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Six Young Tutors Win 2017 National Essay Contest Awards

IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program Tutors Share Stories of the Program's Impact on Their Lives



"Last year, I had a rough year: constantly on campus suspension, referrals, verbally disrespecting teachers... Ever since I started this Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, I feel like I am a different person."

Six students received prizes in a national competition among participants in the [Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program](#), a nationally-recognized cross-age tutoring program of the Intercultural Development Research Association. Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program tutors wrote about how the program helped them do better in school and how they had helped their tutees to do better.

- **First Place High School Winner** - [Ana Luisa Valenzuela](#), 12th Grade, Odessa High School, Ector County ISD, Texas
- **Second Place High School Winner** - [Anahi Ayala](#), 12th Grade, Odessa High School, Ector County ISD, Texas
- **Third Place High School Winner** - [Esmeray Olivas](#), 12th Grade, Odessa High School, Ector County ISD, Texas
- **First Place Middle School Winner** - [Jimena Guerrero](#), 8th Grade, Zamora Middle School, South San Antonio ISD, Texas
- **Second Place Middle School Winner** - [Jennifer Vela](#), 7th Grade, Domingo Treviño Middle School, La Joya ISD, Texas
- **Third Place Middle School Winner** - [Lilibeth Berlanga](#), 7th Grade, Memorial Middle School, La Joya ISD, Texas

There were competitions at both the middle school and high school levels in the United States. Winners from each competition are being awarded \$200 for first place, \$150 for second place and \$100 for third place along with commemorative certificates and trophies.

Highlights from the Winning Essays



In her essay, **Ana Luisa Valenzuela** wrote: "I didn't realize that I would be a role model for these kids...I believe that I learned more from my tutee than he learned from me. He may have learned his ABCs and his numbers, but I learned way more than that. I learned that every child needs a 'backbone' to support him or her... I became that backbone for some of those kids who didn't have anyone. These kids came to me with a smile and a hug every day. And that is something that cost nothing, yet means everything...This world is a very cruel and cold place, and if we do not spread kindness, love and joy, we will become cold too. We must help each other because if not, no one else will." - [See Ana Luisa's full essay](#)

"The day I joined the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program was the day my thoughts for my future became clear," wrote **Anahi Ayala**. "It was the day I became a tutor and met my tutee. My tutee struggled through the first semester of school trying his hardest to learn his alphabet and how to sound out words. Toward the last week before break, he did the most amazing thing: he read a sentence all by himself! To anyone else this may seem like it's not

a big deal, but to me, it was like climbing to the top of the mountain. The emotions I felt when he was reading filled me with glee. It hit me that I was part of the reason he knows how to read... After all the struggling I put myself through on finding the right career, the Coca-Cola Valued Youth helped me realize that teaching is my future profession." [- See Anahi's full essay](#)



Esmeray Olivas wrote in her essay: "I began to want the best, to strive for more, to practice kindness, to be slow to anger, to experience achievement together - not only for myself but for others... It's when we become a captive audience to our passion that we can become active and volunteer for something else other than ourselves. This is what the definition of true love. I learned patience, kindness and selflessness through the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program and working with my tutee. I encourage everyone to create an open mind, helping hands and a willing heart. Together, we can be known as the generation that learned how to love." [- See Esmeray's full essay](#)

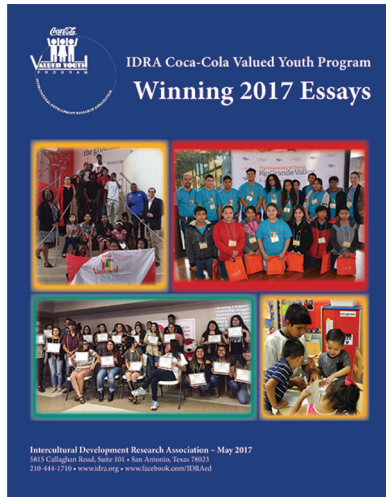
"Ever since I started this Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, I feel like I am a different person," wrote **Jimena Guerrero**. "Last year, I had a rough year: constantly on campus suspension, referrals, verbally disrespecting teachers, and I would go along with my 'friends' making bad choices... I'm trying to teach my first grade tutee reading skills but also life lessons through my experiences. I hope to teach him how to respect teachers and older people and also to treat others the way you would want to be treated. I just wanted to take advantage of the fact that, as a tutor, I can teach him all I can... This program has not only helped me choose what I want to do when I get older, but it also has taught me how to communicate with younger students, and it has taught me many life lessons I will use in the future." [- See Jimena's full essay](#)



Jennifer Vela wrote: "I was a shy, depressed girl, that didn't talk to a lot of people, and never looked on the good side of things. That all changed when I got in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program and started to tutor. I had a reason to laugh, I could finally see the good things and it was all because of my tutees... I then realized I was a role model to my tutees. I was someone they looked up to... I became a better person, more responsible, respectful, passionate, understanding, and my perspective changed... I could not have asked for a better gift than having the ability to change the lives of these children." [- See Jennifer's full essay](#)

"In her essay, **Lilibeth Berlanga**, wrote: "Tutoring others is rewarding because someone else is learning from you what has been taught to you. I have had a lot of fun with them. They are good

tutees, and I love them. Sometimes they don't pay attention to me, but I know that it is part of my job to be patient and guide them back to listening to me. My mom is very proud of me because I help other kids in need. This alone has made me want to come to school every day. Before, I used to miss a lot of school because I had no motive to go. I would get frustrated by how I was being taught and didn't understand my teachers. Now, that I am in this program, I have valued more the efforts my teachers are making in teaching me." [See Lilibeth's full essay](#)



Booklet with the Full Winning Essays

[See PDF](#)



Highlights Flier for 2017 (pdf)

[See PDF](#)

Honorable Mentions

Honorable mentions were awarded to students in schools that submitted multiple student essays; these students had the highest score at their campus.

High School Honorable Mentions

- **Nohemi Gavaldon**, 12th Grade, Odessa High School, Ector County ISD, Texas
- **Bryanna Menchaca**, 10th Grade, South San Antonio High School, Texas

Middle School Honorable Mentions

- **Daniella McBryde**, 8th Grade, Zamora Middle School, San Antonio
- **Yuliana Calvillo**, 7th Grade, Memorial Middle School, La Joya, Texas
- **Gerardo Rodríguez**, 7th Grade, César Chávez Middle School, La Joya, Texas
- **Yahlitza Rosales**, 8th Grade, Lorenzo De Zavala Middle School, La Joya, Texas
- **Daisy García**, 7th Grade, Domingo Treviño Middle School, La Joya, Texas
- **Jeffry Rios**, 9th Grade, New Open World Academy, Los Angeles
- **Mellene Heart Del Mundo**, 8th Grade, John Still Middle School, Sacramento
- **Yarmell Ruffin**, 8th Grade, Manierre Elementary School, Chicago
- **Khadija Begum**, 8th Grade, Captain Manuel Rivera, Jr. PS/MS279, New York City

While not yet in middle school, fifth grade tutors in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program PS94 Kings College School in New York City wrote their own essays. Below are the top three scorers.

- First Place Elementary School - **J'sean Johnson**
- Second Place Elementary School - **Liju Sheikh**
- Third Place Elementary School - **Karla Llerena**
- Fourth Place Elementary School - **Alijah Coles**
- Fifth Place Elementary School - **Sebastian Davis**
- Elementary School Honorable Mention - **Joshua Ruiz**

IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program



The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, created by IDRA, is an internationally-recognized cross-age tutoring program. Since its inception in 1984, the program has kept more than 34,100 students in school, young people who were previously at risk of dropping out. According to the Valued Youth creed, all students are valuable, none is expendable. The lives of more than 671,000 children, families and educators have been positively impacted by the program.

See our **video overview** of how the IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program impacts students and schools. [12 min]



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