

2026 Women's History Month Essay Contest

As women who are passionate about teaching young people today about equality and the history of women in the workplace, we are delighted to once again sponsor the *Women's History Month Essay Contest* highlighting contributions made by extraordinary women over past decades that have paved the way providing opportunities for women today to advance in society and the workplace.

We invite essay contest participants to take advantage of this opportunity to examine the following essay topic:

Topic: This year's topic explores the life of **Clara Barton** born on December 25, 1821 – died April 12, 1912, at the age of 90 years old. Clarissa Harlowe "Clara" Barton was an American nurse, teacher, and humanitarian who founded the American Red Cross. Since nursing education was not very formalized at that time and she did not attend nursing school, she provided self-taught nursing care. During the Civil War, she served as a nurse, ran hospitals in Virginia, and led the agency searching for missing Union soldiers. Known as the "Angel of the Battlefield", Barton risked her life to bring supplies and support to soldiers. Barton is noteworthy for doing humanitarian work and civil rights advocacy at a time before women had the right to vote. She was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in 1973.

Examine the status of Clara Barton in the 18th century. How was life for young women like her in that century? How was her upbringing. What opportunities for studies and employment did she have in a society so dominated by men? What drove Clara to succeed? How did she succeed? What was her impact on society? For what is she best known? How has her legacy impacted our society today? Do you feel she paved the way for young women? If so, how?

Length: 500-750 words

Eligibility: South Plainfield residents in grades 9-12

Deadline: April 17, 2026

Prize: *First Prize: \$300.00 Gift Card, Second Prize: \$200.00 Gift Card and Third Prize: \$100.00 Gift Card. The winners will be announced at the Mayor & Council Meeting in June and also recognized in the local newspaper. The winners will be chosen by the Women's Leadership Committee (Debbie Boyle, Nina Rohrer, Shannon Jefferys, Pat DeSantis, Pamela Stefanek, and Stephanie Bartfalvi).*

Submit to: *Nina Rohrer, 106 Puha Road, South Plainfield, NJ 07080 (Email: linarohrer@aol.com)*

Please include name, address, name of school, grade, phone number, and email address on your essay.

Women's History Month is celebrated every March in the United States and is a month-long celebration of women's contribution to culture, history, and society. The National Women's History Month honors women who successfully challenged their role in both business and the paid labor force. Women have always worked, but often their work has been undervalued and unpaid. Facing stark inequalities in the workplace (lower wages, poor working conditions, and limited opportunities), women has fought for decades to make the workplace a less hostile environment, equal opportunities, and equal wages. Please join us in celebrating women's history and advancement in the United States of America.

Famous Firsts in Women's History:

- 1903 & 1911, Marie Curie is the first woman to win a Nobel Prize (Physics) and first to win in two fields (Physics and Chemistry).
- On Aug. 26, 1920, the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, guaranteed American women the right to vote.
- In 1925, Nellie Tayloe Ross becomes the first female governor in the U.S.
- In 1932, Amelia Earhart became the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean.
- In 1943, The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League becomes the first professional baseball league for female players.
- In 1963, Valentina Tereshkova was the first woman in space
- In 1977, Janet Guthrie is the first woman to drive in the Indy 500 car race.
- On July 7, 1981, Arizona Judge Sandra Day O'Connor became the first female justice on the United States Supreme Court.
- In January 1987, Aretha Franklin becomes the first woman elected to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.
- In January 1997, Madeleine Albright becomes the first female Secretary of State.
- In 2007, Nancy Pelosi becomes the first female Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives.
- On March 7, 2010, Kathryn Bigelow becomes the first woman to win an Oscar for Best Director
- On January 20, 2021, Kamala Harris became the first woman to be sworn in as Vice President of the United States.