

Holmes Soil & Water Conservation District

2023 5th Grade Farm Tour Essay Contest

1. The 5th Grade Farm Tour Essay contest accepts submissions in **Creative nonfiction**. A detailed explanation of the genre can be found later in this document.
2. The SWCD board recommends that essays fall between 450-700 words. Essays will not be disqualified, however, for running slightly outside those parameters.
3. The essay is to be based on the tour itself, with no additional research.
4. The essay should be written in ink or typed. No preference will be given for either format, although neatness will be taken into consideration.
5. Essays should be stapled once in the top left corner. No binders or covers are to be used.
6. On the back of each essay please place a post-it with the following information: **student name, teacher name, school name and grade**. The name of the student, teacher, parents, school, etc. should not appear anywhere in the essay. Please “white out” any reference that might identify the writer or school before submission. This is necessary so essays can be judged anonymously.
7. **Each teacher should submit only the top 10%** (not to exceed 3 and round up only if 0.5 or higher) of the essays to the **Holmes SWCD, 62 W. Clinton St, Millersburg, OH 44654 by 4:30 p.m. on Thursday, October 26th**. Essay judging is tentatively scheduled for October 31st, or soon after. The Holmes SWCD annual meeting will be held Tuesday, November 14th, 2023, with dinner beginning at 6:00 p.m. at Harvest Ridge (Holmes County Fairgrounds) in Millersburg. The top three essay winners and teachers will be recognized at that time. The winning essay writer and parents, as well as teacher, will receive a complimentary ticket to the annual meeting.
8. Any student questions concerning the farm tour should be directed to the student’s teacher and not to the Holmes SWCD office.

What is creative non-fiction?

Quite frankly we’ve struggled with various ways to judge essays “apples to apples.” Many well written “narrative” essays get overlooked by the more “creative” essays, which tend to place at the top. We tried two different categories, and had six winners instead of three, which gets a bit cumbersome. Hence the idea of the creative non-fiction category, with awards for first through third place.

In simplest terms, creative nonfiction conveys facts in a way that reads like fiction. What we’re looking for are essays built around any number of facts or details that the student has gleaned from his or her experience during their day on the farm—information woven into a creative delivery. For instance, a student may choose to tell a “day in the life” story of a boy or girl who lives on a dairy farm, or perhaps a cow living on that same farm. A student could write about the different soils characteristics a worm encounters as it borrows its way through the profile. How about the story of a fish whose life gets a whole lot better when the water in his stream becomes clear? There are any number of possibilities.

“Ultimately, the primary goal of the creative nonfiction writer is to communicate information, just like a reporter, but to shape it in a way that reads like fiction.” Gutkind, Lee (2007)

John Lorson, previous Holmes SWCD Conservation Specialist, is also a freelance outdoor writer and humor columnist and has taught writing courses at The University of Akron. He wrote the following as a guide and included an example essay. If you have any questions, please contact Trevor Berger at tberger@co.holmes.oh.us or call at **330-600-3102**.

Checklist for Creative Nonfiction

Main Goals of Assignment:

Essay will convey specific learning the writer has experienced while participating in the 5th Grade Farm Tour **with emphasis on conservation on and around the farm.**

Overall Structure of Essay:

- Unity (all ideas related to topic)
- Coherence/order (essay is developed in a logical and sequential way)
- Structure clues guide the reader
- Author's original insight is clearly articulated within the work
- Specific examples, language and dialogue used to paint a picture of the experience for the reader
- Suggested word count: 450-700

Other Considerations:

Creative title of essay

Topic is developed logically over the course of the work

- Beginning draws reader into the piece, captures interest
- Clear beginning, middle and end to the piece
- Reader's potential questions are answered when appropriate throughout the piece

Specific details:

- Used to develop an image of the experience in the reader's mind

Stylistics:

- Newly learned terms with proper usage are encouraged.

Sentence errors:

- Spelling, sentence fragments, run-on sentences
- Punctuation: commas, possessives, etc.
- Inconsistent verb tenses

Essay Judging

The essay judges will use the following to judge the submitted essays:

Creative Elements:

- *creative techniques to gain and hold the attention of the reader*
- *captivating sentences that move the reader through the piece*
- *vivid word pictures that develop a scene or experience*
- *stories told from an interesting perspective*

Scale (1-5) (1) few creative elements to (5) many creative elements **SCORE** _____

Factual Elements:

- *contextual use of terms reflects understanding of processes*
- *detailed descriptions of equipment, livestock, wildlife, forestry, soils, crops*
- *detailed descriptions of processes, techniques, practices, safety procedures and/or issues that affect water quality*

Scale (1-5) (1) few factual elements to (5) many factual elements **SCORE** _____

Mechanics of writing:

- *correct spelling, proper sentence structure, proper punctuation*
- *contextual vocabulary and thoughtful word choices*
- *contains beginning, middle and end with conclusion*
- *sufficient length to demonstrate proficiency*

Scale (1-5) (1) poor writing mechanics to (5) excellent writing mechanics **SCORE** _____

Takeaway:

- *conveys lessons learned about conservation on 5th Grade Farm Tour*
- *affords reader a better understanding of why conservation is important to agricultural operations, forestry, wildlife, soils and water quality*

Scale (1-5) (1) minor conveyance to (5) major conveyance **SCORE** _____

Example essay:

Lizzie's Most Important Chore

When Lizzie wakes up at five o'clock in the morning she knows she's got plenty to do. Sometimes, she's still yawning as she pulls on her boots, but when she thinks about the brown-eyed calves waiting for their first drink of the day, she snaps right to it. Her list of chores isn't long, but her work is very important. Feeding the calves is her favorite chore. She figures that's because she is the youngest in her own family she has something in common with the calves. She likes to think of herself as sort of a mom to the calves because she's the one with the milk.

On a dairy farm, newborn calves spend only their first few days with their mother. During that time the cow produces special milk called colostrum that helps a calf grow and stay healthy. A calf only needs a few days of this special milk to make a big difference in its life. Then mom goes back to the milking herd and the calf gets its own pen or shelter away from the big cows. That way it doesn't get hurt and the farmer can make sure each calf gets the right care.

Lizzie feeds the calves a formula called "milk replacer" at first with a bucket with a rubber nipple, but for them to grow into healthy cows they need to start eating a small amount of hay or grass when they are a few weeks old. They also get calf-started pellets. She makes sure the feed stays up off the ground, because that can make the calf sick. Calves also need fresh water nearby always.

In addition to making sure the calves have clean water and fresh food every day, it's very important to keep everything clean around the calf pen. Lizzie spreads clean straw each day for the calves to lay on, and she scrapes their stalls out every Saturday to add to the "dry stack" of straw and manure in a building with low walls and a high roof. The roof keeps rain from falling on the dry stack and carrying the manure away where it might cause pollution. Manure is stored in the dry stack until the time is just right for Lizzie's dad to spread it on the fields. The manure is full of nutrients that help crops grow, and it's important to spread it when it has the best chance to make it into the soil. Her dad will never spread manure if it's going to rain because it could run off the fields and into the stream. That would cause pollution and it would be a waste of all those nutrients, too!

Sometimes Lizzie thinks her job might be the most important one on the farm because healthy calves grow up to be healthy cows and that's where the milk comes from!

What makes this a good creative nonfiction essay?

- *The story is built around Lizzie a fictional farm girl and tells us first a little about her life:*
 - *Farm kids get up early.*
 - *They share in the work of the farm.*
 - *They are responsible for important jobs.*
 - *They understand why their job is important.*
 - *They learn the importance of conservation from their family members*
- *We learn very specific things about raising dairy cows*
 - *Calves need to be with their mother in the beginning.*
 - *Calves are separated from their mothers early on but for good reasons.*
 - *Cows go right back to work producing milk shortly after calving.*
 - *Cleanliness is very important to good health.*
 - *Healthy calves grow into good cows.*
 - *A calf's diet changes over time as it grows.*
 - *Manure, rather than a waste product, is a valuable and important resource on the farm because it helps crops grow.*
 - *Keeping the manure out of the rain prevents it from causing pollution.*
 - *Spreading manure at the right time is good for crops and good for the environment by preventing run-off.*
- *The story includes many facts and at the same time is creative in its delivery. It's interesting to read and one might learn a few things through the telling of "Lizzie's" story.*