

WRITE ON

A large, five-pointed star sculpture made of a reddish-brown metal, positioned in the center foreground. The star is mounted on a concrete base. In the background, there is a large, light-colored building with multiple stories, arched windows, and decorative panels. The sky is a mix of purple, pink, and blue, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall scene is an outdoor plaza or courtyard.

Navigating the UIL Essay Contests



Barbara Jordan Contest:

Not well known

Past and present

Significant contribution to
African American
history/culture in Texas

Look to local communities

TOPIC SELECTION

A black and white portrait of Juanita Craft, an elderly African American woman with short, wavy, light-colored hair. She is wearing glasses and a patterned jacket. She is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a thoughtful expression. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Juanita Craft

Granddaughter of slaves, Juanita Craft transformed the deep hurts of racial discrimination into a lifetime of courageous work for its elimination. In the 1950s, she helped open the University of Texas and North Texas State College to blacks. In 1967, her youth group desegregated the State Fair of Texas. In 1975, at age 73 she was elected to the Dallas City Council.

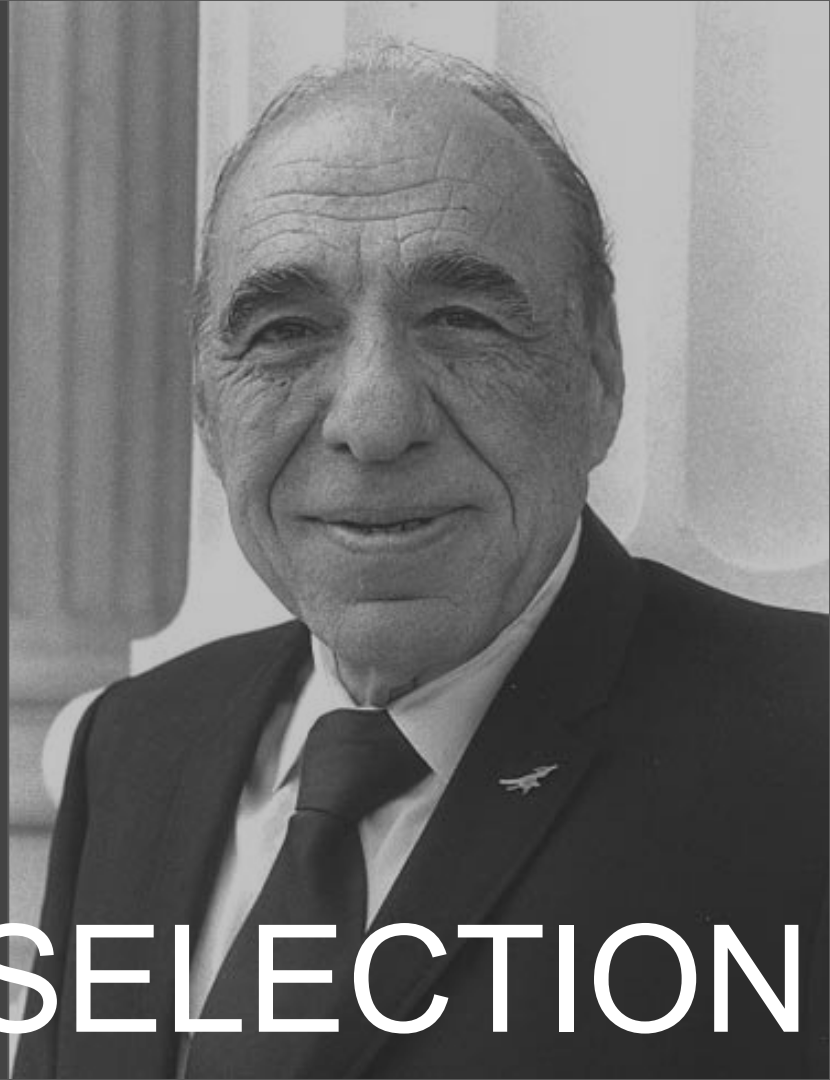
Latino History Contest:

Prominent OR not well known

Historical and cultural legacy

Latino individual, organization, or movement

Significant influence on today's Latino communities



TOPIC SELECTION

A black and white portrait of Jovita Idár, a young woman with dark, wavy hair, looking slightly to the left. The image is a close-up, focusing on her face and upper torso. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

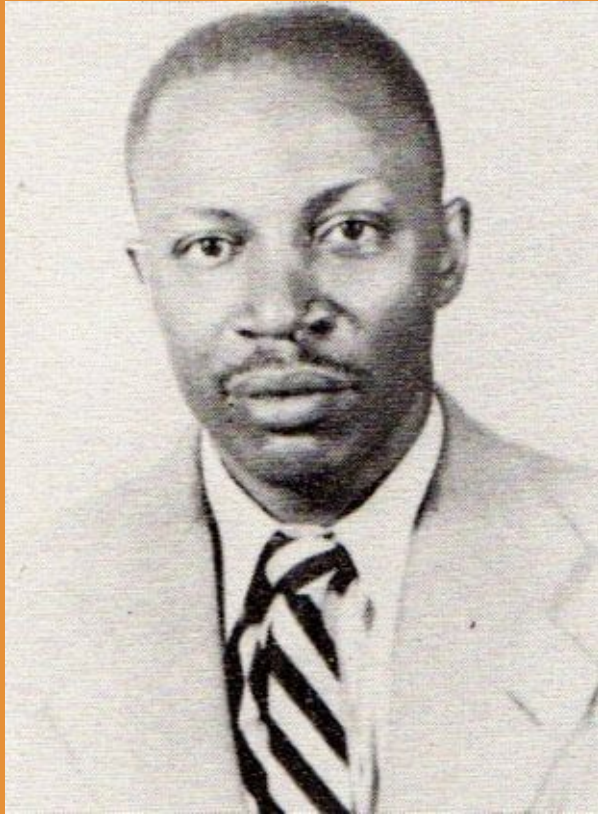
Jovita Idár

Jovita Idar was a multi-talented force throughout South Texas. Alongside her civil rights and women's rights activism, she was an early 20th century champion of bilingual education and transborder relations.

Intro Development & Thesis Statement

Example Intro: *Headlining History*

Zach Jones, 2021 State Champion in Barbara Jordan Essay Contest



“French philosopher Gilles Deleuze once proclaimed that ‘a concept is like a brick, it can be used to build a courthouse of reason or it can be thrown through the window.’ Today, America is in the midst of a difficult, national conversation about institutionalized racism. It is an ongoing issue with a troubling timeline that seems to repeat itself in new forms decades apart. From slavery to mass incarceration and segregation to gerrymandering, the only change is in its name. In the ongoing fight for justice, Black press is the brick. For every protester in the street, a black journalist ensured their voice was given a byline in the fight for freedom (McElroy). One of the most influential members of the press was Houston native George Albert McElroy. Originally denied admission to the University of Texas at Austin due to his skin color, McElroy would go on to spend his career amplifying the voices of the Civil Rights Movement in Texas. He began by reporting from the front lines of the battle against segregation and ultimately left behind a legacy that paved the way for Black journalism for decades to come.”

Example Intro: *Fighting Racism by the Books*

Ainsley Smith, 2021 State Silver Medalist in Latino History Essay Contest

“As a minority student in the American educational system, Mary Helen Bonilla Berlanga struggled to see herself reflected in the Texas History textbook issued by the state when she was in middle school. In fact, in a 1986 interview with the Caller-Times, she commented about how Mexican General Antonio López de Santa Anna was the historical figure who was most like her. It was not lost on her that Santa Anna was the villain. Years later, when Berlanga was elected to the Texas State Board of Education by her voting district, the lack of Latino representation in the state's course remained central to her advocacy. As she saw it, underrepresenting an ethnic group with as much influence as Hispanics in Texas was intentional and, quite literally, a textbook example of racism (Ehrlich). She sought to turn the page on exclusive history and start a new chapter that includes those who share her heritage. As a longtime resident of Corpus Christi, her contribution to the Latino community has been immortalized through the school district's Mary Helen Bonilla Berlanga Middle School. Today, Berlanga is known not just statewide but nationally as a champion of Hispanic inclusivity in education ('Mary Helen Berlanga').”



Judging Expectations

ENTRY NUMBER _____



University Interscholastic League
Essay Evaluation Form

PLEASE RECORD THE ENTRY NUMBER IN THE SPACE ABOVE!

Instructions: Judges evaluate each essay about the following criteria: thesis statement, research, paragraph construction, grammar, and parenthetical citations and bibliography. The sections below are intended for judges to provide brief constructive comments for contestants based on those criteria — strengths of the essay, areas needing improvement, and some suggested ways to improve.

Strengths of the Essay	
Select all that apply:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Paper effectively addresses the essay prompt	<input type="checkbox"/> Commentary bolsters key ideas
<input type="checkbox"/> Thesis statement is effectively proven about far-reaching topic	<input type="checkbox"/> Paper moves beyond a summary of the subject's life
<input type="checkbox"/> Purposefully utilizes a variety of sources including primary sources	<input type="checkbox"/> Contains very few grammatical mistakes
<input type="checkbox"/> Paper is clear, well organized, and coherent	<input type="checkbox"/> Citation method utilized is mostly correct
<input type="checkbox"/> Concrete details (quotes, paraphrases, summaries) are effectively incorporated	<input type="checkbox"/> Essay is memorable
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
Additional comments: _____	
Areas Needing Improvement	
Select all that apply:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Thesis statement is ineffective and/or not proven	<input type="checkbox"/> Commentary about research is lacking
<input type="checkbox"/> Topic is not far-reaching and/or no clear connection to Texas	<input type="checkbox"/> Paper needs to be carefully proofread
<input type="checkbox"/> Paper does not move beyond a biography	<input type="checkbox"/> Awkward sentences and/or word choice
<input type="checkbox"/> Paper needs more source variety	<input type="checkbox"/> Citation method is missing or has multiple errors
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of clarity, organization, and/or coherency	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Concrete details are ineffective	
Additional comments: _____	
Constructive Comments and Suggestions for the Contestant: _____ _____ _____	

Judging Process

Essays are pre-screened in UIL office to ensure they meet contest guidelines

Judges receive a variety of essay topics and writing abilities

They evaluate a batch of papers and recommend the top essays for placement consideration

A separate committee reviews judge evaluations and makes final decisions about placement

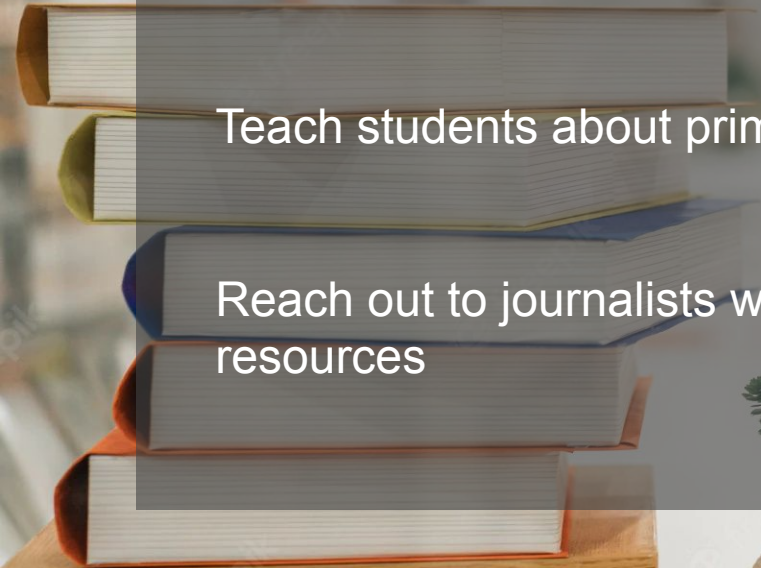


Finding Resources

Have students conduct a “Resource Scavenger Hunt”
(Book, article, person to interview, quotation)

Teach students about primary vs. secondary sources

Reach out to journalists who have written articles for additional resources



The Unraveling of History

George Albert
McElroy

Daughter Kathleen
follows in his
footsteps

Offered job to
revive journalism
program at Texas
A&M...

UT Austin:
Denied admission

Becomes a
journalist

She becomes
director of UT
journalism

Texas Southern
University

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Texas A&M recruited a UT professor to revive its journalism program, then backtracked after “DEI hysteria”

The university celebrated its decision to hire Kathleen McElroy to revive its journalism program. She says she's staying at UT after she felt judged because of her race and gender.

BY [KATE MCGEE](#) JULY 11, 2023 11 AM CENTRAL

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Covering the Story: How Kathleen McElroy is Diversifying Texas Journalism

Aden Ramsey, 2024 State Silver Medalist in Barbara Jordan Essay Contest



Legendary news anchor Walter Cronkite believed that “Freedom of the press is not just important to democracy, it is democracy.” While the press has been under increasingly frequent attacks and criticism over the past few years, it remains critical to upholding core democratic principles of value to all Americans. Because of the 24-hour news cycle, the polarization of the American public has become clear and apparent. Ever since the 1970s, the media has been the scapegoat for many current issues in American society (O’Connor). However, true journalism is not the poison, it is the antidote....Instead of relying on her own writing, Kathleen McElroy has made it her life’s work to educate the next generation of Texas journalists....The time has come to recognize her career, accomplishments, and the ongoing impact of her work in newsrooms across the state of Texas.

The image shows the Texas State History Museum building, a large, curved structure with a stone facade and arched windows. The words "THE STORY OF TEXAS" and "TEXAS STATE HISTORY MUSEUM" are inscribed on the upper part of the building. In the foreground, a large, stylized five-pointed star sculpture made of copper stands on a dark stone base. The sky is overcast and grey. The word "QUESTIONS?" is overlaid in large, white, sans-serif font across the center of the image.

QUESTIONS?