The 2015 Educational Theatre Association National Conference featured a panel focusing on diversity in theatre and other arts education. Addressing the needs of an increasingly diverse student population is one of the most pressing challenges in American education today, including for the arts. The conference panelists noted that, while quality arts education programs are available to some students, a great many more have no access at all, particularly those in high-poverty schools and with special needs. The panel and audience members also discussed multi-cultural content in arts education and how it can influence student interest and participation. Bearing in mind these concerns, the 2016 Democracyworks essay competition is asking students to answer this question:

Why is it important for all students to have arts education opportunities?

The Educational Theatre Association will choose one essay winner based on his or her response to the above question.

Eligibility: Any inducted member of the International Thespian Society (by March 1, 2016) who is enrolled in middle or high school during the 2015-16 school year may submit an essay. Important: If your essay is selected you must be available to attend Arts Advocacy Day in Washington, D.C., March 7-8. EdTA will pay $1,500 towards the cost of travel and attendance for the winner and a chaperone. The winner is responsible for any remaining costs of attendance. The winner will also receive a $250 cash prize; the first runner-up will be awarded $150; the second runner-up, $100. Previous winners are not eligible.

Essay guidelines: Essayists should consider how their theatre and other arts education has been of value to them and why it’s important that all students should be able to engage in arts education opportunities that are relevant to their own cultural and personal experiences.

Submission procedures: All essays must be between 500-700 words, based on the prompt, and submitted electronically to essay@schooltheatre.org. Essays should be double-spaced, in 12-point type, using Word software (or a comparable word-processing program). On the top left side of the first page, include the following information: your name, full mailing address, telephone number, and e-mail address; your Thespian troupe number; the name of your school; the name and telephone number of your troupe director; and the words “Thespian Democracyworks Essay.” All participants will receive an auto-reply confirming receipt of their essay; semi-finalists will be contacted by e-mail after the essay review process is completed, around February 8. The winner and runners-up will be chosen by February 15.

Deadline: Essays must be received via e-mail by February 1, 2016.

Rights: Your essay is protected by copyright from the moment it is created. By submitting to the Educational Theatre Association, you are agreeing to allow EdTA to publish your essay in print and online.