

2023 RELIGIOUS LIBERTY ESSAY SCHOLARSHIP CONTEST



Essay Topic

Religions and cultures have places that are “sacred” to their traditions. For Indigenous peoples, specific land – which cannot be moved or replaced – is often sacred. In religious liberty law, there are some explicit legal protections specifically for buildings used for religious purposes (e.g. Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act and the Church Arson Prevention Act), but often our laws struggle to protect natural sanctuaries.

Using a controversy over Indigenous sacred land – such as the fight over the land known as “Oak Flat” – write an essay in the form of a letter addressed to your member of the House of Representatives about the importance of protecting sacred land.

Your essay should include a discussion of why you support preserving sacred land, what makes land “sacred,” how we should consider competing interests, and applicable federal law such as the First Amendment, Religious Freedom Restoration Act, or the American Indian Religious Freedom Act.

Eligibility: The contest is open to all high school students in the graduating classes of 2023 and 2024. There are no requirements regarding GPA, religious affiliation, after-school activities or clubs.

Prizes: Grand Prize: \$2,000 & a trip for two* to Washington, D.C.; Second Prize: \$1,000; Third Prize: \$500

Submission & Due Date: To enter, students must submit their essay and the registration form online. Students with a Google account will fill out [this Google Form](#) and upload an essay (800-1200 words) within the form. Students without Google accounts must email a PDF copy of [this registration form](#) and their essay to essaycontest@BJCOnline.org. Completed submissions must be sent by March 17, 2023.

Judging Criteria: Entries will be judged on the depth of their content, the mastery of the topic and the skill with which they are written. The student should develop a point of view on the issue and demonstrate critical thinking, using appropriate examples, arguments and other evidence to support a position. Essays should be free of grammatical errors and should be clear, concise and well-organized. Judges reserve the right to reduce the number of winners.

Requirements:

1. Submitted essays should be in 12-point type, double-spaced. To ensure fairness, your name (or any other identifying info) should not appear on any page.
2. Essays must have a title at the top of the first page of the essay (do not use a title page).
3. Essays must be between 800-1,200 words, not counting the title and bibliography.
4. Sources must be used, cited and credited in a bibliography, consistent with an accepted citation style. Wikipedia may not be used as a source.

Essays failing to meet the requirements will not be judged. All essays become property of BJC. Winners will be announced by the end of summer 2023. The first-place winner will be recognized at the BJC Board meeting in October 2023. Entrants will receive an email after the winners are selected.

Visit BJCOnline.org/contest for more information or contact essaycontest@BJCOnline.org.

*Trip includes actual airfare costs to D.C. up to a predetermined amount and one night of lodging for the contest winner and one accompanying parent/guardian to present the winning essay at the BJC Board meeting if the meeting occurs in person.