



“It Seemed Like Reaching for the Moon”

Barbara Johns Quote from the Civil Rights Memorial, Virginia State Capitol Grounds

January 26, 2026

Dear Parents and Teachers,

The Madison County African American Historical Association (MCAAHA) is excited to partner with the Culpeper Branch of the NAACP this year to sponsor the annual Black History Month contest for students in Madison County. Prizes will be awarded at the elementary, middle, and high school levels in two categories: Essays and Artistic Expression.

This year, our theme focuses on the era of segregated schools and the decades-long fight for integration. In Madison County, African American students attended segregated schools for nearly a century, with the first field school in the county opening in 1868 and our local schools finally integrating beginning in 1963.

With that history in mind, we would like to encourage students to explore the experience of African American students during this era, and/or examine the efforts to achieve integrated schools.

Our contest prompt is:

Explore the history of segregated schools in our country or our community, and/or the fight for integration and equality in education.

Students might address one or more of the following questions: what would it have been like to attend a segregated school? What happened during the era of “Massive Resistance”? Who are some champions who led the fight for integration? How was integration received in our local community?

For example, students might consider focusing their project on civil rights leaders in Virginia who were instrumental in the fight for desegregation such as Barbara Johns, Dorothy Hamm, Betty Kilby, Spottswood Robinson, or Oliver Hill, or a national figure such as Thurgood Marshall. They might learn about a particular school such as the George Washington Carver Regional High School in Culpeper County or the Madison Training School. Or (*and we especially encourage this!*), they might interview a former student of a segregated school in our community, and write about their experience or interpret their story artistically.

**Madison County African American Historical Association
700 S. Main Street, Madison, VA 22727**

**NAACP Culpeper Branch # 7058, P.O. Box 687, Culpeper, VA 22701
*Also Representing Madison and Rappahannock Counties***

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Essay Entries:

Essays should be limited to 500 words. Please include the student's name, grade, school, and contact information. The essays should be sent by February 28 to bhm.essay@gmail.com or by mail (postmarked by February 28) to NAACP Culpeper, P.O. Box 687, Culpeper, VA, 22701.

Artistic Expression Entries:

Artistic Expression entries should include the student's name, grade, school, and contact information, along with a brief (25-50 words) description of the artistic intent. Entries should be sent by February 28 to bhm.essay@gmail.com or by mail (postmarked by February 28) to NAACP Culpeper, P.O. Box 687, Culpeper, VA, 22701. Paintings and drawings may be photographed rather than sending the original artwork. Brief video statements and videos for musical entries or poems are also welcome.

Many students will have grandparents, great aunts or uncles, a family friend, or a neighbor who attended school during this era, or the MCAAHA will be happy to provide information and/or connect students with local residents willing to share their stories.

We hope you will encourage your children or students to enter the contest, which offers prizes of \$100 to the winning elementary student, \$150 to the winning middle school student, and \$200 to the winning high school student in each category. Students will also be invited to read or present their work at a special reunion event in Madison, where former students of our local segregated schools will gather, and at the March 2026 NAACP meeting in Culpeper.

In addition, selected student essays and works of art will be highlighted as part of the MCAAHA's upcoming exhibition, *Striving for Excellence: A Century of African American Schools in Madison County*. This new exhibition will open this year, and will highlight the teachers, students, curriculum, buildings, and more from the African American schools in our county prior to integration.


We encourage you to visit www.naacpculpeper.org/for-students for more information. If you have any questions, please contact us at mcaaha@gmail.com or visit our website at www.mcaaha.org, or contact the Culpeper Branch of the NAACP at bhm.essay@gmail.com. Thank you for your participation!

Sincerely,

NAACP CULPEPER BRANCH #7058



Dr. Meshia Jones
President, MCAAHA



Kaleb Hackley
President, NAACP Culpeper Branch #7058

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