

Essay Theme Ideas for Freedom Festival Contests

The founders of our nation believed that we must have the right to think, believe, argue, and worship freely, and, in turn, to express our beliefs to our fellow citizens and to our government as freely as possible. That idea—the freedom of conscience—is the core of the First Amendment.

Some possible questions or issues to be considered in essays:

1. What if there were no First Amendment? How would your life be affected?
2. Do you think the freedoms identified in the First Amendment would already be protected in a democracy where citizens have a role in shaping the government? Was it necessary to establish these rights in an official document?
3. Explain and give examples of how the First Amendment does not permit people to do anything they want to do. How and why are the liberties and rights of people not unlimited? In what kinds of situations do you think it is fair and reasonable to limit freedom of expressions?
4. Are the First Amendment freedoms among the “self-evident” and “unalienable rights” referred to in the Declaration of Independence? What is the relationship of the Declaration of Independence to the Bill of Rights?
5. Explain Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis statement that the founding generation “believed that freedom to think as you will and to speak as you think are means indispensable to the discovery and spread of political truth; that without free speech and assembly discussion would be futile; that with them, discussion affords ordinarily adequate protection against the dissemination of noxious doctrine; that the greatest menace to freedom is an inert people; that public discussion is a political duty; and that this should be a fundamental principle of the American government.”