



American Battle Monuments Foundation ABMF 2025 Past is Prologue Essay Contest

Contest Details

Please see the FAQs for more information

Questions: essaycontest@abmf.org

The **ABMF Past is Prologue Essay Contest** invites students ages 11-12, 13-15, and 16-18 to compete within their age group with an original essay.

Topics relate to historical events associated with an American military cemetery or monument overseas, managed by the American Battle Monuments Commission. Nearly 234,000 American service members are buried or memorialized (remains missing) at ABMC hallowed sites. The [American Battle Monuments Foundation](https://www.abmf.org) (ABMF.org) is an independent, not-for-profit partner of the American Battle Monuments Commission. [abmc.gov](https://www.abmc.gov)

2025 DEADLINE TO SUBMIT ESSAYS AND PRIZES AWARDED

Apply online at [abmf.org](https://www.abmf.org) to receive your Unique Participant ID number

Submit your essay no later than 10 PM (Mountain Time) on Sunday, April 27, 2025

Winners will be announced by Gold Star Mothers and Families Day, September 28, 2025

PARTICIPANTS

Students compete within their age group: 11-12 years; 13-15 years; 16-18 years. Compete in the group based on how old you will be on April 27, 2025. All middle-school and high-school students are invited to participate – public, private, parochial, charter, military and homeschoolers welcome!

Each student, regardless of age, must have an adult editor, generally a parent or guardian. The adult editor helps steer research activities, supports the development of the essay theme, checks grammar, spelling and punctuation, and leads discussion of the two mandatory questions.

Both the student and adult editor must certify that the essay is an original composition. We check for the use of AI and plagiarism, and essays written with AI or without attributions will be disqualified.

Consent to participate must be agreed to by the parent / guardian, regardless of the age of the student.

PRIZES

Prizes will be awarded for First, Second, and Third place *in each age group*.

Age groups 13-15 and 16-18: 1st Prize: \$10,000; 2nd Prize: \$5,000; 3rd Prize: \$2,500.

Age group 11-12: 1st Prize: \$5,000; 2nd Prize \$2,500; 3rd Prize: \$1,500.

Winners will be notified via a telephone call to the parent/guardian and/or with an email. Prize winners will be required to provide a W9 to ABMF before prize money is awarded.

All winning essays become the property of the American Battle Monuments Foundation and may, at the discretion of ABMF, be published on the ABMF website and promoted through its social media channels.

How to Participate

- Fill-out and submit the online Application Form. Both the student and the adult guardian must sign the Application Form.
- You'll receive a confirmation that your application has been received, and you'll be sent a unique Participant ID number.
- Using your unique Participant ID number only (no name) upload your essay no later than April 27, 2025 at 10 PM, Mountain Time. You'll receive a confirmation that your essay has been received. Early submissions encouraged. (This helps us confirm the number of judges and distribution of essays to be read.)

- Winners will be announced on Gold Star Mothers & Families Day, September 28, 2025.

TOPICS

For the contest in 2025, students may choose to **write about one of these two topics:**

The WWII Battle of Midway, June 4-7, 1942

Midway Atoll is a tiny ring of coral reefs located about 1,300 miles northwest of Hawaii. Today, it is the world's largest protected marine reserve and home to 7,000 species of birds and marine life. During WWII, it was an important refueling and provisioning oasis for American service members, "midway" between the U.S. and its UK allies, Australia and New Zealand.

It was also the site of one of the most consequential battles between the U.S. and Japan. The Imperial Japanese Navy spent more than a year preparing for a strategy it believed would bait the Americans to fight and lose there, giving Japan unquestioned superiority in the Pacific. Japan's "Zero" warplanes were faster and more maneuverable, its pilots were more experienced, and it positioned a fleet of at least 97 watercraft and 248 aircraft on the attack, compared to America's 51 watercraft and 360 aircraft.

On the first day of the battle, it seemed Japan had won. But in the few days that followed, America prevailed. Ultimately, the Battle of Midway would claim 362 American sailors, airmen and Marines; Japan would lose 3,057.

What was the ingenious plan used by U.S. cryptographers to decode Japan's strategy and determine when and where an attack would occur? Why did the Japanese choose Midway as a battle strategy? How did the Americans prepare for the secret attack? Japan lost four aircraft carriers; America lost one. How were so many sailors rescued from USS *Yorktown*? How did the Battle of Midway affect the morale of both Japanese and American military leadership and fighting forces? Why was the Battle of Midway a turning point in the Pacific theater and what difference does it make to us today? What lessons may we learn from the Battle of Midway?

A Day in the Life on December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor, HI

Write about the day in the life on December 7, 1941 of one of these four people, either by name or rank. What was his job? How did his work fit into the overall military operations at Pearl Harbor? How did he respond to the events of the day? How did technology, logistics or military protocols factor into his response? What lessons may we learn from the events at Pearl Harbor? How are they relevant to you today?

- **Captain of a battleship:** USS *California*, *Oklahoma*, *Arizona* or *West Virginia*. The captain is responsible for preparing and leading the officers and crew in combat as well as the day-to-day affairs of the ship, including strategy and discipline. A battleship is a small city of about 1,300 to 2,200 people.
- **Ship's Cook:** Cook Petty Officer Third Class, Doris "Dori" Miller, was the first African American to receive the Navy Cross for distinguished heroism when he shot down enemy planes from the USS *West Virginia* during the attack on Pearl Harbor. Rank: PO2.
- **U.S. Army Air Corps pilot:** Regardless of the surprise attack and the chaos that ensued, 14 Army Air Corps pilots tried to get their warplanes off the ground. Only five aviators got airborne, and their courage and skill shot down 10 of the 29 enemy planes shot down that day.

- **U.S. Army radar station operator and/or supervising duty officer on Oahu:** These men were the first to see the enemy approaching, and their actions were hugely consequential. In 1941, the new technology of radar was unproven, but it would become integral to modern life.

Mandatory Questions: Whichever topic you choose, be sure to answer the mandatory questions. (There are no “right answers;” this shows how you see the relevance of the topic to your own life.)

- *What lessons from this specific event are useful for us today?*
- *What difference did this event make to your own life today and for your future?*

COMPOSITION DETAILS

For the 2025 contest, only essays written in English will be considered. If English is not the first language of the student, that should be noted on the application form.

Minimum and maximum word-count: (References are not included in the word count.)

- Students age 11-12: 800 – 1,000 words
- Students age 13-15: 1,200 – 1,500 words
- Students age 16-18: 1,500 – 1,800 words

ESSAY FORMAT

- Include a header on each page **WITHOUT YOUR NAME. Use the Unique ID# only.**
- Header to include: Unique ID#, NO NAME, title of essay, date of essay, word count, page number
- Typed, Double Spaced, 1-inch margins
- Font: Times New Roman (or equivalent) Size: 12 pt.
- Uploaded at the ABMF Essay Contest portal
- DO NOT include a title page with your name.
- **Essays submitted with a name with or instead of a Unique ID# will not be entered into the judging pool.**

Quoted material should be used sparingly and must include a citation of the author, publication and date. Footnotes, references, and source citations are not included in the minimum and maximum word count.

RESEARCH MATERIALS

One excellent resource is the American Battle Monuments Commission www.abmc.gov. Wikipedia, Bing etc. may be starting points for general information about the topic, but they may not be considered authoritative and should not be included in your reference list, although verified sources linked on these and similar pages may point you to authoritative and useful resources for cited sources.

JUDGING CRITERIA – See Judging Guidelines linked on the abmf website for the scoring rubric used by the judges.

- Accuracy of historical events. Include relevant facts such as who, what, when, where, why, and how. Document your source material at the end of the essay.
- Composition and writing style. Correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation are expected.
- Originality. Essay submission should show imagination while not straying from the facts, and be of human interest.
- Two mandatory questions. There are no right or wrong responses, but they must be answered from the student's perspective.
- Submitted in correct format. Essays with a name instead of Unique ID# will be disqualified.

JUDGES

Essays are identified to the judges with only the unique Participant ID number. Qualified judges in Round One will score the essays and recommend finalists in each age group. These essays go to Round Two of judging; their top-ranked essays in each age group are then read by the Review Committee. The Review Committee selects the First, Second and Third place winners in each age group. They may also select an “Honorable Mention” in each age group. The decisions of the Essay Review Committee are final.