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Rand McNally Reveals Finalists of “America the Beautiful” Essay Contest for Students

WorldStrides™ DiscoverNow! Trip to Washington, D.C. and NOOK Tablets™ Are Awarded

SKOKIE, Ill., June 8, 2012 –After receiving nearly 12,000 essays from 7th through 12th graders across the country, Rand McNally has announced the ten finalists in its [“America the Beautiful”](#) short essay contest. The ten finalists have been notified and will arrive in Washington, D.C. for a June 15 ceremony at which two Grand Prize winners will be named.

The ten finalists are:

- Celina Aguilar, V. Sue Cleveland High School, Rio Rancho, NM
- Sarah Dean, Hudsonville High School, Hudsonville, MI
- Amy Deeb, Charles S. Rushe Middle School, Land O’Lakes, FL
- Hannah Harley, Indiana Area Senior High School, Indiana, PA
- Alexa Morales, South Miami Senior High School, Miami, FL
- Kristen Mucha, Belleville High School, Belleville, NJ
- Caitlin Shelby, North Forsyth Middle School, Cumming, GA
- Justin Tso, Challenger School - Berryessa Campus, San Jose, CA
- Will White, Hawaii Preparatory Academy, Kamuela, HI
- Melanie Wilhelm, Linganore High School, Frederick, MD

The ten finalists and a parent or guest will travel to Washington, D.C. next week compliments of WorldStrides, the global leader in accredited educational travel programs. The finalists and the teachers who submitted the essays on the students’ behalf will receive a NOOK Tablet™ from NOOK® by Barnes & Noble, one of the primary sponsors of the contest.

The ten finalists were selected from a group of 100 semi-finalists; the semi-finalists and their teachers also will each receive an award-winning Barnes & Noble NOOK Tablet™, and will have their essays published in the free e-book, “America the Beautiful” available exclusively on NOOK.com.

Launched in March, “America the Beautiful” asked this simple essay question: What’s the one place in the U.S. that truly inspires you? It could have been captured in a hometown or the special memories about a place visited, or even a meaningful landmark.

Essay contest entrants wrote about places ranging from Waimea, Hawaii to Chincoteague, Virginia, and thousands of points in between.

From the ten finalists, two Grand Prize winners will be selected and announced at the June 15 ceremony at the Air Force Memorial in Arlington, Virginia. The Grand Prize winners (one from 7-9th grade and one from 10-12th grade) will receive a \$10,000 College 529 Savings Plan. The schools of the Grand Prize winners will receive \$5,000 of classroom products from Rand McNally.

While in Washington, D.C. the ten finalists will experience an exclusive WorldStrides DiscoverNow! program. WorldStrides is the nation’s largest educational travel organization. Finalists will spend three days and two nights exploring the nation’s capital with the guidance of a WorldStrides-certified course leader. Highlights of the experience will include:

- Witnessing the Changing of the Guard at the Tomb of the Unknowns;
- Reciting Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and visiting the newly dedicated Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial;
- Experiencing life in the first “white house”, George Washington’s beloved Mt. Vernon;
- Seeing the government in action through a visit to the Supreme Court and the U.S. Capitol Building; and
- Attending an official ceremony at the Air Force Memorial where the two Grand Prize winners of the contest will be announced.

More detailed information and complete contest rules for “America the Beautiful” are available at bestoftheroad.com/education. In addition to contest guidelines, the site also features lesson plans for educators, activity guides to assist student writers, and correlations to the Common Core State Standards. Check back at bestoftheroad.com/education for details on future programs.

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About WorldStrides - WorldStrides is the nation's largest and most trusted student travel organization, having inspired more than four million students with interactive and educational travel experiences across the United States and worldwide. Founded 45 years ago by a Chicago school teacher, WorldStrides has grown to a team of more than 450 professionals in the United States and the UK dedicated to delivering life-changing experiences and improving the way students learn. WorldStrides' group travel offerings fall under four major brands: [WorldStrides DiscoverNow! programs](#), [WorldStrides Heritage Performance programs](#), [WorldStrides Capstone programs](#), and [Casterbridge Tours](#). In addition, WorldStrides introduced its [New Worlds Emerge](#) programs for individual travelers at the high school level in 2012.