



Marine Advisory Service
Delaware Sea Grant College Program
University of Delaware
Hugh R. Sharp Campus
700 Pilottown Road
Lewes, DE 19958 USA

August 18, 2026

Dear Fifth-Grade Teachers and Parents:

On behalf of the Delaware Sea Grant College Program and the University of Delaware College of Earth, Ocean and Environment, I am pleased to extend an invitation to 5th grade students to participate in the Coast Day 2026 essay contest. Coast Day offers students and teachers a unique opportunity to learn more about ocean and coastal environments. **This year, Coast Day will be held in-person on the University of Delaware's Lewes Campus, on Sunday, October 4, 2026.**

The theme of this year's essay contest is **Habitats and Ecosystems of Delaware**. In this year's essay contest, students are being asked to **describe their favorite ecosystem or habitat in Delaware to visit and explore, what types of animals and plants live there, why that ecosystem or habitat is important and what people can do to protect that ecosystem or habitat**. The enclosed materials are designed to help guide classroom discussion of the topic. Our intent is to create awareness about coastal issues in Delaware and to help teachers meet state standards through teaching about coastal ecosystems and local weather and the roles they play in our lives.

Student essays must be postmarked or emailed by 5:00 pm on **Friday, October 9, 2026**. **Essay submissions can be sent to David Christopher, Delaware Sea Grant, 700 Pilottown Rd., Lewes, DE 19958 or emailed to dmchrist@udel.edu**. Essays may also be dropped off during Coast Day on October 4 at the Sea Grant tent. Essay Contest winners and students receiving honorable mention will be recognized in a special online ceremony tentatively scheduled for late October/early November.

While this essay topic does require some thought, the judges also will be looking for accurate descriptions that show students have researched the topic. A reminder that because this is a contest measuring students' aptitude for writing, parents should provide only limited help/guidance. A copy of the judges' scoring sheet is included in this packet, so you can see how different areas are weighted. If you have any questions, please contact me by e-mail at dmchrist@udel.edu. Visit www.udel.edu/coastday for more information.

Sincerely,

David Christopher
Marine Education Specialist

Coast Day 2026

Theme: Habitats and Ecosystems of Delaware

Students should include in their essay:

- Describe their favorite natural place in Delaware to visit and explore
- What types of animals and plants live there
- Why that place is important
- What people can do to protect that ecosystem or habitat.

***Note:** Please include student's name, teacher's name, school name, and word count on each entry.

Word Count: Up to 400 words. Please include the word count at the bottom of the essay.

Deadline: Submission must be postmarked or emailed by 5:00pm on Friday, October 10, 2025.

Submissions may be mailed or emailed to:

David Christopher
Delaware Sea Grant
700 Pilottown Rd.
Lewes, DE 19958
dmchrist@udel.edu

Essays may also be dropped off to the Delaware Sea Grant tent during the Coast Day event on October 5.

Prizes will be awarded to the winning essayists:

Winners and students receiving honorable mention will be recognized in an online ceremony in October.

- First prize: \$100 bookstore gift card
- Second prize: \$75 bookstore gift card
- Third prize: \$50 bookstore gift card

Questions? Contact David Christopher at dmchrist@UDel.edu

Teacher's Aids

This contest can also be used to meet Delaware Science, Social Studies, and English/Language Arts standards. A few examples of standards related to this essay theme are highlighted below.

Definitions

Ecosystem: all of the living (biotic) and nonliving (abiotic) things in an area

Habitat: a place where an animal lives

Sample Vocabulary

Abiotic, Aquatic, Biotic, Biodiversity, Breeding ground, Community, Conservation, Diverse, Dune, Ecosystem, Endangered, Estuary, Forest, Freshwater, Habitat, Marine, Marsh, Meadow, Native, Niche, Nursery, Organism, Population, Protected, Species, Sustainability, Terrestrial, Tidal pool, Wetland, Wildlife

Web Resources

Delaware Naturally

<https://delawarenaturally.org/habitats-ecosystems/>

DNREC

<https://dnrec.delaware.gov/fish-wildlife/>

<https://dnrec.delaware.gov/outdoor-delaware/endangered-species/>

<https://dnrec.delaware.gov/fish-wildlife/conservation/shorebirds/bay-ecology/>

Chesapeake Bay Foundation

<https://www.cbf.org/about-the-bay/chesapeake-habitats/index.html>

Chesapeake Bay Program

<https://www.chesapeakebay.net/news/blog/what-habitats-are-found-in-the-chesapeake-bay-watershed>

Britannica kids

<https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/ecosystem/433377#:~:text=An%20ecosystem%20is%20made%20up,rocks%2C%20soil%2C%20and%20sand>

<https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/habitat/399492#:~:text=A%20habitat%20is%20the%20home,soil%20or%20sand%2C%20and%20rocks>

National Geographic

<https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/geography/states/article/delaware>

USDA

https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r6/learning/kids/?cid=fsbdev2_027480

DE Nature Society

<https://www.delawarenaturesociety.org/what-we-do/protecting-habitats-wildlife/>

DE River Keeper

<https://delawariverkeeper.org/estuary/>

DE Estuary Partnership

<https://delawareestuary.org/kids-and-teachers/>

Video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H6PBtCfgcHo&ab_channel=SmileandLearn-English

Additional Resources/Activities

<https://www.exploringnature.org/db/view/Delaware-Habitats-Mammals-Birds-Amphibians-Reptiles>

<https://www.doe.k12.de.us/cms/lib/DE01922744/Centricity/domain/66/grade%205/Student%20Workbook%20Ecosystems.pdf>

Delaware Social Studies Standards, Next Generation Science Standards & Common Core Content Standards

Reprinted in part from: <http://www.nextgenscience.org> and <http://www.doe.k12.de.us/commoncore/ela/teachertoolkit/geninfo.shtml>.

Next Generation Science Standards

5-ESS3-1 Earth and Human Activity: Obtain and combine information about ways individual communities use science ideas to protect the Earth's resources and environment.

Delaware Social Studies Standards

Geography Anchor Standard Two: Students will apply a knowledge of topography, climate, soils, and vegetation of Delaware and the United States to understand how human society alters, and is affected by, the physical environment.

Common Core English Language Arts Standards – Writing – Grade 5

Text Types and Purposes

- CC.5.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.
- CC.5.W.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

Production and Distribution of Writing

- CC.5.W.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- CC.5.W.5. With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

- CC.5.W.7. Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.
- CC.5.W.8. Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; summarize or paraphrase information in notes and finished work, and provide a list of sources.

Common Core English Language Arts Standards – Language – Grade 5

Conventions of Standard English

- CC.5.L.1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
- CC.5.L.2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Knowledge of Language

- CC.5.L.3.a. Expand, combine, and reduce sentences for meaning, reader/listener interest, and style.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

- CC.5.L.6. Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, including those that signal contrast, addition, and other logical relationships (e.g., *however, although, nevertheless, similarly, moreover, in addition*).

Coast Day 2026

Delaware Student Essay Contest

Name:
School:
Teacher:

5 = Excellent
2 = Below average

4 = Above average
1 = Poor

3 = Average
0 = Did not attempt/show

Content (25 points)

- _____ Essay shows overall understanding of subject matter and clearly and accurately addresses the topic. (5)
- _____ Main idea is clear, focused, and well supported. (5)
- _____ Student has met and followed requirements and criteria of the writing prompt. (5)
- _____ Student has included information from suggested/relevant resources and sample vocabulary. (5)
- _____ Essay includes only factual, accurate information—scientific, historic, etc. (5)

_____ Total

Organization (15 points)

- _____ Essay has a strong beginning that draws the reader into the text. (5)
- _____ Paragraphs are focused, idea-centered, and transition smoothly, connecting ideas and creating a sense of flow. (5)
- _____ Essay has a logical order and leads the reader through the text, including a clear beginning, middle, and end. (5)

_____ Total

Grammar and Spelling (10 points)

- _____ Essay demonstrates correct use of sentence structure and punctuation. (5)
- _____ Student uses correct spelling and capitalization. (5)

_____ Total

Originality & Creativity (15 points)

- _____ Student creates a meaningful connection to the reader. (5)
- _____ Student takes fresh approach to subject, addressing topic in a creative way. (5)
- _____ Student uses interesting organization or storytelling techniques to examine topic in an original manner. (5)

_____ Total

_____ **Final Score (65 points possible)**