

National English Language Competition 2019/2020

Topic: Environment and its representations in the English-speaking world

The aim of the National English Language Competition is to create interest in topics concerning the English language and the societies and cultures of the UK, USA and other English-speaking countries. We seek to develop students' understanding of different cultural phenomena and intercultural links, but especially to guide them to see the points of connection between the English and Estonian culture through independent research and analysis. The general aim is to encourage students with academic interests in their first scholarly endeavours and to offer them an opportunity to hone their skills of research, analysis and writing in English. This not only meets one of the requirements of the Estonian National Curriculum but also improves analytical and writing skills that students will need on entering the labour market.

This year we want to initiate a discussion about our environment in the broadest sense of the world. Climate change is one of the major challenges facing human societies in the coming decades and it impacts how we live and what kinds of cultural texts we produce. The focus is not just on environmental issues, but the rural and urban environments we move in, the practices they encourage (from hiking to recycling) and the other species we interact with. We invite you to think about how these experiences are represented in the English-speaking world. Comparative perspectives with Estonia are also welcome.

We expect independent student research papers (10-15 double-spaced pages in 12-point Times New Roman font) on some question related to our environments (for general guidelines see How to write a research paper). The papers are supposed to show some background research but also to contain a clear section of independent analysis by the student. The paper should focus on one subject area and clearly formulate a narrower research question within the area (some suggestions are given below). In view of the length of the paper, the topic should be relatively narrow to enable its in-depth analysis. The list below is not exhaustive but rather seeks to demonstrate the wealth of topics available and to stimulate students' imagination and creativity. We want to see students' ability to select an appropriate topic area, define a research question or hypothesis, gather information about it, analyse the information and draw conclusions from it.

Assessment

The papers will be assessed by the jury of the competition in one round and two stages. In the first stage the jury will assess the written paper, its content and its accordance to the requirements set for the projects (see How to Write the Research Project). The analytical side of the paper will be the main focus. Up to 15 best papers will advance to the second stage of assessment. The second stage will take place at the University of Tartu in the form of a mini conference where all participants will present the results of their research orally (the use of visual aids is permitted). This stage will assess the students' command of the topic of their paper, their ability to present the results in an oral presentation and to respond to spontaneous questions on the topic of the paper. Possible research topics within the general theme

Possible research topics within the general theme:

- Representation of our lived environments (city, countryside) novels, movies or TV series. Think of the issues that arise in connection with different lived environments (space use, city planning, transportation, innovation, survival in the wilderness, etc.)
- Representation of different challenges of living today (e.g. carbon emissions, pollution, plastic waste, food issues, etc.) in media, social media, fiction, TV or films.
- Representation of our relationship with non-human animals and plants
- Representation of different aspects of climate change in the media or social media (e.g., social awareness campaigns, websites or media stories)
- Representation of climate change in different utopian or dystopian novels, movies or TV series (pick one novel, film or TV show to discuss how it represents the utopian/dystopian environments)
- Translation of texts related to the real and imagined environments into Estonian.
- Language related to the environment: for example, differences in English and Estonian terms for different natural phenomena (from mountains to mushrooms), idioms and metaphors about the environment
- Political challenges connected to climate issues (what can be done and why decision-making is difficult)
- Economic side of life in different environments

In all topics you may compare the English-speaking countries to each other or one of them to Estonia.