



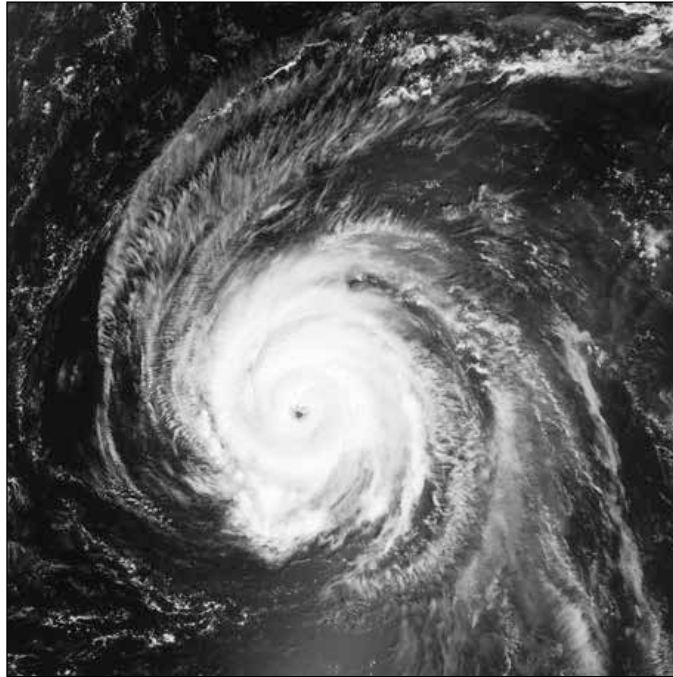
Making a World of Difference

CURRENT ISSUES & EVENTS

 @UILCIANDE

2025 • INVITATIONAL B

Jan. 6, 2025



NASA image created by Jesse Allen, Earth Observatory, using data provided courtesy of the MODIS Rapid Response team.

Hurricane Helene began forming on Sept. 22. More pronounced and rapid intensification ensued as Helene traversed the Gulf of Mexico, reaching Category 4 intensity on the evening of Sept. 26. Late on Sept. 26, Helene made landfall at peak intensity in the Big Bend region of Florida, near the city of Perry, with maximum sustained winds of 140 mph.

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UNIVERSITY INTERSCHOLASTIC LEAGUE

CURRENT ISSUES & EVENTS

INVITATIONAL B • 2025

- 1. Loans that Elon Musk used to buy what company have become the worst merger-finance deal for banks since the financial crisis of 2008-09?**
 - a. Twitter
 - b. SpaceX
 - c. Tesla
 - d. Neuralink
- 2. CEO Brian Thompson was fatally shot in what police said appeared to be a “premeditated, preplanned targeted attack” outside the New York Hilton hotel in midtown Manhattan. Thompson was head of which of the leading companies?**
 - a. Tesla
 - b. Apple
 - c. UnitedHealth Group
 - d. Regeneron
- 3. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing protection and status as a “threatened species” for one of the nation’s most beloved species and is encouraging the public to be part of its recovery. What?**
 - a. papillated redbait fish
 - b. Amur leopard
 - c. monarch butterfly
 - d. hawksbill sea turtle
- 4. Troops stormed the country’s National Assembly, shares of major companies fell and thousands protested in the streets. In what country did President Yoon Suk Yeol abruptly declare martial law and then lift the order hours later?**
 - a. Taiwan
 - b. South Korea
 - c. Laos
 - d. Philippines
- 5. After his family ruled the country for 50 years, the liberation from President Bashar al-Assad of what Middle Eastern country happened rather quickly?**
 - a. Venezuela
 - b. Bangladesh
 - c. Chad
 - d. Syria
- 6. The Texas State Board of Education, in an 8-7 vote, approved a state-authored curriculum under intense scrutiny in recent months for its heavy inclusion of what?**
 - a. biblical teaching
 - b. sex education
 - c. party politics
 - d. racism and slavery

7. **With the backing of the Connecticut families of eight victims of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting and one first responder, satirical publication *The Onion* said it bought what other media outlet at a bankruptcy auction?**
 - a. CNET, an early pioneer of online tech coverage
 - b. *The Canadian Record*
 - c. Alex Jones' *Infowars*
 - d. *The Spectator*, a 196-year-old magazine with a prominent place in British political life

8. **The Biden-Harris Administration proposed in November a new rule to significantly expand coverage of medications such as Wegovy, Zepbound and Ozempic for Americans with Medicare and Medicaid and the 42% of Americans afflicted with what chronic disease?**
 - a. heart disease
 - b. arthritis
 - c. Alzheimer's
 - d. obesity

9. **Resulting in the fourth snap election in the 75 years since the modern state was founded, lawmakers in what country voted to dissolve the existing government by a vote of 394 to 207 last fall?**
 - a. Germany
 - b. Australia
 - c. Sri Lanka
 - d. Bulgaria

10. **Michel Barnier lost a no-confidence vote, making him the shortest-tenured prime minister in modern French history after he pushed through a controversial spending bill by executive decree related to what?**
 - a. abortion
 - b. national security
 - c. social security spending
 - d. funding the war in Ukraine

11. **The Senate voted 85-11 to approve a short-term spending bill to fund the government until March 14. However, it did NOT include one item despite demands from President-elect Donald Trump. What?**
 - a. any attempt to address the nation's borrowing limit
 - b. about \$100 billion in disaster aid funding
 - c. funding to replace the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Maryland
 - d. \$10 billion in economic aid for farmers

12. **Altogether, candidates and related groups spent \$10.5 billion on campaign ads in the 2024 election cycle. Twenty-three states this cycle spent more than \$100 million. But one state topped them all with \$1.2 billion in expenditures. Which state?**
 - a. Michigan
 - b. Pennsylvania
 - c. Ohio
 - d. Wisconsin

13. **Led by CEO Weldon Spangler, nearly 50 locations of what restaurant chain abruptly closed the last week of October and filed for bankruptcy in early November?**
- Applebee's
 - TGI Fridays
 - Red Lobster
 - Wendy's
14. **Canada and India each expelled diplomats from the other country in October. The rift between the two nations began last year when Canadian officials accused India of what?**
- requiring visas for Canadian tourist visits to India
 - increasing tariffs for goods imported from the countries, requiring businesses to double prices to consumers
 - orchestrating the killing of a Sikh separatist on Canadian soil
 - putting out social media posts that would interfere in the spring Canadian national elections
15. **In a decision that will impact about 3,000 students, the University of Texas System Board of Regents agreed in November to provide free tuition to undergraduates that meet what criteria?**
- have a family adjusted gross income of \$100,000 or less
 - are Texas residents at the top of their class
 - attend rural high schools
 - are U.S. citizens or permanent residents and whose families have typical assets
16. **Weeks before he was to leave office, U.S. President Joe Biden issued a "full and unconditional pardon" for whom?**
- Michael Flynn, retired U.S. Army lieutenant general and the 25th national security adviser
 - Charles Kushner, father of Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner
 - Paul Manafort, Donald Trump's former campaign chair
 - Hunter Biden, his son
17. **Both a federal and a state judge moved to block a deal that would have been the biggest grocery store merger in U.S. history between what two grocery chains?**
- HEB and Walmart
 - Kroger and Albertsons
 - Whole Foods Market and Randalls
 - Sprouts Farmers Market and Central Market
18. **Tidal action on the underside of the Thwaites Glacier will "inexorably" accelerate melting of the glacier this century. The massive glacier, which is roughly the size of Florida, also known as the "Doomsday Glacier," is located where?**
- Siberia
 - Canada
 - Iceland
 - Antarctica
19. **Pete Hegseth is a veteran of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and a vocal supporter of Donald Trump on television, where he is a host of "Fox & Friends." Trump named Hegseth to become head of what government department?**
- First Amendment Operations
 - Government Efficiency
 - Health and Human Services
 - Defense

20. A cease-fire meant to end the deadliest war in decades took effect early Nov. 27, less than a day after U.S. President Joe Biden announced the deal and Israel approved its terms. Who was Israel at war with?
- Syria
 - Kurdistan Workers' Party
 - the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah
 - Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq in Iraq
21. Democratic Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand made an all-out push in the waning days of the Biden administration to bolster reproductive rights and enshrine what document's protections into the Constitution?
- the *Roe v. Wade* case
 - The Equal Rights Amendment
 - The Voting Rights Amendment
 - The No One Is Above the Law Amendment
22. It represents roughly 45,000 workers who went on strike, shutting down most trade through U.S. ports on the East and Gulf Coasts. However, two days later, what union agreed to suspend the strike until January?
- United Auto Workers
 - American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
 - International Longshoremen's Association
 - Service Employees International Union
23. In what U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin called a "very, very serious" escalation, what country in October sent troops to Russia to join the fight against Ukraine?
- Iran
 - Syria
 - North Korea
 - China
24. In 2019, more than 27% of high school students reported that they vaped. According to an annual survey released last fall, what was true in 2024 in schools about e-cigarette use by high school students in the past month?
- The lowest level in a decade, 5.9% of middle and high school students reported using e-cigarettes.
 - More than 28% reported using e-cigarettes in the past month, a record high.
 - More than 16% reported using e-cigarette in the past month, the most significant one-year increase since 2022.
 - Almost no high school students reported using e-cigarettes in the past month.
25. In November, the Federal Aviation Administration prohibited U.S. airlines from flying to Haiti for 30 days. Why?
- The airport in Port-au-Prince was being modernized with better security.
 - A transitional council created to reestablish democratic order in Haiti signed a decree firing interim Prime Minister Garry Conille.
 - Alix Didier Fils-Aimé staged a coup and took over ruling power.
 - Gangs shot three planes.

26. **The Palisades nuclear plant in Covert Township, Michigan, obtained a \$1.5 billion loan to restart operations. Palisades would be the first reactor to restart in U.S. history, blazing a trail for what plant — the site of a partial nuclear meltdown in 1979 — to come back online in 2028?**
- Three Mile Island (Pennsylvania)
 - Chernobyl (Ukraine)
 - Fukushima Daiichi (Japan)
 - Enrico Fermi (Michigan)
27. **Although typhoons can occur at any time of year, this year, Kong-rey was unusually strong and late in the typhoon season, peaking at a Category 4 storm. Where did it first make landfall?**
- Taiwan
 - Philippines
 - Japan
 - Sri Lanka
28. **More than 300,000 people canceled their subscriptions after which newspaper announced it would not endorse any presidential candidate for the first time in more than 50 years?**
- Washington Post*
 - The New York Times*
 - Houston Chronicle*
 - The Wall Street Journal*
29. **Which country experienced its longest blackout in decades, a power grid collapse, just before it was hit by Tropical Storm Oscar?**
- San Juan
 - Bermuda
 - Cuba
 - The Bahamas
30. **On Veterans Day last fall, Maryland Gov. Wes Moore and the Maryland National Guard posthumously commissioned which historical figure to the rank of brigadier general to honor her military service?**
- Clara Barton
 - Billie Holiday
 - Mary Katharine Goddard
 - Harriet Tubman
31. **NASA and Boeing safely returned the Starliner spacecraft following its landing Sept. 6 at White Sands Space Harbor in New Mexico, concluding a three-month flight test to the International Space Station. What was unexpected about this return to Earth?**
- It was the first time humans had orbited the moon since the end of the Apollo program.
 - The crew remained on the space station due to thruster problems.
 - A window blew out of the spacecraft during return to Earth, but the crew returned safely.
 - Some 33,000 workers at Boeing and NASA went on strike, delaying the return.
32. **ABC agreed to pay \$15 million toward a Trump presidential library to settle what kind of lawsuit?**
- “brazen election interference”
 - illegally promoting the sale of materials used for the construction of the wall at the U.S.-Mexico border
 - defamation after George Stephanopoulos inaccurately said Trump had been found civilly liable for rape
 - libel after Southern officials published an ad violating the rights of African Americans

33. **The world's number-one-ranked hot dog eater defeated not only his archrival but his own world record when he downed a whopping 83 hot dogs in buns in 10 minutes in August to earn \$100,000. However, for the first time, Joey Chestnut was not able to do what?**
- profit from an endorsement from Impossible Foods
 - dunk his hot dogs in water
 - eat the meat and discard the bun
 - store the hot dogs in his cheeks while chewing
34. **Accusing the financial giant of unfairly stifling competition in debit cards, the latest in a string of cases aimed at deterring monopolistic behavior by big companies, the Justice Department filed an antitrust lawsuit against what company in late September?**
- MasterCard
 - Discover
 - PayPal
 - Visa
35. **Some 33,000 workers walked off the job at Boeing Commercial Airplane factories and other operations on the West Coast. What was NOT one of their demands?**
- raising wages by more than 40%
 - bringing all airplane manufacturing back to the U.S. while closing plants in South Korea
 - lowering employee share of health care costs
 - returning to the defined pension benefit plan they lost in their last contract
36. **Sarah McBride, a state legislator, won the Democratic primary for Delaware's only U.S. House seat. Which of the following is true?**
- She is the first former police officer to become a member of Congress.
 - She is the highest-ranking openly transgender elected official in United States history.
 - She is the first White House intern elected to national office since interns began getting paid in 2002.
 - She is the first openly conservative member of the Democratic party elected to statewide office.
37. **Selena Gomez earned her first paycheck as a child actor on "Barney & Friends" in 2002, and stars on the popular Hulu series "Only Murders in the Building." But she became a billionaire doing what?**
- writing children's books
 - giving motivational speeches to children
 - posting on Instagram
 - selling cosmetics
38. **A joint statement from the FAA, FBI and Department of Homeland Security in late December reassured residents across New Jersey that what did not present an immediate national security risk?**
- drone sightings
 - unidentified anomalous phenomena
 - satellites in low Earth orbit
 - a surveillance balloon

39. U.S. consumers spent a total of \$13.3 billion in 2024, up 7.3% from the previous year, according to Adobe Analytics. Capping off a five-day spending spree, U.S. consumers spent \$15.8 million every 60 seconds in two hours in the biggest shopping day ever. When?
- Giving Tuesday
 - Black Friday
 - Singles Day
 - Cyber Monday
40. Who became the most nominated artist in Grammy history, receiving 11 nominations for her album *Cowboy Carter*, which brought her career total to 99 nominations?
- Whitney Houston
 - Beyoncé
 - Taylor Swift
 - Madonna

THE ESSAY

NOTE: *Contestants who do not write an essay will be disqualified.* Essay length is not a major grading factor as long as the essay is substantial and demonstrates a sincere effort to discuss the assigned topic. Cover as many corners of the issue as practical, including historical, political, economic, social and cultural, when relevant. Avoid including your personal opinions, as more than enough information on the subject has been published.

A focused, concise and specific essay beats a vague and rambling essay.

PROMPT

In the last six months, climate change has reached a critical tipping point, with global temperatures hitting record highs, natural disasters wreaking havoc across continents, and nations grappling with the urgent need for action. Discuss two significant events scientists have attributed, at least in part, to climate change and the social, political, economic and cultural impacts of those events.

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

ANSWER KEY

ESSAY PROMPT

In the last six months, climate change has reached a critical tipping point, with global temperatures hitting record highs, natural disasters wreaking havoc across continents, and nations grappling with the urgent need for action. Discuss two significant events scientists have attributed, at least in part, to climate change and the social, political, economic and cultural impacts of those events.

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION POINTS PREPARED Jan. 6, 2025 might include, but should not be limited to...

- | | |
|-------|-------|
| 1. A | 21. B |
| 2. C | 22. C |
| 3. C | 23. C |
| 4. B | 24. A |
| 5. D | 25. D |
| 6. A | 26. A |
| 7. C | 27. A |
| 8. D | 28. A |
| 9. A | 29. C |
| 10. C | 30. D |
| 11. A | 31. B |
| 12. B | 32. C |
| 13. B | 33. B |
| 14. C | 34. D |
| 15. A | 35. B |
| 16. D | 36. B |
| 17. B | 37. D |
| 18. D | 38. A |
| 19. D | 39. D |
| 20. C | 40. B |

- *Record-breaking global temperatures:* 2024 was the warmest year on record according to the World Meteorological Organization. The global average temperature in September was 1.26°C above NASA's baseline. October 2024 ranked as the second-warmest October in NOAA's 175-year global climate record. The average temperature of the contiguous U.S. in November was 45.3°F, 3.6°F above average, ranking sixth warmest in the 130-year record. The YTD global surface temperature was 2.3°F above the 20th-century average, making it the warmest such period on record. Africa, Europe, North America, Oceania and South America each had their warmest YTD period. Changes to Earth's climate driven by increased human emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases are already having widespread effects on the environment: glaciers and ice sheets are shrinking, river and lake ice is breaking up earlier, plant and animal geographic ranges are shifting, and plants and trees are blooming sooner.
- *Long-term changes:* According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change — the United Nations body established to assess the science related to climate change — modern humans have never before seen the observed changes in our global climate, and some of these changes are irreversible over the next hundreds to thousands of years. “The scientific evidence is unequivocal: climate change is a threat to human wellbeing and the health of the planet. Any further delay in concerted global action will miss the brief, rapidly closing window to secure a livable future.” Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
- *Devastating floods in Valencia, Spain:* The worst floods to hit Spain in decades on Oct. 29 killed at least 230 people, covered towns in mud and debris, destroyed bridges, roads and rail lines and submerged cars, mainly in the eastern region of Valencia. In places like Chiva, a town near Valencia, a year's worth of rain fell in just eight hours, according to Spain's meteorological agency. Climate change is the main driver of record-breaking hot oceans. When ocean waters are hotter, storms can suck up additional moisture.
- *Severe drought and wildfires in the northeastern U.S.:* Drought has parched the Northeast U.S. for weeks, draining reservoirs, priming the landscape for damaging wildfires and pushing politicians to implement water-saving measures. More than 58% of the Northeast is in moderate drought or worse, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. The drought is particularly extreme in New Jersey, which has had its driest conditions in nearly 120 years. Some areas have experienced 40 days without measurable rain. A study released in the fall found that wildfires that swept Canada's woodlands last year released more greenhouse gases than some of the largest emitting countries.
- *Flash floods in Libya:* On Sept. 10, 2023, heavy rainfall caused two dams upstream of Derna to collapse, resulting in devastating flooding and leaving at least 5,923 dead, thousands missing, and more than 40,000 internally displaced, according to the United Nations, and large-scale destruction in eastern Libya, a country under transitional government and struggling to recover.
- *Melting sea ice:* Arctic sea ice retreated to near-historic lows in the Northern Hemisphere this summer, likely melting to its minimum extent for the year on Sept. 11, 2024, according to researchers at NASA and the National Snow and Ice Data Center. The amount of sea ice in September 2024 was the sixth smallest on record, continuing a nearly two-decade streak. Sea ice in the southern polar regions of the planet was also low in 2024. Around Antarctica, scientists tracked near-record-low sea ice during the Southern Hemisphere's darkest and coldest months. “While changes in sea ice have been dramatic in the Arctic over several decades, Antarctic sea ice was relatively stable. But that has changed,” said Walt Meier, a sea ice scientist at NSIDC. “It appears that global warming has come to the Southern Ocean.”
- *Hurricanes:* The 2024 Atlantic hurricane season officially ended on Nov. 30. The Atlantic basin saw 18 named storms with 11 intensifying into hurricanes. Five of those were major hurricanes intensifying into Category 3 or higher. The season was the second costliest on record after 2017, inflicting at least \$232 billion in damages and 400 deaths overall, most of which was caused by four systems: Beryl, Debby, Helene and Milton. “There was a lot of eddy activity in the Gulf this summer, and those eddies seem to be carrying more thermal energy than they were 10 or 15 years ago,” said Lynn “Nick” Shay, a professor of oceanography at the Rosenstiel School. Powerful Hurricane Helene made landfall on the Florida Gulf Coast as a Category 4 storm on Sept. 26, causing catastrophic flooding across the southern Appalachians, widespread wind damage from the Gulf Coast to the North Carolina mountains, and storm surge flooding along portions of western Florida. The storm killed more than 238 people in six states.