

2024 Announcement of winners in the U.S. Ukrainian Holodomor Genocide Student Competition



Dr. Sue Kenny and her students of Immaculate Heart Academy in Township of Washington, New Jersey

Building on last year's success, U.S Committee for Ukrainian Holodomor Genocide Awareness is pleased to announce the winners of the 2024 Ukrainian Holodomor-Genocide Student Competition.

The objective of the competition is to promote students' understanding of the Holodomor, the genocide perpetrated on the people of Ukraine during Stalin's regime in the 1930's, resulting in the deaths of millions by extermination and starvation. Studying the Holodomor is increasingly relevant today as we see the same terrorist state repeating genocide against the Ukrainian nation.

The winners of the competition in the 11-12 grade category are Rose Martin of Immaculate Heart Academy in the Township of Washington, N.J. who took first place, Yuliana Kovtunenکو of Oliver Ames High School in North Easton, Massachusetts took second place and Kayla Maceda of Lincoln High School in Yonkers, New York took third place.

The winners of the competition in the 9-10th grade category are Victoria Hawkins of Jefferson Forest High School in Forest, Virginia who took first place, Melania Sydor of Walsh Jesuit High school in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio and Maria Ustymenko of Ukrainian Sunday School at Epiphany of Our Lord in St. Petersburg,

Florida shared second place, while Iryna Dukas and Sofii Dymitska of James B. Conant High School in Hoffman Estates, Illinois, took third place. Honorable Mention was also given to Sofia Voitiuk of Hopewell Valley Central High School in Pennington, New Jersey and to Rachel Abbott of Padua Academy in Wilmington, Delaware.

Winners of the competition received prizes of \$500 for first place, \$300 for second place and \$100 for third place. In the case of ties, prize money was split among the winners. Winning schools also received awards of \$75, \$50 and \$25 respectively to be used toward the purchase of Holodomor related materials. They were provided with a list of suggestions that could be used to enhance their Holodomor curriculum.

In order to encourage students to take part in the Ukrainian Holodomor Genocide Student Competition, event organizers conducted extensive outreach to high schools and Ukrainian organizations throughout the United States. Competition entries included students from Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. It is our goal to expand the participation of more states in the competition and consequently add the Holodomor-Genocide to their curriculum.

The judging committee, consisting of Elizabeth Buniak, Lidia Choma, Christine Tymkiw-Hanifin, Daria Horbachevsky, Lesia Kaszczak, Oksana Kulynych and Donna Voronovich, would like to commend the students and their teachers for their hard work and participation in the competition. It was heartening to see that a considerable number of the participants were newly arrived refugees from Ukraine.

Of particular importance is the feedback from teachers when learning about the Holodomor through a student's presentation. Aaron Lewy, a teacher of World History from New Jersey, stated that many students revealed that this was the first time they had been confronted with information about the Holodomor. Students of Betsy Engel from Ohio were stunned to learn of the horrors of the Holodomor. Teacher Peter Ruzinka from Illinois stated that his student spoke passionately about the topic, using personal connections, and that the impact of the current war on his family was heartbreaking. Teacher Leanne Schwan from New York indicated that her student took great pride in researching and presenting information about her culture and her nation's past. Brittany Potts, a sponsor of a Ukrainian Club at her school in Illinois, noted that the perseverance of the students was inspiring and that they continue to find new ways to share their love of Ukraine. Students responded very positively about the topic and were deeply engaged throughout the presentation.

Similarly, teacher Emma Wells from Massachusetts stated that students asked questions and made connections to other genocides in the world. Students in Jonah Pichette's 9th grade world history class in Ohio were eager to learn about the Holodomor and how it connects with current events. Another student in Sue Kenney's U.S. II Honors History class in New Jersey commented that the Holodomor project was the most profound project she had ever researched and that she was deeply moved by it. According to teacher Matthew Auger in Massachusetts, his students did not previously know about this genocide, so it was informative and shocking at the same time. It provided them with a window into the struggles and perseverance of the Ukrainian people. One student's entry from Virginia went on to win her school's History Day first prize and will advance to the district level competition.

We would like to particularly commend Dr. Sue Kenney from NJ, winner of the 2020 HREC (Holodomor Research and Education Consortium) Educator Award for Holodomor Lesson Plan Development, for

offering an extra credit assignment on the Holodomor. Many students took advantage of this opportunity. When one of the students told her father that she was doing a project on the Holodomor, he said, “What is Holodomor?”

The Ukrainian Holodomor Genocide Student Competition is an excellent tool which enables students not only to research the topic but also to present their findings to others. As part of the competition criteria students were required to present their work to a group. This competition provided students the opportunity to promote knowledge about the Holodomor not only to their peers and teachers but also to the community at large, thus widening knowledge about Ukraine. Many of the students made the clear connection from the Holodomor to the present Russian genocidal war against Ukraine.

A Teacher Feedback Form indicating the preparedness and impact of the student’s presentation was also part of the competition. Educators stated that they would like their students to participate next year and will now be including the Holodomor as part of their studies.

The Holodomor Student Competition can have far reaching effects. Ellery Franceschini, a winner of the 2023 Holodomor competition, emailed us saying, “Since the competition I have learned so much about Ukraine and even became a volunteer to help young Ukrainians learn English. It has become an important cause for me.”

Individuals interested in helping to work on this important project can email ukrainecompetition@gmail.com for more information.

Oksana Kulynych, a retired NYC educator, is the chair of the Holodomor Student Competition subcommittee of the U.S. Committee for Ukrainian Holodomor-Genocide Awareness.

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