



South Dakota Department of Agriculture & Natural Resources

RESOURCE CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY DIVISION

4305 S Louise, Suite 107

Sioux Falls, SD 57106

Phone: 605.362.2830/605.933.9650

<https://danr.sd.gov/>

TO: CONSERVATION DISTRICT SUPERVISORS AND EMPLOYEES

FROM: John Hartland

DATE: 12/06/2024

RE: 2025 ARBOR DAY CREATIVE WRITING CONTEST

2025 marks the 47th year of the Arbor Day Creative Writing Contest open to all 5th and 6th grade students from South Dakota. It will have been 153 years ago, in 1872 that J. Sterling Morton and the State of Nebraska sponsored and hosted the first ever Arbor Day. Over one million trees were estimated to have been planted in Nebraska on that day.

Prizes

First Place: \$125 cash award and \$150 to the winner's school

Second Place: \$100 cash award

Third Place: \$75 cash award

The South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts (SDACD) has agreed to arrange for each of the three state winners to receive an engraved plaque and the above cash prizes. Each student who enters the contest will receive a packet of honeylocust tree seeds, instructions on how to grow their own tree, courtesy of the South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Division of Resource Conservation and Forestry (RC&F). Finally, I am attaching the certificates of achievement available for local district winners. It is a Microsoft Word document. All you need to do is type in the student's name and date and print it.

Seed Packets

Please send your requests for seed packets **via email directly to me. Let me know the number of entries you had, and I will send all the materials to you.** In the email, please inform me if you intend to give packets to the teachers.

Last year some districts requested more seed packets than the participant numbers submitted to Angela. If you need more packets than you have contest participants, please tell me why in your email request for packets.

Rules

The central theme of entries should be the importance of Arbor Day and trees. Students should concentrate on why we celebrate Arbor Day in South Dakota and why it is important to plant and care for trees across the state. Students are encouraged to focus on personal experience, and to remember that originality and effectiveness are major factors in judging.

The 2025 rules sheet is available on the RC&F website at:

<https://danr.sd.gov/Conservation/Forestry/Education/ArborDayEssay/default.aspx>.

Note: There is a place to stamp or type in the name and address of your conservation district on the flyer.

Please promote the contest as best you can, especially by contacting elementary schools in your district.

This will provide an opportunity to explain the contest to school officials and answer questions. You should understand that school systems are bombarded with creative writing and poster contests and, as a result, can be indifferent to such projects. But the fact that each student who enters will receive a packet of tree seeds to grow his/her own tree and that local recognition of the school and student winners will be arranged, should help sell the program.

Please encourage teachers not to alter the creative writing in any way; obviously corrected or edited entries cannot be considered. Grammatical, punctuation, and spelling errors should not be corrected by teachers or others at the local level. Typing is not required. A prize at the local level is optional but encouraged. We suggest that it should not exceed \$25 in value; it would have to come from a local source.

Deadlines and Judging

Each conservation district should select a local winner and if you like, honorable mentions. We are recommending a deadline for the schools to get their entries to you, on March 21, 2025 in order to get your winning entry to Angela on April 4, 2025. Submit only the local first place winner with completed cover page for judging at the state level. The attached point scoring system, part of the Contest Rules, can be used as a more objective and uniform method of scoring creative writings. **Scan your local winning entry and email it to Angela Ehlers, SDACD at sdoffice@sdconservation.net by April 4, 2025.**

The panel of state contest judges includes representatives of SDACD, the Resource Conservation and Forestry Division (RCF), and persons to be selected. The judges will select the first, second, and third place winners shortly after the April 4, 2025 deadline, and will immediately notify the conservation districts that sponsored the three winners. Well in advance of local awards presentations, contact your local RC&F office or the Sioux Falls office to request tree seed cards. Be sure to indicate how many of each you will need. You might invite your local service forester to assist with the presentation of awards on or around Arbor Day which falls on Friday, April 25th, 2025.

When submitting your local entries to the state contest, **please use the attached cover sheet and indicate the name of the student's teacher and how many total entries were received by your district.** This gives us an accurate figure on the grand total number of entries received which is very important for publicity purposes as the question always comes up.

The final aspect of the project is to distribute the seed packets to all students who enter the contest. This can be handled in several ways. You can visit each classroom, give a talk on the importance of planting and caring for trees, then pass out the packets. Another option is to arrange a school assembly for the elementary school fifth and sixth graders. You can also present the packets to the schools and allow teachers to distribute them. The latter takes less time but is less personal and less effective. If you need assistance with speaking in the classroom, please contact myself or one of our area service foresters.

If you have any questions or concerns, please give John Hartland at 605.362.2830 or Angela Ehlers at 605.895.4099.

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