



# African American Trailblazers Student Essay Contest

Congratulations to our 2009 essay contest winners. Below are the winners from the 3-4 grade division, 5-6 grade division, and the 7-8 grade division. To read the second and third place winning essays, please visit [TimesDispatch.com](http://TimesDispatch.com), keyword "essay contest".

## Nicolas DeLaPena • 4th Grade

Attention all Americans, this is a news flash coming to you from Hopkins Road Elementary School in Richmond, VA. A fourth grader named Nicolas DeLaPena, has come up with the true meaning of the Pursuit of Happiness.

The Declaration of Independence told us that we were all created with rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Nicolas has designed an amazing plan for the pursuit to happiness.

The first step is to be happy with yourself. It does not matter if you are short or tall, or big or small. You should love yourself for everything you are and be proud of being different. You should always believe in yourself and treat others nicely.

The second step is to be happy with your family. You are given only one family, so be proud of each person. You should always respect your parents.

The third step is to be happy with your school. We are so lucky to have great teachers and the chance to get a good education and knowledge. You also can join clubs and be a part of special programs. The best thing is that you can be creative in art, sing everyday in music, and stay healthy in PE class.

The fourth step is to be happy with your friends. Each person is a different color, and has a different personality. Each friend has something to share to make us happy. We should not let their problems take away our happiness. If someone has something wrong or is handicap, you should always help them. Give from your heart.

The fifth step in to be happy with your country. We are free to go to church, speak, and go after our dreams. You can believe in your own religion. I am so happy that I have God. The people in the army keep us safe. That makes me happy. I can dream of becoming the first half Spanish half white President of the United States of America.

The last step of my plan for happiness is to always follow the steps above. Always wake up in the morning and start your day happy. At the end of the day, give thanks for everything that happened to you. Even if it was bad, it was a learning lesson for your life and can help you to be happy later.

Nicolas is working for the right of the Pursuit of Happiness by teaching this plan to his family, classmates, teachers, and now through this news broadcast. He wishes for all people to have a special life, close friends, and true happiness.

He wishes each of you a happy life and to always follow the steps of his plan.

**Second Place:** Brianna Dudley

**Third Place:** Camille Perry

## Imani Brooks • 5th Grade

What the Pursuit of Happiness Means to Me.

The pursuit of happiness is an important part of the Declaration of Independence. It has value like no other. Thomas Jefferson and Martin L. King, Jr. were history makers that have brought our country to its present state. Thomas Jefferson was the author of the Declaration of Independence.

In that document, he strongly expressed his thoughts of freedom from England. Martin L. King, Jr. was the leader of the Civil Rights Movement. He spoke strongly, but peacefully about the necessity that all men should be treated equally not matter the color of our skin. Thomas Jefferson and Martin L. King, Jr. made an impression on our lives. They have helped me to take one more step to a brighter future!

"Our Declaration of Independence says that we are created with the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I agree with the life and the liberty. The pursuit of happiness ought to include the right to be taught and trained, to be able to do something constructive, to move toward a civilized society." These are words of Oliver Hill.

The pursuit of happiness to me means I have the ability to achieve my goals and have no one discouraging me. I agree with Oliver Hill. I think he is trying to make the bold statement that the pursuit of happiness is more of a right than a common joy.

Goals are what we strive for in life. As I go through my schooling, I think about the future. You shouldn't ever try to throw your education down the drain because it is a right. When I think about jobs, I think about choosing one that makes me work. Many leaders worked hard for us to be able to get jobs. There are people in my life that are an inspiration to me to achieve my goals. These people have helped me achieve, encouraged me, or have fought to give me a right to achieve. Goals are the basis for our lives. We need to achieve them.

My experiences are life changing. Two years ago I went to a camp called the National Young Scholars' Program. I experienced unforgettable times while I learned. This year history was made. On January 20, 2009 the first African American was sworn into office, and I was there. Martin L. King, Jr. allowed me to witness that moment. My last life-changing event has been the Junior Presidential Youth Inaugural Conference which I attended. At this conference I became a stronger leader when I heard the inspiring speeches of Colin Powell and Al Gore. Through all of my experiences, I learned more about my right to the pursuit of happiness.

My role models and those I come into contact on a daily basis have facilitated the realization of my right to the pursuit of happiness as a citizen of the United States of America.

**Second Place:** Taylor Burrell

**Third Place:** Terence Hardy

## Jessica Moniz • 8th Grade

Our Pursuit of Happiness.

Many years ago American colonists decided they had had enough of unfair treatment bestowed upon them by the monarchy of England. They drafted a paper stating that Americans had the right to life liberty and the pursuit of happiness. When I learned about this as a little kid I was overjoyed. But I didn't quite understand what was being granted to me. What was the pursuit of happiness? I knew that pursuit meant you chased after something. So maybe it had to do with tag? Now I am older and although I don't (and probably never will) know everything, I know at least what the pursuit of happiness means to me.

I was right about one thing when I was little. The pursuit of happiness does involve chasing. Happiness is one of those emotions that vary from person to person. Something you ignore everyday can bring joy to someone else. So there is chasing, something we all understand and happiness, something no one really does. Together it comes to each individual chasing after what makes them happy. Hmmm. Pretty radical idea for the prim and proper pre-revolutionary world. But isn't it still a radical idea? Imagine the man in the subway station becoming a CEO. Absurd? The woman who owns the flower shop on the corner becoming a singer. Crazy. Or a girl wanting to become a ballerina, with her mother's busy schedule. We aren't being guaranteed that we will achieve what we want, but that we can dream and try, that we can still hope when the hopes flown away. Crazy? Sure. Absurd? Maybe. In America? Of Course.

My mother is Nigerian and my father is originally from Portugal (he came here when he was young). My mother came here with no family or a job here. And you know what she did? I'll tell you. Something crazy. She married my dad, a non-African white guy. My parents knew that what would make them both happy would be to be together. Slavery had been abolished some time ago and the civil rights movement was over but people didn't understand them. They still don't. but what if our founding fathers had stopped at life and liberty? My mother wouldn't have a chance here. I wouldn't be here. DO you know how many of us wouldn't be here? And even if we were here do you know how miserable we'd be?

Face it. We need our dreams. Even if as long as we live they stay only dreams. We have the right to try and still dream whether we succeed or not. To me it's American dreams that define the pursuit of Happiness. A want, a thought, a dream or spark of inspiration. Go after it. you achieve the pursuit of happiness by doing something you want, starting a business or taking ballet, by going for it. In America, no one is going to hurt your dreams and goals. It's your unalienable right.

**Second Place:** Annesha Serigupta

**Third Place:** Marisela Ochoa