



HISTORICAL COMMISSION AGENDA REPORT

Meeting Date: January 27, 2025

Subject: Margaret Thompson Essay Contest

Prepared by: Sean Gallegos, Senior Planner

Initiated by: City of Los Altos

Attachment:

1. 2025 Cover Sheet
2. 2025 Writing Prompt
3. 2025 General Instructions for Teachers, Principals, and Parents
4. 2025 Rubric for Essay Contest

Recommendation

None.

Background

Margaret Thompson Essay Contest Overview

The Margaret Thompson Historical Essay Contest is an annual program established by the City of Los Altos and the Los Altos History Museum to engage students in exploring and reflecting on the city's rich history. Named in honor of Margaret Thompson, a dedicated Los Altos educator and historian, the contest encourages local youth to learn about the past while fostering a sense of community pride and connection.

The contest is open to students in grades 3 through 6 within Los Altos and the Los Altos Hills area. Each year, the contest features a unique theme designed to inspire students to research and write about significant historical events, figures, or landmarks that have shaped the community.

The contest goals include:

1. **Promoting Historical Awareness:** Encouraging students to discover and appreciate the history of Los Altos through research and storytelling.
2. **Fostering Civic Engagement:** Strengthening the connection between students and their local community by highlighting historical contributions and milestones.

3. **Developing Writing Skills:** Providing an opportunity for students to hone their writing abilities through a structured and meaningful academic exercise.

Winning essays are selected based on creativity, historical accuracy, and clarity of expression. Winners are publicly recognized by the City Council and the Los Altos History Museum, with awards given to honor their achievements.

The Margaret Thompson Historical Essay Contest remains a cornerstone of local efforts to educate future generations about the importance of history in shaping the identity and values of the Los Altos community.

2025 Essay Contest Theme: “Rooted in Time: Hidden Villa”

The 2025 Essay Contest theme, "Rooted in Time: Hidden Villa," invites students to explore the rich history and natural beauty of Hidden Villa, a historic site nestled in Los Altos Hills. Students will learn about the lasting legacy left behind by Frank and Josephine Duveneck, whose stewardship shaped the land into a place where nature and history intersect.

To prepare for the contest, students are encouraged to visit the Hidden Villa Exhibit at the Los Altos History Museum. The exhibit delves into the Duveneck’s lasting impact on Hidden Villa and the area’s historical significance. The exhibit is open Thursday through Sunday, 12:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. until March 1. For more details, visit the [Rooted in Time: Hidden Villa Exhibit](#).

Hidden Villa is also celebrating its Centennial this year, marking 100 years of its founding. Students may want to visit Hidden Villa in person, where they can explore a farm with animals, hiking trails, and other attractions. For more information, visit the [Hidden Villa Website](#).

Writing Prompt: Reflecting on Your Outdoor Adventures

Students are invited to reflect on a past visit to Hidden Villa or a similar outdoor location that they and their family have enjoyed together. This could include a local park, national park, forest, or other natural habitat. Have a conversation with your family to recall your shared memories. To help you get started, consider these questions:

- Where did you go on your adventure?
- What activities did you participate in?
- What sounds, sights, and textures stood out to you?
- Who joined you on this experience?
- What made this place unforgettable?

After reflecting on their adventure, students will write a personal narrative to share their story. Creativity, interesting vocabulary, and vivid descriptions are encouraged.

Students are also invited to include a visual component, such as a drawing, painting, or photograph to complement their written narrative. Although visuals are optional, they are welcome and will not be considered in the evaluation process.

Outreach Efforts for the 2025 Contest

Staff has actively worked to promote the 2025 Margaret Thompson Essay Contest to ensure broad community participation. The following outreach efforts have been undertaken:

- **Los Altos Town Crier Article:** Staff worked to secure an article in the Los Altos Town Crier to advertise the essay contest and encourage participation.
- **Essay Contest Webpage:** A dedicated webpage has been created for the contest, where all relevant documents—including the 2025 cover sheet, writing prompt, general instructions, and rubric—are available. Visit the webpage at: [Margaret Thompson Essay Contest Webpage](#).
- **School Outreach:** Staff has directly contacted local schools to invite students in grades 3 through 6 to participate in the contest. This outreach ensures that a wide range of students within the Los Altos and Los Altos Hills communities have the opportunity to engage with the contest theme.