



LAW DAY
2021 –
“Advancing
the Rule of
Law – NOW!”

GRADES 9 – 12

ART, ESSAY AND POETRY
WINNING ENTRIES

High School Poetry Contest (Grades 9-12)

PROMPT:

Read “Freedom’s Plow” by Langston Hughes, a narrative poem which reflects on the Declaration of Independence.

Write a narrative poem that expresses your deepest thoughts on the U.S. Constitution. Try to include language from the Constitution.

First Place: Julianna Coniglio, Colts Neck H.S.

In the US Constitution, there are a lot of rules

Never break these rules, or else you're a bunch of fools!

Didn't they say, "we the people"?

Excuse me? Did you forget the bald eagle?

People don't mean animals, where are they in the constitution?

Eagles have hearts too, don't they Susan!!!

Now, on a serious note, don't forget your rights

Do you see that flag flagging up there? We won that in fights.

Every American should have a pocket constitution, no?

Never go a day without reading your rights, your mind will grow!

Coming to the end of this amazing rap

Everyone read those 27 amendments, read it asap!

Second Place: Shreya Ramen, Holmdel H.S.

“All people were created equal”
said the man who, with a metal grip, held
many innocent people under his grasp
It is a moral depravity,
a blot on humanity’s face,
yet still, the man went stoic on the subject of the slaves at his place

You see, even the core writer of the Constitution
and the Declaration of Independence
never thought that his workers deserved
a ration of fair pay,
something that the law prevents today.
When they talked of the right of the man,
they marginalize it to just that
Many groups of people didn’t get their rights
and still faced the consequences of others’ ignorance

“They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity.”
Just as justice back in time was biased toward certain people
Just as people thought that someone
Who stood apart from them was
Of lower standing than them.
Even though brother and sisterhood connects all
Past blood,
Past color,
Past all the things that differentiate you from me.

That is the shortcoming.
That a statement that affected so many
was brazen enough, not to be true to its author,
that the author shamed others who practiced the same acts as he.

Then again, the past is not the present
just as yesterday is not today.
But yesterday we have reflected,
today we have changed

Just as the past has scarred our soil
and marred our history
with blatant reminders
that people firmly believed that they were better because of something
as shallow as their content of melanin,
we seek today to plant and bring out new life
and meaning to the past.
Just as we step onto the soil
we step onto the shoulders of giants
who have brought our world from a barren cold place,
to a world warm and fecund

Maybe it’s the past that has changed us
the past that we regret
the people we took for granted
that carve us into the people that we are today
the same people who carved the world,
and passed on their plow

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from hand, to hand, to hand.

Just as my poem will pass onto you my feelings,
just as my poem will pass onto you the pain in my heart
to learn that sometimes the beliefs of those idolized
are superficial,
just as the law has taught me that people are equal,
that the place I have in this world
just as my predecessors,
is equal to others

Just as the law has reformed to talk about world events and reflect
the world we live is not the cookie-cutter that Jefferson templated
The world we live in has been changed
by our suffering and our pain,
and our reflections on it.

Just as my parents have taught me
Of the beauty that lies around and within the land where
All people link arms
Place their plows and shovels into the ground
And together
Build our land
The beautiful land of the mixed.
America.

We Trust

TV on

The news is saying Russia doesn't know democracy

I couldn't help but be baffled by the hypocrisy

Doesn't matter if you vote or not, you see

Either way, all you get is presidential mediocrity

Two choices

No voices

Corrupt primaries

The plight of Mr. Sanders, how could we not remember

The poor man got screwed by media agenda

A system designed to ensure status quo

Bland options make the establishment go

Bananas, each party's candidate is moderate

But this thing has its root in the Constitution, let's not forget

Electoral college requires majority

There's just no space for three

So Congress makes a decision on the president to be

Party loyalty keeps royalty in power

Until it's gone, the college of the founding fathers will tower

Over the American people, and it devours

Any hope of democracy, so at this very hour

Let's remove what's meant to protect them from us

In the people, we trust



Third Place: Peter Gertsenshteyn, Colts Neck H.S.

High School Essay Contest (Grades 9-12)

PROMPT:

The original Articles of Confederation said that Congress only had those powers “expressly delegated” to it by the states. In June 1788, the U.S. Constitution was adopted; Article II only outlined Congressional powers. In December 1791 the 10th Amendment was ratified and adopted. It states, “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.”

Write an essay discussing how the 10th Amendment has been applied by the states during the pandemic and give examples.

Federalism and The Coronavirus Pandemic

The Coronavirus Pandemic tested the nation's ability to respond to a global crisis. As our governments designed mandates to ensure our protection, the issue evolved into widespread political debate. When the people disagreed with certain presidential administrations regarding their response to the pandemic, many were unaware of the reservation of powers. However, the roles of federal versus state governments are often lost in translation for our citizens. While federal government organizations like the CDC and the WHO propose pandemic guidelines, it is up to state governors to enact them. In exchange for monetary compensation for abiding, governors will often enforce these policies.

The 10th Amendment states, "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution...are reserved to the States...or the people" (The 10th Amendment). In history, federalists and anti-federalists clashed about whether the central federal government should be stronger, or the state governments should be stronger. After much deliberation, the central government became the national governing body, but legislation was carefully developed to prevent it from turning into a monarchy. Therefore, state and federal governments equally share responsibilities in decision-making for our nation's response to crises such as the pandemic.

Each level of government must balance responsibilities. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "state governments have most of the power to place people in isolation or quarantine under certain circumstances. But federal and state [roles also] overlap" (Bomboy). Most citizens don't realize this essential correlation, but a Facebook user had posted, "Do people realize their GOVERNORS are responsible for how the virus was handled in their state, not the President?" (Caldera). This post was referenced in a USAToday article to raise awareness among readers that it is crucial that citizens understand the law.

First Place: Sofia DeThomasis, Colts Neck H.S.

As progress is made towards eradicating the pandemic, controversy has arisen with New York's vaccine mandates. The government is being accused of coercing citizens into getting vaccinated regardless of their opinions. To encourage the process, New York has made many places inaccessible to citizens unless a vaccination card is presented. The evolution of a vaccination card into being a ticket of entry into attractions has sparked debate and outrage. These policies beg the question of whether forcing vaccination on citizens is abusive of power. Although getting the vaccine may be ethical and considerate to the well-being of others, can it be interpreted as an infringement on our freedoms? Can the withholding of access to certain locations be deemed unusual? On the flip side, restaurant owners are also expecting protection. Some restaurant owners, like "Ms. Howard of Dame (one of the first places in NYC to ask diners for vaccine cards) are now worried about the potential for disorderly guests upset about vaccines. She felt the mayor's ending the vaccine requirement was a signal that restaurants don't have the city's support" (Morales).

It is apparent in the pandemic age that the 10th Amendment's prevalence is extremely significant. The state and national level governments carry the duty of protecting the American people by enacting laws that serve our best interest. Through strict interpretation of governing documents, the people who form the composition of the government have a heavy responsibility to carry. Although the government (like all systems in our world) sometimes fails us, it is up to the American citizens to voice our concerns to these officials. Governing a nation is a complex task that requires assistance from the people it is meant to serve. Our ability to abide by laws and respectfully deliver our thoughts to political representatives can ultimately create ease for officials and lead to a better tomorrow.

The Malleable 10th Amendment

In matters of national security, the 10th amendment has been made malleable, fitting the mold of the situation at hand. States rights are the clay and the federal government are the hands manipulating the mold. In March of 2020, the federal government extended their powers past those of the 10th amendment under the guise of "public safety." The federal government's roles and infringements of states' rights has stimulated many debates over their effectiveness and purpose. While other nations around the world began taking preventative measures from the beginning to the middle of January, the federal government did not establish effective legislation for containment of the virus till the beginning of March. The federal government overstepped the powers of the states through the implementation of stay at home orders, mandatory quarantines, and a mask mandate. However, a commonly overlooked aspect of the government mandates is the lack of funding provided to the states to accommodate for the necessary supply demand; notably the PPE masks. In Mid-March of 2020, the federal government placed large orders for N95 masks, ventilators, and other medical equipment, but these materials were not provided to the state governments to sustain themselves. Hospitals across the nation were scrambling for supplies, especially masks to prevent the conception of the little understood virus at the time, but the federal government provided no sympathy or assistance. Former President Trump expressed his belief that it was the responsibility of the state governments to distribute PPE to medical professionals, not the federal government. The federal government sets the standards and breaches the states rights depicted in the 10th amendment, but does not provide the assistance to carry out the demands. Healthcare workers on the frontlines of this pandemic underwent shortages, forced to resort to extreme measures such as wearing trash bags as layers of safety gear, seen by workers in Mount Sinai of New York. While continuing to impose more

Second Place: Olivia Henein, Colts Neck H.S.

regulations and restrictions, the federal government failed to endorse state governments and supplement them in order to accommodate the detrimental effects of the pandemic. In addition to health care mandates initiated by the federal government, the mask and social distancing requirements stemmed from the CDC. From the beginning of the pandemic, requirements and guidelines for masks came from the federal government and the CDC. Yet, in 2022 as the nation tries to heal and return to a newfound sense of normalcy, the control of masks is in longer in the same hands. The state legislatures are now allowed to resume their 10th amendment rights to make decisions best fit for their constituents in terms of lifting and lightening mask mandates. Federal agencies bypassed the rights of the state governments when they deemed it necessary, and took it upon themselves to make the decision on when to return them. If the state governments are responsible for altering the mandates or lifting them, and for acquiring the necessary supplies for these mandates; they should have had the power to make these decisions from the start of the pandemic by the 10th amendment. All of these instances only illustrate the methods in which the federal government has manipulated the 10th amendment to fit their needs at the time. All the meanwhile, neglecting responsibility, leaving the burdens of the Covid-19 Pandemic to the states, while depriving them of their rights.

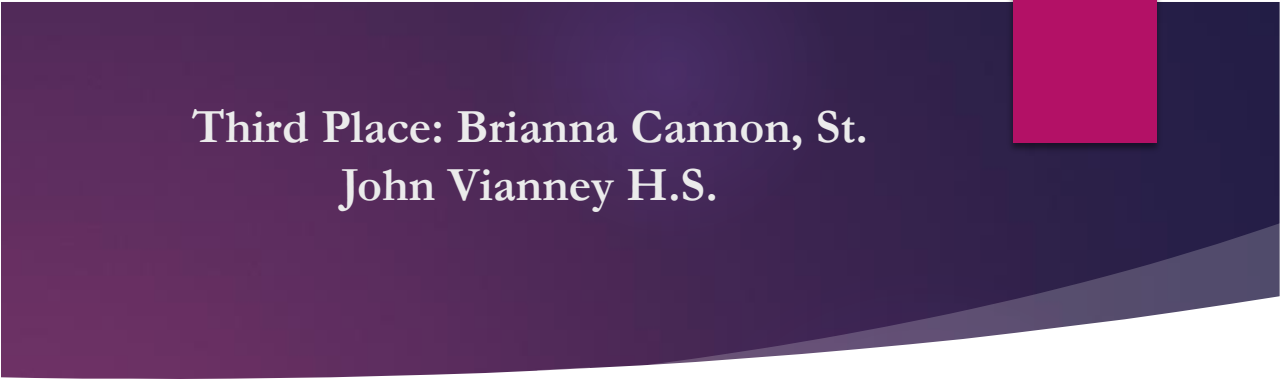
Reserved Powers, Guaranteed by the 10th Amendment

Everyone, in their lifetime, has blamed the government for a particular issue.

Surprisingly, the 10th Amendment limits the power of the federal government. “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people” (Library of Congress). By implication, this left significant issues like education up to state governments. Given how each state has a varied range of populations, it is pertinent that there is some form of state sovereignty. As many political leaders understand, the ‘one-size-fits-all’ mentality can not and will not work in national situations. The Tenth Amendment has a controversial history, but because of Anti-federalists’ persistent nature, such Amendment played a crucial role in deciphering the twists and turns of the Covid-19 pandemic.

As state legislatures managed the covid pandemic, the nearly forgotten Tenth Amendment came out of the shadows. State governments, not the federal government, have most of the power to place people in isolation or quarantine under certain circumstances. But in some instances, federal and state officials have overlapping roles. Covid has shown the importance of federalism and the separation of powers between state and federal legislature. As the federal government worked with issues of economy and treaty, state legislatures were able to keep its citizens safe at home.

Such privilege should be used to further life and grant fundamental freedoms to all of the state’s inhabitants. For instance, a recent study expressed citizens were happier in Florida than in New York once their Covid restrictions were lifted. Florida’s cabinet felt it necessary for its citizens to have freedom after being in quarantine for so long.



Third Place: Brianna Cannon, St.
John Vianney H.S.

Another reform in place after the spread of covid was the different learning options. At first, students were forced inside or fully virtual. This became the most popular option throughout the country, especially since the government could not abruptly stop schooling. As covid restrictions got lighter, hybrid learning became integrated. Finally, the classic in-person learning was the breath of fresh air teens and children needed. Such variation of learning options could be integrated quickly, directly because of the Tenth Amendment. As shown, state legislatures are not taking advantage of such powers but instead are using them to benefit the people of the United States.

Accordingly, state legislatures were also able to change mask mandates according to the level of severity in their specified area. This also includes, and is not limited to, vaccine mandates. Mask and vaccine mandates were heavily debated, as citizens wanted their lives to go back to normal. Many states applied the vaccine mandate for concerts, sporting events, and restaurants. Since the federal government had no official jurisdiction in such matters, it was up to state governments to enforce Covid-19 policies.

Presently, the Tenth Amendment plays a significant role in how the country runs. Our central government could have easily fallen into old habits and resembled the English monarchy without the Tenth Amendment. Giving the federal government such immense power over a singular life could mean order by also unhappiness. This is especially true in the matter of Covid-19 restrictions and other current examples.