

# Announcing the 10th Annual Writing Contest!

## Transcript of Episode 469

**Andrew Pudewa:** I have long noticed that, kids will work okay when I ask them to do something. But when there's a competition involved, very often they just go to a whole higher level.

**Julie Walker:** Hello, and welcome to the Arts of Language Podcast with Andrew Pudewa, founder of the Institute for Excellence in Writing or as many like to say, "IEW." My name is Julie Walker, and I'm honored to serve Andrew and IEW as the chief marketing officer. Our goal is to equip teachers and teaching parents with methods and materials, which will aid them in training their students to become confident and competent communicators and thinkers.

**Julie Walker:** Well, Andrew, this is March. I know you know that.

**Andrew Pudewa:** It is March 4th, National Grammar Day.

**Julie Walker:** It's not actually March 4th, but

**Andrew Pudewa:** but the date is the only date that makes a complete sentence. March 4th! Exclamation point. So, let's talk about how we can help our kids do that. March 4th into,

**Julie Walker:** Writing contests. So we announce our writing contests in March. And so that was what we're doing today for this podcast.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah You, and you know that I have long been a proponent of contests. I think that we've all experienced this with our own kids or our classes, we try to motivate them to do their best. We use checklists. We may have some kind of little tickets or reward system, or we use an acknowledgment of grade or whatever.

But I have long noticed that kids will work okay when I asked them to do something, but when there's a competition involved, very often they just go to a whole higher level. And I've seen this with kids in speech and debate. I've seen this with kids entering various contests. And I remember one year, I had the whole group I was teaching do the National History Day competition.

**Julie Walker:** right? Yeah. I remember that,

**Andrew Pudewa:** And I was just overwhelmed with the tremendous effort they put in for this contest. And I felt a little bit sad, like, how come you don't work that hard for me? But once the thing got underway, it shifted from, this is something they have to do because it's an assignment, to something that they really poured their heart and mind and energy into. And I think that we benefit so greatly when we have those sorts of contests and competitions and concrete goals with a little bit of external accountability, a little external feedback as well.

And so I have long been trying to always let people know, Hey, there's a Daughters of the American Revolution contest here. There's this contest over there. We've even sponsored writing contests for other organizations just because it's a good thing to do. We have had some really fantastic results from our competition.

**Julie Walker:** Yes, we have. And I will just mention that years ago, I actually wrote an article for our Magalog about the benefits of contests. I don't even remember the name of it. But I talk about how my own kids did musical theater, and that really helped them with their public speaking, with their musical abilities, and just this idea of having an audience, writing for someone other than just your teacher or just your mom.

And, like you say, kind of kick it up a notch. We actually have, well, I'm going to mention our website, IEW.com/contest. And if you go to that website, link in the show notes, you will see that we list. Several contests, not just our own that we offer, but just an opportunity for people to show their proudness in writing.

And of course, we also have our *Magnum Opus Magazine*. This is based on Webster's idea of, hey, collect all the best work, *magnum opus*, publish it, and then the students can be just really gratified to see. And this year's copy, this is actually volume 15.

**Andrew Pudewa:** It gets better every year.

**Julie Walker:** It does.

**Andrew Pudewa:** This issue of the *Magnum Opus*, I read a good number of them on an airplane. And I just thought, wow, this is really spectacularly good writing. And not just a couple kids, dozens.

**Julie Walker:** Yes. Exactly. And we do publish the winners of our essay contest in the *Magnum Opus Magazine* as well. So that's kind of a both and, but our writing contest, every year we try to come up with some interesting prompts.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And how long have we been doing this?

**Julie Walker:** We have been doing this, Andrew Pudewa, for 10 years. Can you believe that?

**Andrew Pudewa:** That's nice, but frightening, actually, too, so...

**Julie Walker:** To imagine that we've been doing this this long. And every year we come up with a different prompt. And so we've had prompts where there was a quote that we gave one year about necessity is the mother of invention. It takes someone to see a problem and then come up with a way to solve it and then write an essay about this.

And we have three different levels so that the eight year olds are not competing against the 18 year olds. So we kind of categorize them according to age and ability. Mostly it's just age.

**Andrew Pudewa:** We don't know everybody's ability. So we have our junior level, kids are 8 to 10.

**Julie Walker:** Yes.

**Andrew Pudewa:** and then we have 11 to 13, and then 14 and up.

**Julie Walker:** 14 to 18. And that's on March 1st.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So whatever age you are on March 1st. So if you turned 12 on February 28th, you are stuck in the upper group.

**Julie Walker:** You're in level B.

**Andrew Pudewa:** But if you turn 12 on March 2nd.

**Julie Walker:** Well, it's ages 11 to 13, so you're, you're safe if you're 12, either way.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Anyway, March 4th. That's the magic day. All right.

**Julie Walker:** So this year's prompt that you came up with, which I love. "We usually try to avoid doing things we don't want to do." I did laugh at this because I know that is human nature, but that is especially you when we need you to write an article.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh come on now. I do what I have to do.

**Julie Walker:** Well, and you have written an exceptionally, when you do write, Andrew, you do a great job and I love the writing that you did this year for our magalog.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I always tell the kids, you don't have to like doing this. Just do it. And there's an irony here because it might be someone says to their kids, here's a writing contest. I want you to enter. And their immediate reaction is, "uh, do I have to? That's hard." And of course, this year's prompt is about doing hard things.

**Julie Walker:** Doing hard things. Yes. "We usually try to avoid doing things we don't want to do, but sometimes when we go ahead and do them, we experience benefits."

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah, it's like, I don't like writing, but I like having written something. I like seeing what I wrote in print.

**Julie Walker:** Okay, so level A, this is the actual prompt for those 8 to 10 year olds. Write a two paragraph composition answering this prompt. What is the hardest thing you have ever done? I mean, if you're 8, not too much life experience, but that's okay.

**Andrew Pudewa:** They may need some help thinking of all the things they've done, because kids that age kind of live in the moment, and I might mention, it doesn't necessarily have to be a single thing, it could be a responsibility that you gained milking the goats in the morning or something that lasted over time rather than, I climbed a big mountain or whatever.

Yeah, the hardest thing you've done. Okay.

**Julie Walker:** Okay. So write a two paragraph composition answering this prompt: “What is the hardest thing you have ever done? How did you feel when you finished or what lesson did you learn?” That's level A, 8 to 10 year olds. Level B, write a four or five paragraph composition answering this prompt: What is the hardest thing you have accomplished? Describe the process, what you learned, and benefits gained.

Now I just want to just speak to our listeners, if you are familiar with our structure and style models, you know that Unit 7 is the blank page, respond to a prompt generally and in this model, what we teach, especially for level B is a five paragraph model coming up with three topics. We even told you what the topics are. How hard could this be?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Never helped too much!

**Julie Walker:** Never helped too much, right? Okay. Level C. Write a five to seven paragraph composition answering this prompt: “What is something you resisted doing but attempted anyway? Describe the experience, the outcome, as well as lessons learned and or benefits gained.”

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah, there's three or four topics right there ready to go.

**Julie Walker:** Now, there are some rules about the contest and how to submit them and everything. Because we do, we scrutinize them. And first of all, we're going to see if you followed the rules. If you don't follow the rules, you get kicked out. Andrew, I don't think I've ever told you this. I graduated from the same high school that the Beach Boys went to. You know, the Beach Boys, that group from Southern California?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh, man I have to go way back in my ancient memory. But yes, I have heard of the Beach Boys.

**Julie Walker:** Yes, well, they're pretty popular even today. And I also had,

**Andrew Pudewa:** Today? They must be like 80 years old.

**Julie Walker:** Well, I, everybody who's listening to this right now probably knows who the Beach Boys are, and is pretty impressed that, there's my claim to fame. They graduated 25 years before I did. But we had the same band instructor. Can you believe that?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh That's cool

**Julie Walker:** And here's one thing that the claim to fame for Mr. Morgan—he failed the Beach Boys on the song “Surfin’ USA.” Now that's the story. This might be urban legend. But the reason he failed it was because they did the wrong assignment. And so even though it is a golden platinum rock single, amazing song that everybody loved.

And you hear all the cities that you and I went and played at when we were living in Southern California at Not Together. We kind of grew up in the same locale, but we never met each other until much later. But here's my point with all this. If you don't follow the rules, you will not win this contest.

**Andrew Pudewa:** The rules aren't terribly restrictive, right?

**Julie Walker:** This is an essay. This is not a story. Don't tell a story. Make it something that you've actually experienced.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, a good essay can include elements of a story, because you have to set it up. But there is that reflection part, and that's really where the key to the content is—is not just what you did, but what you think, feel, believe as a result, and how that affects you.

**Julie Walker:** Now, just a few of the checklist. We don't have a style checklist.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Right, because anybody can enter whether they've done Structure and Style or not.

**Julie Walker:** But they do need to format it with Times New Roman, 12 point double-spaced format, even the eight year olds. So you might need to get mom to help.

**Andrew Pudewa:** They are going to get some help on that part, I believe.

**Julie Walker:** Do not include your name on the paper.

**Andrew Pudewa:** That's good.

**Julie Walker:** Because it has to be anonymous.

**Andrew Pudewa:** It has to be anonymous.

**Julie Walker:** And center the title. And that's it. And then you follow the prompts and we will, of course, post this on the website, but I'm excited to... well, 10 years, it's a long time.

We need some special sparkle with the prizes.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh, you always want to up those prizes.

**Julie Walker:** I do. I do. And I'm really excited to be able to announce that Andrew has approved new prize levels for 2025.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Because it's the 10th year

**Julie Walker:** Because it's the 10th year. Yeah. So it may not be...

**Andrew Pudewa:** And because you persuaded me.

**Julie Walker:** It may not be as generous in following years, but here we go. If you win third prize, the student who wins third prize gets a \$100 check and the parent receives a \$100 IEW gift certificate.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Or teacher.

**Julie Walker:** The parent or teacher, right, whoever is helping the students submit the assignment. And we've had before where whole classrooms are submitting essays to be evaluated, which I love that. And of course, we publish the best ones, as I mentioned, in our *Magnum Opus Magazine*. Second prize, if you are a student, you will receive a check for \$200 and the teacher or parent will receive a \$200 IEW gift certificate.

**Andrew Pudewa:** for each level, right? So there's third, second, and first for the 8 to 10 year olds, 11 to 13 year olds, and the 14 to 18 year olds.

**Julie Walker:** Yep. So normally we do half of that, but this year we're doubling it because it's the 10th year. First prize, the students win \$400. Hey kids, do hard things. It may just pay off.

**Andrew Pudewa:** That's getting into some serious potential there.

**Julie Walker:** Exactly. Exactly. And the parents or teachers will receive a \$400 IEW gift certificate. So that's our writing contest for 2025. Looking forward to seeing your submissions. The deadline to submit is April 30th. So you only have a few weeks, but that's plenty of time to be able to come up with some ideas.

**Andrew Pudewa:** We've got at least a month,

**Julie Walker:** Yes,

**Andrew Pudewa:** which is more than a few,

**Julie Walker:** this is

**Andrew Pudewa:** because you have told me a couple is two, a few is three, and several is four or more.

**Julie Walker:** But what you have also told me, and not me specifically, but just kids in general, don't procrastinate.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Don't procrastinate. Yes, so procrastinate is from the Latin *pro*, meaning for, and *crass* is the adverb for tomorrow. So when you procrastinate, you say, I'll do it tomorrow, I'll do it tomorrow, do it tomorrow. No, if you want to do well in a contest, this one in particular, start now, write, revise, get some feedback. The kids aren't totally cut off from help, right? We want to inspire the parents and teachers to help the kids be their best by asking some helpful questions. But don't, of course, write the thing for your kids. Spelling and all that can be edited as normal. I think we've had a pretty good balance between help with parents, but not meddling, coercing, or just doing the whole thing for them.

Although with these higher dollar amounts, I don't know, the temptation could be too strong.

**Julie Walker:** Yes. Well, that's all we have to talk about today. I think it's a worthy topic and I look forward to seeing from your students what you are going to have them submit or you submit on their behalf for our writing contest.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I'm very tempted to encourage my grandchildren who are old enough. To participate, but it does have to be anonymous.

**Julie Walker:** Yes,

**Andrew Pudewa:** I'm not involved in the judging myself at all, so

**Julie Walker:** We actually

**Andrew Pudewa:** I just look at the winners and appreciate the efforts.

**Julie Walker:** So our judges, Andrew, you say you're not judging him. It's true. We have an exceptional group of teachers, our own IEW Online teachers, who will be providing the feedback and deciding ultimately who our winners are.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And the winning essays are published both on our website, as well as in the *Magnum Opus Magazine*, is that correct?

**Julie Walker:** We have a digital version, and then we have a print version, so you can request to be signed up for either one of those. And we include our *Magnum Opus Magazine* in every IEW order now, just because it's such a great way to show people what is possible.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And I think it's a resource, too, that teachers can have and then pull out a model composition. This is how some kids did their inventive writing for Unit 7, which is, of course, what this really is, writing from your own memory, experience, imagination.

**Julie Walker:** Yep, this is not a research project, this is your own experience, so. Well, I'm excited. I'm looking forward to seeing the submissions.

**Andrew Pudewa:** All right, I am, too. Thank you.

**Julie Walker:** Thanks so much for joining us. If you enjoyed this episode and want to hear more, please subscribe to our podcast in iTunes, Stitcher, or Spotify. Or just visit us each week at [IEW.com/podcast](http://IEW.com/podcast). Here you can also find show notes and relevant links from today's broadcast. One last thing: would you mind going to iTunes to rate and review our podcast? This really helps other smart, caring listeners like you find us. Thanks so much.