



**MARTIN LUTHER
KING JR
BIRTHDAY
CELEBRATION**
Contests **26-27**

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**MILWAUKEE TEACHERS'
EDUCATION ASSOCIATION**

milwaukee journal sentinel

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

Contest Theme

A Look to the Future

Contest Areas of Focus

Art, Writing and Speech

Submission Deadline

Nov 13, 2026 by 5 PM

[Jump to Art Contest](#)

[Jump to Writing Contest](#)

[Jump to Speech Contest](#)

PRIZES & CELEBRATION EVENT

- Prizes for the Student Contest winners in each category will be available for pickup at the 2027 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday Celebration at Marcus Performing Arts Center on January 18, 2027 at 4pm.
- The event will highlight the winners of the Art, Speech, and Writing contests, as well as feature talented local performing artists to celebrate the life and legacy of Dr. King.
- The Marcus Center is located at 929 N. Water Street, Milwaukee, WI, 53202.
- Parking for the event will be free and is available in the attached parking structure on State Street.

For more information, please visit [MarcusCenter.org/mlk](https://marcuscenter.org/mlk)

You've got questions? We've got answers!

After reviewing these slides, please contact us if you have further questions.

Art Contest: Gina Jorgensen | jorgengm@milwaukeekeepublicschools.org | 414-380-0808

Writing Contest: Donelle Johnson | donellejohnson@aol.com | 414-445-5635

Speech Contest: Ja'Rahn Leveston | levestjs@milwaukeekeepublicschools.org | 414-750-3189

Teachers:

- Please make a copy to adapt this resource for your classroom.
- Feel free to modify the grade level, standards, objectives, or activities to best fit your students' needs.

Listen to Dr. King Speak: A Look to the Future

Mr. Chairman [*John B. Thompson*], Mr. Horton, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great privilege and a distinct honor for me to have the opportunity of being a part of the twenty-fifth anniversary observance of the Highlander Folk School. I have long admired the noble purpose and creative work of this institution. For twenty-five years you have stood with dauntless courage and fearless determination. You have given the South some of its most responsible leaders in this great period of transition. I am happy to congratulate you today for all of your great work, and hope for your continued creative and meaningful work.

Click on text to go to full speech!

I cannot begin my talk this morning without pausing to bring you greetings from Montgomery, Alabama. And I bring you special greetings from the fifty thousand Negro citizens of Montgomery who more than a year ago came to see that it is ultimately more honorable to walk in dignity than ride in humiliation. I bring you greetings from a people who were willing to substitute tired feet for tired souls, and walk the streets of Montgomery until the long night of enforced segregation in bus transportation had been removed.

Why do we celebrate Dr. King's Birthday?

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is a federal holiday that's designated as a national day of service. It's a day to honor King's life and legacy by serving your community.

How do we celebrate Dr. King's Birthday in Milwaukee?

Learning about MLK
and creating art,
essays and speeches

Observed holiday
volunteering in the
community

Celebrations
throughout
the city

"A Look to the Future"

"In order to look to the future, it is often necessary to get a clear picture of the past. In order to know where we are going, it is often necessary to see from whence we have come."

Contest Theme

Prompt:

For Grades K-5

When we talk about 'A Look to the Future,' we are thinking about the world we want to create together. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. believed that to make the future bright, we have to learn from the past, stand up for fairness, and work together with love. What is your big dream for tomorrow? Show us or tell us what a happier, kinder world looks like to you!



Contest Theme

Prompt:

For Grades 6-8

When Dr. King gave his speech 'A Look to the Future' in 1957, he reminded us that a better tomorrow isn't guaranteed—it has to be built on purpose. He said that to know where we're going, we have to look clearly at where we've been, learn from history, and refuse to accept unfairness in our own time.

Your task for this contest is to look ahead. What does a more just, fair, and unified world look like to you? Don't just show us a fantasy world—show us the real change, the moral courage, and the hope your generation brings to the table.



Contest Theme Prompt: For Grades 9-12

In 1957, Dr. King stated that 'to know where we are going, it is often necessary to see from whence we have come.' He framed 'A Look to the Future' not as idle daydreaming, but as an urgent moral obligation to dismantle injustice and complete the work of democracy.

For this contest, your challenge is to go deeper than broad generalizations. What does justice look like when it moves from theory into reality? How do we use historical awareness to confront the urgent crises of our time? We want to see your critical voice, your artistic rigor, and your uncompromising vision for the future.



Themes to Explore

Andrew Young
Black Nationalism
Boycott
Brotherhood
Bullying
Civil Disobedience
Civil Rights Act
Civil Rights Activists
Civil Rights Movement
Community
Conflict Resolution
Constitutional Rights
Demonstration
Direct Action
Equality
Family
Freedom
Freedom Rides
Friendship

Homelessness
Human Rights
Integration
Jim Crow
Jim Lawson
John Lewis
Magazines
Mahatma Gandhi
March on Washington
Materialism
Ministers of Chicago
Minority
Montgomery Bus Boycott
Modern civil rights protests
NAACP
Nonviolence
Oppression
Peace
Population

Poverty
Protest
Racial equality
Racism
Resilience
SCLC (Southern Christian
Leadership Conference)
Segregation
Selective buying
SNCC (Student Nonviolent
Coordinating Committee)
Social change
Social Justice
Sports
Student Sit-ins
Unemployment
Voting Rights Act

More Resources

This extensive compilation from the National Education Association includes lesson plan ideas for grades K-5, 6-8, and 9-12, as well as interactive activities and printables like coloring pages and crosswords.

[Learning and Living the Legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.](#)

[THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF CELEBRATING MLK DAY](#)

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is an ideal time to reflect on the life and legacy of this great leader, but it's important to do it with care and nuance—and to keep the conversation going beyond January 15.

ONLINE ARTICLES:

1. ["Letter from Birmingham City Jail"](#) by Martin Luther King, Jr., 1963. (Digital Public Library of America)
2. Library of Congress: [Civil Rights History Project](#)
3. Constitutional Rights Foundation: [Martin Luther King and the Philosophy of Nonviolence](#)
4. CNN: [Why Martin Luther King Jr.'s philosophy of nonviolence matters now more than ever](#)

VIDEOS

1. 50 years on, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s legacy lives out loud
2. Letter from a Birmingham Jail - Martin Luther King, Jr.
3. Martin Luther King, Jr: Crash Course Black American History #36
4. Student Civil Rights Activism: Crash Course Black American History #37
5. The 1960s in America: Crash Course US History #40

Books

- Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power by Kenneth Clark
- Stride Toward Freedom by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Memphis, Martin, and the Mountaintop by Alice Faye Duncan
- It Starts with Me! by Dr. Bernice A. King
- My Life, My Love, My Legacy by Coretta Scott King
- A Time to Break Silence (The Essential Works of Martin Luther King, Jr., For Students) by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Milwaukee Public Library booklist link:
 - [https://www.mpl.org/kids/?booklists_kids\(6-9\)](https://www.mpl.org/kids/?booklists_kids(6-9))

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION *Art Contest*



**Submissions Due:
November 13, 2026, at 5 PM**

NEW THIS YEAR!
WE WILL BE ACCEPTING 3D ENTRIES!!!
For the MLK Jr. Art Contest



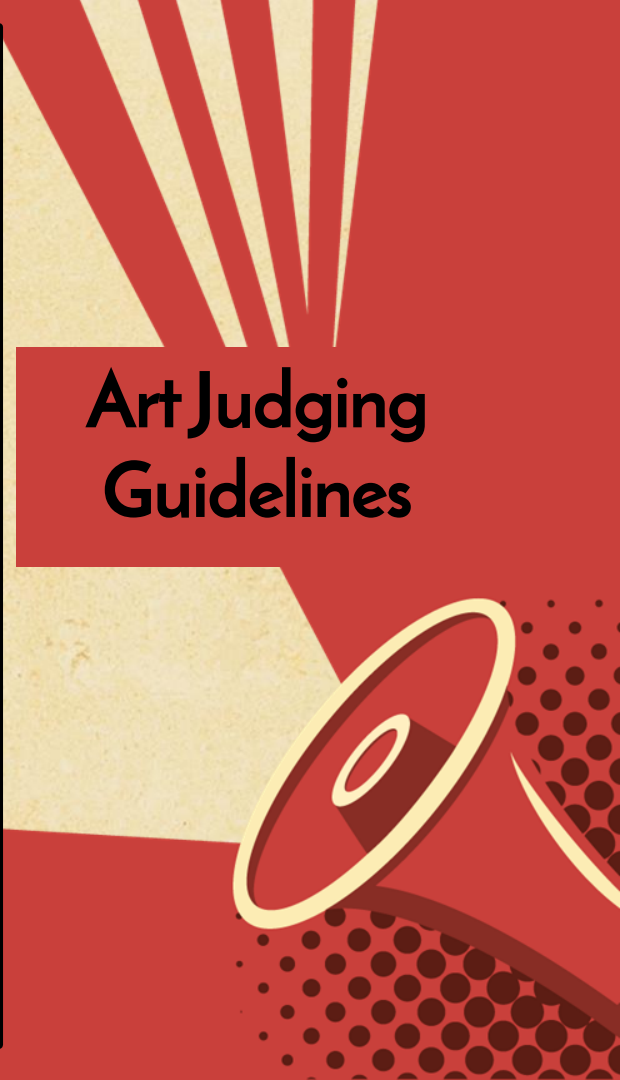
Art Contest Categories

- Grades K-2: 3 winners
 - Grades 3-5: 3 winners
 - Grades 6-8: 3 winners
 - Grades 9-12: 3 winners
- 

Judging Criteria & Guidelines

- **Scoring Focus:** Entries are evaluated on a point system prioritizing clarity, creativity, and originality.
- **Theme & Authenticity:**
 - Must clearly express creative ideas representing the contest theme.
 - Must be 100% original student work—no photoduplication, no tracings of existing photos of Dr. King, and no AI-generated plagiarism (all entries will be screened).
 - Teachers should guide students to understand the historical context of Dr. King's life, values, words, and actions, and how to reflect those themes in their work.
- **Execution & Technical Standards:**
 - Artwork should showcase the student's individual ability level without adult intervention or retouches.
 - 2D entries must adhere to size limits: Minimum **8 × 10 inches** to Maximum **18 × 24 inches**.
 - 3D entries must be finished on all sides. Incomplete or unfinished work will be disqualified.

Art Judging Guidelines

A decorative graphic on the right side of the page. It features a red background with a yellow megaphone pointing upwards. From the top of the megaphone, several yellow lines radiate outwards, resembling a sunburst or a signal. The background also has a pattern of small white dots on the right side.

Key Guidelines

- **Digital Submissions:** ONLY entries from districts outside of Milwaukee will be accepted digitally. Judging in person is preferred for a true and accurate analysis.
- **Originality:** Entries must be original student work. Photo copies and teacher contributions/retouches are strictly prohibited.
- **Text & Themes:** Work must relate to the theme, though explicit written text is not required. Avoid using the quote *"I have a dream"* unless it is the designated theme.
- **Spelling & Drafts:** Ensure all text in artwork is spelled correctly. Have students write out and review text on draft paper before adding it to final pieces.
- **Work Quality:** Unfinished or incomplete work should not be submitted.
- **Framing & Mounting:** Do not frame or mount artwork for initial digital submissions. Framing/mounting is only required for winning entries.
- **3D Submissions:** 3D artwork is now accepted!
- Art entries are grouped by four grade level bands:
 - K-2
 - 3-5
 - 6-8
 - 9-12

2D Rubric

Category	Advanced (4)	Proficient (3)	Basic (2)	Minimal (1)
Technical Skill/ Craftsmanship & Visual Appeal	Color for background and text is consistent and adds to the content and theme.	Color for background and text adds to the content and theme.	Used too many different colors for background and text, distracts from content and theme.	Did not use colors for background and/or text, or may be unrelated to content and theme.
Design-Creativity and Originality: Creative Design and Original Artwork	Design was unique, original and interesting. Conveys the fellowship, social comment and equity of Dr. King's vision.	Design was unique, original and interesting. Conveys some of the fellowship, social comment and/or equity of Dr. King's vision.	Design appears original may have had assistance. Conveys some of the fellowship, social comment and/or equity of Dr. King's vision.	Used only design templates, not original and/or may have had assistance. Missing ideas that express fellowship, social comment and/or equity of Dr. King's vision.
Theme and Composition: Planning	Uses a variety of The Elements and Principles of Design to express artistic ideas.	Uses some of The Elements and Principles of Design to express artistic ideas.	Uses few of The Elements and Principles of Design to express artistic ideas.	Minimal use of The Elements and Principles and Design to express artistic ideas.

3D Rubric

Category	Advanced (4)	Proficient (3)	Basic (2)	Minimal (1)
Technical Skill/ Craftsmanship & Visual Appeal	Choice of 3D media, textures, and surface finishes is consistent, well-crafted, and enhances the content and theme.	Choice of 3D media, textures, and surface finishes adds to the content and theme.	Inconsistent use of 3D media, textures, or surface finishes; distracts from content and theme.	Poor construction or unfinished surface treatments; unrelated to content and theme.
Design-Creativity and Originality: Creative Design and Original Artwork	Form and structure are unique, original, and interesting. Conveys the fellowship, social comment, and equity of Dr. King's vision.	Form and structure are unique, original, and interesting. Conveys some of the fellowship, social comment, and/or equity of Dr. King's vision.	Form appears original; may have had assistance. Conveys some of the fellowship, social comment, and/or equity of Dr. King's vision.	Relies on existing models/kits, not original; may have had assistance. Missing ideas that express fellowship, social comment, and/or equity of Dr. King's vision.
Theme and Composition: Planning	Uses a variety of 3D Elements and Principles of Design (e.g., form, space, balance, texture) to express artistic ideas from all angles.	Uses some 3D Elements and Principles of Design to express artistic ideas in space.	Uses few 3D Elements and Principles of Design to express artistic ideas.	Minimal use of 3D Elements and Principles of Design to express artistic ideas.

Art Materials and Techniques

(suggestions but no limited to)

Drawing	Painting	Collage	Printmaking	Digital	3D
Markers Pencil Colored Pencil Oil Pastel Color Sticks Charcoal Hatching Cross- Hatching Stippling Blending Scumbling Contour Drawing Gestural Drawing Sanguine Pencil Grading Highlighting	Watercolor Tempera Acrylic Oil Brushes Ink Wash Dry Brushing Wash Glazing Impasto Wet- on-Wet Scumbling Stippling Palette Knife Painting Spattering	Magazines Your own drawings or paintings Paper Glue Scissor Layering Torn-Edge Tearing Fussy Cutting Photo Montage Mixed Media Assembly Decoupage Overlapping Textural Placement Image Juxtaposition	Plate Ink Brayer Carving tools Paper Wooden spoon Relief Printing Block Printing Monoprinting Collagraph Linocut Woodcut Screen Printing Etching Intaglio Stamp Printing	Anything that is not AI generated. Any computer program you have available to you. Photographs Camera/Phone Digital Painting Vector Illustration Photo Manipulation Digital Collage Pixel Art 3D Modeling Vector Tracing Digital Airbrushing Layer Masking Matte Painting	Clay Paper Mache Wood Additive Construction Subtractive Carving Slab Building Coil Pot Building Pinch Potting Sgraffito Paper Mache Wire Armature Building Assemblage Casting Mold Making Kinetic Assembly

ART SUBMISSIONS for Judging

Please note any missing information may result in disqualification.

Labels for Art Submissions

ALL work must be
dropped off at AWE:
4315 Vliet St.
Monday and Thursday
4-7 PM

For digital submissions:
submit to the following link:
[Submission Link](#)

****Important****

When submitting your contest entry, please name your submission in the following format both online and in person: Student Full Name, Grade, School Name, Teacher Name, MLK 2026.

Secondary

Learning Intention: We are learning to analyze the core themes of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s speeches—such as equality, unity, justice, and hope—and translate those complex ideas into a original visual artwork that communicates a personal and societal vision for "A Look to the Future."

I am successful when:

- **Concept & Connection:** I can select a quote or theme from Dr. King's speech and use it to build an original idea about the future.
- **Visual Communication:** I can intentionally combine symbols, imagery, and color to express a clear message or story.
- **Composition & Technique:** I can use elements of design (like focal point and balance) and control my art media to create a polished finished piece.
- **Artist Statement:** I can write 2-4 sentences explaining how my visual choices connect Dr. King's words to my vision for tomorrow.

Elementary

Learning Intention: We are learning how to use art to express ideas about the future, inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision of hope, equality, and justice.

Success Criteria

- **Inspiration:** I can choose one idea or value from Dr. King's speech (such as peace, fairness, kindness, or togetherness) to guide my art.
- **Artistic Expression:** I can create an artwork that clearly shows what my "Look to the Future" looks like.
- **Creative Choice:** I can use color, symbols, or images on purpose to help tell my story.
- **Reflection:** I can explain in 1-2 sentences how my artwork connects to Dr. King's vision for a better tomorrow.

Let's Look and Respond to Images of MLK Jr.



Think about....

- ❖ Mind map your ideas. Templates
 - Art of Ed Template
 - Art of Ed Brainstorming
 - Art of Ed Heroes and Leaders Brainstorming
- ❖ What do the words mean to you?
- ❖ What are your own personal experiences?
- ❖ How do you connect to the theme?
- ❖ What images come to your mind?
- ❖ Do those images look like a drawing or painting or a sculpture?
- ❖ Are you influenced by any artists?

How do you
translate
words to
images?



What's going on in this picture?

What do you see that makes you say that?"

(pinpointing visual evidence)

What more can we find?





Guide your students to analyze the ages of the marchers, their attire, and the text or symbols on the signs they carry.

What do you notice about how the people in this group are interacting with each other? What details in the setting give us clues about where they are and what they might be doing?



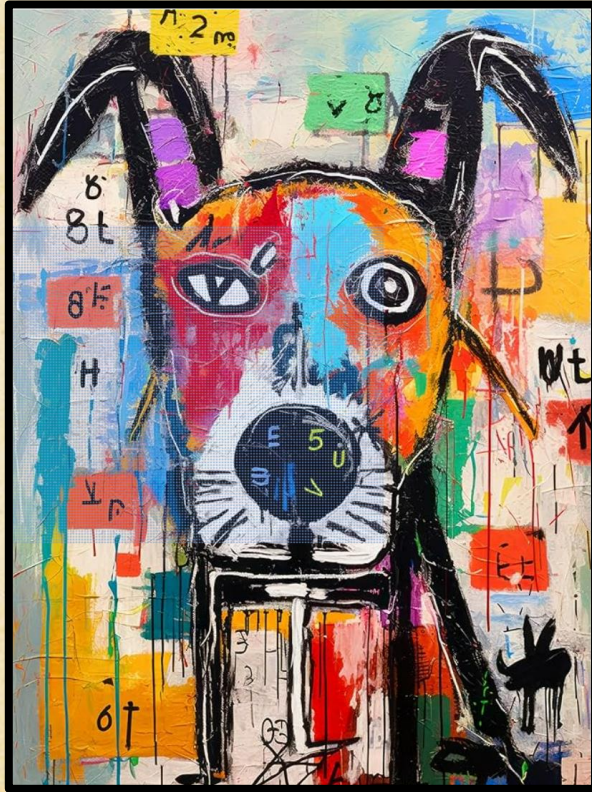
~~Author: King Date: 06/06/2008 Desc: Darko Deljak Abomath~~

MLK Student Art 2025 Winners

Please note these images have
last year's theme and do not
reflect this year's theme of
A LOOK TO THE FUTURE.

For example

Treating the background as a intentional design element transforms an entire artwork, though "interesting" doesn't always have to mean heavily painted or filled with detail.



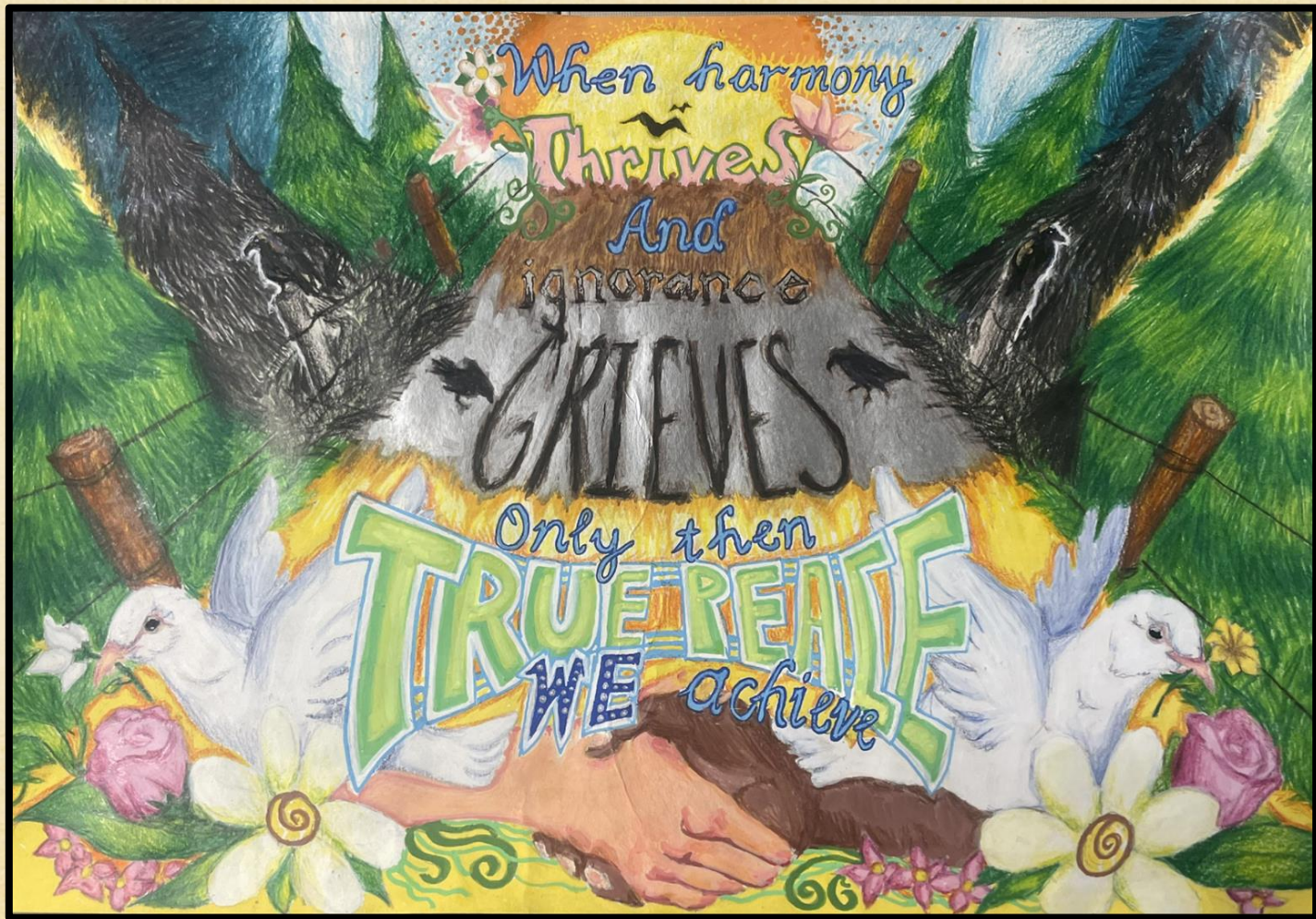
Consider the background first

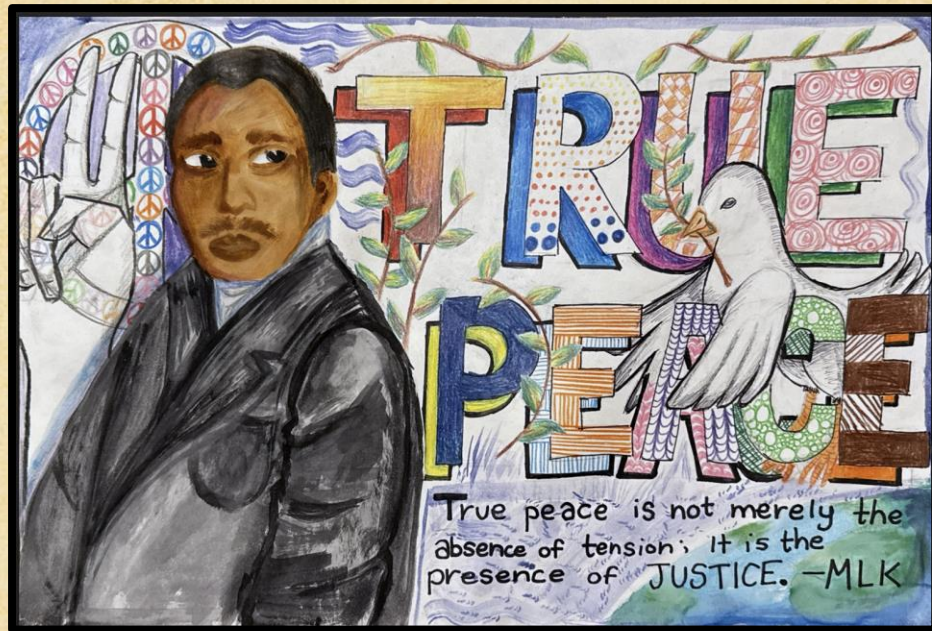
**Look at the backgrounds
in past winners' art.
It matters!**

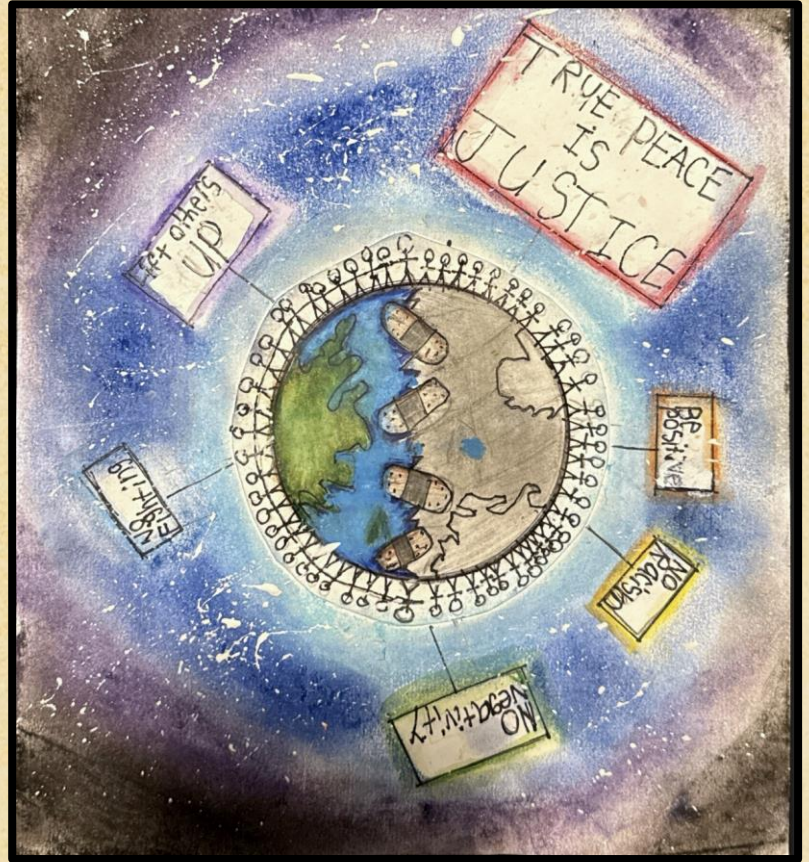


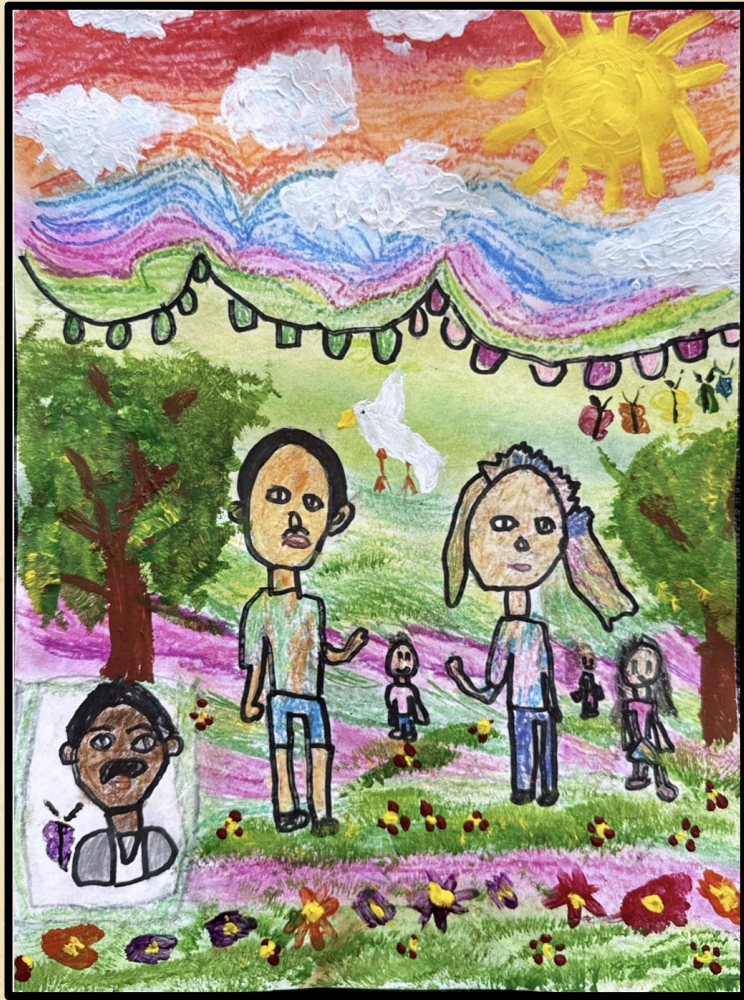


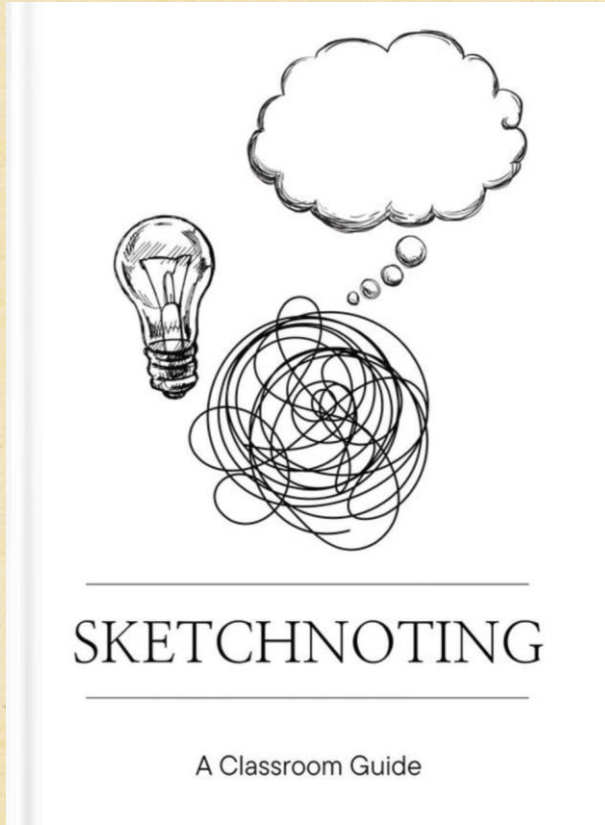












Link to Sketchnoting Book in Book Creator (Randi Wagner)

Click book to read



Further resource on Canva to Print
Make a copy and modify as needed



MARTIN LUTHER KING JR BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION *Writing Contest*

**Submissions Due:
November 13, 2026, at 5 PM**

Writing Contest Categories

Grades K-1: Group projects only

Grades 2-3: Individual entries (250 words max)

Grades 4-5: Individual entries (350 words max)

Grade 6: Individual entries (400 words max)

Grades 7-8: Individual entries (450 words max)

Grades 9-10: Individual entries (500 words max)

Grades 11-12: Individual entries (550 words max)



Writing Contest Guidelines

The entries will be judged on a point system, with the following criteria considered:

- Entries must address the theme.
- Entries should relate the student's own personal ideas, work and experiences to the topic and show an understanding of Dr. King's ideals.
- Entries must not be a biographical sketch of Dr. King.
- Entries will be judged on the basis of clearly expressed, creative ideas and ability level.
- Entries will be judged on clarity, creativity, originality, and grammar and writing skills..

Teachers are encouraged to help students understand the historical context of Dr. King's words and actions, see the relevance of these words and actions in their world today, and become familiar with Dr. King's life and values. We recommend utilizing the resources of MPS school libraries and the Milwaukee Public Libraries.

MLK JR Writing Rubric

Advanced

- Sentences are complete with a variety of descriptive words
- Work includes complete thoughts, correct punctuation, capitalization and spelling
- Sentences are creative and relate to self and/or others
- Work demonstrates understanding of King's ideals
 - Ideas and details are clearly presented and well organized
- Work includes vivid verbs, strong adjectives, and specific nouns
- Work is original and created by the author with no use of plagiarized generated resources such as AI

Meeting

- Sentences are complete and descriptive
- Work includes complete thoughts, correct punctuation, capitalization and spelling
- Sentences are creative and relate to self and/or others
- Work demonstrates understanding of King's ideals
 - Ideas and details are presented and organized
- Work includes verbs, adjectives, and nouns
- Work is original and created by the author with no use of plagiarized generated resources such as AI

Approaching

- Does not always stay on topic
- Sentences are not developed
- There is little use of descriptive words
- Work includes some verbs, adjectives, and nouns
- Work has some originality and reflects King's ideals with no evidence of plagiarism

Developing

- Does not stay on topic
- Sentences are incomplete or do not make sense
- Writing is not descriptive
- Ideas and details are not organized
- Work is not original and shows evidence of plagiarism.

Writing Contest Submission

Entries can be submitted digitally or in-person at MTEA Office on Vliet Street or at any Milwaukee Public Library branch.

In-person entries must be submitted with a cover page that includes:

- Student's first and last name
- Student's grade level
- Name of student's school
- First and last name of student's teacher

WRITING CONTEST DIGITAL SUBMISSION FORM



MARTIN LUTHER KING JR BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION *Speech Contest*

**Submissions Due:
November 13, 2026, at 5 PM**

Speech Contest

Schools may submit 1 student in each grade level category:

- Grades K-2
 - Grades 3-4
 - Grades 5-6
 - Grades 7-8
 - Grades 9-10
 - Grades 11-12
- 

Speech Contest

Process

Submission - students submit at [Educators | We Energies](#)

Virtual Preliminaries - students give their speeches, receive scores, and finalists announced

In-Person Finals - the top 5 finalists in each grade category give their speeches at the We Energies Public Building

MLK Celebration - the winner of each grade category gives their speech at the Marcus Center

Rules

1. Speeches must be written and delivered by students.
2. Speeches are a maximum of four minutes in length.
3. Schools may advance only one student per grade category to the preliminaries.
4. Speeches must address the theme.

Judging Criteria

Speeches are judged on a 5-point scale in the following eight areas:

- **SPEECH DEVELOPMENT:** structure and transitions, opening, body, closing organization.
- **ANALYSIS/REASONING:** worthwhile use of support material such as examples, experiences, facts, and expert opinions.
- **SPEECH VALUE:** ideas, originality of thought and material, accurate information.
- **APPROPRIATENESS:** to speech purpose and audience, reflecting good taste
- **VOICE:** flexibility, emphasis, variety of volume, pitch, rate, and voice quality
- **PHYSICAL:** appearance, body language including facial expression, eye contact, gestures and stance.
- **MANNER:** directness, assurance, enthusiasm, and poise.
- **CORRECTNESS/LANGUAGE SKILLS:** grammar, pronunciation, word selection.