

MLK Student Essay, Poetry, and Visual Art Competition

The Martin Luther King Jr. Human Rights Commission invites students in grades 8–12 to explore the Six Principles of Nonviolence through writing and visual art. Use your creativity to reflect on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision and share your ideas about how nonviolence can shape our lives, our communities, and our future.

Theme: The Six Principles of Non-Violence in Action

Students may select from the Six Principles of Nonviolence

(The King Center's Definition of Nonviolence) [fi010-01.pdf](#)

- 1) **Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people :** It is not a method for cowards; it does resist. It is active nonviolent resistance to evil. It is aggressive spiritually, mentally, and emotionally.
- 2) **Nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding:** The outcome of nonviolence is the creation of the Beloved Community. The end result of nonviolence is redemption and reconciliation.
- 3) **Nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice, not people:** Nonviolence recognizes that evildoers are also victims and are not evil people. The nonviolent resister seeks to defeat evil not persons victimized by evil.
- 4) **Nonviolence holds that suffering can educate and transform people and societies:** Nonviolence is a willingness to accept suffering without retaliation; to accept blows without striking back. Nonviolence is a willingness to accept violence if necessary but never inflict it. Nonviolence holds that unearned suffering for a cause is redemptive and has tremendous educational and transforming possibilities.
- 5) **Nonviolence chooses love instead of hate:** Nonviolence resists violence of the spirit as well as the body. Nonviolent love is spontaneous, unselfish, and creative.
- 6) **Nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice:** The nonviolent resister has deep faith that justice will eventually win. Nonviolence believes that God is a God of justice.

MLK Student Essay, Poetry, and Visual Art Competition

Competition Categories and Criteria:

Students are eligible to participate in one or all three categories and may incorporate one or more of the six principles of nonviolence.

Essay: Explore one or more of the Six Principles of Nonviolence and connect them to your life, history, or the world today. How can nonviolent action help build the “Beloved Community”?

Submissions are limited to 300 words. Double-spaced, 12pt standard font. Word or pdf.

Poetry: Put your ideas into verse. Reflect on what it means to choose nonviolence in the face of conflict, injustice, or division.

Submissions must be 25 lines or less. Double spaced. Word document or pdf.

Visual Art: Bring one or more of the Six Principles of Nonviolence to life through original artwork. Create a piece of artwork that shows nonviolence in action.

Art submissions must be titled and must connect with one of more of the Six Principles of Nonviolence.

Eligibility

- 1) Open to all 8th-12th grade students in the state of Utah.
- 2) All submissions should explore one or more of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s Six Principles of Nonviolence.
- 3) Essays & Poems may be submitted in English or in Spanish.
- 4) Submissions must be created by the student.
- 5) AI-generated content and copyrighted imagery are not permitted.

Recognition and prizes

Winning students will have opportunities to be recognized during Utah’s MLK celebrations around the state of Utah in January 2027.

Honorarium will be awarded to top winners in each category:

- **1st Place:** \$300
- **2nd Place:** \$200
- **3rd Place:** \$100

MLK Student Essay, Poetry, and Visual Art Competition

Competition Timeline

- **Competition Launch:** October 12th 2026
 - **Submission Deadline:** November 29th, 2026 by 11:59 PM MTN
 - **Submission Review:** December 1st - December 14th
 - Winners will be contacted by December 16th
 - Student Recognition during MLK Day events in January
-

Utilizing the Dr. Martin Luther King Human Rights Commission Toolkit

<https://multicultural.utah.gov/celebrating-mlk-day/>