



2026 Ocean Awareness Contest

A CREATIVE CHALLENGE FOR TEENS WORLDWIDE

The 15th annual Ocean Awareness Contest is a platform for young people to learn about environmental issues through art-making and creative communication, explore their relationship to a changing world, and become advocates for positive change. Students ages 11-18 from around the world are invited to participate.

THEME

Your Story, Our Ocean: How Our Ocean Sustains, Protects, and Inspires Us

The ocean has always been central to Bow Seat's mission. Since the first Ocean Awareness Contest in 2012, we've asked students to explore ocean-related issues like marine species conservation, plastic pollution, and climate change. As our organization continues to evolve in new and exciting ways, we wanted to return to the topic that has captivated, moved, and activated tens of thousands of students who have participated in the Contest: the ocean! What value does the ocean bring to all of our lives? We've learned about the challenges that threaten the ocean, but why is it so important that we protect it?

We challenge you to dive into this year's theme by exploring how the ocean sustains, protects, and inspires you and your community. We hope that these prompts serve as jumping-off points, guiding you toward further exploration! Be sure to check out our [past winners](#) and explore our broader [Resource Studio](#) for ideas and guidance.

Our [Resource Studio](#) is a unique space for creative exploration and a jumping-off point for deep inquiry of climate change, ocean conservation, and using art and creativity as tools in environmental movements.

Sustains

From the fish sustaining coastal communities to medicines derived from jellyfish, the ocean feeds us and provides us with materials integral to countless lives. We create glass from sand, extract ingredients from algae to thicken foods like ice cream, and harvest pearls from oysters. Beyond these physical resources, the ocean produces over half of the oxygen we breathe and helps drive the water cycle by fueling evaporation and rainfall. It sustains our lives through natural processes that are not only practical and economic, but also deeply connected to our cultures and survival. **What are some meaningful or unexpected ways the ocean provides for you or your community? In what ways does the ocean provide beyond physical resources—such as emotionally, spiritually, or culturally?**

But while the ocean sustains us, it also relies on us to sustain and protect it in return. [Reciprocity](#), a concept deeply rooted in the worldviews of many Indigenous cultures worldwide, emphasizes a balanced, respectful relationship between humans and the natural world. Through this view, accepting the ocean's sustenance is not a one-way transaction but an obligatory action that comes with giving back, whether through acts of stewardship or restraint in regards to resource use. This sub-theme invites you to explore what it means to be sustained by the ocean and ensure that it can nourish life for generations to come. **What local traditions, practices, or stories reflect a reciprocal relationship with the ocean? What might a reciprocal relationship look like? What barriers—social, political, or economic—stand in the way of true reciprocity with the ocean, and how might they be challenged?**

Protects

Just as the ocean plays a protective role by shaping coastal terrain to mitigate storm damage, it also serves as a climate buffer, acting as a carbon sink and absorbing heat. Mangroves prevent erosion of our coasts and protect us from natural disasters such as hurricanes and storm surges. The ocean itself acts as a carbon sink, absorbing about a quarter of the carbon dioxide we emit and helping to regulate the Earth's climate by reducing the severity of global warming. Yet as it absorbs CO₂, it acidifies, harming wildlife, and as it absorbs heat, countless species must alter migrational pathways. **How can we better prepare for natural disasters by working with, not against, nature? In what ways do natural disasters reveal environmental injustice or unequal vulnerability?**

While the ocean does so much to protect us from natural disasters, and even from ourselves, there is a limit to how much it can take before the balance shifts in a dangerous direction. Just as it protects us, we must also protect it in return, maintaining the delicate balance it has upheld for so long. Protecting the environment isn't just about preserving beauty. It's about ensuring stability, resilience, and survival in an age of rapid change. This sub-theme invites you to explore how natural systems protect us and the reciprocity of this relationship. **Which environments around you act as buffers to environmental change? Are they protected? What would the world look like without these buffers? What can we do to prevent that future?**

Inspires

From the hydrodynamic hulls of ancient boats, shaped to mimic the forms of darting fish, to the tales of sea gods preserved by myth, the ocean has long been our source of awe and creativity. It has served as the stage for legends like Homer's *Odyssey*, inspired the haunting sea ballads of coastal communities, and shaped the settings of iconic films such as *The Little Mermaid* and art like *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*. It has even shaped our understanding of technology through [biomimicry](#), with seashells exhibiting the golden ratio in the angle of their spirals and sponges serving as inspiration for sturdy architecture. **What technological advances do we owe to the ocean? Is there a specific ocean species that you find brilliantly designed—something that humans could learn from or replicate?**

The ocean's influence is carved into pottery dating back centuries and engraved in indigenous knowledge and histories. Just as we did then, we still love to create. But the wellbeing of the ocean, our ancient muse, is not as it once was. As pollution, warming, acidification, and much more pressure this massive ecosystem and the life within it, it is crucial to remember its importance to our many communities.

With the many gifts of the ocean comes the question, “what would we do without it?” Just how deeply is the ocean ingrained in our joys, hopes, and successes? This subtheme invites you to explore the ways the natural world inspires you and the world you live in, as well as the importance of what we stand to lose. Reflect on the ocean influences you see around you and what they mean for your community and beyond. **What are some of the earliest ocean-related films, books, or songs that resonate with you and why? How do they shape your perception of the ocean? What might be lost culturally if younger generations grow up without ocean stories or influences? If some of your favorite ocean-related characters were real, how do you think they'd react to the state of the oceans today?**

Submit online at: bowseat.org/contest

YOUR STORY, OUR OCEAN: HOW OUR OCEAN SUSTAINS, PROTECTS, AND INSPIRES US | Prompt

The 2026 Ocean Awareness Contest – *Your Story, Our Ocean* – encourages you to explore the many ways our ocean sustains, protects, and inspires us. We invite you to think about your personal connection to the ocean – whether you're coastal or landlocked – through the value it brings to your life. The benefits of the ocean are widespread and multifaceted, from food production to climate regulation to artistic inspiration. Go through the sub-themes and explore the topics that resonate with you. Share how the ocean has shaped your story through art, writing, performance, film, or multimedia. How does the ocean sustain, protect, and inspire you?

Submissions Accepted in:

- Visual Art: Handcrafted
- Visual Art: Digital
- Creative Writing
- Film
- Poetry & Spoken Word
- Performing Arts
- Interactive & Multimedia

WHO MAY ENTER

Students from around the world are invited to participate in the Ocean Awareness Contest. Enter the division based on your age at the time of entry:

- **Junior Division:** Age 11-14
- **Senior Division:** Age 15-18

Students can participate as an individual or as a club, class, or group of any size.

All students must provide the contact information for an [adult sponsor](#) (teacher, parent, mentor, etc.).

WHY PARTICIPATE?

- **Join Bow Seat's global movement** of over 42,000 young creatives who care about the ocean, environmental justice, and climate action, and contribute to the [largest youth environmental arts collection in the world](#).
- **Gain knowledge** about climate change and its relationship to and impact on our changing world. Dive into Bow Seat's [Resource Studio](#) to learn more about the issues; find artists and organizations taking action to protect our blue planet; and discover ways that you can get involved.
- **Grow your skills** in communication, critical thinking, creativity, and environmental advocacy. Use your artwork to raise awareness for critical environmental issues.
- **Build your portfolio** and make art in your preferred medium, or practice a new one! Add to your resume with a participation certificate.
- **Showcase your talents worldwide.** Through art exhibitions, publications, social media campaigns, and scholarships, Bow Seat uplifts diverse youth voices to advance dialogue and participation in environmental conservation and advocacy.
- **Be eligible for special opportunities**, like the [Future Blue Youth Council](#). Past program participants also serve as Bow Seat interns and Contest judges!
- [Earn cash awards](#) of up to \$1,000!

Creativity is Power

You play an important role in shaping the future world. Your creative voice has the ability to: expose what is happening to our blue planet; question the societal norms that have brought us to this point; reflect and reshape what it means to be a human in the 21st century; discover and advocate for solutions; and persuade others to take action.

AWARDS

Awards will be given in each of the categories at both the Junior and Senior divisions:

GOLD	\$1,000
SILVER	\$750
BRONZE	\$500
PEARL	\$250
DISTINGUISHED HONORABLE MENTION	\$100
HONORABLE MENTION	\$50

SPECIAL AWARDS OFFERED IN 2026

Visit bowseat.org/contest for more information.

We All Rise Prize (Black, Indigenous, and Latina/o/e students only)

As part of Bow Seat’s long-term effort to increase the diversity of our program participants, we sponsor the We All Rise Prize, awards totaling **\$5,000 specifically for youth in the U.S. who self-identify as Black, Indigenous, and/or Latine.**

Five \$500 awards in both the Junior Division (ages 11-14) and Senior Division (ages 15-18)—a total of 10 awards—will be offered to students in the U.S. who identify as Black, Indigenous, and/or Latine in the Ocean Awareness Contest, and whose entries demonstrate notable artistic achievement in their chosen category. Cash awards are not restricted and can be used for tuition, art supplies, or personal expenses. Select winners will also be featured in promotional materials for the following year’s We All Rise Prize.

Voice of the Sea Award (Spoken Word submissions only)

In partnership with poet/activist/educator Tayllor Johnson. As the Ocean Awareness Contest has grown over the years, young artists have continued to push the boundaries of our categories in ways that have intrigued and moved us. The Voice of the Sea Award was inspired by receiving a growing number of spoken word poems—pieces that truly came alive through performance. To celebrate this powerful mode of expression, Bow Seat recognizes two spoken word poetry submissions with Voice of the Sea Awards at the Gold-level in each age division: **one \$500 award for a Junior submission, and one \$500 award for a Senior submission.** Entries must follow the requirements for submitting in the Poetry & Spoken Word category.

Bay State Award (Massachusetts students only)

All students who reside in Massachusetts will be automatically considered for the Bay State Award, a special recognition to celebrate the creative young artists, thinkers, and activists in our home state. From the Housatonic River to the Quabbin Reservoir to the Atlantic Ocean, water connects us all and plays a wicked important role in the Commonwealth's economy, culture, and health of our human and non-human residents. Up to 3 winners in each age division will each receive a \$100 cash award.

Hometown Award (Boston students only)

This award recognizes talented students in Bow Seat's hometown of Boston, Massachusetts. Up to 3 winners in each age division will each receive a \$100 cash award.

Publishing, Exhibitions, and Special Opportunities

As a winner, you may have a special opportunity to showcase your talents worldwide while raising awareness of environmental issues to a broader community. Bow Seat organizes art exhibitions, pop-up art shows, and social media campaigns; curates anthologies of art and poetry; and finds opportunities to publish student writing. As part of Bow Seat's student collection, your creative piece will help to educate and inspire audiences to take action!

HOW TO ENTER

Step 1: Review & Research

Review the Theme & Prompt

The Ocean Awareness Contest theme changes every year. Be sure to review the description of the 2026 theme, *Your Story, Our Ocean*, before starting your piece. Submissions are judged based on how well they address the annual theme. Your submission should respond to the prompt listed on Page 3.

Read the Rules

This is an international contest open to students ages 11-18. Make sure you read all of the Contest rules, submission requirements, and other details before you get started.

Do Your Research & Get Inspired

We have many resources on our website to help you get started on your submission. [Explore Bow Seat's Resource Studio](#)—a unique, curated space that includes inspirational artwork, journalistic media, primary literature, interactive quizzes, videos, and more—to learn more about this year's sub-themes of how the ocean sustains, protects, and inspires us. There are also skills-based resources with educational information and tips on art-making, filmmaking, spoken word, storytelling, and more, as well as examples of environmental art to inspire your craft.

Visit bowseat.org/resources.

Contest Deadline

The 2026 Ocean Awareness Contest deadline is Monday, June 8, 2026, at 11:59 PM Eastern Time (ET). Visit bowseat.org/contest to submit online.

Step 2: Create

Submission Categories

Please review all submission requirements carefully. Students may submit one entry per category, meaning that you may enter up to seven pieces, one in each category. If you submit more than one entry in a category (for example, two poems), additional entries will not be counted or judged.

Visual Art: Handcrafted

Visual Art: Handcrafted submissions may include:

- Drawing & illustration
- Painting
- Sculpture
- Land art
- Collage
- Printmaking
- Film photography
- Ceramics
- Fashion & jewelry
- Mixed media

Digital art should be submitted to the Visual Art: Digital category. AI-Generated Art is not permitted in the Ocean Awareness Contest.

Visit our student gallery for examples of visual art: bowseat.org/gallery

Submission Requirements:

- Accepted file types: JPG, PNG, GIF, or PDF.
- You may submit up to 3 images (different angles or details) of your submission.
- Make sure your files are high resolution, not crooked, and can easily be viewed.

Progress Photo (required): All Visual Art: Handcrafted submissions must include a progress photo or a photo of you standing with your completed work. These images will only be used to verify your artwork and not be considered in the judging process.

Reflection (required): All submissions must include a written reflection (artist's statement) of 100-300 words. This will be a separate question on the submission form.

Works Cited (if applicable): Include a bibliography (any style) crediting sources and citing any ideas, facts, quotes, or existing media used in your artwork that are not your own.

We encourage you to learn from and be inspired by other environmental artists and designers as you create your piece. If your submission is influenced by someone else's work of art, or if your submission uses someone else's image/artwork/photograph as a reference, you must give credit to the original source in the Works Cited section.

Visual Art: Digital

Visual Art: Digital submissions may include:

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Graphic design | • Digital photography |
| • Digital illustration | • Data visualization |
| • Coding art | • Infographics |
| • GIFs | • 3D modeling & printing |

AI-Generated Art is not permitted in the Ocean Awareness Contest.

Visit our student gallery for examples of visual art: bowseat.org/gallery

Submission Requirements:

- Accepted file types: JPG, PNG, GIF, or PDF.
- You may submit up to 3 images (different angles or details) of your submission.
- Make sure your files are high resolution, not crooked, and can easily be viewed.

Progress Photo (required): All Visual Art: Digital submissions must include a screenshot of your submission in progress or in the program used to create it. These images will only be used to verify your artwork and not be considered in the judging process.

Reflection (required): All submissions must include a written reflection (artist's statement) of 100-300 words. This will be a separate question on the submission form.

Works Cited (if applicable): Include a bibliography (any style) crediting sources and citing any ideas, facts, quotes, or existing media used in your artwork that are not your own.

We encourage you to learn from and be inspired by other environmental artists and designers as you create your piece. If your submission is influenced by someone else's work of art, or if your submission uses someone else's image/artwork/photograph as a reference, you must give credit to the original source in the Works Cited section.

Creative Writing

Submissions may include fiction (e.g., short stories) or creative nonfiction (e.g., personal narratives, blog posts, or journalistic writing). Visit our student gallery for examples of creative writing: bowseat.org/gallery

Submission Requirements:

- Document should be in 12-point type, Times New Roman font; double-spaced with 1-inch margins.
- Include the title of your work at the beginning of this document. Do not include identifying information such as student name and school.
- Accepted file types: Word documents (.doc or .docx) or PDF.
- Your submission must be written in English.
- Submission length:
 - Junior Division: Up to 3 pages (approximately 750 words)
 - Senior Division: Up to 5 pages (approximately 1,250 words)

Reflection (required): All submissions must include a written reflection (artist's statement) of 100-300 words. This will be a separate question on the submission form.

Works Cited (if applicable): Use in-text citations (parenthetical or footnotes, in any style) and include a bibliography (any style) for any ideas, facts, and quotes that are not your own. Works cited are not included in submission length.

AI-generated writing is not permitted in the Ocean Awareness Contest.

Film

Submissions may include (but are not limited to) narrative films, live action films, hand-drawn or computer-generated animation, documentaries, or experimental film. Visit our student gallery for examples of film: bowseat.org/gallery

Submission Requirements:

- Films must be 2-4 minutes in length.
- Upload your film to Google Drive (preferred), YouTube, or Vimeo and provide the public URL on the submission form. Ensure that your video is not private.
- Include a title and credits in the film itself for any information, images, audio, or video clips that are not your own. Bow Seat encourages you to use original, copyright-free, or public domain images, footage, and music.
- Name your film as “2026 Ocean Awareness Contest – Film Title”.
- Your submission must be in English or have English subtitles if narration is in a language other than English.

Reflection (required): All submissions must include a written reflection (artist’s statement) of 100-300 words. This will be a separate question on the submission form.

Works Cited (if applicable): Include a bibliography (any style) crediting sources and citing any ideas, facts, quotes, or existing media used in your work that are not your own.

AI-Generated work is not permitted in the Ocean Awareness Contest.

Interactive & Multimedia

The Interactive & Multimedia category invites submissions that integrate creative communication and interactive or participatory elements, or which combine three or more of the other submission categories. Visit our student gallery for examples of interactive and multimedia: bowseat.org/gallery

Submissions may include, but are not limited to:

- Websites or apps
- Social media campaigns
- Games (video games or board games)
- Installations
- Podcasts

Note: Digital paintings and graphic design should be submitted in the Visual Art: Digital category. Ceramics should be submitted to Visual Art: Handcrafted. Animated films should

be submitted in the Film category. Please contact us at info@bowseat.org if you have questions about Interactive & Multimedia submissions.

Submission Requirements:

- Interactive & Multimedia submissions must include a short written description of your concept or description of use (for example: instructions of app use; gameplay summary; description of viewer interaction; or description of how the submission combines multiple categories or media forms). This will be a separate question on the submission form.
- You must provide up to 5 images, screenshots, or supporting text documents that illustrate your work. Accepted file types: JPG, PDF, PNG, GIF, or Word (.doc or .docx).
- You may also provide a link to browser-based works, as well as a video of gameplay or demonstrating projects in use (optional). If provided, videos must be shorter than 5 minutes and uploaded to Google Drive (preferred), YouTube, or Vimeo (ensure they are not private).
- Audio files in MP3 format may also be uploaded (optional). If you are creating a podcast, we recommend an episode length of 5-15 minutes, and you must provide a written script.

Reflection (required): All submissions must include a written reflection (artist's statement) of 100-300 words. This will be a separate question on the submission form.

Works Cited (if applicable): Include a bibliography (any style) crediting sources and citing any ideas, facts, quotes, or existing media used in your work that are not your own.

AI-Generated work is not permitted in the Ocean Awareness Contest.

Performing Arts: Music & Dance

Submissions may be original compositions or song parodies in any musical genre, or dance performances in any style. Visit our student gallery for examples of music and dance:

bowseat.org/gallery

Submission Requirements:

- Record a video of yourself performing the work. The video may include other images or video, but must contain footage of your performance* or composition process. (*Screen captures of digital instruments are acceptable for electronic or digital music.)
- Submissions should be 2-4 minutes in length.

- Upload your performance to Google Drive (preferred), YouTube or Vimeo and provide the public URL on the submission form. Ensure that your video is not private.
- Name your video as “2026 Ocean Awareness Contest –Title”.
- If your Music submission has lyrics, you must upload a Word (.doc or .docx) or PDF document of your song lyrics (in English). You may include lyrics as captions in the video (recommended). If your song is performed in a language other than English, you must provide an English translation of the lyrics.
- Include a title and credits in the video for any information, images, audio, or video clips that are not your own. Bow Seat encourages you to use original, copyright-free, or public domain images, footage, and music.

Reflection (required): All submissions must include a written reflection (artist’s statement) of 100-300 words. This will be a separate question on the submission form.

Works Cited (if applicable): Include a bibliography (any style) crediting sources and citing any ideas, facts, or quotes used in your work that are not your own. If you create a song parody, you must clearly credit the original songwriter. Bow Seat encourages you to use original, copyright-free, or public domain images, footage, and music.

AI-Generated music is not permitted in the Ocean Awareness Contest.

Poetry & Spoken Word

Submissions may be free or formal verse, or spoken word poetry. Visit our student gallery for examples of poetry: bowseat.org/gallery

Submission Requirements:

- Format your submission in 12-point type, Times New Roman font, single-spaced with 1-inch margins.
- Include the title of your poem at the top of the page. Do not include identifying information such as student name and school.
- Accepted file types: Word documents (.doc or .docx) or PDF.
- Your submission must be written in English.
- Submission length:
 - Junior Division: no more than 1 page
 - Senior Division: no more than 2 pages

Reflection (required): All submissions must include a written reflection (artist’s statement) of 100-300 words. This will be a separate question on the submission form.

Works Cited (if applicable): Include a bibliography (any style) crediting sources and citing any ideas, facts, or quotes used in your work that are not your own. Works cited are not included in submission length.

Spoken Word Video (optional): You may include a video of you performing your poem. You must upload your video to Google Drive (preferred), YouTube or Vimeo and provide the video URL in your online submission form. Please ensure that your video is not private. Do NOT submit a Word or PDF document with a link to the video. **All spoken word submissions will be automatically considered for the Voice of the Sea Award.**

AI-generated writing is not permitted in the Ocean Awareness Contest.

Write Your Reflection

A written reflection is required to accompany your submission, regardless of category. It is like the introduction to a book or an artist's statement in a museum. Judges may consider the content of your reflection when evaluating your submission. Judges will not consider spelling or grammar, only the ideas expressed. You are welcome to use translating tools, particularly if English is not your first language.

Your reflection should describe 1) your creative process and 2) what you have learned through your exploration of the Ocean Awareness Contest theme. Use the following questions to guide your writing:

- How did you come up with the idea for your piece?
- What inspired your work and creative process?
- How does being creative make you feel?
- Why did you choose the medium (oil paint, charcoal, ballet, film, pop music, etc.) you did? How have you engaged with this medium in the past?
- What have you learned through your exploration of the Contest theme, *Your Story, Our Ocean*?
- What is your message to viewers of your artwork?

Reflection Requirements:

- Length: Minimum of 100 words and maximum of 300 words
- Your reflection must be written in English

Step 3: Submit

Students must create an account and submit their work through our [online system](#). If you are submitting multiple works, you only need to create one account. Bow Seat cannot accept submissions via email or physical mail. Visit bowseat.org/contest to access the submission platform. **Preview the submission form on Page 18.**

The Ocean Awareness Contest deadline is June 8, 2026.

Submission Checklist:

- ☐ Your contact information
- ☐ Your submission (Visual Art: Handcrafted, Visual Art: Digital, Creative Writing, Film, Interactive & Multimedia, Performing Arts: Music & Dance, Poetry & Spoken Word)
- ☐ A title for your submission
- ☐ Your written reflection
- ☐ Works cited (if applicable): List of sources for any ideas, quotes, or facts used that are not your own
- ☐ Contact information for an adult sponsor (required for all participants)
- ☐ Parent/guardian consent (required if under 13 years old). See pages 19-20 for more information

Once you create an account and start a submission, you will have the opportunity to save your work and continue at another time.

Teachers: You may create a single account under your name and submit multiple entries on behalf of your class, but you must submit separate entries for each individual student, unless they are participating as a group.

Step 4: Connect & Continue

Share Your Work

Thank you for participating! You have contributed to the largest youth environmental arts collection in the world, and are part of Bow Seat's global community of more than 42,000 young people and counting who are using their creative voices to speak up for our blue planet.

Share this opportunity with other artists, writers, filmmakers, musicians, dancers, digital media mavens, environmental activists, and ocean lovers you know! By giving young people an opportunity to think creatively about conservation, and a platform for you to express your ideas, we hope to create a wave of awareness and impact around the world. Tag us **@fromthebowseat** if you share your work online so we can spread the love!

JUDGING

The 2026 Ocean Awareness Contest results will be announced in November 2026. Winners and their sponsors will be notified via email before the results are publicly announced.

Bow Seat judges are artists, writers, teachers, scientists, and of course, ocean-lovers! Each year, we also invite a cohort of Bow Seat student alumni and emerging artists to participate in Contest judging. Meet the team at bowseat.org/about/our-team.

Judges consider:

- How well submissions address the annual theme of the Contest;
- Demonstration of artistic voice, originality, and imagination;
- Craftsmanship, including quality, technique, and skill in chosen medium; attention to detail; and accuracy in communicating issues; and
- If a submission meets category requirements (such as length, file type, etc.).

Judging begins immediately after the Contest ends, and we take the time to fairly judge each and every entry to the Contest. We receive thousands of entries, and our team of judges puts in thousands of hours of cumulative work each year reviewing your submissions.

We know that you're anxious to hear Contest results. We take an enormous amount of pride in the care we put into the Contest, and we appreciate your patience as we continue to do so!

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS & SPONSORS

All student participants are required to provide the contact information for an Adult Sponsor. This can be a teacher, parent, guardian, mentor, coach, or other supporting adult.

Whether you are a teacher who assigned the Contest as a class project, a parent helping your child explore their creative potential, or an adult who was asked to be a sponsor for a student submitting on their own, your responsibilities are simple: all we need is to be able to contact you in case we have problems getting in touch with your sponsored student.

When your student submits their work, they will be asked to provide your name and email address. You will receive a confirmation email once they submit so that you can have it on record as well.

We have many resources in our new Resource Studio—including articles, lesson plans, and videos—to help you and your student learn more about issues related to climate change, and to support project inspiration and planning. Visit bowseat.org/resources.

For Sponsors of Participating Students Under the Age of 13: Parent/Guardian Consent Forms (Page 19-20) are required for any participating student under the age of 13. On the

first page of the online Contest submission form, select “Yes” to the question “Are you under 13 years old?” and choose an option:

1. **Provide Consent Electronically.** This option sends an electronic Consent Letter to the parent or guardian specified for an e-signature.
2. **Upload Parent/Guardian Consent Form.** This option allows you to upload a signed version of the PDF form. If you would like to upload multiple Consent Forms, combine all forms into one PDF or email the individual forms to us (see below).
3. **Email Parent/Guardian Consent Form.** Choose this option if you would like to email us at info@bowseat.org one or multiple signed Consent Forms, and we will add them to the student’s submission.

Educator Innovation Awards

Many of our sponsors are teachers who effectively and creatively bring the Contest into their classrooms, teaching entire groups of students about environmental issues and empowering them to be stewards of our blue planet, while meeting important educational standards. To recognize their efforts, Bow Seat grants nomination-based Educator Innovation Awards of \$500. Visit bowseat.org/resources/for-teachers for details.

Rules & Eligibility

Competition Period

All submissions must be received by June 8, 2026, at 11:59 PM Eastern Time (ET) to be considered in the 2026 Ocean Awareness Contest. The online platform will close automatically at the Contest deadline. Please plan accordingly!

Who May Enter

- This is an international Contest and is open to students ages 11-18 who are enrolled in middle school or high school (or the homeschool equivalent) worldwide. Proof of age, identity, or eligibility may be required.
- Students ages 11-14 may enter the Junior Division. Students ages 15-18 may enter the Senior Division. Please enter the age division based on your age at the time of entry.
- Participants under the age of 13 must have a parent or legal guardian complete a Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) Parent/Guardian Consent Form with their submission. See Pages 19-20.
- Entries may be submitted by an individual or group of unlimited size. If you submit as a group, there must be one group leader who will serve as the contact person for the group. All of the names of the group members must be listed in the submission. Award money will be split evenly among the group members.

- Any student may submit (i.e., have their name included in) only one entry per category. Therefore, a student may have a maximum of seven different submissions, one in each category.

How to Enter

- There is no fee to enter the Contest.
- Students must create an account and submit their work through our online system by the Contest deadline: June 8, 2026, at 11:59 PM Eastern Time (ET). Bow Seat cannot accept submissions via email or physical mail.
- Students must provide the contact information for an Adult Sponsor: a teacher, parent, guardian, mentor, or other supporting adult.
- Entries submitted previously to the Bow Seat Ocean Awareness Contest will not be considered in the 2026 Contest. Submissions must be created during the 2025-26 academic year (or between September 2025 and June 2026).
- All entries must be the students' original work. While we recognize that existing sources will be used for inspiration and research, Bow Seat reserves the right to disqualify an entry at any time if we suspect or determine plagiarism. The use of AI-generators is considered plagiarism. Any participant who submits AI-generated work will be disqualified and their sponsor will be notified.
- Entries must be submitted in English or have an English translation in order to be considered for judging.

Additional

- By entering the Ocean Awareness Contest, you agree to Bow Seat's Terms of Use (bowseat.org/terms-of-use).
- Bow Seat promises to run this Contest fairly, ethically, and with integrity.
- All judging decisions are final.
- All winners and their sponsors will be notified by email before they are publicly announced.
- Bow Seat: Creative Action for Conservation reserves the right to use students' work for marketing and promotional purposes in any and all media.
- Winners will be required to verify their eligibility by completing an Affidavit of Eligibility/Liability Release, and, where lawful, a Publicity Release during the award claim process.

Submission Form Preview

To get started, create an account in our [online submission platform](#). If you are a teacher submitting on behalf of a class, or a student submitting in more than one category, you can use one account for multiple submissions. Please be sure to review all [Contest rules](#) and guidelines before starting your submission.

Deadline to submit: June 8, 2026.

PAGE 1: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Participant Full Name

Email Address We will use the Primary Contact email address for submission and winner notifications.

Are you participating as an individual or a group? Group member names and email addresses are required for group entries.

Category Visual Art: Handcrafted, Visual Art: Digital/Creative Writing/Film/Interactive & Multimedia/Performing Arts: Music & Dance/Poetry & Spoken Word

Age Division Junior Division (Age 11-14) or Senior Division (Age 15-18)

Participant Age Parent/Guardian consent is required for students under the age of 13. See Pages 19-20 for more information.

Hometown or City, U.S. State (if applicable), and Country

Demographic Information (optional) We ask for information on gender and ethnic identity to help us better understand who participates in our program.

PAGE 2: SCHOOL & SPONSOR INFORMATION

School Name

Adult Sponsor Name and Email Address A sponsor can be any adult, but is typically a parent, guardian, or teacher. Your sponsor will receive a confirmation email when you submit to the Contest.

PAGE 3: SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Submission Title

Medium, Dimensions, and Progress Photo Visual Art Categories only

Performing Arts: Music Genre and Lyrics **OR** Dance Style Performing Arts Category only

Upload Submission See [How to Enter page](#) for full category requirements

Description of Submission Interactive & Multimedia Category only; See [How to Enter page](#) for full category requirements

Video Link (Google Drive (preferred), YouTube, or Vimeo) Film and Performing Arts, required; Poetry and Interactive & Multimedia, optional

Browser-Based Media Link Interactive & Multimedia Category, optional

Upload Audio File Interactive & Multimedia Category, optional. If you create a podcast, you must provide a written script.

Works Cited List the sources of any ideas, facts, media, or quotes used in your work that are not your own.

Reflection (100-300 words) Required. Your reflection should describe 1) your creative process and 2) what you have learned through your exploration of the Ocean Awareness Contest theme, *Your Story, Our Ocean*.

PAGE 5: FINALIZE & SUBMIT Submissions may be saved as a draft in progress, but cannot be edited once they are finalized. Students and sponsors will receive an email confirmation upon successful submission.



Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) Privacy Notice

Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) requires that we gain verifiable consent for your child to participate in a Bow Seat-sponsored program. We are asking for your permission to retain your child's information (name, email, hometown, grade level, and school) and adult sponsor's (teacher, parent/guardian) name and email in order to track student participation, accept student submissions, notify winners, and distribute awards. If you consent, we may use your child's name, grade, and hometown (city, state (if USA) and/or city, country) in program-related outreach.

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your child is participating in a program hosted by Bow Seat: Creative Action for Conservation ("Bow Seat"), an educational nonprofit. Bow Seat's mission is to engage youth in environmental conservation and advocacy through the creative arts.

To participate, your child must provide his/her personal information (first and last name, email, grade level, hometown, and school); his/her project; and an adult sponsor's first and last name and email. Since your child is under the age of 13, the information collected will be kept confidential in compliance with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA).

Bow Seat is the sole owner of all of the information that is collected.

- The personal information provided by the child is used to track program participation, accept student projects, notify program winners, and distribute awards.
- Only with parent/guardian consent, the child's name, grade, and hometown (city, state (if USA) and/or city, country) may be used to promote the program. This includes, but is not limited to, outreach via social media, websites, organizational literature, and at events.
- Bow Seat will not require a child to disclose more information than is reasonably necessary to participate in the program.
- No information will be disclosed to third parties.
- The parent can review the child's personal information, ask to have it deleted, and refuse to allow any further collection or use of the child's information.

Please complete the attached Parent/Guardian Consent Form. If you have any inquiries or concerns regarding Bow Seat's programming, please email info@bowseat.org.



Parent/Guardian Consent Form

I, _____, the parent or legal guardian of _____
(PRINT PARENT/GUARDIAN NAME) (PRINT CHILD'S NAME)

have reviewed Bow Seat: Creative Action for Conservation's COPPA Privacy Notice. By signing below, I authorize my child to provide personal information for and to participate in a Bow Seat program.

By checking the "Yes" box below, I acknowledge that my child's name, grade, and hometown (city, state (if USA) and/or city, country) may be used to promote Bow Seat's programs.

- ☐ **Yes**, my child's first and last name, grade, and hometown (city, state (if USA) and/or city, country) may be used to promote Bow Seat's programs.
- ☐ **No**, my child's first and last name, grade, and hometown (city, state (if USA) and/or city, country) may not be used to promote Bow Seat's programs.

I also understand that it is important to provide accurate information on this consent form so that Bow Seat: Creative Action for Conservation may contact me.

Parent/Guardian Signature:

Date:

Parent/Guardian Email Address:

Parent/Guardian Phone Number:

Please email this signed form to info@bowseat.org or upload it with your student's submission on Bow Seat's online submission platform.