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## **Hawkinsville Unity Juneteenth Essay and Art Contest Overview**

Juneteenth is a national holiday commemorating the day the last group of enslaved people in the United States learned of their freedom. Within the African American community, it is often celebrated in ways similar to July 4th—our nation’s Independence Day—honoring liberation, resilience, and cultural heritage. While deeply significant to African Americans, Juneteenth also marks a pivotal moment in our nation’s history, representing a step toward realizing one of our most fundamental ideals: that freedom is the unalienable right of all people, regardless of background.

Freedom is the foundation upon which our nation was built. As we reflect on this historic moment, it is important to consider how the pursuit of freedom has evolved over time and how it continues today.

This contest invites students in grades 3 through 12 to explore the meaning of freedom, past, present, and future, through original writing and artwork. We believe every young voice carries insight and power, and this contest provides a platform to express both.

Pulaski County youth are encouraged to use their creativity to examine freedom in all its dimensions, including its significance in American history and its role in shaping our world today.

**Theme:** “Freedom: Yesterday and Today”

**Submission Deadline:** May 24, 2026 at 11:59 pm

**Winners Notified:** June 10, 2026

**Awards Celebration:** Juneteenth Celebration on June 19, 2026 (details will be shared with prize notification)

*Note: All students should fill out the registration form. Art submission, with cover sheet and summary, will be dropped off at **the front office at Pulaski County Schools**. Only essay division students will submit an attachment to the registration form.*

## **Awards & Recognition**

Winners in each division will receive a mix of prizes and public recognition. Awards will be presented at the community Juneteenth Celebration. All participants will receive a certificate of participation.

### **High School Divisions (9-12)**

- 1st Place — \$75, certificate, and public recognition
- 2nd Place — \$50 and certificate
- 3rd Place — \$25 and certificate

### **Middle School Division (6-8)**

- 1st Place — \$50 and certificate
- 2nd Place — \$25 and certificate
- 3rd Place — \$15 and certificate

### **Art Division (3-5)**

- 1st Place — \$25 and certificate
- 2nd Place — \$15 and certificate
- 3rd Place — \$10 and certificate

## **Contest Criteria by Division**

### **Division 1: Art Contest — Grades 3–5**

The Art Division invites elementary students to express what freedom means to them through original visual artwork. We want to see your imagination! Think about what freedom looks like, feels like, or sounds like, in your own life, in your community, or in the world.

#### **Eligible Media**

- Drawing (colored pencil, marker, crayon, pen/ink)
- Painting (watercolor, acrylic, tempera)
- Collage or mixed media

#### **Submission Requirements**

- Artwork must be original and created by the student
- Size: 8.5" x 11" to 18" x 24"
- Student's name, grade, school, and parent/guardian contact must be on a separate sheet
- Include the title of your work and a 2–3 sentence written description of what your artwork means to you (on a separate sheet attached)
- Artwork must not have been previously submitted to another contest

#### **What Judges Are Looking For**

- Connection to the theme of freedom and/or Juneteenth
- Creativity and originality
- Effort and craftsmanship for grade level
- Clarity of visual message

## **Division 2: Middle School Essay — Grades 6–8**

Middle schoolers are invited to write a personal essay exploring what freedom means to them and how it connects to the history and legacy of Juneteenth. You might write about a moment when you felt free, a time when freedom felt far away, or what Juneteenth's story means to your community.

### **Essay Requirements**

- Length: 350–500 words
- Format: Double-spaced, 12-point font, standard margins
- Must include an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion
- Must be original, unpublished work by the student
- Student name, grade, and school on a separate cover sheet (not on the essay itself, for blind review)

### **Encouraged Approaches**

- Personal narrative: share a story from your own life that connects to freedom
- Community reflection: how does Juneteenth's story show up in your neighborhood, family, or school?
- Creative nonfiction: blend storytelling with historical connection

*Formal citations are not required at this level, but students are encouraged to reference things they have learned.*

### **What Judges Are Looking For**

- Clear connection to the theme of freedom and/or Juneteenth
- Thoughtful, personal voice
- Organization and structure
- Writing mechanics (grammar, punctuation, spelling) appropriate for grade level

### **Division 3: High School Essay — Grades 9–12**

Students in grades 9–12 are challenged to dive deeper, exploring freedom through personal narrative, historical lens, or community storytelling. How does Juneteenth's legacy connect to the freedoms we experience (or struggle for) today?

#### **Essay Requirements**

- Length: 500–750 words
- Format: Double-spaced, 12-point font, standard margins
- Must include a clear thesis, developed body paragraphs, and a strong conclusion
- Must be original, unpublished work by the student
- Student name, grade, and school on a separate cover sheet (not on the essay itself, for blind review)

#### **Encouraged Approaches**

- Historical narrative: tell the story of a moment or person in the history of freedom movements
- Comparative reflection: connect a historical freedom struggle to something happening in the world today
- Community voice: interview or draw on experiences of family/community members, reflecting on their understanding of freedom
- Analytical narrative: blend personal experience with larger historical or social context

*While references are not required, students should attribute any historical facts, quotations, or information they include. Peer-reviewed or reputable sources are encouraged.*

#### **What Judges Are Looking For**

- Compelling thesis and argument or central idea
- Historical and/or community grounding
- Engagement, creativity, and original thought
- Writing mechanics appropriate for grade level
- Writing craft: organization, voice, clarity, and mechanics