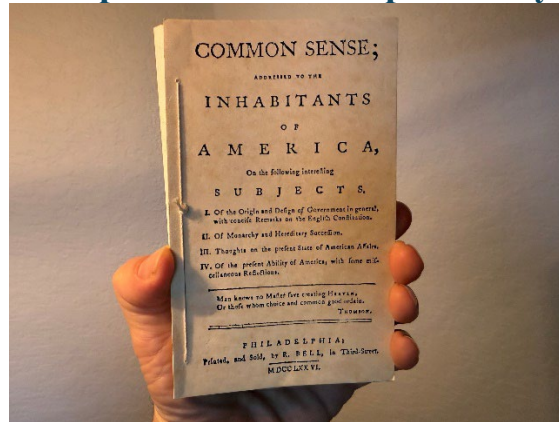


CORNERSTONE

INTEGRATED LIBERAL ARTS

Cornerstone Fall 2026 Contest Independence and Responsibility



“Society in every state is a blessing, but government even in its best state is but a necessary evil; in its worst state an intolerable one; for when we suffer, or are exposed to the same miseries by a government, which we might expect in a country without government, our calamity is heightened by reflecting that we furnish the means by which we suffer.”

Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, 1776

Paine reminds us that government is something created and sustained by the people themselves. To claim independence, then, is to accept responsibility: for the laws under which we live, for the institutions we maintain, and for the principles we uphold. When governments succeed, it reflects a people capable of self-rule and true independence. When it fails, this too reflects on the people.

To celebrate the 250th anniversary of America’s experiment in self-government, Cornerstone invites students to reflect on one of the following questions:

1. What does it mean to govern oneself in a free society? Can we remain free without cultivating the habits and civic virtues necessary for democratic self-governance?
2. What is the relationship between political independence and economic freedom? Can citizens truly pursue happiness and prosperity in a nation that does not govern itself?
3. What does America mean to you? As a country built by immigrants and defined by its great diversity, what makes America feel like “home,” or a “home away from home” to you? What does “belonging here” ask of you?

Eligibility: Any student currently enrolled in SCLA 101, 102, or 210.

Criteria: Artwork, essays, short fiction, videos, and poetry inspired by Transformative Texts. All contest entries must be a student’s own work without *any* use of generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT, DALL-E, Midjourney, DeepSeek). A faculty committee will judge submissions based on originality and creativity. All artwork submissions must include a brief synopsis of the piece.

Prizes: Amazon Gift Cards. First Place: \$95; Second Place: \$65; 3 honorary mentions: \$35. Winners will automatically be nominated for publication in *The Cornerstone Review* or *The Exchange: Literature, Art, & Business*.

Timeline: Submission deadline: **Thursday, November 5th, 2026**. Please send your submissions to cornerstonecontest@outlook.com. All files must be labeled with your last name. In your entry, please list your full name and your professor’s name. Winners will be announced on **Tuesday, December 1st, 2026**.