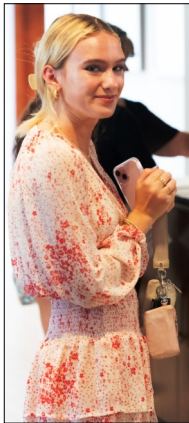


Annual Meeting & Awards Ceremony | June 27, 2024

Photos by Tom Tracy





Essay Contest & Creative Arts Competition

2024 TOPIC — Impact: The Power of Our Words and Actions

The following six pages feature the first place works and the complete lists of other winning entries. Congratulations to all the 2024 winners and thank you to all the Palm Beach County students who entered! Check www.palmbeachfellowship.net or write info@palmbeachfellowship.net for information on the 2025 contest!

First Place Essays are on pages 16, 17, and 19.
Additional Essay finalists are listed below.

Please note that student schools and grade levels listed reflect where they were during the 2023-2024 school year.

Second Place Essay – Sixth Grade

Catherine Bell | The Benjamin School

Second Place Essay (tie) – Seventh Grade

Jaxon Altman | Western Pines Middle School

Second Place Essay (tie) – Seventh Grade

Maximo Farias | Western Pines Middle School

Second Place Essay (tie) – Eighth Grade

Soleil Demers | The Benjamin School

Second Place Essay (tie) – Eighth Grade

Enzo Zeledob | Western Pines Middle School

Second Place Essay – High School

Jake Preville | Wellington High School

Third Place Essay (tie) – Sixth Grade

Adalyn Bosse | St. Mark's Episcopal School

Third Place Essay (tie) – Sixth Grade

Claire Melendy | The Benjamin School

Third Place Essay (tie) – Seventh Grade

Leanna Salloum | Independence Middle School

Third Place Essay (tie) – Seventh Grade

Madison Haser | Western Pines Middle School

Third Place Essay (tie) – Eighth Grade

Natalie Carvajal | Western Pines Middle School

Third Place Essay (tie) – Eighth Grade

Jaden Spooner | Western Pines Middle School

Third Place Essay (tie) – High School

Zva Chow | Wellington High School

Third Place Essay (tie) – High School

Daniella Iglesias | Wellington High School

Special Judges Award Essay

Emile Phanitnavong | Panther Run Elementary School

Honorable Mention Essay – Sixth Grade

Holden Peck | The Benjamin School

Honorable Mention Essay – Sixth Grade

Sadie Thompson | The Benjamin School

Honorable Mention Essay – Seventh Grade

Amira Aghzafi | The Benjamin School

Honorable Mention Essay – Seventh Grade

Amira Aghzafi | The Benjamin School

Honorable Mention Essay – Seventh Grade

Alex Becker | The Benjamin School

Honorable Mention Essay – Seventh Grade

Jodi Buczyner | The Benjamin School

Honorable Mention Essay – Seventh Grade

Claire McDermott | The Benjamin School

Honorable Mention Essay – Seventh Grade

Barlowe Wilson | The Benjamin School

Honorable Mention Essay – Eighth Grade

Barry Caden | Western Pines Middle School

Honorable Mention Essay – Eighth Grade

Megan Cajas | St. Luke Catholic School

Honorable Mention Essay – Eighth Grade

Victor Claros | Western Pines Middle School

Honorable Mention Essay – Eighth Grade

Amanda Daher | Western Pines Middle School.

Poetry

First Place Poetry – High School

Michael Louis | The Benjamin School

In the echo of our words, a symphony resounds,
A melody of kindness, or discord's painful sounds.
Each syllable we utter, each action that we take,
Ripples through the world, shaping hearts with every wake.

For in the quiet corners, where shadows oft reside,
Our words can be a beacon, or a force that may divide.
They carry weight and meaning, like feathers in the breeze,
But can shatter like thunder, leaving hearts upon their knees.

Our actions, too, hold power, to uplift or to dismay,
They paint the world around us in hues of night and day.
With every step we taken we leave imprints in the sand,
Guiding those who follow, toward a kinder, fairer land.

So let us choose our words with care, like seeds upon the earth,
Planting gardens of compassion, where hope can find rebirth.
Let empathy be our compass, and understanding be our guide,
As we navigate this journey, side by side.

Together, hand in hand, let's build a world brand new,
Where justice is the cornerstone, and kindness rings true.
With open hearts and open minds, let's bridge the gaps that part,
And sow the seeds of love and peace in every beating heart.

For in the end, it's not the wealth or power we amass,
But the love we share, the kindness shown, that truly makes us last.
So let us speak with love, and act with gentle grace,
And in the tapestry of life, let compassion find its place.

Honorable Mention Essay – Eighth Grade

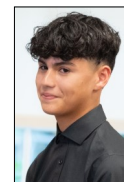
Gillian Goodman | Western Pines Middle School

Honorable Mention Essay – Eighth Grade

Annabella Lopez | Western Pines Middle School

Honorable Mention Essay – High School

Kirsten Maarsingh | Wellington High School



First Place Poems are on pages 14 and 15.

Additional Poetry finalists are listed below.

Second Place Poetry – High School

Hannah Chung | Wellington High School

Second Place Poetry (tie) – Middle School

Anastasia McCormack | Independence Middle School

Second Place Poetry (tie) – Middle School

Dominick Castillo | St. Luke Catholic School

Third Place Poetry – High School

Leanza Sojour | American Heritage School

Third Place Poetry (tie) – Middle School

Zlata Golubovska | Independence Middle School

Third Place Poetry (tie) – Middle School

Sky Requena | Rosarian Academy

Honorable Mention Poetry – High School

Jordan Lawson | Inlet Grove Community High School

Special Judges Award Poetry – Haiku

Martin Finn | The Benjamin School



First Place Poetry (tie) – Middle School
Brody Dunhill | Rosarian Academy

We only hurt when hurt;
The world is like that.
One word is the difference between the unity of all
 or destruction of another place;
The world is like that.
Lies inflict harm, but the truth helps;
The world is like that.
Teachers are influencers;
The world is like that.
Influencers are people who understand words and actions;
The world is like that.
Differences give us a reason to disrespect, and fight;
The world is like that.
We try and see this, yet we still continue to fight;
The world is like that.
Things we do and say keep us fighting because of our differences;
The world is like that.
A first impression could be judgement;
The world is like that.
First impressions are what we do and say;
The world is like that.
Words are more powerful than actions;
The world is like that.
Words can be used to stop wars, yet we use them to start them;
The world is like that.
Words and actions make up this world;
The world is like that.

First Place Poetry (tie) – Middle School
Tessa Brown
Beatrice George
Caroline Yohe | Rosarian Academy

Words are a bundle of letters.
People in the past have randomly bunched letters together
 with the intent of hopefully making
something that others will remember; yet they are so much
 more than an unsystematic creation.
Words are seeds of hope.
Seeping through your veins, the soil places itself into your heart,
With the wish of sprouting their leaves and forming your emotions.
As those leaves progress into vines, they weave within your body
 and make the ability to care.
Words are like a wave.
They begin as something small, something not as important
 but that you can easily think of.
Gradually, those words flow out of our minds and into the air,
 wrapping around someone's personality.
That particular person now has your words within their reach.
Your words can either make or break them.
But as the wave comes down from its peak
It consumes those below them.
Your words engulf a specific human being's existence;
Wishing that those bundle of letters, those waves of feelings,
 and those seeds of hope,
Will eternally remain and grow,
During whatever you may go through.
Because words don't go through you like a passing storm,
These words stay within you,
Making up who you are and leaving you transformed.

Spoken Word



First Place (tie) – Spoken Word
Nick Ferik
Santino Merchan
Andrew Sevald | Rosarian Academy



First Place (tie) – Spoken Word
Cerina Deitz
Brynn Saleeby-Russell
Khloe Ugarte | Rosarian Academy

Second Place – Spoken Word
Isla Brawn
Caroline Mischke | Rosarian Academy

Third Place – Spoken Word
Cecelia Hernandez-Macias | Rosarian Academy

Honorable Mention – Spoken Word
Valentina Luna-Garcia
Sawyer Treadway | Rosarian Academy

Thank you...

to the supervising teachers
of the winning students for
encouraging their participation!

Tara Abydos, Inlet Grove Community High
Karyn Aurilio, Panther Run Elementary School
Robert Bayless, The Benjamin School
Jennifer Bird, Rosarian Academy
Mary Cooney, St. Luke's Catholic School
Rudy Devries, The Benjamin School
Patricia Duebber, Crestwood Middle School
Chrissie Ferguson, The Benjamin School
Anne Franzen, The Benjamin School
Megan Gilmore, American Heritage School
Steve Gordon, Western Pines Middle School
Charles Hagy, The Benjamin School
Flint Keller, Rosarian Academy
Sharon Lencheski, Rosarian Academy
Ethan Lenczycki, St. Luke's Catholic School
Jacquelyn Leth, Panther Run Elementary School
Melissa Long, Wellington High School
Ashley Monastra, BAK Middle School of the Arts
Michael Palmgren, The Benjamin School
Melanie Perkins, St. Mark's Episcopal School
Amanda Petrucco, Rosarian Academy
Mary Richichi, Independence Middle School

Essays

First Place Essay – Sixth Grade Mae Havlicek | The Benjamin School

According to vocabulary.com, impact has a forceful consequence; or a very strong effect. Impact is very important while taking others' actions into play with kindness is truly great when said by John Havlicek, "Stay humble, be kind," to enforce humbleness, loveliness and kindness globally. My grandfather, J.H., was a famous man but he was a humble man which is why I chose to write about him. He had a major impact on our world as he is a hall of fame basketball player, but his impact on his family and others is truly important because of his kind heart.

My grandfather, who we all called Captain because he led us, was a basketball player but more than that he was very involved in the community with helping children born with birth defects. He was able to use his status as a basketball player for good by helping families that had children who were disabled. Captain changed people's and families' lives with hopefulness and kindness. He helped babies and young children who had no hope to get better. Captain shared with me how being kind can make a difference. Even if someone is having the worst day he always told me to be kind no matter what happens. Sometimes the impact on one can make a dramatic change in them.

I watched my Captain be humble and kind to all around him which impacted me to do the same. I try my hardest to take his words and actions into consideration in my own life. I think about every person I come into contact with trying to be kind. I always say hello and try to make someone's day better because I know that's what he did and I feel him watching over me every day. I will always strive to help anyone in need. While I grew up I watched him help others who could not help themselves, so if someone is new and is in need of help or friends I want him to know I'm following in his footsteps to make them better. Throughout the years without him I've noticed I hope to have his humbleness and not brag or show off something that others do not have, so my solution to that is to always do what he did to help but not to hurt.

J.H. was humble and kind and an amazing influence on me. His actions taught me to want to be a better person every day of my life. I know he is up there watching me which is why I will always be as humble and kind as I can be in order to honor all he did for people and our family. When the time comes for me to grow old like he did, I want to walk straight to what he said, "Stay humble, be kind."

First Place Essay (tie) – Eighth Grade Liv Heurich | The Benjamin School

Often the biggest impacts are made when you take action with passion. Sometimes from struggle, actions to help build ourselves can help others and our communities. There was a time when I felt invisible in school. This was because I am quiet and being bubbly does not come naturally to me. Since as early as the third grade, I was aware that I was not in the "popular group" and that many students didn't know my name. This caused me anxiety for several years as I compared myself to others and wondered if something was wrong with me. I could have continued to feel more alone. But one day, I realized that I needed to do something to change my situation. I decided to create a club where I could focus my thoughts and time on something positive. So I started a *Girls Who Code* chapter in my town.

Girls Who Code is a national nonprofit organization with the goal of increasing the number of girls in computer science. I sent invitations to all the girls in my grade and on my lacrosse team. We rented a private event space and over 25 girls joined. We began holding meetings once a week. During the meetings, we studied Python coding, did crafts, and played "sisterhood" games. *Girls Who Code* believes promoting sisterhood, the relationships between girls, is essential.

It was one month into the second session when I realized that the impact I was making was not just to me and the girls in my club. The organization sent me an email and asked if I would testify in front of the State legislature in support of a bill to increase the funding for education and technology for girls in grades 4-12. So, I wrote a statement about my experience with the program. I went to the State Capitol and spoke in front of 16 legislators. At that moment, I realized that my opinion mattered and that I was making a difference. If these funds were put aside for technology in schools, many young girls would benefit from this. Many girls could build their confidence and find sisterhood like I did. Countless girls from across the state could have the resources and opportunities they needed to excel in technology.

In starting the *Girls Who Code* chapter, many impacts were made. First, I was impacted. I grew in confidence and I gained friends who had the same values as me. Also, the impact was on girls in the club who felt included and learned girl power through learning coding. However, the impact reached farther than I ever expected as House Bill 1195 (2020) passed and went into effect on October 1, 2020, in the State of Maryland. This bill gave additional funding for computer science in schools throughout the state and required reporting to ensure girls were receiving them. Little steps toward change can grow into an impactful leap. When we can positively connect with others, we can grow as an individual. From overcoming my struggles, I had the strength to impact others.

First Place Essay – Seventh Grade
Annabel Brown | The Benjamin School

"Whenever anyone criticized me I felt certain that I had been living under the most dreadful misapprehension. I always accepted the attack in silence, though inwardly so terrified as almost to be out of my mind," wrote author Osamu Dazai in his semi-autobiographical novel: **No Longer Human**. While it might seem a fleeting sentiment, even the pettiest of remarks can have lasting effects on the receiver. People sometimes lack tact in everyday situations, not stepping into the other person's shoes and acknowledging how harmful their words are. While everyone is bound to make mistakes, it's the recognition of them that will permit positive development. Impact, the ability of speech or action to influence others, plays a critical part in this. I plan to make positive impacts by using my words and influence to uplift others.

Our words can have either negative or positive effects. The negative of them can thoroughly disturb one's views of themselves. Back in the fifth grade, I remember being constantly criticized by my friends for being loud. While it may have seemed inconsequential to them, their negative comments caused me to become meek, self-conscious of something I shouldn't have to worry about. Inconsiderate comments like these matter. If I could go back in time, I would encourage myself not to take those comments to heart. But ignoring negativity is difficult. In this uncomfortable stage of adolescence, we're all awkwardly navigating our identities, and bleakness is even more adversely impactful. We should all be working together to encourage each other, not put each other down. Instead of resorting to unhealthy practices like comparison and self-validation, I suggest we as a middle school community come together to build a fraternity of love and acceptance, using our words as a basis.

Conversely, words can also have positive impacts. Even just complimenting someone can make a difference, despite how miniscule that may seem. As previously pronounced, one never knows what's going on in someone else's head. It is inherently difficult to understand another person's feeling, no matter how much one has grasped the nature of the situation. And what's worse is when one has no idea about what their victim is going through, laying into the latter with the sole purpose of malice. While mocking someone may seem satisfying in the moment, it leaves behind a residue of guilt, unlike the fulfillment that positivity brings.

I, like many, understand the horrible feeling of humiliation. It's an oppressive, stressful feeling that, having experienced it, I would never want to cause anyone. Instead of discouraging those around me, I want to uplift and help them. To build on this, I want to form a steady spirit of inclusivity one step at a time. Humans are creatures of habit, and I hope to make that habit one of amiability and empathy. By using my words, I mean to set an example for the younger of my peers and therefore reduce the negativity, increase the positivity!

First Place Essay (tie) – Eighth Grade
Tara Huynh | Western Pines Middle School

Malala Yousafzai once said, "I truly believe the only way we can create global peace is through not only educating our minds, but our hearts and souls." Like Malala inspired those around her by speaking up for the rights of others who had no voice, I too can live by her words and inspire others. I may not change the world, or I may, but every small act of kindness or words of support can go a long way in impacting the lives of others and touching their hearts and souls.

For instance, at school, simply helping a friend in need, sticking up for a student that is being bullied, or giving support to someone who doesn't believe in him or herself are all examples of how I can positively affect the lives of others. When those around me are upset or feeling defeated, I can be the voice of support to lift them up. School can be a tough place for many reasons, knowing that you have someone who believes in you or is "in your corner" can make a difference in that person's future.

In my community I can help a neighbor by taking a chore or task "off their plate" to show them that life is manageable and support is there if you need it. Hopefully, leading by example will cause others to do the same, which will in turn spread kindness, support, care, and gratitude in my community. Positivity can be contagious. Inspiring others, spreading kindness, and spreading positivity has a snowball effect, if that snowball keeps rolling, it goes on to the next person and they may feel inspired to do the same for someone else. By working with others, individuals gain insight into diverse perspectives and experiences, and create compassion and mutual respect. Through active listening, individuals can bridge divides and foster a culture of empathy within their communities. Small gestures of kindness and understanding have the power to ignite positive change, creating a ripple effect that extends far beyond individual interactions. Our actions can serve as a beacon of hope and inspiration for others to follow and do the same for other individuals.

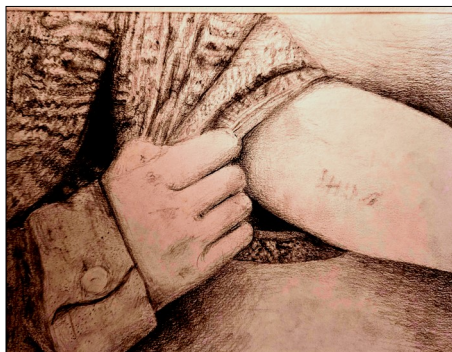
In conclusion, by educating not only our minds but also our hearts and souls, we can spread kindness, positivity, and much more to overcome division. It's not enough to simply aspire to peace; we must actively work towards it each day, demonstrating kindness, empathy, and understanding in all our interactions. By collectively harnessing the power of education and compassion, we can build a brighter, more harmonious future for generations to come.

See list of other Essay finalists on page 14.

Poster—*First Place*
Colette Conde
BAK Middle School
of the Arts



▼
Painting/Drawing — *Second Place*
Caitlyn Panse
Crestwood Middle School



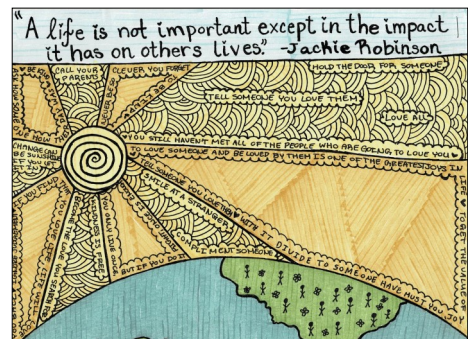
Poster — *Second Place* (tie)
Alexandra Massenat
Crestwood Middle School



Poster — *Second Place (tie)*
Penelope Perez
BAK Middle School of the Arts



Painting/Drawing—*Third Place*
Kylie Loucks
Crestwood Middle School



First Place Essay – High School
Cabo Kujawa | The Benjamin School

It's been said that even a tiny pebble creates ripples throughout the entire pond. The same is true of the things we say and do.

Everything we do affects the world and the people in it. An action that may feel meaningless to one person may mean the world to another. A careless lane change has triggered tragic road rage, altering lives forever. A black woman refusing to give up her seat has inspired millions and changed the course of history.

But not all impacts are monumental or world-changing, and often times the consequences aren't even considered, let alone intended. If someone is having a great day, a small, seemingly harmless comment about the fit of their pants could spoil their mood. Alternatively, if someone is having a tough time, a thoughtful compliment or even an encouraging word could be the ray of light shining through the dark clouds of their day.

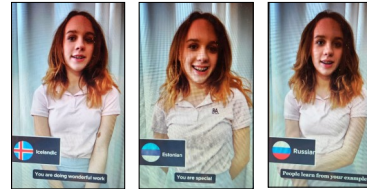
One of the easiest small interactions that can affect others is just saying hi and smiling at other people. Having someone smile at you is strangely satisfying. Kind words are free. And often times such warm, quick interactions are passed forward to the next person encountered.

Every one of us goes throughout our day leaving ripples in our paths. It is up to us to decide if these ripples are positive or negative for those who share our pond. We can all create positive ripples, no matter how small, every chance we get. A warm smile. An encouraging word. A friendly greeting. None of these on their own will change the world, but enough of them can make our pond a little better.

Music

Special Judges Award – Music Performance
Celeste Campos
Gabriela Chavez
Bryan Hernandez | St. Luke Catholic School

Video



First Place – Video
Cameron Lencheski | Rosarian Academy

Second Place – Video
Hannah Butler | St. Mark's Episcopal School

Third Place – Video
Alyssa Barber | Independence Middle School

Honorable Mention – Video
Zachary Barys | Independence Middle School

Membership Application 2024-2025

Join others in the community who are committed to the mission of the Fellowship through their support of its programs and activities. Visit palmbeachfellowship.net or call 561-833-6150 for more information, and add your name to our distinguished list of generous supporters!

Complete this form and mail with your payment to:
Palm Beach Fellowship, PO Box 507, Palm Beach, FL 33480
(you may also call 561-833-6150 to pay by credit card or to arrange installment payments).

Yes, I/we wish to support the projects and programs of the Palm Beach Fellowship of Christians & Jews.

Membership Level:	\$100	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual
	\$150	<input type="checkbox"/> Friend
	\$250	<input type="checkbox"/> Family
	\$500	<input type="checkbox"/> Supporter
	\$1,000	<input type="checkbox"/> Patron
	\$2,500	<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor
	\$5,000	<input type="checkbox"/> Chairman's Council
	\$10,000	<input type="checkbox"/> Founder's Society

Visit palmbeachfellowship.net or call 561-833-6150 for more information about member benefits of these levels.

☐ I/we give permission to be acknowledged publicly.

Memberships cover the fiscal year July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025.
We do not sell or share donor information.

Named program sponsorships also available, call for details!

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E-mail ** _____

* If you have a seasonal address, please add w/approximate dates below.

** Be assured that we use e-mail very sparingly for event reminders and other notices.

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(payable to Palm Beach Fellowship) - Check No. _____

☐ Credit Card (circle one)

Visa MasterCard Discover AmEx

Name as Written on Credit Card _____

Expiration Date _____ CVC Code _____

Account Number _____

☐ Billing Address (if different from above):

Address _____

City/State/ZIP _____

☐ Seasonal Information (if applicable):

Address _____

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Palm Beach Fellowship of Christians & Jews

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Our Mission

The Palm Beach Fellowship of Christians & Jews is dedicated to promoting fellowship, understanding, and respect among all religions and cultures; to bringing the community together through education, dialogue, and interaction; and to addressing issues rooted in intolerance, antisemitism, and unjust discrimination.

Add your voice to our efforts!

Join your neighbors in taking a stand by supporting the Fellowship's mission through your membership contribution. Help us bring the community together with meaningful programs and events during the 2024-2025 season!

See page 19 to join or renew your membership NOW to take full advantage of members only activities and discounts on events such as the Annual Dinner.

Facing History and Ourselves **Holocaust Education**

One of the most important and longtime projects of the Fellowship is to provide materials and full scholarships for local educators to attend seminars and workshops to prepare them to teach the lessons of the Holocaust, as mandated by the state of Florida more than 30 years ago.

With the *Facing History and Ourselves* programming changes resulting from the covid years, we have been partnering more recently with the School District of Palm Beach County and InSIGHT Through Education to present the "Holocaust and Human Behavior" multi-day seminars locally with the assistance of *Facing History* staff.

In July 2023, more than 40 educators participated in the training, which included an inspiring presentation by and 99th birthday salute to Holocaust survivor Sam Ron, who sadly passed away a few months later, underscoring the urgency of hearing these stories first-hand while we can.

► *Facing History's* Dimitry Anselme leads a breakout session at the July 2024 Holocaust education seminar at Palm Beach Central High School.



Under the leadership of our Education Chair Charles Hagy with assistance from Benjamin School colleagues Anne Franzen and Chrissie Ferguson, implementation workshops were also developed for FHAO seminar alums.

More collaborations with the School District and InSIGHT in 2024 have included "Teaching With Testimony" workshop held in April, featuring Alexandra Zapruder, author and editor of the award-winning **Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust**, and the two-day "Holocaust and Human Behavior" seminar in late July, facilitated by *Facing History* staff and featuring survivor Mary Eckstein.

Approximately 40 local educators attended each of these programs, and plans are already in the works for more in 2025. For more info, contact CharlesHagy@TheBenjaminSchool.org.