

***Laws of Life Essay Program: Participation Characteristics, Topic, & Impact***  
***Hamby, Banyard, & Grych, 2013; partially adapted from Pennebaker, Colder, & Sharp, 1990***

Initially started in Franklin County, TN in 1987, the Templeton Laws of Life Essay Program offers people the opportunity to reflect upon and write about their core principles, such as integrity, trust, honesty, or perseverance. The goal of the program is character development. The program now takes place in many school districts around the U.S. and internationally with as many as 100,000 youth participating annually. This scale was constructed to measure participation in the program, as well as to assess general attitudes regarding participation. Although this measure was designed for this particular narrative program and this specific region, it may be adapted to accommodate similar writing exercises in any location. To account for the variety of ways that the program has been offered, certain items, such as items 3, 4, and 9a, have an open-ended “Other” option that allows participants to share their own experiences. Items 10, 13, 14, 15, and 16 were adapted from Pennebaker, Colder, & Sharp (1990), with minor wording edits made to better address the essay contest. For example, item 10 originally read: “Since the writing experiment, how much have you talked to other people about what you wrote?” Instead, we present it as “Not counting required class discussion, how often did you talk with other people about what you wrote?” Other items, such as item 12, were developed in part through past essay writers’ reflections of their essays (Veljkovic & Schwartz, 2001).

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**Sources:** Pennebaker, J.W., Colder, M., & Sharp, L.K. (1990). Accelerating the coping process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58, 528-537.  
 Veljkovic, P., & Schwartz, A. J. (Ed.). (2001). *Writing from the heart*. Radnor, Pennsylvania: Templeton Foundation Press.

1. Many people who went to school in Tennessee took part in the Laws of Life Essay Contest. As you probably remember, this contest takes place every year and involves writing an essay about your personal values. Did you ever write an essay for the Laws of Life Essay Contest?

- Yes ..... 1
- No ..... 1

[IF NO THEN SKIP TO NEXT SECTION]

2. What grade were you in when you wrote an essay for the Laws of Life Essay Contest? (Check all that apply).

- 6th grade ..... 1
- 7th grade ..... 2
- 8th grade ..... 3
- 9th grade ..... 4
- 10th grade ..... 5
- 11th grade ..... 6
- 12th grade ..... 7

3. What grade were you in when you wrote the essay that you remember the best or that meant the most to you?

- 6th grade ..... 1
- 7th grade ..... 2
- 8th grade ..... 3
- 9th grade ..... 4
- 10th grade ..... 5
- 11th grade ..... 6
- 12th grade ..... 7
- Other

4. What school did you go to when you participated?

- North Jr./Middle School ..... 1
- South Jr./Middle School ..... 2
- Huntland School ..... 3
- Franklin County High School ..... 4
- St. Andrew’s Sewanee School ..... 5
- School of the Good Shepherd ..... 6
- Other, please specify ..... 7

5. Was the Laws of Life Essay a required or optional assignment?	
Required .....	1
Optional .....	2
6. Did you get an award for your essay?	
First place .....	1
Second place .....	2
Third place .....	3
Honorable mention .....	4
No award .....	5
7. Approximately how much time did you spend working on your essay?	
Less than an hour .....	1
About an hour .....	2
About two hours .....	3
About three to five hours .....	4
More than five hours .....	5
8. How much work did you put into writing your essay?	
More than for most school work. ....	1
About the same as for other school work. ....	2
Less than for most school work. ....	3
9. Did anyone encourage you while you were writing the essay?	
Yes .....	1
No .....	2
[IF 9 = NO THEN SKIP TO 10]	
9a. Who encouraged you?	
Teacher .....	1
Principal .....	2
Parent .....	3
Classmate .....	4
Other, please specify .....	5
10. Not counting required class discussion, how often did you talk with other people about what you wrote?	
More than 10 conversations .....	1
5 to 9 conversations .....	2
3 or 4 conversations .....	3
2 conversations .....	4
1 conversation .....	5
No conversations.....	6
11. What Law of Life did you focus on?	
12. People write their essays about many different topics. What did you write your essay about?	
Death or serious illness of a family member .....	1
An inspiring person you have known .....	2
How a parent influenced you .....	3
A trip you took that made an impact on you .....	4
A famous quote or famous person who had inspired you .....	5
Being bullied or picked on by someone at school .....	6
Dealing with a hard time in your life .....	7
Other, please specify .....	8
Not sure .....	9

[IF 12 = 9 GO TO 12a]

12a. Take a moment and try to remember what you wrote about. Although it may have been a while since you wrote it, many people can remember their essay if they take a moment to think back to those days. Do you remember anything at all about what you wrote your essay about? Some common topics are:

Death or serious illness of a family member .....	1
An inspiring person you have known .....	2
How a parent influenced you .....	3
A trip you took that made an impact on you .....	4
A famous quote or famous person who had inspired you .....	5

- Being bullied or picked on by someone at school ..... 6
- Dealing with a hard time in your life ..... 7
- Other, please specify ..... 8
- Not sure ..... 9

13. Overall, how personal was the essay that you wrote?

- Very personal ..... 4
- Somewhat personal ..... 3
- A little personal ..... 2
- Not at all personal ..... 1

14. In the time since the Laws of Life Essay Contest, how often have you thought about what you wrote?

- More than 10 times ..... 6
- 5 to 9 times ..... 5
- 3 or 4 times ..... 4
- 2 times ..... 3
- 1 time ..... 2
- Not at all ..... 1

15. Looking back on the Laws of Life Essay Contest, how much do you feel that the experience had a positive effect on you?

- Very positive ..... 4
- Somewhat positive ..... 3
- A little positive ..... 2
- Not at all positive ..... 1

16. Looking back on the Laws of Life Essay Contest, how much do you feel that the experience had a negative effect on you?

- Very negative ..... 1
- Somewhat negative ..... 2
- A little negative ..... 3
- Not at all negative ..... 4