

NORMAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS' FIFTH-GRADER WINS COLONIAL DAY LITERATURE CONTEST

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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OKLAHOMA CITY – Charlie Balthrop, a fifth-grader at Eisenhower Elementary School in Norman, has been named winner of the Colonial Day Literature Contest sponsored by the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence.

Charlie, 10, was recognized and read his award-winning essay, “What It Means To Be An American,” during Colonial Day at the Oklahoma History Center on Feb. 7 in the Devon Great Hall. Nearly 300 students participated in the contest.

Revolutionary War hero James Armistead Lafayette, portrayed by historical interpreter Stephen Seals from Colonial Williamsburg, presented Charlie with a plaque and a \$100 prize during Colonial Day opening ceremonies. Charlie also received a citation from his state representative Merleyn Bell during the event. Charlie’s essay focused on First Amendment rights, America’s diversity and the importance of voting.

“I am so proud of Charlie and his essay,” said Deji Dugger, Charlie’s Gifted and Talented Program teacher at Eisenhower. “We talk about how important being a good and active citizen is for our country, and he took it to great length to promote voting in our society. I know he is going to be that productive citizen our country needs now more than ever. May he continue to use his voice!”

Charlie is the son of Matt Balthrop of Moore and LaDawn and Josh Batch of Norman. He is active in Moore Youth Football League and enjoys raising fish and playing computer games. He is a straight-A student who enjoys reading and learning about current events.

Also recognized at the Colonial Day opening ceremony were four contest finalists, who received certificates of merit. They were Olivia Johnson of Oakdale Elementary School in EDMOND; Lucas West of John Rex Charter Elementary School in OKLAHOMA CITY; Lindzee Wessels of CHEROKEE Elementary School; and Rosa Gonzalez of Coolidge Elementary School in ENID.

During Colonial Day, nearly 300 Oklahoma fifth-graders dressed in early-American clothing, traveled back in time to meet historical figures and learn about the daily lives of early Americans. Colonial Day is coordinated by teachers who have participated in the Colonial Williamsburg Teacher Institute through a fellowship program administered by the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence.

Major funding for Colonial Day is provided by a grant from Oklahoma Humanities and the National Endowment for the Humanities. The event is also made possible with support from Aunt

Pittypat's Catering, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Embassy Suites Hilton Oklahoma City Northwest, George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate and Gardens, Mattocks Printing Co., the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Oklahoma, the Oklahoma History Center, the Oklahoma Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Charles L. Oppenheim and Catherine Wootten.

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(EDITOR: Below is the text of Charlie Balthrop's essay, "What It Means To Be An American," in case you wish to print it.)

Being an American to me means having freedom of speech, freedom to choose your own religion and the freedom to fulfill your own dreams. I believe being an American also means that everyone is equal and has equal rights. One very important right is the right to vote.

Americans are very fortunate to have these freedoms. Many people come to American for better opportunities – to be free and to have a better chance at achieving their dreams. Our forefathers fought for us to have these freedoms, and it's something we should never take for granted.

America is a very diverse country with many different races and religions. It is our duty to respect each other, no matter what race or religion people may be. Just as the Pledge of Allegiance states, "One nation under God and indivisible with liberty and justice for all," we are meant to unite together, fight together and above all, love one another.

In the United States, no one is required to vote in any local, state or presidential election. Voting is, however, a privilege that we should never waiver. Our forefathers have written several amendments to the Constitution that discuss our right to vote.

It is my promise to my country to exercise and never waiver my rights as an American. I know as an American, I have the freedom of speech, freedom to choose my religion and the freedom to fulfill my own dreams. I also promise to respect my fellow Americans, regardless of race or religion. I will also, when of age, exercise my right to vote. I have great respect for my forefathers and the solid foundation in which they build our country. I am proud to be an American.

**CUTLINE: EISENHOWER ELEMENTARY FIFTH-GRADER
WINS COLONIAL DAY LITERATURE CONTEST**

Charlie Balthrop, (front right), a fifth-grader at Eisenhower Elementary School in Norman, receives a citation from State Rep. Merleyn Bell recognizing him as the winner of the Colonial Day Literature Contest, sponsored by the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence. They are joined by (back row, from left) Eisenhower Elementary School Vice Principal Andrea Crowe, Principal Danielle Eikel and Colonial Williamsburg Historical interpreter Stephen Seals, who portrays Revolutionary War hero James Armistead Lafayette. Lafayette presented Charlie with a plaque and \$100 award during opening ceremonies of Colonial Day at the Oklahoma History Center, held recently in Oklahoma City. Nearly 300 Oklahoma students participated in the literature contest and other Colonial Day activities.