

Ben Ferencz

Writing/Creative Expression Competition



INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Ben Ferencz Writing/Creative Expression Competition

OUR GOAL:

- The Holocaust & Human Rights Education Center strives to enhance the teaching and learning of the lessons of the Holocaust, other human rights violations, and the right of all people to be treated with dignity and respect. Our goal is to encourage students to speak up against all forms of bigotry and prejudice. This competition will assist teachers as they strive to inspire their students to become upstanders who make their voices heard. We encourage you to use this competition, either as an individual or in cooperation with teachers in other disciplines, as a class or grade-wide activity.

BACKGROUND:

- Benjamin Ferencz (1920 – 2023) was a former prosecutor at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trial. Born in Transylvania, he and his family emigrated to Hell's Kitchen, New York City, when he was ten months old. After graduating from Harvard Law School in 1943, he enlisted in the army, fought in France under General Patton, and was transferred to the War Crimes Branch of the army. After the war, he served as a Chief Prosecutor during the Nuremberg Trials. He sought to establish legal precedents for a more humane and peaceful world. In later years, Ferencz became a human rights activist, helped to create the Claims Conference, and worked to establish the International Criminal Court. A former Pace University Professor and longtime Westchester County resident, Ben Ferencz serves as a role model to us all.

HOW WILL THIS COMPETITION ENHANCE MY CURRICULUM?:

- Students will be able to explore, analyze and use varied means to communicate their understanding of human rights violations and/or the responses to evil that demonstrate moral courage.
- The variety of methods by which students can present their entries – whether through a formal research paper, documentary, podcast, painting, museum exhibit, poster or any other creative method -- encourages differentiation and allows all students to participate.
- The competition correlates to the New York standards for different grade levels.
- Students will have the opportunity to share their work with peers. The winners and their entries will receive a financial award and be featured on our website.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR TEACHERS:

- Please note that there are separate categories and due dates for middle and high school students; the competition is open to students from grades 6 – 11. Middle and High School Entries will be judged separately, with prizes for each division.
- Distribute the necessary information and forms to your students (ATTACHED). All pertinent information/forms are also available on our website (www.hhrecny.org).
- Ensure that students list their identifying information solely on the Title Page/Entry Form and upload their completed work by the deadline.

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Competition Overview:

- For this Competition, you will explore human rights, courage, justice, and perseverance through the words of Ben Ferencz. You will choose ONE quotation and ONE guiding question connected to it. You may present your work as either a written essay OR a visual/performing art piece.
- Your goal is to show deep understanding, careful research, and thoughtful reflection on how individuals or movements can create change—even when the task is difficult.
- All work must be **ORIGINAL**.
- You may work individually or in groups of up to four.
- Middle and High School entries will be judged separately.
- Deadlines:
 - Middle School (Grades 6, 7, 8):
 - **Friday, May 8, 2026**
 - High School (Grades 9, 10, 11):
 - **Friday, June 5, 2026**

STEP 1: Choose a Quotation and Question

- Select ONE of the quotations below. Then choose ONE question listed under that quotation to guide your project.

Quotation 1

“People get discouraged. They should remember, from me, it takes courage not to be discouraged.” —

Ben Ferencz

Question options for Quotation 1 (CHOOSE ONE):

Find a hero who stood up for justice, either during the Holocaust or in another human rights struggle.

How did this person demonstrate courage and commitment to human rights

Quotation 2

“Nuremberg taught me that creating a world of tolerance and compassion would be a long and arduous task.”

Ben Ferencz

Question options for Quotation 2 (CHOOSE ONE):

Select a movement that identified a problem in the world.

What problem did it address?

What obstacles did it face?

What methods were used to create change?

How successful was the movement over time?

Select a current issue you care about.

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Quotation 3

“I don’t think I’m an idealist. I’m a realist. And I see the progress...The world is changing and you shouldn’t – you know – be despairing because it’s never happened before. Nothing new ever happened before.” — Ben Ferencz

Question option for Quotation 3:

Identify and research a human rights violation from the past or present.

How aware was the world of this issue?

How did governments, organizations, or the public respond?

How can misinformation or disinformation be corrected?

STEP 2: Choose Your Format

- You must complete either an essay **OR** creative expression (Visual or Performing Arts).

OPTION A: Writing

- Write a clear, well-organized *Essay* that responds directly to your chosen quotation and question (including primary/secondary sources). You must also include a short *Process Paper* and an *Annotated Bibliography* along with your essay. **DO NOT** include any identifying information on your essay (you will create a separate Title Page for your submission).
 - **Essay Requirements:**
 - Word count:
 - Middle School: 400-600 words
 - High School: 600-800 words
 - Use appropriate citations
 - Follow grammar and language conventions
 - Your Essay should be original and connect to the Ben Ferencz quotation you chose
 - **Process Paper (REQUIRED):**
 - Write a short process paper explaining:
 - How did you choose your topic?
 - How did you research your topic?
 - Why does your topic help expand our understanding of human rights?
 - **Annotated Bibliography (REQUIRED):**
 - Include all sources used
 - Separate primary and secondary sources
 - Middle School:
 - Minimum one (1) primary source and one (1) secondary source
 - High School:
 - Minimum two (2) primary sources and one (1) secondary source
 - Use MLA, APA, or Chicago format
 - Each annotation must explain:
 - The author's point of view or bias
 - How the source helped you understand the issue
 - How the source influenced your final work

OPTION B: Creative Expression (Visual or Performing Arts)

- Create an original Visual or Performing Art piece that communicates your ideas related to your chosen quotation and inspires others to think or act (including primary/secondary sources). You must also include an Artist Statement, a short Process Paper, and an Annotated Bibliography along with your essay. **DO NOT** include any identifying information on your artwork (you will create a separate Title Page for your submission).
 - **Creative Expression Requirements:**
 - Possible Formats:
 - Visual art (drawing, painting, sculpture, poster, mixed media)
 - Performance (dance, song, spoken word)
 - Short documentary or multimedia presentation (ie. podcast)
 - Time Limits (for performances/documentaries/multimedia presentations)
 - Middle School: 3–5 minutes
 - High School: 4–6 minutes
 - Your Creative Expression piece should be original, connect to the Ben Ferencz quotation you chose, and be meaningful (artistic skill is less important than message)
 - **Artist Statement (REQUIRED):**
 - Include a written artist statement (maximum 100 words):
 - What is the “big idea” (theme/background) behind your piece?
 - What is your inspiration for the work?
 - Identify the artist who influenced your piece and/or explain your artistic choices
 - What materials and techniques did you use?
 - What challenges did you face and how did you overcome them?
 - **Process Paper (REQUIRED):**
 - Write a short process paper explaining:
 - How did you choose your topic?
 - How did you research your topic?
 - Why does your topic help expand our understanding of human rights?
 - **Annotated Bibliography (REQUIRED):**
 - Include all sources used
 - Separate primary and secondary sources
 - Middle School:
 - Minimum one (1) primary source and one (1) secondary source
 - High School:
 - Minimum two (2) primary sources and one (1) secondary source
 - Use MLA, APA, or Chicago format
 - Each annotation must explain:
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- How the source influenced your final work

Step 3: Create a Title Page for your submission

- Include a separate *Title Page* listing:
 - Your name
 - Your school
 - Your teacher
 - Your grade
- REMINDER: Do not include any identifying information on your submission.