobs would Dr. King say can be great?”

KAS Alignment: SL.4.1.

Activity 5: Three Corners Opinion Debate

Objective: Help students form and defend an opinion.

1. Label three corners: *Aim for the Top* · *Do Any Job Well* · *Be the Best of Whatever You Are*.
2. Students move to the corner that matches their opinion and explain using evidence from the transcript.
3. Students may move if persuaded — and must say what changed their mind.

KAS Alignment: SL.4.1.

Activity 6: Opinion Essay Blueprint

Objective: Help students organize the essay.

- Introduction (hook + opinion): ____
- Reason 1 + evidence from Dr. King: ____
- Reason 2 + a real person who did their work well: ____
- Conclusion: Our school should ____

KAS Alignment: W.4.1.

Activity 7: Formal Tone Sort

Objective: Help students write respectfully to real audiences.

Students sort informal and formal phrases. Example — Informal: “Some jobs are lame.” Formal: “Every job in our community deserves respect.”

KAS Alignment: L.4.3.

A note for teachers on one passage: In this section, Dr. King also tells students not to set out to do “a good Negro job,” but “a good job that anybody could do,” and says that anyone who aims lower has “flunked your matriculation exam for entrance into the University of Integration.” The language is of its era and belongs to Dr. King. The idea underneath it is powerful and very much alive: he is telling students to refuse a ceiling that someone else built for them, and to measure their work against the whole world’s standard rather than a lowered one. Read this passage in context and be ready to discuss it plainly.

HOME & COMMUNITY CONNECTION: A PARTNER’S GUIDE FOR GRADES 4–5

Family Activity: “Sweep Streets Like Michelangelo”

Read the street sweeper passage together. Ask: Do you think Dr. King really meant it? What is a job in our family that nobody notices but everybody needs? Who do you know who does an ordinary job extraordinarily well?

Family Activity: The Question Behind the Question

Instead of “What do you want to be when you grow up?”, try Dr. King’s version: **“However you spend your life, how do you want to do it?”** Ask: What would it look like to do that *really* well? Would it matter if nobody noticed?

Community Activity: Learn About a Local Helper

Research Oscar Cross or Shirley Bunch together. Ask: Was this a famous job? Did they do it well? Which mattered more — the job itself, or the doing of the job?

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?

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.

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.

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
- McCracken County Fiscal Court — mccrackencountyky.gov
- Notable Kentucky African Americans Database — nkaa.uky.edu
- The King Center, Nonviolence365® — 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?

2026–27 FREDRICKIA HARGROVE POSTER AND ESSAY CONTEST

DIVISION 4 — GRADE 7 ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY PROMPT

Theme: “Blueprint for Tomorrow: Constructing Your Character”

Anchor Passage: “I Am Black, But Beautiful” and the commitment to beauty, love, and justice

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 two passages. First, the section where Dr. King tells students not to be ashamed of their color or their “biological features,” and warns them that they “need not be lured into purchasing cosmetics advertised to make you lighter,” nor to “process your hair to make it appear straight.” **Second**, the closing section, where he tells students, “Don’t allow anybody to pull you so low as to make you hate them,” and commits them to “the eternal principles of beauty, love, and justice.”

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

In 1967, Dr. King stood in front of a room of junior high students and warned them about an industry.

He told them not to buy cosmetics advertised to make their skin lighter. He told them they did not need to process their hair to make it appear straight. He described companies that made money by convincing young people that the face they already had was the wrong one—and then selling them the correction. His answer was to say out loud, and believe it: “I Am Black, But Beautiful.”

Read that passage again and recognize what it's really saying. Dr. King is pointing out that someone is exploiting your insecurity, and you don't have to fall for it.

That industry did not disappear. It moved onto your phone.

Today, a filter can lighten your skin, narrow your nose, and reshape your jaw before you have finished deciding whether to post. An app can tell you, in numbers, how many people approved of your face this afternoon. The pressure Dr. King described has not just survived — it has been automated, personalized, and made free of charge.

The rest of the digital world raises his other warning too. Dr. King told students, “Don’t allow anybody to pull you so low as to make you hate them.” Anyone who has watched a comment thread turn into a pile-on knows how hard that instruction is when the other person is a username. A post can lift someone up. A comment can tear someone down. A rumor can travel faster than anyone can correct it.

Paducah has examples of people who kept their character under pressure. **Dr. William Stuart Nelson**, who grew up in Paducah and graduated from Lincoln High School, studied nonviolence with Gandhi in India in 1946 and later marched with Dr. King at Selma. **Rev. W.G. Harvey**, the first Black person elected

to public office in western Kentucky, once led a group to confront a Ku Klux Klan meeting in Paducah — and did not become what he opposed.

Kentucky and national history offer the same lessons through the student sit-ins, the Freedom Riders, and John Lewis, who practiced nonviolence in public when the pressure to answer hate with hate was overwhelming.

The King Center is asking the **Paducah Human Rights Commission** to help gather student ideas for teaching digital dignity and nonviolent courage to young people today.

This raises a critical question: How should young people build true character in a digital world?

VIEWPOINT 1: TEACH DIGITAL RESPONSIBILITY

Supporters argue that students need practical rules and habits: privacy, cyberbullying, misinformation, screen time, respectful communication, and the real consequences of online cruelty. A digital world without responsibility becomes unsafe quickly, and you cannot ask a twelve-year-old to philosophize their way out of a harassment campaign. Teach the rules first; the character can grow inside them.

VIEWPOINT 2: TEACH INNER CHARACTER

Supporters argue that online problems begin with a deeper question: who told you that you needed fixing? Dr. King did not tell students to use skin-lightening cream responsibly. He told them not to want it. Rules can stop a student from posting something cruel, but only somebodiness can stop a student from believing the lie that their real face is not enough. A self-aware student doesn't rely on filters or seek strangers' approval to the point of cruelty.

VIEWPOINT 3: TEACH DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP FOR JUSTICE

Supporters argue that safety and self-worth are not enough — they are both defensive. Dr. King's third blueprint principle was a *commitment*, an obligation to act. He told students that however young they are, they have a responsibility to make the nation better. Supporters argue that students should be taught to use these tools courageously: to tell the truth, protect someone being targeted, correct a rumor, organize service, and build community. Anything less leaves the most powerful communication tools in history in the hands of everyone except the people trying to do good with them.

YOUR TASK

The Paducah Human Rights Commission is planning a community forum on how young people can keep their dignity and their character online, and The King Center wants student thinking to shape it. Write a formal argumentative essay to them that answers one question:

How should young people build true character in a digital world?

Argue for the approach you believe matters most:

1. **Teach digital responsibility** — students need safety, privacy, and respectful habits.
2. **Teach inner character** — students need a strong foundation of “somebodiness.”
3. **Teach digital citizenship for justice** — students should use technology to protect dignity and build community.

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 digital scenario.
- Include a local Paducah example of courageous character.
- Include a Kentucky or national example of nonviolent action for justice.
- Acknowledge and respond to a counterclaim with logical reasoning and evidence.
- Organize your essay with an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion.
- Use a formal tone appropriate for The King Center and a city commission.

Word Count: 300–750 words.

RESEARCH EXTENSION OPPORTUNITIES

Local History

- Dr. William Stuart Nelson — Lincoln High School to Gandhi’s side in 1946
- Rev. W.G. Harvey — Kentucky Civil Rights Hall of Fame
- Paducah Human Rights Commission — paducahky.gov

Kentucky History

- Kentucky Civil Rights Hall of Fame
- Kentucky leaders who challenged segregation and discrimination

National History

- John Lewis and SNCC
- The Freedom Rides
- The student sit-ins
- The Little Rock Nine

Digital Citizenship and Current Context

- Research on social media use and adolescent well-being
- Media literacy and misinformation
- Cyberbullying prevention
- Youth civic engagement online

KSA ALIGNMENT FOR DIVISION 4

KSA Focus Area	What It Means	How to Show It
Clarity & Coherence	Write arguments supporting claims with clear reasons and evidence	“Students should be taught ____ because...”
Support/Development	Introduce claims, acknowledge opposing claims, organize evidence logically	Use King, digital examples, and history
Counterclaims	Acknowledge and respond to an opposing claim	“Some may argue that _____. However, _____.”
Organization	Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion	Use transitions like furthermore, however, consequently
Audience & Purpose	Establish and maintain a formal style	Write respectfully to The King Center and Human Rights Commission
Language & Conventions	Demonstrate command of standard English	Use precise language and varied sentences

TEACHER’S TOOLKIT FOR DIVISION 4

Activity 1: “1967 Advertisement, 2027 Filter”

Objective: Make the anchor passage land.

1. Read aloud only King’s lines about cosmetics and processed hair. Do not mention phones.
2. Ask: “What is he describing? Who is making money here?”
3. Then ask: “Does anything today do this?” Let students get there themselves.
4. Discuss: “King’s answer was five words — ‘I Am Black, But Beautiful.’ Why did he think saying it out loud mattered?”

KAS Alignment: RI.7.1.

Activity 2: Profile vs. Blueprint

Objective: Compare online identity and real character.

Students create a two-column chart: *What a profile can show / What a profile cannot show.*

Discussion question: “Can a person’s online image become a false blueprint?”

KAS Alignment: RI.7.1.

Activity 3: Digital Nonviolence Scenarios

Objective: Apply nonviolence to online conflict.

Students analyze short scenarios: a cruel comment thread, a rumor spreading, a friend being mocked, a misleading post. For each, students identify a harmful response, a silent response, and a *nonviolent* response — and discuss why the second and third are not the same thing.

KAS Alignment: SL.7.1.

Activity 4: Paducah’s Nonviolence Scholars

Objective: Connect local history to digital courage.

Students research Dr. William Stuart Nelson and Rev. W.G. Harvey. They answer: *What injustice did this person confront? How did they show courage? How did they resist without becoming hateful?*

KAS Alignment: RH.7.2.

Activity 5: Counterclaim Paragraph Workshop

Objective: Strengthen argumentative writing.

Students write a paragraph that fairly introduces an opposing view, rebuts it with evidence, and explains why their claim is stronger. Peer reviewers check one thing: *was the other side represented fairly, or was it made easy to knock down?*

KAS Alignment: W.7.1b.

Activity 6: Socratic Seminar — Is Online Courage Real Courage?

Discussion questions:

- Is it easier or harder to be nonviolent online?
- What does “somebodiness” mean when a number is attached to your face?
- King told students not to let anyone pull them so low as to make them hate them. Is that harder when you cannot see the person?
- If King had a phone in 1967, would he have used it?

KAS Alignment: SL.7.1.

HOME & COMMUNITY CONNECTION: A PARTNER’S GUIDE FOR GRADE 7

Family Activity: Digital Dignity Conversation

Ask:

- When does online attention help a person?
- When does it hurt character?
- What should never be posted about another person?

Family Activity: The 1967 Passage

Read King’s lines about cosmetics and hair together. Ask:

- Who was profiting from that?
- Does anything today do the same thing?
- What would it take to say “I am enough” and mean it?

Community Activity: Watch a Public Meeting

Watch a city commission, school board, or public meeting. Ask:

- Who speaks respectfully?
- Who disagrees without insulting?
- What would digital dignity look like in public life?

Local History Activity

Research Dr. William Stuart Nelson. Ask:

- Why should more people in Paducah know his story?
- What can students learn from someone who studied nonviolence before it became nationally famous?

2026–27 FREDRICKIA HARGROVE POSTER AND ESSAY CONTEST

DIVISION 5 — GRADE 8 ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY PROMPT

Theme: “Blueprint for Tomorrow: Constructing Your Character”

Anchor Passage: “Stay in school... in spite of your economic plight”

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 passage in which Dr. King urges them to “study hard, to burn the midnight oil” and says plainly, **“don’t drop out of school.”** Read the next sentences very carefully. Dr. King immediately adds, **“And I understand all of the sociological reasons why we often drop out of school.”** Then he says: **“But I urge you in spite of your economic plight, in spite of the situation, that you are forced to live so often with intolerable conditions, stay in school.”**

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

Read those three sentences again, because Dr. King does something remarkable in them.

He tells students to stay in school. Then he says he *understands* the reasons they leave — the economic plight, the intolerable conditions. He does not pretend the barriers are imaginary. He names them. And then he tells the students to stay anyway.

In approximately twenty seconds, Dr. King presents both sides of a longstanding debate among adults. Is the solution encouraging young people to persevere? Or should we address the conditions that make perseverance so costly? He refuses to pick a side—and instead leaves students to determine what a school should actually do with that.

Kentucky is living with this question right now, and the numbers are stark.

Before the pandemic, in the 2018–19 school year, **119,581 Kentucky students — 17.8% —** were chronically absent, meaning they missed 10% or more of the school year. By 2022–23, that number had climbed to **198,524 students, or 29.8%.** Nearly one in three. In the most recent data, chronic absenteeism has fallen from **28% to 25%** — real progress, and still far above where it started. Meanwhile, Kentucky’s graduation rate reached **93.5%** over four years and **94.2%** over five.

Kentucky is graduating nearly all students, but a quarter are missing enough school to fall behind during the process.

Kentucky’s response is worth studying closely. The Department of Education built a statewide campaign around a single phrase: **“You belong.”** Commissioner Robbie Fletcher explained the message this way: when you miss school, *“you miss more than lessons... you miss connection with your school, you miss connection with students, and you miss on building on your own future.”*

That is Dr. King's word. The Commonwealth's answer to a difficult attendance statistic was not a stricter rule. It was **somebodiness**.

Paducah has been struggling with this question for a century, and its heroes did not all answer the same way.

Curlee Brown Sr. was denied admission to Paducah Junior College in 1951 because he was Black. He did not respond by trying harder. He sued — and the court forced the college to integrate three years before *Brown v. Board of Education* reached the Supreme Court. He changed the condition.

Dr. Dennis H. Anderson founded the West Kentucky Industrial College because Black students had nowhere to go. He built the opportunity that did not exist.

Oscar Cross and **Shirley Bunch** worked on the other side of the equation. Cross built a club so children had somewhere to belong after school. Bunch, the first Black female deputy in the McCracken County Police Department, spent her life mentoring young people — because she knew what many of them needed most was one adult who believed in them.

Kentucky history adds **Lyman T. Johnson**, who sued to integrate the University of Kentucky, and **Georgia Davis Powers**, the first Black member of the Kentucky Senate. National history adds **Thurgood Marshall**, *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The King Center is asking the **Paducah Independent** and **McCracken County Boards of Education** to help gather student recommendations about how schools should respond when students stop showing up.

This raises a difficult question: **What should schools focus on first to keep students present and building?**

VIEWPOINT 1: CHARACTER AND PERSEVERANCE

Supporters believe schools should emphasize responsibility, work ethic, discipline, and striving for excellence. Dr. King encouraged students to remain in school despite their challenges — his message was not dependent on conditions improving first. They also argue that handling absences as someone else's fault teaches students that their decisions are irrelevant, which contradicts the concept of 'somebodiness.' Each hero in this story, they point out, persisted through adversity.

VIEWPOINT 2: OPPORTUNITY AND BARRIERS

Supporters believe schools should prioritize conditions like transportation, internet access, health care, advanced course availability, mentoring, and cost. Dr. King acknowledged the sociological reasons behind student dropout rates and took them seriously. Supporters note that Curlee Brown Sr. didn't just persevere against segregation; he challenged it legally. Telling a student to persist through barriers that could have been removed is not encouragement but an excuse.

VIEWPOINT 3: BELONGING AND CONNECTION

Supporters claim that other perspectives overlook the real data. Kentucky didn't cut chronic absenteeism through student lectures or poverty reduction. Instead, it launched a campaign called **"You belong"**—recognizing that a student who feels invisible won't return, regardless of buses or pep talks. They argue this aligns with King's core principle: a sense of somebodyhood precedes excellence, as emphasized in his blueprint. Oscar Cross didn't solve poverty or lecture students; he created a space where kids felt they belonged, and as a result, they showed up.

YOUR TASK

A quarter of Kentucky students are chronically absent, and the Paducah Independent and McCracken County Boards of Education must decide where to put their effort first. The King Center wants student recommendations to shape that decision. Write a formal argumentative essay to them that answers one question:

What should schools focus on first to keep students present and building — character, opportunity, or belonging?

Argue for the principle that should guide schools:

1. **Character and perseverance** — schools should emphasize responsibility, persistence, and excellence.
2. **Opportunity and barriers** — schools should remove the obstacles that make staying difficult.
3. **Belonging and connection** — schools should make every student feel they are somebody who is missed when they are gone.

Be sure to:

- State your claim clearly in the introduction.
- Support your claim with reasons and evidence from Dr. King's speech transcript.
- Use at least one statistic from the scenario and explain what it means.
- Use facts and details from local, Kentucky, and national history.
- Fairly present the opposing view and rebut it with logical reasoning and evidence.
- Cite at least three sources. You may draw on King's speech, the NAACP mission, Kentucky School Report Card data, local history, Kentucky history, national civil-rights history, or other documented sources.
- Organize your essay with an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion.
- Use a formal tone appropriate for The King Center and school boards.

Word Count: 300–750 words.

A note on this question: Dr. King held all three of these ideas at once, in a single passage, without resolving them. That is not a flaw in his speech. It is the assignment.

RESEARCH EXTENSION OPPORTUNITIES

Data

- Kentucky School Report Card — attendance, graduation, and readiness data by district: kyschoolreportcard.com
- KDE “Attendance Matters” chronic absenteeism resources
- Education Recovery Scorecard — Kentucky: educationrecoveryscorecard.org

Local History

- Curlee Brown Sr. and Paducah Junior College (1951)
- Dr. Dennis H. Anderson and West Kentucky Industrial College
- Oscar Cross and youth opportunity
- Shirley Bunch and mentoring

Kentucky History

- Lyman T. Johnson and the University of Kentucky
- Georgia Davis Powers
- Kentucky higher-education access

National History

- *Brown v. Board of Education*
- Thurgood Marshall
- Civil Rights Act of 1964
- Voting Rights Act of 1965

KSA ALIGNMENT FOR DIVISION 5

KSA Focus Area	What It Means	How to Show It
Clarity & Coherence	Write arguments supporting claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence	“Schools should prioritize ____ because...”
Support/Development	Introduce and distinguish claims from opposing claims	Use King, data, the NAACP mission, and history
Counterclaims	Acknowledge and respond to an opposing claim with logical reasoning and evidence	“Some may argue that _____. However, _____.”
Use of Data	Interpret a statistic rather than only quoting it	“A 25% absenteeism rate means one in four students...”
Citations	Integrate and attribute sources	Name at least three sources
Organization	Use transitions to clarify relationships	Use furthermore, however, consequently
Audience & Purpose	Establish and maintain a formal style	Write respectfully to The King Center and school boards
Language & Conventions	Demonstrate command of standard English	Use precise language and varied sentence structure

TEACHER’S TOOLKIT FOR DIVISION 5

Activity 1: “Twenty Seconds” — Close Reading

Objective: Show students that King holds both sides at once.

1. Isolate the three sentences: *don’t drop out / I understand all of the sociological reasons / in spite of your economic plight... stay in school.*
2. Students annotate each: which viewpoint does each sentence support?
3. Ask: “He argues against himself in twenty seconds. Why would a speaker do that on purpose?”

KAS Alignment: RI.8.1.

Activity 2: Read the Actual Data

Objective: Build statistical literacy.

1. Students pull their own district’s numbers from kyschoolreportcard.com.
2. Each student must find one figure for **their own school** and state what it means in a sentence with no percentage sign in it.
3. Discuss: “What does this number NOT tell us? Can a statistic show whether a student feels they belong?”

KAS Alignment: RH.8.7.

Activity 3: “You Belong” — Analyzing the State’s Answer

Objective: Connect King’s vocabulary to current policy.

1. Present KDE’s campaign message and Commissioner Fletcher’s explanation.
2. Ask: “The state’s answer to an attendance problem was a message about connection. Is that a serious policy or a slogan?”
3. Students find the passage in King’s speech that the campaign echoes.

KAS Alignment: RH.8.1.

Activity 4: Paducah’s Two Answers — Local Case Study

Objective: Connect Paducah history to the debate.

Half the class researches **Curlee Brown Sr.** (changed the condition — he sued). Half researches **Oscar Cross** (built belonging — he opened a club). Each side presents. Then the hard question: *Both worked. Does that mean schools have to choose?*

KAS Alignment: RH.8.1.

Activity 5: Character Is Not Excuse-Making

Objective: Explore the tension honestly.

Discussion question: *Can we believe in personal responsibility and still demand equal opportunity — or does each one weaken the other?* Students must use evidence from King and local history, not opinion alone.

KAS Alignment: SL.8.1.

Activity 6: Counterclaim Workshop

Objective: Improve rebuttal quality.

Students introduce the opposing view fairly, rebut with evidence, and explain why their claim is stronger. Peer review checks one criterion: *is the rebuttal supported by evidence, or only by assertion?*

KAS Alignment: W.8.1b.

Activity 7: Mock Board of Education Hearing

Objective: Practice civic argument.

Students testify for three minutes about what schools should prioritize. Board members ask questions about fairness, cost, feasibility, and student responsibility — and must vote at the end and justify the vote.

KAS Alignment: SL.8.1.

HOME & COMMUNITY CONNECTION: A PARTNER'S GUIDE FOR GRADE 8

Family Activity: The Hardest Sentence

Read King's three sentences together. Ask:

- Is he telling students to persevere, or telling adults to fix things?
- Can he mean both?
- Which one did our family need more?

Community Activity: Opportunity Audit

Look up available school programs: advanced courses, CTE pathways, clubs, internships, tutoring, dual credit, mentoring. Ask: *"Who has access to these opportunities, and who might be missing them?"*

Local History Activity

Research Curlee Brown Sr. Ask:

- Why did he have to sue?
- What did his case change?
- How does his story connect to Dr. King's idea of "somebodiness"?

2026–27 FREDRICKIA HARGROVE POSTER AND ESSAY CONTEST

DIVISION 6 — HIGH SCHOOL ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY PROMPT (POLICY)

Theme: “Blueprint for Tomorrow: Constructing Your Character”

Anchor Passage: The architect’s blueprint, and “Learn, baby, learn, so that we can earn, baby, earn”

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 Dr. King’s architectural metaphor — that “a building is not well erected without a good, sound, and solid blueprint” — to his three blueprint principles, to his claim that “doors of opportunity are opening to each of you that were not open to your mothers and your fathers,” and to his linking of learning directly to earning.

Students should also examine the **Emerson passage** closely. Dr. King quotes Emerson’s claim that the world beats a path to the door of whoever builds a better mousetrap and then adds a striking qualification of his own: **“This hadn’t always been true — but it will become increasingly true.”** In 1967, Dr. King predicted whether merit would be rewarded. Your generation is in a position now to evaluate it.

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

In 1967, Dr. King emphasized that a building cannot be properly constructed without a solid blueprint. Today, Kentucky is creating one under circumstances he could never have foreseen.

The technology question is here, and Kentucky is already ahead of most states. Kentucky was among the first states in the nation to issue artificial intelligence guidance to all its public school districts, and **140 districts — 80% — now report having an intentional AI plan.** KDE’s guidance is built on keeping “humans in the loop.” The department has asked lawmakers for a baseline increase to the Kentucky Education Technology System plus **\$800,000** for a statewide network of professional learning and student demonstrations. Nationally, the pace is extraordinary: FutureEd is tracking **71 bills across 27 states** on AI in classroom instruction this session alone, and AI literacy will be assessed for the first time on the **2029 PISA** exam.

The opportunity question is also here, and it is not evenly distributed. Nationally, **57% of adults in households earning under \$30,000** have home broadband — compared with **95%** in households above \$100,000. Kentucky has invested heavily to close that gap, including a **\$386 million** high-speed internet expansion reaching more than 42,600 homes and businesses across 46 counties. But affordability remains a barrier: roughly **41%** of Kentuckians without home internet cite cost as the reason.

The presence question underlies both. Kentucky’s chronic absenteeism rose from **17.8% in 2018–19 to 29.8% in 2022–23** and has since improved to **25%**. The graduation rate stands at **93.5%**. Kentucky received

\$3.2 billion in federal pandemic relief for K–12 — about **\$4,700 per student**, above the national average of \$3,700 — and that funding has now expired.

Dr. King’s speech gives Kentucky a clear three-part test for any education policy:

- Does the policy protect student **dignity** and “somebodiness”?
- Does it prepare students for **excellence**?
- Does it advance **beauty, love, justice**, and equal opportunity?

Local history proves that opportunity must be built intentionally. Dr. Dennis H. Anderson founded the West Kentucky Industrial College in Paducah to educate Black students when other doors were closed. W.C. Young connected labor rights, education, dignity, and civic power. Curlee Brown Sr. sued Paducah Junior College in 1951, forcing it to integrate. Kentucky history shows the same struggle through the lives of Lyman T. Johnson and Georgia Davis Powers. National history situates it within the broader fight for civil rights, voting rights, and educational equity.

The King Center is asking the **Kentucky General Assembly’s Interim Joint Committee on Education** to help gather student policy proposals. This is a live audience: the Committee meets through the interim and cannot act on legislation until the **2027 regular session convenes on January 5, 2027** — approximately when your essay will reach them.

This raises a policy question: **How should Kentucky help students construct a future-ready life blueprint?**

VIEWPOINT 1: DIGITAL AND CAREER READINESS MUST LEAD

Supporters argue that Kentucky should prioritize AI literacy, computer science, career and technical education, dual credit, apprenticeships, and workforce skills. This connects directly to King’s call for excellence and to his own formula: *learn, baby, learn, so that we can earn, baby, earn*. Kentucky is already a national leader here, with 80% of districts holding an AI plan; supporters argue the state should press its advantage rather than hesitate.

Critics warn that this approach can become too focused on jobs and technology while ignoring character, dignity, and equity. Supporters respond that students cannot pursue excellence in the modern world without modern tools — and that a student without AI literacy in 2035 will be locked out of the very doors King promised were opening.

VIEWPOINT 2: CHARACTER AND CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY MUST LEAD

Supporters argue that schools should not chase every new technology trend without first asking what kind of people students are becoming. This connects to King’s “somebodiness” and his commitment to beauty, love, and justice. Students need digital ethics, media literacy, civic education, service learning, and real opportunities to practice responsibility. Supporters point out that King put dignity *first* in the blueprint and excellence second — and that KDE’s own answer to a 25% absenteeism rate was a campaign about belonging, not a new device.

Critics warn that character education without workforce preparation may leave students underprepared for economic realities. Supporters respond that innovation without character produces students who are technically skilled and morally unprepared — and that a machine that can write the essay makes the question “*who are you when no one is checking?*” more urgent, not less.

VIEWPOINT 3: AN EQUITY-BASED FUTURE BLUEPRINT

Supporters argue that Kentucky should combine future-ready skills with equity protections, civic learning, and character formation. A strong policy would include AI and digital literacy; career-connected learning; mentoring and advising; civic and ethical technology education; equity audits ensuring rural, low-income, Black, and other underserved students receive access; and student leadership and service opportunities.

This approach treats technology as a tool, excellence as a goal, dignity as the foundation, and justice as the measure. Supporters note the broadband gap — 57% versus 95% — and argue that an AI plan in 80% of districts means nothing to a student who cannot get online at home.

Critics argue that this approach is too expensive and too complicated, especially now that \$3.2 billion in federal relief has expired. Supporters respond that a partial blueprint produces partial results.

YOUR TASK

The Kentucky General Assembly’s Interim Joint Committee on Education is drawing up the state’s education blueprint for a generation facing AI, automation, and an uneven digital divide — and The King Center wants student policy proposals to inform it. Write a formal argumentative policy essay to them that answers one question:

How should Kentucky help students construct a future-ready life blueprint grounded in dignity, excellence, and justice?

Propose a specific, workable Kentucky policy grounded in one approach:

1. **Digital and career readiness** — Kentucky should prioritize technology, AI literacy, and workforce preparation.
2. **Character and civic responsibility** — Kentucky should prioritize digital ethics, identity, civic education, service, and democratic participation.
3. **Equity-based future blueprint** — Kentucky should combine future-ready skills, character formation, civic responsibility, and equal access to opportunity.

Your essay should go beyond merely naming a value; it must specify a policy.

For example:

“Kentucky should create a Future Blueprint Grant Program that requires participating districts to provide AI literacy, career-connected learning, digital ethics instruction, civic education, mentoring, and an annual equity audit showing which students have access to advanced coursework, technology, broadband, and career pathways.”

Be sure to:

- Open with a hook that grabs the reader’s attention before your claim.
- State a precise claim in the introduction — name the policy you are proposing.
- Support your claim with evidence from Dr. King’s speech transcript.
- **Use at least two statistics and interpret them** — do not simply quote a number.
- Connect your proposal to educational innovation, digital identity, AI, workforce change, civic education, or voting rights.
- Connect your proposal to equity, opportunity, or the NAACP mission.
- Include one local Paducah/McCracken County historical example.
- Include one Kentucky historical or policy example.
- Include one national civil-rights, education, voting-rights, or technology-equity example.
- Acknowledge and rebut counterclaims, including concerns about cost, staffing, technology overuse, local control, implementation, or political disagreement.
- Explain how the policy would be funded or why it deserves appropriation.
- Cite your sources.
- Organize your essay with an introduction, body paragraphs, counterclaim and rebuttal, and conclusion.
- Use a formal, policy-oriented tone appropriate for state lawmakers and The King Center.

Word Count: 750–1,000 words.

RESEARCH EXTENSION OPPORTUNITIES

The King Center Resources

- The King Philosophy — Nonviolence365®
- The King Center recording of “What Is Your Life’s Blueprint?”

Data and Current Context

- Kentucky School Report Card — kyschoolreportcard.com
- KDE, AI in Kentucky K–12 — education.ky.gov/districts/tech
- KDE Artificial Intelligence Guidance Brief
- Education Recovery Scorecard — Kentucky
- Pew Research Center — broadband adoption by income
- Kentucky Digital Equity Plan and state broadband investment

- FutureEd — 2026 state AI in education legislative tracker

Local History

- Dr. Dennis H. Anderson and West Kentucky Industrial College
- W.C. Young and Paducah labor and civil-rights history
- Curlee Brown Sr. and Paducah Junior College

Kentucky History and Policy

- Lyman T. Johnson and the University of Kentucky
- Georgia Davis Powers
- Kentucky career and technical education; dual credit
- Rural broadband access; school funding
- Kentucky Legislative Research Commission — legislature.ky.gov

National History

- *Brown v. Board of Education*
- Civil Rights Act of 1964; Voting Rights Act of 1965
- Thurgood Marshall and NAACP legal strategy
- AI literacy and digital equity

KSA ALIGNMENT FOR DIVISION 6

KSA Focus Area	What It Means	How to Show It
Clarity & Coherence	Write arguments supporting claims in an analysis of substantive topics using valid reasoning and sufficient evidence	“Kentucky should adopt ____ because...”
Support/Development	Establish relationships among claims, counterclaims, reasons, and evidence	Braid King, history, policy, technology, and equity
Counterclaims	Acknowledge and respond to opposing claims with logical reasoning and evidence	Address cost, staffing, feasibility, local control, technology concerns
Data Synthesis	Integrate and interpret multiple types of evidence	Pair a statistic with a passage from the speech and a bill or budget item
Organization	Use varied syntax and transitions	Use consequently, nevertheless, moreover, conversely
Audience & Purpose	Maintain a formal style appropriate to lawmakers and The King Center	Use policy-oriented tone
Language & Conventions	Demonstrate command of standard English	Use precise policy and philosophical language

TEACHER’S TOOLKIT FOR DIVISION 6

Activity 1: Blueprint Policy Audit

Objective: Apply King’s three pillars to school policy.

Students evaluate their own school against King’s test: Does the school affirm dignity? Does it prepare students for excellence? Does it advance beauty, love, justice, and opportunity? Each answer requires evidence, not impression.

KAS Alignment: RI.11-12.1.

Activity 2: “Was King Right?” — Testing the Emerson Prediction

Objective: Evaluate a primary-source claim against evidence.

1. Isolate King’s line: the mousetrap principle “hadn’t always been true — but it will become increasingly true.”
2. Ask: “Dr. King made a prediction in 1967 about whether merit would be rewarded. Nearly sixty years have passed. Was he right?”
3. Students must argue with evidence — mobility data, the broadband gap, graduation rates, hiring practices, or AI’s effect on entry-level work.
4. Push: “If he was partly right, what made the difference — individual excellence, or the laws that changed between then and now?”

KAS Alignment: RH.11-12.8.

Activity 3: Read the Actual Data

Objective: Build statistical literacy.

Students pull raw figures themselves from the Kentucky School Report Card and KDE’s AI in Kentucky K–12 page. Each student must find one Kentucky-specific number not printed in this manual and cite it properly. Discuss: “*What does this number not tell us? What would King’s first principle say is missing from it?*”

KAS Alignment: RH.11-12.7.

Activity 4: AI and Human Dignity Seminar

Objective: Connect modern technology to King’s blueprint.

Discussion questions:

- If AI can produce competent work in seconds, what does King’s “excellence” mean now?
- King said to sweep streets like Michelangelo painted. What is the AI-era version of that sentence?
- What should a student never outsource to a machine?
- Kentucky’s AI guidance insists on keeping “humans in the loop.” Is that a technical rule or a moral one?

KAS Alignment: SL.11-12.1.

Activity 5: Equity Access Map

Objective: Identify unequal access to opportunity.

Students map access to advanced courses, digital tools, broadband, dual credit, mentoring, transportation, career pathways, and extracurricular leadership — then overlay it with the 57%/95% broadband figure and ask what an “AI plan” means in a home without internet.

KAS Alignment: RH.11-12.7.

Activity 6: Policy Brief Research Project

Objective: Help students create specific policy proposals.

Groups research one policy area — AI literacy, CTE and apprenticeships, broadband access, civic education, dual credit, mentoring, or equity audits — and write a brief policy memo with a recommendation.

KAS Alignment: RH.11-12.7.

Activity 7: Fiscal Note Reality Check

Objective: Make policy proposals realistic.

Every student must estimate the cost of the proposal and identify a plausible funding source: state appropriation, pilot program, reallocation, matching grant, or phased implementation. Remind students that the \$3.2 billion in federal relief has expired — “use the federal money” is no longer an answer. A proposal without a funding explanation is returned for revision.

KAS Alignment: W.11-12.1b.

Activity 8: Mock Legislative Hearing

Objective: Practice policy argument.

Assign students as committee members and witnesses. Witnesses deliver three-minute testimony. Committee members must ask at least one hostile question about cost, feasibility, evidence, equity, or local control. Debrief: “Which testimony survived cross-examination?”

KAS Alignment: SL.11-12.1.

Activity 9: Advanced Counterclaim Workshop

Objective: Strengthen rebuttal.

Students use four moves: introduce the opposing view with nuance; **concede what is legitimate in it**; rebut with evidence; explain why the claim still stands. The concession is the graded element — a student who cannot concede anything has not understood the opposing view.

KAS Alignment: W.11-12.1b.

Family Activity: Future Work Conversation

Ask:

- What work did you think you would do at my age? What changed?
- What part of your job could a machine do today?
- What part could it never do?

Family Activity: The 1967 Prediction

Read King's Emerson passage together. Ask:

- He said the world would increasingly reward whoever does the best work. Has it?
- What made the difference — effort, or the laws that changed?

Community Activity: Watch Frankfort Work

Watch an Interim Joint Committee on Education meeting online at legislature.ky.gov. Ask:

- What questions do legislators actually ask?
- What kind of evidence moves them?
- What would persuade them to fund something new?

Local History Activity

Research Dr. Dennis H. Anderson. Ask:

- What did he build, and what did it cost him?
- Who would have built it if he had not?

APPENDIX A — LOCAL HISTORY MATRIX

Quick reference for teachers. Every figure appears in at least one 2026–27 prompt, and no figure carries more than two divisions.

Figure or Place	Connection to the Blueprint	Division
Oscar Cross	Paducah’s first African American juvenile officer; founded the Boys Club of Paducah (1949) — the builder	1, 2, 3, 5
Shirley Bunch	First Black female deputy, McCracken County Police Department; lifelong youth mentor	2, 5
W.C. Young	Paducah labor and civil rights leader; namesake of the W.C. Young Community Center — the organizer	3, 6
Dr. Dennis H. Anderson	Founded the West Kentucky Industrial College for Black students in Paducah — the teacher	3, 5, 6
Dr. William Stuart Nelson	Raised in Paducah; Lincoln High School; studied nonviolence with Gandhi in India (1946); marched with King at Selma (1965)	4
Rev. W.G. Harvey	First Black person elected to public office in western Kentucky; confronted a Klan meeting; Kentucky Civil Rights Hall of Fame	4
Curlee Brown Sr.	Sued after being denied admission to Paducah Junior College (1951); court forced integration	5, 6
Hotel Metropolitan	<i>Green Book</i> haven for Black travelers turned away elsewhere	3, 4 (extension)
Lyman T. Johnson	Sued to integrate the University of Kentucky	5, 6
Georgia Davis Powers	First Black member of the Kentucky Senate	5, 6

Primary research resources

- Notable Kentucky African Americans Database — nkaa.uky.edu
- McCracken County Public Library, local and digital collections
- Kentucky Civil Rights Hall of Fame
- The King Center — thekingcenter.org

APPENDIX B — TWO WAYS TO ASSIGN EVERY PROMPT

Each divisional unit is built to work in either mode without modification.

As an on-demand assignment (one to two class periods). Distribute the transcript and the Scenario. Students read, plan, and draft in a single sitting, using only the supplied text as evidence. For Divisions 3 through 6, direct students to the division’s anchor passage rather than the full speech if time is short.

As a research unit (two to four weeks). Use the transcript as an anchor text study, run the Toolkit activities, and open the Research Extension list. Students gather outside evidence, investigate the local figures, and pull their own data from the Kentucky School Report Card. The Mock Hearing activities work as a culminating assessment.

The prompts are deliberately over-supplied with historical, statistical, and civic detail so that a teacher may use them as a lesson in *how to research*. Every name, date, statistic, and institution in a Scenario is a verifiable thread a student can pull.

APPENDIX C — OFFICIAL SCORESHEETS

Every essay in Divisions 2 through 6 is scored with the official Fredrickia Hargrove **Essay Scoresheet**. Each of the eighteen components is scored on a 1–10 scale across four performance bands. Judges score every component, sum the scores for a total, and rank entries within each division by total points.

The four performance bands

Band	Score
Beginning	1
Developing	2 – 3 – 4
Accomplished	5 – 6 – 7
Exemplary	8 – 9 – 10

SECTION 1 — SPECIFIC COMPONENTS OF THE ESSAY

#	Component	Analysis Question	Beginning (1)	Developing (2–4)	Accomplished (5–7)	Exemplary (8–10)
1	Introduction / Hook	Did the opening grab your attention?	Does not capture attention	Somewhat captures attention	Moderately captures attention	Strongly captures attention
2	Opinion / Argument	Is the main point clear in the introduction?	Unclear and irrelevant	Somewhat clear and relevant	Moderately clear and relevant	Very clear and highly relevant
3	Thesis Relevance	Does the thesis directly answer the prompt?	Unrelated to the essay’s purpose	Somewhat aligns	Moderately aligns	Strongly aligns
4	Thesis Points	Are the supporting reasons clear and logical?	Unclear and unsupported	Somewhat clear and supported	Moderately clear and well-supported	Very clear and highly supported
5	Idea Transition	Does the essay flow from one idea to the next?	Transitions poorly; disrupts understanding	Some disruption	Minimal disruption	Very smooth; no disruption
6	Idea Development	Are ideas explained with details and examples from the prompt?	Underdeveloped; lacks depth	Some depth	Moderate depth	Well-developed; significant depth
7	Opposing Views	Does the writer present and consider opposing viewpoints?	Ignored or dismissed	Somewhat acknowledged	Moderately acknowledged	Fully and effectively acknowledged
8	Rebuttal(s)	Does the writer address why their viewpoint is stronger?	Absent or weak	Somewhat effective	Moderately effective	Very effective

SECTION 2 — HOLISTIC OVERVIEW OF THE ESSAY

#	Component	Analysis Question	Beginning (1)	Developing (2–4)	Accomplished (5–7)	Exemplary (8–10)
9	Conclusion / Call to Action	Does the ending summarize the argument and give a final thought?	Unclear or ineffective	Somewhat effective	Moderately effective	Very clear and highly effective
10	Purpose	Is the writer's overall goal clear?	Unclear; leaves reader confused	Somewhat conveyed	Moderately clear	Very clear and effectively conveyed
11	Audience	Is the essay written appropriately for the targeted audience?	Neglects the audience	Somewhat considers the audience	Moderately considers the audience	Effectively communicates with the audience
12	Voice / Tone	Is the essay engaging and does it convey the right attitude?	Unengaging	Somewhat engaging	Moderately engaging	Strongly engaging
13	Persuasive Strategies	Does the writer use techniques to convince the reader?	Ineffective	Somewhat effective	Moderately effective	Highly effective
14	Historical / Cultural Context	Does the essay connect ideas to real-world examples?	Absent or irrelevant	Somewhat integrated	Moderately integrated	Effectively integrated; strongly supports the argument
15	Grammar, Spelling, Capitalization	How was the essay's grammar, spelling, and capitalization?	Riddled with errors	Some errors	Mostly free of errors	Impeccable
16	Sentence Variety	Are sentences varied in length and structure?	Monotonous	Limited variety	Moderate variety	Rich and varied
17	Vocabulary	Does the writer use interesting and precise words?	Limited and inappropriate	Somewhat rich	Moderately rich	Highly rich and appropriate
18	Citations	Does the student use information from the prompt to support the argument?	Little or no evidence; incorrect format	Inconsistent; some format errors	Accurate; correctly formatted	Skillful; consistent; no format errors

DIVISION 1 — OFFICIAL POSTER SCORESHEET (GRADES K–3)

Division 1 posters are scored on the official **K–3 Poster Scoresheet**, not the essay sheet. Each of the eight components is scored 1–10 across the same four bands; judges sum the components for a total and rank within the set.

Component	Analysis Question	Beginning (1)	Developing (2–4)	Accomplished (5–7)	Exemplary (8–10)
Use of Color	Does the poster use color to convey emotion, create interest, and enhance the composition?	Color used in a limited, basic way	Color used, but lacks variety and thought	Color used effectively to enhance the work	Color used in an excellent, thoughtful way to convey the idea
Composition	How well are the elements arranged?	Elements placed randomly, without clear thought	Some organization, but lacks cohesion	Well-organized; elements placed thoughtfully	Excellent; a clear focal point and thoughtful arrangement
Creativity	How original and creative is the poster?	Little creativity; common, predictable ideas	Some creativity, but lacks originality	Creative, with original ideas and thoughtful execution	Highly creative and original; a unique perspective
Application of the Theme	How well does the poster adhere to the contest theme?	Theme unclear and not well represented	Theme somewhat represented but lacks clarity	Poster clearly connects to the theme	Poster excellently interprets the theme
Clarity of Message	How clear is the message the poster conveys?	Message unclear and hard to understand	Somewhat clear but lacks impact	Clear and understandable	Very clear and powerful; leaves a strong impact
Use of Space	How effectively is the available space used?	Space not used well; areas empty or cluttered	Space used, but lacks balance and thought	Space used effectively; elements balanced	Space used excellently; a balanced, engaging layout
Visual Appeal	Does the arrangement show thoughtful, intentional design?	Not visually appealing; lacks interest	Somewhat appealing but lacks impact	Visually appealing, with interesting elements	Very appealing; draws the viewer in
Overall Impact	What is the poster’s overall impact on the viewer?	Little impact; no lasting impression	Some impact, but not strong	Strong impact; a lasting impression	Strong impact; a lasting and powerful impression

A note for poster judges. The four essay-judging principles apply to posters too: judge the work, not the child; reward what is present; apply the scoresheet consistently. For the youngest entrants especially, **Application of the Theme** and **Clarity of Message** are where a poster shows it understood “I am somebody” — a technically simple poster that clearly says *every child matters* should outscore a polished poster that misses the theme.

APPENDIX D — PROMPT-TO-SCORESHEET CROSSWALK

This crosswalk shows exactly how each essay requirement in the “Be sure to” checklists earn points on the official scoresheet. Teachers can use it to make scoring transparent to students: *every instruction in the prompt exists because a judge is scoring it.*

Scoresheet Component	Earned by this prompt instruction
1. Introduction / Hook	“Open with a hook that grabs your reader’s attention.”
2. Opinion / Argument	“State your claim (or opinion) clearly in the introduction.”
3. Thesis Relevance	Answering the division’s Essential Question directly.
4. Thesis Points	“Support your claim with clear reasons.”
5. Idea Transition	“Use linking words/transitions”; “organize with introduction, body, conclusion.”
6. Idea Development	“Support with reasons and evidence”; “use facts and details from the scenario.”
7. Opposing Views	“Acknowledge a counterclaim” (<i>Divisions 3–6 only — see note below</i>).
8. Rebuttal(s)	“Respond to / rebut the counterclaim” (<i>Divisions 3–6 only</i>).
9. Conclusion / Call to Action	“Organize with ... a conclusion”; upper divisions, a recommendation or call to action.
10. Purpose	Writing clearly toward the Essential Question and the named audience.
11. Audience	“Write respectfully to [the SBDM Council / Fiscal Court / Commission / Boards / Committee] and The King Center.”
12. Voice / Tone	“Use a formal tone appropriate for [the audience].”
13. Persuasive Strategies	Using the three viewpoints, evidence, and history to build a convincing case.
14. Historical / Cultural Context	“Include a local Paducah example” and “a Kentucky or national example.”
15. Grammar, Spelling, Capitalization	Proofreading; “write clearly.”
16. Sentence Variety	Varying sentence length and structure (coached in the toolkit).
17. Vocabulary	Using the division’s Key Terms accurately and precisely.
18. Citations	“Quote or paraphrase Dr. King’s exact words from the transcript, and name him;” upper divisions, “cite your sources.”

What changed in this revision to close the gaps: the “Be sure to” checklists previously did not cue components **1 (Hook)** or **18 (Citations)** in the lower divisions, even though both are scored. Every essay division now includes a hook instruction, and Divisions 2, 3, and 4 now explicitly instruct students to quote or paraphrase the transcript — so no student is scored on something the prompt never asked for.

APPENDIX E — JUDGING NOTES AND CALIBRATION

1. In Divisions 2, 3, and 5, “all of them matter equally” is not a thesis.

These prompts ask what should come **first**. A student who concludes that all of King’s principles (or all three slogans) matter equally has summarized the speech rather than argued with it. On the scoresheet, this shows up in **Components 2, 3, and 4**: the Opinion/Argument is not truly clear, the Thesis Relevance only partly answers the prompt, and the Thesis Points cannot be logical because no single position is being defended. Such an essay should not score in the Accomplished range on those three components, however polished the writing. Reward the student who picks one, concedes the others matter, and explains why their choice makes the others possible.

2. Division 2 is an opinion essay — do not penalize the missing counterclaim.

The Division 2 (Grades 4–5) prompt is an **opinion** essay and does not ask students to include opposing views or rebuttals. When scoring Division 2, **Components 7 (Opposing Views) and 8 (Rebuttals) should be marked N/A** and excluded from the total, or the total should be computed out of the remaining sixteen components. A fourth grader must not lose points for omitting a counterclaim the prompt told them not to include.

3. Citations now apply from Grade 4 up.

Because the essay scoresheet includes **Component 18 (Citations)** for all essay divisions, every essay division — including Grades 4–5 — now instructs students to quote or paraphrase the transcript. Judges should score younger writers on this component generously: for Grades 4–5, a single accurate, attributed reference to Dr. King’s words (“Dr. King said...”) earns the Accomplished band. Skillful, repeated, correctly integrated citation earns Exemplary.

4. Reward students who read the whole speech.

Every division is anchored in a specific passage, but the strongest essays reach across the speech. This shows up in **Component 6 (Idea Development)** and **Component 18 (Citations)**: a Division 2 student who connects the street sweeper to the poem King reads, or a Division 5 student who connects “stay in school” to “Mother to Son,” has understood that these are the same argument in two forms.

5. Reward local specificity.

Component 14 (Historical/Cultural Context) rewards real, specific local evidence over general references. Dr. King, speaking in Philadelphia, reached for a Philadelphian — Marian Anderson — and told the students they should know her “because it’s in your own city.” A student who names a real Paducah or McCracken County figure and uses them as evidence is copying a move Dr. King made in this very speech. Score it accordingly.

6. The standing principles.

Judge the work, not the student. Reward what is present. Apply the scoresheet consistently across every entry in a division.