

HUMAN RIGHTS ESSAY COMPETITION TOP TEN WINNERS

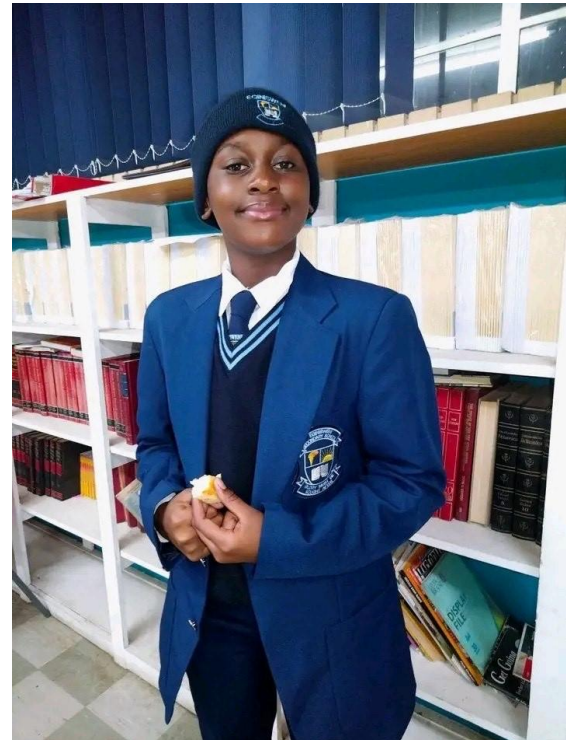
QUNU, MTHATHA - The Nelson Mandela Museum made a call for Grade 10 and Grade 11 learners to submit Essays for its Annual Human Rights Essay Competition. The program encourages Grade 10 and 11 learners to showcase their writing abilities, knowledge, and engagement on the subject, presentation, and public speaking abilities.

This year's program saw more than seven hundred applicants from nine provinces of South Africa submitting their essays. This year's essay topic, "You are a student at school X, but owing to your sexual orientation, you feel discriminated against, and your human rights as enshrined in the constitution are trampled by other learners and educators," resonated with high school learners from across South Africa.

The essays were adjudicated by independent judges from Walter Sisulu University and the Department of Basic Education, who have looked at all submissions, which saw 100 essays advancing to the next stage. After a rigorous selection process, the top 10 finalists were chosen. The top ten competitors will be vying for the top three positions. On the 13th of March 2025, they will be doing oral presentations at the Nelson Mandela Museum Youth and Heritage Centre in Qunu.

The Nelson Mandela Museum Communication unit caught up with

the top ten to find out about their feelings on making the top ten;



Marungula Nkuna Said, " To be honest, I was a bit anxious when I started writing the essay. I felt overwhelmed by the complexity of the topic, but as I researched, I realised the importance of creating a safe and inclusive environment, and was struck by the alarming statistics on bullying and harassment.

"I structured my arguments using legal instruments, which include the South African constitutional framework, international human rights law, and domestic legislation, hoping to contribute to a greater understanding and inspire change for good.

"I wouldn't say I had a thorough understanding of the topic before starting the essay, but I had some general knowledge about some of the legal instruments used to protect the rights of sexual oriented learners.

Despite this, through research and writing the essay, I gained a deeper understanding.

“I was completely overwhelmed with joy and gratitude upon hearing that I've been selected for the top 10 of the competition. I felt so blessed and humbled for this recognition and I'm also thankful that God granted me this opportunity, not to forget how my teacher was feeling about the hard work and dedication I put into the essay. My teacher felt a sense of fulfilment knowing that their guidance and mentorship played a role in my achievement, furthermore my parents were so emotional and filled with so much happiness upon hearing the news and thanking God for this wonderful blessing, they also felt validated knowing that their sacrifices, support and unconditional love paid off.

“I've been preparing for this moment and I'm confident that I can effectively communicate my ideas about protecting the rights of sexual orientated learners in South Africa, in addition to the Nelson Mandela Museum, which is an iconic venue and so I am honoured to have the opportunity to present my work there.

“I believe that God will give me wisdom, courage, and clarity to deliver a compelling presentation”. **End**



Carter-Blyke MC from Northern Cape said, “My mind went through a spiral while doing my essay. I am passionate about human rights, I'd love to have won, and I wanted to effectively advocate for the gospel and kingdom of Jesus Christ through my essay. This took me through a lot of legal research, as well as prayer and petition.

“I understood the topic to a great extent. It was certainly out of my comfort zone, as I am a conservative Christian. But I didn't let that stop me. And I was able to write my essay within the topic, while firmly standing by my beliefs.

“I felt overwhelmed with joy upon hearing the news. But I wasn't all shocked, as I know that my God always makes a way, and it's not my first time taking on this project.

“Both my family, educators, and friends are overwhelmed with pride and joy for my outstanding achievement, and trust that I will do my best at the oral presentations.

“I am more than ready for the oral presentations to be held at the museum! I can't wait to return to the beautiful city of Mthatha, and to see the greatest museum itself again. I am ready to advocate the gospel and human rights, as I always strive to do”.
End



Lesia Leticia a grade 11 learner from Maralaneng ss in the Free State Said, “what went through my mind was that not all of us are treated fairly. The universal declaration of Human Rights came to mind that “all human being is born free and equal irrespective of gender, and sexuality according to our sexuality.

“When I was writing the essay, I had to rely mainly on the declaration of human rights as a point of reference and guiding tool in responding to the topic of the essay.

“I was surprised but felt excited after hearing that I have made the top ten. I was also happy to see the visible joy of my teacher and that of my parents. Being cheered by your teacher and parents becomes a motivating factor in achieving your goals. I am looking forward to the oral presentations to be held at the Nelson Mandela Museum.
End



ANATHI SIYALU, a learner from Zingisa Comprehensive School in Mthatha, Eastern Cape, said, “Writing this essay and the thought at the helm of my mind was not an easy task to carry. However, with the understanding of the topic, that positioned me to put arguments accurately. When my teacher told me, I had made it into the top ten, I had immense joy and relief.

“At first, I couldn't quite comprehend that I had made the top ten; it felt like a dream. My teacher's and parents' faces were glowing with pride and joy. I strongly believe that I am ready to

deliver my essay orally at the museum on the set date”. **End**



Tshegofatso Selemela's from Sol Plaatje Secondary in Mahikeng, North West said, “Before I started with the essay, I aimed to make it as genuine and truthful as possible, and I knew that if I wrote as a homosexual learner, I would not achieve my aim because I am not. So, I decided to write my truth, being a heterosexual learner and some of the things that I experienced.

“When I was writing this essay, I had doubts because I was writing about an unpopular idea that doesn’t get reported when it happens, as it doesn’t seem very valid. After all, such things are believed only to happen to people of the LGBTQI+ community. However, I put my doubts aside and continued, hoping to shed some light on this constantly hidden experience, so I did.

“I believe I did have a thorough understanding and knowledge of the topic. I was requested to write about the

discrimination, challenges, and experiences I faced because of my sexual orientation at school. Not only this, but I was also requested to support my concerns with some laws in our Constitution, mainly focusing on the Human Rights Laws, which I believe I did exactly that.

“I was overwhelmed and happy. I was not expecting to be selected as I wrote about a very unpopular opinion and took a great risk, but was happy when I did get selected. My teacher expressed that it was a great and overwhelming feeling for me to be selected out of a hundred (probably a thousand participants). She is proud of me and says that it shows that hard work and effort will always reap good results.

“Honestly, a person can never be too ready. I am nervous, but I know that as long as I am determined and I have God, I can do anything”. **End**



Motebele Ramokone, Noordwyk SSS from Gauteng said, “In the beginning I was clueless about what I could write

about since the topic was about me being discriminated because of my sexual orientation. In the process of writing my essay, one thing that I was sure about was that I wanted to make a difference. To be able to make people understand about the emotions and pain that other people have to go through because of how their sexual orientation is seen in the eyes of the public and society.

“When this topic was introduced to us (learners), it was a bit challenging and confusing. I did not understand what was expected from us as I have never encountered such an issue. As much as I have never encountered this, I knew that there might be a possibility of other learners who are experiencing ill-treatment in our schools.

“Ma’am Ntshingila, who is my teacher, did explain to us that her explanation and interpretation of the topic brought some light. I further got assistance from my English teacher Mr Mashao, my father, and Nduvho who is a previous learner at our school. Their assistance gave me confidence and understanding of how I can write this essay.

“After getting the amazing news, I was so happy. I had a lot of mixed emotions running in my heart. At that time, I was so grateful that all my hard work paid off. Both my teachers and my parents were so proud of me.

“My parents were happy, and proud that their daughter made it to the top 10. Both the school and my family encouraged me to keep going and keep fighting for those whose voices are not heard.

“I intend to make my province proud and shine a light in these challenges we are facing because it may be just an

essay competition to some, but there is someone who is living through this.

“Currently I am still preparing for the oral preparation to be held at the museum. I can confidently say that I will make it to the top three 3. I will do all that I can to make my family and school proud”. **END**



Asanda Mpungose from Makhasa high school in KwaZulu Natal said, “I would like to elaborate more about what went through my mind while I was writing my essay based on the human rights. I felt so emotional about the topic because it has lots of things that are happening today in our lives, which are true.

“I did have an understanding about the topic because in our school they teach us about the human rights, so to me it was very important to elaborate more about the topic, and I even felt so emotional because there are learners who don’t know their rights who are oppressed.

“When I heard that I had been nominated in the top ten, I was happy and I even cried because it was my first time to enter the competition. My teacher, Miss Rameetse, was excited

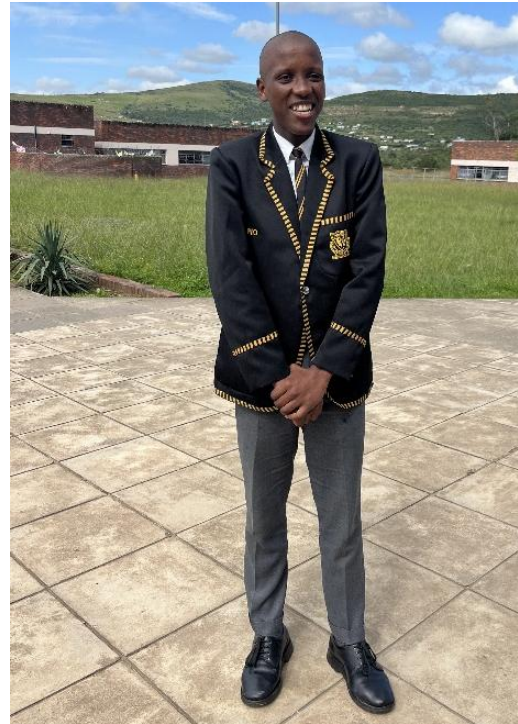
and she didn't even believe that I made the top ten. Miss Rameetse hugged me.

"My family was very excited and they said that they are proud of me and I must carry on doing good things. I am more than ready and I can't wait for the presentation". **END**



Mahlatsi Malebala - Atlehang Secondary school said, "I felt a deep sense of empathy. I tried to put myself in their shoes and understand the pain, fear, and resilience they experience daily. Throughout the essay, I also felt a sense of understanding and hope, which made me have self-confidence in raising awareness, promoting education, and advocating for LGBTQ rights, we can create a more justified and equitable society for all.

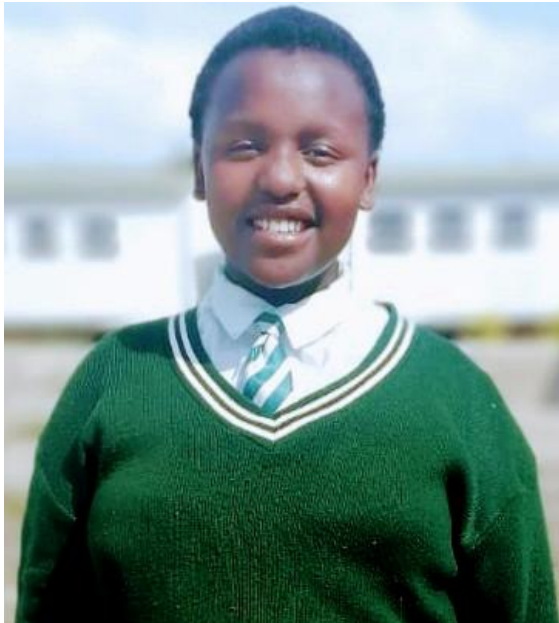
"I did understand the topic, but I can still improve on my writing and research skills. I felt proud and utterly relieved with a mix of emotions. My teacher and parents were very proud and happy for me. Yes, I am ready and excited to be part of the oral presentations". **END**



Qebeyi Hlomla from Ndamase Senior Secondary school, Eastern Cape said, "At first it was a bit challenging for me to understand the topic. When our teachers explained to us, we came to an understanding of the topic.

"It is then that I developed a self-esteem to enter the competition. The topic requested that I do research on the Bill of Rights, which will expose me to Human Rights matters as enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. I had to use Google search and the knowledge acquired at school.

"When I heard that I was listed among the top ten winners I was happy. My teachers and parents were also excited about my achievement. I am ready for the oral presentation". **END**



Swelihle Mkhize, a grade 10 learner from Msimude High School, KwaZulu-Natal said, “The topic was a little bit confusing at first. I had to start by brainstorming ideas, organizing my thoughts into a cohesive structure. As I wrote, I reflected my understanding of the topic, making connections between ideas and concepts. This process allowed me to strengthen my argument.

“When I heard about the results, I was slightly nervous but happy. My parents and the teachers at school were overwhelmed. I am looking forward to competing for the top three position”.
End