

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES FOR THE NATIONAL YOUNG AUTHORS CHALLENGE

The National Young Authors Challenge invites students to submit an original short story in English. The story must be written entirely by the student and must be an original, previously unpublished work of fiction.

Categories and Themes

Umbrella Theme: The World We Inherit

Every story begins in a world shaped by others: families, friendships, places, memories, traditions, rules, mistakes, inventions, dreams and choices. This year, we invite young writers to imagine the worlds their characters receive, protect, question, change or pass on.

The stories may be realistic, magical, funny, adventurous, futuristic or emotional. They may explore nature, home, school, technology, friendship, identity, courage, community or belonging. What matters is that each story shows how a character understands the world around them and their place within it.

Junior Category: Grades 5–8

Theme: What If?

Write an original short story that begins with a problem. It could be about a character embarks on an adventure, is out to solve a mystery, discovers a secret, enters a strange place, faces a fear or a challenge.

Every great story begins with a question: *What if something unexpected happened?*

Your story can be funny, adventurous, light-hearted, emotional, futuristic, mysterious or realistic. What matters is the problem, way to deal with it and the journey to the end.

Senior Category: Grades 9–12

Theme: At the Crossroads

Every character reaches a moment when they are in an unwanted or unexpected situation.

Write an original short story about dealing with a circumstance. The crossroads could be personal, emotional, moral, social, technological or environmental. It may involve

family, friendship, ambition, identity, courage, climate, AI, belonging, truth, loss, love or the future.

Your story should show what is at stake, why the moment matters, and what results in the character's choice or action.

Sensitive themes may be explored, but they must be handled with care, context and respect. The organisers reserve the right to flag, review or reject entries that are unsuitable for the age group or present legal, ethical, copyright or reputational concerns.

Originality and AI Use

- Submissions must be written by the student without the use of generative AI.
- AI tools must not be used to create, draft, rewrite, translate, polish, edit, expand or improve the story.
- Students may use a dictionary, thesaurus or standard non-generative spell-check tools.
- Parents, teachers or guardians may encourage the student and discuss ideas, but they must not write, rewrite, edit or substantially shape the story.
- Students may be asked to share drafts, notes or outlines to verify originality.
- Any entry found to be plagiarised, copied, AI-generated or not substantially written by the student may be disqualified at any stage, including after selection.

Content Guidelines

Stories should be thoughtful, respectful and age appropriate. Students should avoid:

- Racist, sexist, ableist or discriminatory language
- Harmful stereotypes or misrepresentation of communities, cultures, religions, genders or disabilities
- Graphic violence, abuse, trauma or cruelty
- Explicit sexual content
- Defamatory statements or direct accusations against real people, schools, companies or organisations
- Private or confidential information about real individuals

- Song lyrics, poems, long quotations or characters/settings from existing books, films, games or shows
- Content that promotes hatred, bullying, self-harm, illegal activity or unsafe behaviour

Story Requirements

- The submission must be a short story written in English.
- The story must be original fiction.
- The story must be previously unpublished and not submitted for publication elsewhere.
- The story must be written entirely by the student.
- The maximum word limit is 700 words, excluding the title.
- Entries exceeding the word limit may be disqualified.
- The story must be suitable for the student's age category.
- The story should have a clear beginning, middle and end.
- Poems, memoirs, fan fiction, scripts, reports and non-fiction pieces will not be accepted.

Formatting Guidelines

- Submit the story as a Word document or PDF.
- All entries must be submitted using the following naming format: Name_Grade_Story[Number]. Example: AaravSharma_8_Story1
- Use A4 page size.
- Use Times New Roman, Arial or Calibri.
- Font size: 12 pt.
- Line spacing: 1.5.
- Use black text only.
- Do not include images, illustrations, maps or decorative formatting.

- The title should appear at the top of the first page.

Judging Criteria

Entries will be evaluated on:

- Originality of idea
- Connection to the theme
- Story structure and narrative flow
- Characterisation
- Language and expression
- Creativity and imagination
- Age-appropriateness
- Overall impact

Student Declaration

By submitting an entry, the student confirms that the story is original, unpublished, written entirely by them, and not generated, rewritten or substantially assisted by AI or any other person.