2025 Frederick Douglass Oratorical Contest Official Rules

**Dates & Locations**

Students must reside in the United States, Canada, or Ireland in order to participate in this contest. The contest will be held between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. **Eastern Standard Time** (EST) on the following days:

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| --- | --- |
| Tuesday, November 18th | On-Line |
| Wednesday, November 19th | On-Line |
| Thursday, November 20th AM | In-Person |
| Thursday, November 20th PM | On-Line |
| Friday, November 21st | In-Person |
| Saturday, November 22nd | In-Person |

NPS staff does their best to schedule students who live in other time zones at times that are close to their regular school day but there is no guarantee that we will be able to accommodate everyone’s schedules.

**Speeches and Delivery**

Contestants should memorize and deliver an excerpt of one of the four speeches featured on the Frederick Douglass NHS website [Annual Oratorical Contest - Frederick Douglass National Historic Site (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov)](https://www.nps.gov/frdo/learn/kidsyouth/oratorical-contest.htm).

Students are permitted to dress up in costume appropriate to the time period or the role however, costumes are not required. Since this is a speech competition, the emphasis of the contest is on the delivery, accuracy, and emotional appeal to the audience. *No points will be given for costumes or props.*

**Deaf students will have an ASL sign language interpreter** present to communicate any greetings and directions from the moderator to the students and to translate the speech from ASL to English for the judges.

Students should be standing when they present their speeches (unless they request an accommodation) and they will be judged on their posture and presence as they present the speech.

**Speeches must be memorized.** Students may not read from cue cards, computer screens or teleprompters and they may not be prompted by another individual to help them remember lines, etc. Students will be disqualified for reading their speeches and/or receiving prompts/help from someone else.

For students participating on-line, it is okay to have a parent help you run the technology or to assist you with a phone, iPad or computer camera to make sure you look your best while you give your speech on-line. If the judges feel that a student is reading their speech, they will be disqualified from the contest.

Students must begin by introducing themselves and will receive a deduction in points for not including the following in their introduction:

* Name
* Age or grade
* Where they are from (city/state or city/country in the case of Irish or Canadian Students)
* School Attended
* Name of the speech that they will be reciting. Students may also choose to say something about the speech in the introduction such as when and where Douglass delivered the speech.

Students must meet the minimum time requirements (see contest guideline for time ranges) for their speech while not going overtime. Once a student goes 1 minute over their allotted time, they will be asked to stop.

**Judging and Scoring**

Judges are volunteers of the National Park Service. They have been given copies of all the speeches, judging rubrics and the contest rules to read in advance of the contest. They have also attended a short training session to understand how the contest is run. All judges independently evaluate each student and are not given any coaching or advice on how to evaluate individual students from National Park Service staff. They are also asked not to discuss their scoring with the other judges. All judges’ rulings are final.

An NPS staff person or a volunteer will act as timekeeper to time the length of each student’s speech. The timer will start the “clock” as soon as a contestant completes their self- introduction and begins giving the speech.

*All students should review the judging rubric to see the categories being used to evaluate each student and the scores associated with each category. The final score for each student will be established by taking an average of all the judges’ scores and by subtracting any deductions for time related issues.* ***Deductions will be taken for the following:***

* ***Not meeting the minimum time limit or going over the maximum time limit.*** *A one-point deduction will be taken every 10 seconds that a student is under or over the time required for their division.*
* **Taking a Time-Out.** During the contest, the contestant may request one 30 second timeout for a penalty of 2.5 points to regain composure or remember part of his/her speech. At the end of the 30 second timeout the clock resumes. If the student does not request a “time out,” the clock continues to keep time.
* **Not covering all the elements required in the introduction** will result in a half-point deduction for each category omitted (for example, leaving out the name of their school or the name of the speech they will deliver)

A contestant who reads their speech from note cards, paper, cue cards, computer screens, etc. will be disqualified. **Speeches must be given from memory**.

**Other Things to Note**

The National Park Service will notify all winners by email within one week of the completion of the contest. After all students are notified by email, a competed listing of all winners will be posted on the park’s website.

National Park Service retains the right to amend the rules of the contest before the start of the contest. Students will be notified of any changes to the rules prior to the beginning of the competition.

Students registering after November 12th may not be admitted to the contest.