



Written by [Isabel Lyman](#) on April 19, 2011

What's Great About America? Homeschoolers Winning Essay Contests

We have a winner! The results of a national essay contest, sponsored by “Stossel in the Classroom” and the Sandra and Lawrence Post Family Foundation, were announced last week.

First place went to Philip Wegmann, an 18-year-old homeschooler from Woodburn, Indiana, and the second place winner is Dora Juhasz, age fourteen, who attends middle school in Grosse Pointe Woods, Michigan.

Students ages 13 to 18, were invited to submit a 500- to 1000-word essay, after watching a video featuring John Stossel (the [Fox Business](#) Channel reporter and former co-anchor of ABC News' *20/20* show, picture above). The topic was “What qualities make America a great nation?”



The video, which also featured author Dinesh D'Souza, can be viewed [here](#).

The contest received over 7,500 submissions. A total of 222 winning essays were selected. (Full disclosure: I was among the team of evaluators for the contest and read 600 of these essays. Evaluators did not know any names, schools, or locations, just the participants' age.)

Here's a portion of Philip Wegmann's essay: “The journey for many European immigrants across the Atlantic Ocean to the United States must be described as nothing short of a nightmare. Conditions on the often decrepit passenger steamers, which ferried millions of immigrants across the Atlantic, were cramped, overcrowded, and miserable. Yet when the ships chugged into New York's Harbor, all miseries were quickly forgotten. At those moments, the railings of the sea-going vessels were immediately crowded. All waited with bated breath, staring at the emerging New York coastline. Soon after entering the harbor, passengers were afforded their first glimpse of the Statue of Liberty. This colossal structure of copper and steel offered to them a physical manifestation of American greatness. This was what they had sacrificed everything for. This was freedom.”

Philip, Dora Juhasz, and their teachers, won a free trip to New York City and some cash, and they will be in the audience during a taping of the television program, [Stossel](#). In 2010, the accomplished Philip was awarded a \$2000 college scholarship from the National Rifle Association (NRA).

John Stossel, whose lively reporting on government regulations and consumer protection has made him (and his trademark mustache) famous, has also reported on the decline of American education. To that end, “Stossel in the Classroom” partners with the Center for Independent Thought, a non-profit educational foundation, to provide free learning materials, aimed at “challenging conventional wisdom



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about many of today's issues," to educators.

The essay contest was not without controversy. A blogger at the liberal [Daily Kos site](#) described it as "a very pernicious attempt by Fox News and John Stossel of spreading their worldview in a Trojan horse essay contest to children across America."

As John Stossel would say, "Give me a break."

Congratulations to all the winners.



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