**Selma Speech & Essay Contest**

**2015** marks the 50th anniversary of the Selma march and President Johnson’s signing into law of the Voting Rights Act on August 6, 1965, which changed the course of our nation’s history. *Selma* ([www.selmamovie.com](http://www.selmamovie.com)) tells the story of the three months leading up to the Selma march as it has never been told, portraying Martin Luther King, Jr. as both a hero and a citizen, who used his voice to advance voting rights for all Americans. Now it’s your turn to use your voice.

**Did you know?**

At the age of 15, a young Martin Luther King, Jr. entered a high school public speaking competition with his submission called, “The Negro and the Constitution.” He was in his junior year, and he won the competition. On the bus ride home, young King and his three companions were told to give up their seats to a white couple who had just boarded the bus, and they stood for several hours on their way back to Atlanta.

It has been widely written that the high school speech Dr. King wrote inspired his “I Have a Dream” oration, since all of the concepts in his competition submission were encapsulated into the historic 1963 speech. There are striking parallels between the two writings.

That is the power of words. We invite you to use yours in the *Selma* Speech & Essay Contest.

**Purpose:**

Inspired by the release of the dramatic film *Selma*, the purpose of the *Selma* Speech & Essay Contest is to engage US high school students in thinking, writing and speaking about relevant, current issues of **individual freedom** and **self-determination** in our country today.

As 2015 marks the 50th anniversary of the Selma march and signing into law of the Voting Rights Act, the *Selma* Speech & Essay Contest aims to inspire students to think about and appreciate their Constitutional rights, the preciousness of our freedoms and how contributing to our democracy is the responsibility of all US Citizens.

***Selma* Speech & Essay Contest Topic:**

“The movie *Selma* tells the story of how Martin Luther King, Jr. and others peacefully protested to advance voting rights. What do you think needs to be done today to protect individual freedom and self-determination? **What are you doing or will you do to peacefully advance those rights?”**

***Selma* Speech & Essay Contest Prizes:**

* One grand prize: $5,000
* First runner up: $2,500
* Second runner up: $1,000
* Seven honorable mentions: $500 each
* $300 cash prize for each teacher/mentor who sponsors a top 10 finalist

**About the National Liberty Museum**

The [National Liberty Museum](https://libertymuseum.org/) (NLM), located in historic Philadelphia, is the only museum in the country dedicated to advancing liberty by fostering strong character and civic engagement. Since its founding in the year 2000, the NLM has brought liberty to life through exciting exhibits, its interactive web platform of curricular activities and the school-based Young Heroes Club program, which teaches students to be the change they want to see in the world.

The *Selma* Speech and Essay Contest is funded by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation and aims to inspire students to think about and appreciate their Constitutional rights, the preciousness of our freedoms, and how contributing to our democracy is the responsibility of all US citizens. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. famously said, “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” When the John Templeton Foundation was seeking the most ideal partner to host the *Selma* Contest, they found their counterpart in the National Liberty Museum, which works every day to show the world that civic engagement, grounded in strong character, enables liberty to flourish. And that each of us can be a hero of liberty. Because, where liberty lives, people live better.

### ****Who Can Participate?****

The Selma Speech & Essay Contest is open to US High School students ages 14-18 (as of the February 15 deadline), who are enrolled in a public, private or parochial high school or home study program in the United States and its territories.

### ****How do High School students participate?****

See the movie Selma and then answer this question with an essay and a speech (reading of the essay):

“The movie Selma tells the story of how Martin Luther King, Jr. and others peacefully protested to advance voting rights. What do you think needs to be done today to protect individual freedom and self-determination? **What are you doing or will you do to peacefully advance those rights?”**

### ****Rules:****

* Only one submission per entrant is allowed.
* Only entrants who have viewed Paramount’s film Selma are eligible to receive the prize awards.
* A submission is complete when the applicant has completed the following at <http://libertymuseumselmacontest.org/enter/>: 1) Fully completed the Entrant Information; 2) Printed the Certification and Release Form, completed the form with inked signatures, and either scanned it and uploaded it or mailed it to the National Liberty Museum by February 15, 2015; 3) Uploaded the Contest Essay document; 4) Uploaded the Contest Speech video. Applicants who fail to complete the four steps will be disqualified from the Contest.
* The speech consists of the videotaped recording of the entrant’s essay. It must be spoken in English and should be about 3 minutes long. (Videos that are slightly longer than 3 minutes will be accepted although please keep your video as close to 3 minutes as possible. Also, keep in mind as indicated below that the judges will be looking at how well you **creatively bring your words to life** using video and self-expression.) The entrant must start the video by showing his/her Selma film ticket stub so that it can be read clearly and stating their name, city, state and grade. The videotape must follow the format guidelines for **Facebook** and **YouTube**, recommended: MOV (.mov), 3GP (.3gp, .3g2, .3gpp), MPEG-4 (.mp4), FLV (.flv), AVI (.avi), MPEGS (.mpg), WMV (.wmv), WebM (.webm)
* Essays must be written in English and 500-700 words, typed, double-spaced formatted in no smaller than 12pt font. Allowed formats: Word or Adobe PDF.
* Submissions must be the entrant’s own original work.
* Applications must include certification from a parent/guardian (if the applicant is under 18) and sponsor teacher or mentor verifying the student’s age and originality of the work submitted.
* Winning videos and essays, including those of honorable mentions, may be published on the National Liberty Museum and Paramount Pictures’ websites and affiliated social networks as well as in other publications at the discretion of Contest administrators.
* The top 3 finalists will be invited to the Selma Speech & Essay Contest award ceremony in Philadelphia along with two family members and their sponsor teacher/mentor.
* Applicants will be asked to complete a short survey about their experience with the Selma Speech & Essay Contest immediately after they submit their speech and essay online, following the end of the Contest and possibly one year later.
* Sponsor teachers may be asked to complete a short survey about their student’s experience with the Selma Speech & Essay Contest once they submit their speech and essay online. Teachers will be contacted by the Contest administrators.

### ****Judging criteria:****

#### 70% of Total Score—Words/Message

Originality: The essay/speech must be in the entrant’s own voice with his/her own ideas. Relevance of essay & speech to topic: The essay/speech must demonstrate the entrant has watched the film Selma and considered how the film portrayed 20th century heroes who acted upon their Constitutional rights to peacefully advance the rights of others. The essay/speech must directly address the concepts of **individual freedom** and **self-determination** in current day America. The entrant must convey his/her understanding of the US Constitution and liberty as both a right and a personal responsibility. Content: The essay/speech must be **constructive** and have **universal appeal**. The essay/speech must demonstrate the entrant has given careful thought to the topic, offered original, creative and relevant approaches to the concepts of **individual freedom** and **self-determination,** and demonstrate that the entrant has carefully considered real-life ways that s/he can contribute to peacefully advancing the rights of others **today**. Effectiveness of presentation: In his/her essay, the entrant must present an effective argument for his/her hypothesis and the topic. The essay must be well-written with outstanding grammar and punctuation, easy to read and clearly convey what the entrant intended to share.

#### 30% of Total Score—Delivery of speech:

The video recording of the entrant’s essay is an opportunity for the entrant to creatively bring his/her words to life using video and self-expression, inspired by how the characters in the film Selma used oratory to bring about peaceful change. Effectiveness of presentation: The speech must be well enunciated and understandable to the viewer.

### ****Judging Panel****

[Common (Lonnie Rashid Lynn, Jr.)](http://libertymuseumselmacontest.org/rules/#accordion2_1)

**Common (Lonnie Rashid Lynn, Jr.)** is a Grammy-winning hip hop artist, actor, author, model and activist. Common won the 2015 Golden Globe Award for Best Song, and has been nominated for the Academy Award® for Best Original Song, for his song “Glory” from the 2014 film SELMA, in which he co-starred as 1960s Civil Rights Movement leader James Bevel. The film SELMA has also be nominated for the 2015 Academy Award® for best motion picture.

[Dr. Marvin W. Berkowitz](http://libertymuseumselmacontest.org/rules/#accordion2_2)

[Xavier de Souza Briggs](http://libertymuseumselmacontest.org/rules/#accordion2_3)

[Van Jones](http://libertymuseumselmacontest.org/rules/#accordion2_4)

[Shiza Shahid](http://libertymuseumselmacontest.org/rules/#accordion2_5)

[Douglas O. Tozour](http://libertymuseumselmacontest.org/rules/#accordion2_6)

### ****Selection of Winners:****

The 10 top finalists will be evaluated by the Judging Panel. The Judging Panel reserves the right not to award prizes should it deem that submissions do not meet the Selma Speech & Essay Contest criteria. All decisions of the Judging Panel shall be considered final. Inquiries regarding selection process may be addressed to Selma@libertymuseum.org. Please do not contact the judges directly. Contestants who do so will be automatically disqualified.

### ****Award Ceremony:****

The top three finalists of the Selma Speech & Essay Contest will be invited on an all-expense-paid trip to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA and honored at a two-day program, April 20-22, 2015. Each of the three top finalists is invited to bring two family members as guests, as well as the teacher who sponsored their submission. The grand prizewinner will be asked to read his/her essay in front of the audience.

### ****Submission Process:****

Entrants must complete 4 items at <http://libertymuseumselmacontest.org/enter/>: 1) Fully complete the Entrant Information. 2) Print the Certification and Release Form, complete the form with inked signatures, and either scan and upload it or mail it to the National Liberty Museum by February 15, 2015; 3) Upload the Contest Essay document; 4) Upload the Contest Speech video. Applicants who fail to complete the four steps will be disqualified from the Contest. **The online portal for submissions will NOT open until the official launch of the Contest on December 25, 2014.**

### ****For more information:****

Questions may be emailed to Selma@libertymuseum.org. No telephone inquiries will be accepted by the program.