

2025 Memphis Parks Literacy Meets Recreation Black History Month Oratorical Contest Information

Event Dates:

Preliminary Contest February 15, 2025

Location: Gaisman Community Center @ 1pm

Final Oratorical Gala February 23, 2025

Location: Whitehaven Banquet Hall from 3pm-6pm

Purpose

Memphis Parks Literacy Meets Recreation provides Memphis youth with an opportunity to improve recreational and educational attitudes towards literacy by providing intervention that includes a variety of literacy-based programming, games, activities, field trips and special events. The 2025 Black History Month Oratorical Competition allows participants the opportunity to showcase their literacy, comprehension, communication, and public speaking skills, while honoring the history and contributions of African Americans in this country. The 3-phase competition culminates with a formal awards gala.

Black History Month Theme

The 2025 Black History Month theme, “African Americans and Labor,” focuses on the various and profound ways that work and working of all kinds – free and unfree, skilled, and unskilled, vocational, and voluntary – intersect with the collective experiences of Black people. This theme focuses on the valuable contributions of African Americans in the workforce.

Eligibility

Contest is open to all students in grades K-12th who reside in Memphis, TN.

K-5th Grade Contest Guidelines

Students in the K-5th grade division will have 1 to 3 minutes to recite a poem written by a famous African American poet or an original poem that reflects this year's theme of African Americans in the workplace. Participants may research poets like Sojourner Truth, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Gwendolyn Brooks, and others for inspiration.

- Participants must submit a copy of their selected poem and a cover page.
- K-5th competition is open to groups of no more than 3 members. (One award will be given.)
- All participants in this grade division will automatically advance to the preliminary oratorical competition that will be held on Saturday, February 15, 2025, at Gaisman Community Center at 1 p.m.
- Participants will dress business casual for the preliminary competition and formal for the Oratorical Gala.
- Poems will not have to be memorized, but familiarity with the poem and practice are strongly encouraged. Extra points will be given for memorization.
- They will be judged on (1) delivery/diction, (2) creativity, (3) time, (4) tone, (5) pronunciation and bonus points added for audience engagement.
- The top 4 individuals/groups will advance to the final round at the Oratorical Gala on February 23, 2025.

6th - 8th Grade Contest Guidelines

Students in grades 6th-8th must submit a written speech on the following topic:

This year's theme for Black History Month, "African Americans and Labor," highlights the central role that African Americans have played in shaping the workforce of the United States, Africa, and the Diaspora. It also encourages people to consider the barriers that Black workers face and how to help eliminate them.

In your opinion, what are some significant contributions that African Americans have made in the workplace over the past 20 years? What are some ways African Americans used jobs to contribute to the struggle for equality in this country?

- Each written speech should be 1-2 pages.
- Each written speech should have 1-inch margins, Times New Roman 12-point font size, and be double spaced.
- Written speeches will be judged on content, flow, grammar, clarity, and adherence to topic.
- Written speeches must be submitted by Sunday, February 9, 2025.
- The top 6 scoring submissions will be invited to participate in the preliminary competition, where they will present speeches before a selected panel of judges.
- The top 3 scoring speeches will then advance to the final competition awards gala.
- You will have 1 to 5 minutes to present your oration to judges.
- The speech does not have to be memorized. Extra points will be given for memorization; however, points will not be deducted if the speech is not memorized.

9th-12th Grade Contest Guidelines

"African Americans and Labor" looks at the pivotal role that the hard work of African Americans played in shaping our country. Historically, Blacks were only allowed to work domesticated jobs of servitude, in poor conditions and for little or no pay. Examples of these jobs include field hands, cooks, maids, railroad workers, garbage men, chauffeurs, and several others. Discuss significant ways in which they used these positions of labor to support the overall fight for equality in this country, and in your opinion, how can African Americans survive the job disparities facing them today.

- Each written speech should be 2-4 pages.
- Each written speech should have 1-inch margins, Times New Roman 12-point font size, and be double spaced.
- Written speeches will be judged on content, flow, grammar, clarity, and adherence to topic.

- Speeches must be submitted by Sunday, February 9, 2025.
- The top 6 scoring submissions will be invited to participate in the preliminary competition where they will present speeches before a selected panel of judges.
- The top 3 scoring speeches will then advance to the final competition awards gala.
- You will have 3 to 5 minutes to present your oration to judges.
- The speech should be memorized for the final event gala. Points will be deducted if the speech is not memorized. Presenters may use note cards.
- Participants will dress business casual for the preliminary competition and formal for the Oratorical Gala.

Submission Deadline

All submissions must be emailed to memphisparksoratorical@gmail.com by 5 p.m. on February 9, 2025.

Each submission must have a cover page with the following information:

Name

School

Community Center

Grade

Parents' Name, Phone, and Email Address