



STUDENT ESSAY COMPETITION

The author of the essay judged by reviewers from ACT to be the best will receive one year of free tuition to the University of Iowa*. A select number of runners up will receive a \$500 scholarship from the Iowa City UNESCO City of Literature.

Essays may be submitted to the competition by emailing them as an MSWord attachment on or before **July 2, 2021** to info@iowacityofliterature.org. Please put "Paul Engle Day Student Essay Contest submission" in the subject line. All submissions must include the cover sheet found on p. 6 of this packet (the cover sheet also can be found at <http://www.iowacityofliterature.org/Paul-Engle-essay-contest>).

*See full scholarship details on page 5

Background Information

Paul Hamilton Engle was born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, on October 12, 1908, and grew up in a frame house in the Wellington Heights area. After graduating from Washington High School in Cedar Rapids, Engle attended Coe College and the University of Iowa where he was one of the first students to earn an advanced degree based on a thesis of creative work—a collection of poems. His first published collection, Worn Earth, went on to win the Yale Series of Young Poets. His best-selling second book of poetry, American Song, was heralded on the cover of the New York Times Book Review in a headline declaring him “A New Voice in American Poetry”. After Iowa, Engle travelled as a Rhodes Scholar to Oxford University in England.

Though Engle did not found the Writers’ Workshop at the University of Iowa, he built its reputation as the top graduate writing program in the United States. During his tenure as director, he was responsible for luring some of the finest writers of the day to Iowa City: Phillip Roth, John Berryman, Kurt Vonnegut, and many other prominent novelists and poets served as faculty under Engle. Additionally, Engle increased enrollment and oversaw numerous students of future fame and influence, including Flannery O’Connor, John Irving, Raymond Carver, William Stafford, and Robert Bly. After directing the Writers’ Workshop for twenty-four years, Engle and future-second-wife Nieh Hualing co-founded The University of Iowa’s International Writing Program, which invited dozens of published authors from around the globe to visit the University of Iowa to write and collaborate. For their work with the IWP, Engle and his wife were nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1976. Engle died at the age of eighty-two, having published fourteen books of poetry, a novel, a memoir, and an opera libretto, and his literary legacy lives on in the lives and works of those authors he helped to educate and inspire.

In 2000, nearly a decade after his death, Paul Engle was declared Iowa’s “Poet of the Century” and then-Governor Tom Vilsack declared that Engle’s birthday, October 12th, would hereafter be known as “Paul Engle Day” to honor this life of creativity, mentorship, and generosity.

To continue Engle’s tradition of inspiring writers and celebrating the rich culture of Iowa, students are invited to participate in a writing contest that will culminate with a presentation in Iowa City this fall.

The Glory of the Senses

In his autobiography *A Lucky American Childhood*, Paul Engle describes his Iowa upbringing and how it helped him to grow from the son of a horse trainer in the heartland to a poet and professor of international reputation. More than merely keeping a record of locations and events, Engle uses sensory detail to evoke his experience, to recreate it for the reader.

In the chapter entitled “The Glory of the Senses”, Engle addresses each of the senses in turn to bring to life the Iowa of his youth. He revels in “the smell of wood and coal [that] burned the kitchen air” and the “healthy sound ... of a horse’s broad teeth grinding grain”, experiences that were common to a young person growing up at the beginning of the twentieth century in Iowa. He recalls the accents of the Czech, German, Irish, and Russian immigrants whose “speech had not yet become homogenized by radio and television...trying hard to communicate with these strange Americans,” sounds that mirrored the combination of heritages that comprise the American quilt. As he watches the spectacle of a cattle drive down Fifth Avenue in Cedar Rapids, the animals “snorting, frightened of the city, tossing their horns, trampling the lawns, a furious animal force...,” Engle says he “learned from them, as I watched their massive motion, the power of mass,” as the “thousand-pound beef animals look at you with their oval, liquid eyes...”

Like every other poet, Paul Engle understood the power of the written word to transport the reader to another time and place, to impart experience viscerally, to make the reader feel as if she were *there*. Unlike (virtually) every other poet, Engle found rich experience and profound truth in the humble, mundane events of a small town in Iowa. Even after travelling the world, Engle returned to Iowa to live and write because “this was surely the best of all worlds,” where there was “no sense of the destruction of life, only of its rich creativeness.”

Here at the beginning of the twenty-first century, more than one hundred years after the birth of Paul Engle, we find ourselves in a very different world. The Iowa that Engle describes in his writing feels like a foreign country to our modern noses and ears, just as the textures and sights of our world would seem like a distant planet to the young Paul Engle. But what was true about Iowa for Paul Engle at the beginning of the twentieth-century is true now, at the dawn of a new millennium: we are surrounded by a vivid tapestry of sight and sound and smell that, if you pay attention to it, will not only enrich your experience, it will enlighten your mind.

STUDENT ESSAY COMPETITION

Consider your own Iowa experience. In your essay, choose a single, specific Iowa memory to write into life. It could be a day you escaped Iowa's humid air in the sparkling waters of a lake, a bitter cold morning spent digging out from under an Iowa blizzard, a crisp autumn Saturday in the crowd at a football game, or a soggy spring rain turning the rich Iowa soil to mud. Then, in an essay of three to five pages, tell the story of that day, that moment, fully. What did this Iowa experience teach you about life or love or friendship or family? Pay special attention to include details that evoke the sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch of your memory so that, as Engle did in his writing, a reader one hundred years in the future can experience your Iowa in a "Glory of the Senses".

Evaluation will be done by judges from ACT. The author of the essay judged to be the best will receive one year of free tuition to the University of Iowa. Runners up will receive a \$500 scholarship from the Iowa City UNESCO City of Literature.

All scholarship winners will be honored in Iowa City this fall at a special ceremony.

Requirements:

1. Students must be a sophomore at an Iowa high school during the 2020-21 academic year, or be aged 15 or 16 and registered through a Home School Assistance Program to qualify.
2. Each student should submit an essay not to exceed five, type-written pages in twelve pt. Times New Roman or equivalent, double-spaced.
3. The student's name should not appear anywhere on the essay itself.
4. A title for the essay should be included on the first page of the submission.
5. The cover letter found on p. 6 of this packet must be included with each submission. It also can be found at www.iowacityofliterature.org/Paul-Engle-essay-contest.
(visit www.iowaaea.org/find-my-aea/ to find the name of your AEA or ask your school principal).
6. Any number of students from a school may submit work to this competition, but only one submission per student will be accepted.

Essays may be submitted to the competition by emailing them to info@iowacityofliterature.org **on or before July 2, 2021. Submissions also can be mailed to the City of Literature office at the address on p. 5, though electronic submissions are preferred.** Please put "Paul Engle Day Student Essay Contest submission" in the subject line. All submissions must include the cover sheet found on p. 6 (or at www.iowacityofliterature.org/Paul-Engle-essay-contest) as well.

We look forward to reading your writing, and we welcome you to contact us with any questions or comments about this process, the essay contest, or Paul Engle Day.

Iowa City UNESCO City of Literature
123 S. Linn St.
Iowa City, IA 52245
(319) 887-6100
info@iowacityofliterature.org
www.iowacityofliterature.org

NOTE: A rubric has been established that will guide judges as they evaluate the essays. The rubric is available on the City of Literature web site.

Winners will be notified on or around August 23, 2021.

About the first prize University of Iowa scholarship: To qualify for the award, the winning student must be eligible for enrollment at the University of Iowa as a full-time in-state student in his or her freshman year. This is a non-renewable award.



Glory of the Senses Essay Contest Cover Sheet

Student Name: _____

Email: _____

Student Mailing Address: _____

Essay title: _____

Are you a sophomore? Yes/No

Parent/Guardian name _____

Parent Email: _____

High School: _____

Principal: _____

Principal's Email: _____

Language Arts Teacher: _____

Teacher's Email: _____

Area Education Agency: _____

Visit www.iowaaea.org/find-my-aea to find the name of your AEA or ask your school principal.

Essays may be submitted to the competition by emailing them as an MSWord attachment on or before **July 2, 2021** to info@iowacityofliterature.org. Please put "Paul Engle Day Student Essay Contest submission" in the subject line. All submissions must include this cover sheet as well.