

In this pilot year of the National Civics Bee, middle school students will write a 500-word essay in response to the following prompt:

Identify a problem facing your community. How might a citizen solve the problem?

Specifically, students are asked to respond to the questions below. Educators can help to prepare their students by exploring these questions through the sample lesson plans provided.

Question	Sample Lesson Plan
What is the problem, and how do different members in your community or neighborhood view it?	MyImpact Challenge: Identifying Your Problem (Bill of Rights Institute) https://billofrightsinstitute.org/lessons/mic-identifying-your-problem
What civic principles or systems could help to address the problem?	Citizen Me (iCivics) https://www.icivics.org/teachers/lesson-plans/citizen-me
What is your idea or recommendation for solving the problem?	We the People: Project Citizen (Center for Civic Education) https://www.civiced.org/lessons/we-the-people-project-citizen
What primary sources provide supporting evidence or examples for your idea or recommendation?	We the Civics Kids (National Constitution Center) https://constitutioncenter.org/learn/educational-resources/we-the-civics-kids
How might members of your community or neighborhood bring your idea or recommendation to life?	Civic Engagement and How Students Can Get Involved (PBS NewsHour EXTRA) https://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/lessons-plans/lesson-plan-civic-engagement-and-ways-for-students-to-get-involved/

Essays will be evaluated by a panel of judges based on how well the students:

- Demonstrate an understanding of civics
- Acknowledge and address opposing points of view
- Use primary sources
- Clearly describe an idea that is innovative or new to them

Educators can support their students during the essay writing process by guiding them through the following suggestions:

Essay Writing Guidance

(Borrowed from the Bill of Rights Institute with permission)

Ideal responses...

- Address the question asked in a thoughtful and meaningful manner
- Use cited facts and arguments when appropriate to support their answers
- Are expressed in cohesive sentences and are free of distracting spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors
- Address diverse viewpoints in a respectful manner
- Organize their answer in a manner that flows logically and reads clearly

While you are writing:

- Stay focused and minimize distractions.
- Write however you feel most comfortable—using a pen and paper or a computer.
- Let your topic guide your structure. Consider including an introductory paragraph, three supporting paragraphs, and a conclusion.
- Stay on track: if you find yourself getting off the topic, go back and revise.
- Remember all writing is re-writing.

After you write, ask yourself:**1. Have I answered all aspects of the question?**

- Is it clear what I am discussing?
- Have I stated an opinion when asked for one?
- Have I provided examples where asked?
- Have I said what I wanted to say?

2. Is my essay well-written?

- Have I used paragraphs?
- Do all my paragraphs have a topic sentence?
- Do I fully develop one idea per paragraph?

3. Is my writing correct?

- Have I checked for spelling errors myself, without relying on spell-check?
- Have I checked for grammar errors without relying on a grammar checker?
- Have I checked my facts: dates, document titles, names, etc.?

Other ideas:

- Try reading your essay aloud to a family member. Does it sound like it flows easily? Can your audience member summarize your essay back to you in one or two sentences? (If they can't, try going back and clarifying your ideas.)
- Try putting your essay down for a day or two and coming back to it and re-reading it. Do you notice anything you'd like to change or add?