

Unfinished Revolutions: New Perspectives, New Voices
A High School Writers Contest Based on
THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION A Film by Ken Burns, Sarah Botstein and David Schmidt
Contest Rules

MANY WILL ENTER; FEW WILL WIN. NO PURCHASE NECESSARY TO ENTER OR WIN. The BTPM Unfinished Revolutions: New Perspectives, New Voices Essay Contest (the “Contest”) is produced by Buffalo Toronto Public Media (“BTPM”) and is a High School Writers Contest based on THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION A Film by Ken Burns, Sarah Botstein and David Schmidt. The Contest begins on or about February 1, 2026, and ends with the announcement of winners on or about June 19, 2026. This Contest consists of one round of local judging. To enter the Contest, complete this [form](#) and submit an entry. All entries must be received by 5:00 pm EST, on **May 29, 2026**, to be eligible. These Contest rules are subject to modification by BTPM at its discretion. This Contest is void where prohibited. The Contest is coordinated by Buffalo Toronto Public Media, located at 140 Lower Terrace, Buffalo, NY 14202.

Essay Prompt

Essays must respond to the prompt: “Unfinished Revolutions.”

What unfinished revolutions, past or present, still shape our world? How do the film’s themes of freedom, equality, or justice continue to evolve in society today?

What Do We Mean by “Unfinished Revolutions?”

The American Revolution promised liberty, freedom, independence, and democracy, but not everyone was included in those promises. Enslaved people, women, and Indigenous nations were left out of many of the rights that defined the new nation. The bold ideas of the American Revolution inspired change, but much of the work remained unfinished.

Generations later, movements like abolition, women’s suffrage, and the struggle for civil rights carried forward the American Revolution’s unfinished promise of equality and justice. And even today, people are still working to make liberty, freedom, and democracy real for everyone.

This contest asks you to think about:

- Whose voices were left out of the American Revolution?
- Of those groups left out, how have later movements carried those ideas forward?
- What “unfinished revolutions” do you see in your community or the country today?

Eligibility & Entry Guidelines

- This contest is open to all students enrolled in grades 9-12 in Western New York and Southern Ontario. You do not have to submit work as part of a class to be considered.
- Only one entry per person will be accepted in this Contest; all subsequent entries will be disqualified.
- Only single author stories qualify (no co-authored stories).

- Essays must be original and unpublished work.
- Watching THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, a film by Ken Burns, Sarah Botstein, and David Schmidt is encouraged but not required. Students may draw inspiration from the contest theme and prompt without having seen the film.
- Essays must be received by 5:00 pm EST, May 29, 2026.
- Children of employees of BTPM and judges are not eligible.
- To be eligible, an entrant must be a legal resident of the fifty (50) United States and D.C. or a Southern Ontario province of Canada within the Buffalo Toronto Public Media viewing area.
- BTPM reserves the right to disqualify ineligible entries.
- Any failure to adhere to these Contest Rules may result in disqualification from the Contest.
- No purchase is necessary to enter the Contest.

Word Count Requirement

- Entries must have a minimum of 750 words, not to exceed 1,200 words.
- The word count includes “a,” “an,” and “the.”
- Non-English text must be translated on the same page, and the translated text (English text) must adhere to word count.

Official Entry Form

- Each entry must be submitted using this [form](#). Parent/guardian consent is required if entrant is under 18 years old.
- Consent is required by author or parent/guardian to enter the Contest, confirming that the essay is original, and granting certain rights to the entry materials.

Judging, Awards & Notification

All entries submitted to the Contest will be judged by a panel of no fewer than three judges selected and coordinated by BTPM. Judging will occur after May 29th and before June 12th. The judging will be based on the criteria as follows:

- Connection to Theme (30%)
 - Thoughtful response to the prompt
 - Clear understanding of historical and/or contemporary relevance
- Originality and Creativity (25%)
 - Unique perspectives
 - Creative use of examples, storytelling, and/or analysis
- Organization and Clarity (20%)
 - Strong thesis and logical structure
 - Clear, well-developed arguments with supporting evidence
- Writing Style (15%)
 - Engaging, appropriate tone
 - Varied sentence structure and effective word choice
- Grammar (10%)
 - Proper spelling, grammar, and punctuation

All decisions of the judges are final and binding and not subject to appeal or review. Winners will be as follows: (1) First Place winners; (2) Second Place winners (3) Third Place winners; and (4) Honorable Mention as specified below. Winners will be notified on or before June 19, 2026.

Winning Entries

One (1) First Place Winner: One (1) First Place winner among all entries, grades 9-12. **One (1) Second Place Winner:** One (1) Second Place winner among all entries, grades 9-12. **One (1) Third Place Winner:** One (1) Third Place winner among all entries, grades 9-12. **One (1) Honorable Mention Winner:** One (1) Honorable Mention winner among all entries, grades 9-12. Potential winners will be notified by BTM on or about June 19th for winner verification. All winning entries will be showcased on BTM's website, social media channels, and invited in-studio for the opportunity to record their essay to be broadcast on BTM NPR. Additionally, winners will receive a nominal gift card and BTM swag. Prizes are not redeemable for cash, non-transferable, and non-substitutable, except at the sole discretion of BTM.

Rights Associated with Contest

Submission of the Entry Form constitutes permission from the participant or participant's parent/legal guardian for Buffalo Toronto Public Media to use the participants' name, likeness, biographical information, information and materials contained in the Entry Form, photographs, and any statements or remarks made about the Contest in advertising and promotion without further compensation or permission, except where prohibited by law. All entries, and any copyrights therein, become the sole property of Buffalo Toronto Public Media. By entering, entrant or entrants' parent/legal guardian agree to abide by the rules stated herein, and warrant that the entry is original work and does not infringe upon or violate rights of any third party and grant to Buffalo Toronto Public Media the right to edit, publish, promote, and otherwise use their entry materials without permission, notice or compensation. No royalties will be paid at this or any time. By submitting an entry and Entry Form, each participant, or participant's parent/legal guardian on behalf of the participant, agrees to assign all right, title, and interest in and to the entry and Entry Form to Buffalo Toronto Public Media and warrants that the participant or participant's parent/legal guardian has the authority to assign such right, title, and interest. In the event that any applicable law requires certain formalities to be fulfilled to effectuate such grant of rights, each participant (and parent or guardian) agrees to cooperate with Buffalo Toronto Public Media to achieve fulfillment of such formalities. By submitting an Entry Form, each participant or participant's parent/legal guardian, on behalf of participant, agrees to be bound by these Contest Rules. Each participant or participant's parent/legal guardian, on behalf of the participant, agrees to release and hold Buffalo Toronto Public Media and its employees, officers, directors, shareholders, agents, representatives, subsidiaries, parent companies, or other affiliated companies harmless from any and all damages, losses, claims and liabilities arising out of participation in the Contest or resulting from acceptance or claiming of any prize hereunder. Buffalo Toronto Public Media reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to terminate, suspend or otherwise cancel the Contest at any time. Income and all other taxes are the responsibility of the prize recipient. Buffalo Toronto Public Media is not responsible for any expenses incurred in connection with participation in the Contest.

Privacy: Unless otherwise specified, any and all information connected with this Contest will be used by BTM solely for the purpose of administering the Contest. To understand how Buffalo Toronto Public Media uses, stores, manages and discards private information, visit the Buffalo Toronto Public Media [privacy policy](#). To understand how PBS uses, stores, manages, and discards private information, visit the PBS privacy policy at: <http://www.pbs.org/about/policies/privacy-policy/>.