



JAMAICA CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION AND EXHIBITION HANDBOOK 2026

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2026 COMPETITION OVERVIEW

In the beginning was the Word. The written Word is of great importance. Writing, which is a foundation on which modern life is built produces the highest forms of human communication. Writing contributes to civilization by advancing written art forms, entertainment, history, learning and importantly, generating creations for commercial use. With the unearthing of Jamaican works as one main focus, the Jamaica Creative Writing Competition and Exhibition aims to highlight writers' work and cause the outpouring of the writing talents of our people. The competition's main thrust is to propel writers to write "novel" and innovative Jamaican materials of international quality. This will engage publishers with works that are ready to be published in hard or electronic formats for world readership. This competition is open to Jamaican citizens, members of the diaspora and persons residing in Jamaica for at least two years.

The competition does not provide suggested titles or themes for aspiring writers. Competitors may choose any theme or topic they wish to explore. For those who may be desirous of inspiration, given the mandate of the JCDC to preserve Jamaica's cultural heritage, we encourage entrants to consider the Jamaican realities (past and present), lifestyles and traditions in their written works.

An entrant may enter **as many categories with a maximum of three entries as per readership** in Essays, Short Stories, Plays, Novels and Poetry; however, for Screenplays a writer may enter any number of works. Writers **MUST NOT** include their legal names on their works, only a **PEN NAME** and the registration information generated via Awards Force packing slip is acceptable.

The submission timeline for this year's competition is June 1 – 30, 2026.

Entries are only accepted through our designated online portal, which may be accessed through the JCDC website, or via jcdc.awardsplatform.com. Please see the 'General Rules and Guidelines' for more information. Entrants may contact the JCDC parish office staff for assistance with the portal.

CREATIVE WRITING CATEGORIES

CATEGORIES

There are six categories in this competition, namely:

1. Screenplays
2. Short Stories
3. Novels
4. Poetry
5. Plays
6. Essays

SCREENPLAYS

Unlimited manuscripts may be submitted for Feature length screenplays (80 – 120 pages).

PROPER FORMAT IS REQUIRED, THAT IS, like FINAL DRAFT.

Writers are to choose the appropriate viewership when submitting their work:

- *Junior Screenplays*
- *Intermediate Screenplays*
- *Adult Screenplays*

Writers may utilize screenplay freeware (free software), such as StudioBinder, Prewrite, Kit Scenarist, Fade In, celtx and Arc Studio Pro.

Writers are allowed to choose the software they can access that provides the correct format.

GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSMENT

- Originality
- Creativity
- Title
- Genre / Structure
- Theme / Tone
- Characters
- Format
- Appeal (Entertainment Value) / Plot
- Reach (Effectiveness of Message) / Visual Elements
- Dialogue
- Emotional Impact / Effective Communication

SHORT STORIES

The Short Stories category allows each entrant a maximum of:

- Three (3) Junior Short Stories
- Three (3) Intermediate Short Stories
- Three (3) Adult Short Stories

Be reminded that entrants are encouraged to write about Jamaican themes or otherwise reflect contact with the Jamaican and or West Indian environment.

Entries should be prose and must not exceed the following limit:

- 5,000 words with a minimum of 3000 words for Adults
- 4,000 words with a minimum of 2000 words for Intermediates
- 3000 words with a minimum of 1000 words for Juniors

GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSMENT

CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

- Story line/plot
- Characterization
- Setting/atmosphere/mood
- Relevance
- Originality
- Logical development of story line
- Sequencing of events

USE OF LANGUAGE/MECHANICS

- Use of language to create mood/setting
- Use of dialogue to advance plot/feelings/reveal character etc
- Use of figurative language (appropriate to age)
- Spelling/punctuation
- Sentence/structure/paragraphs
- Concord (grammatical agreement)
- Novelty and innovation
- Overall Impact/presentation

NOVELS

The Novels category allows each entrant a maximum of

- Three (3) Junior Novels
- Three (3) Intermediate Novels
- Three (3) Adult Short Novels

The novel should be of a forty thousand (40,000) word minimum length.

GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSMENT

CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

- Story line/plot
- Characterization
- Setting/atmosphere/mood
- Relevance
- Originality
- Logical development of story line
- Sequencing of events
- Novelty and innovation

USE OF LANGUAGE

- Use of language to create mood/setting
- Use of dialogue to advance plot/indicate feelings/reveal character etc.
- Use of figurative language (appropriate to age)
- Spelling/punctuation
- Sentence structure/paragraphs
- Concord (grammatical agreement)
- Overall impact and presentation

POETRY

The Poetry category allows each entrant a maximum of:

- Three (3) Junior poems
- Three (3) Intermediate poems
- Three (3) Adult poems

GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSMENT

In assessing entries in this category, emphasis will be placed on the following:

- Interpretation of the subject chosen
- Use of imagery and metaphor
- Originality and creativity
- Creative use of language i.e. not cliché usage
- Imaginative expression
- Use of literary devices (appropriate to level)
- Novelty and innovation
- Overall impact/presentation

PLAYS

The Plays category allows each entrant a maximum of:

- Three (3) Junior plays
- Three (3) Intermediate plays
- Three (3) Adult plays

Manuscripts may be submitted for:

- Full-length Plays (1-2 hrs)
- One-act Plays (30-45 minutes)
- Radio Plays (5 minutes-½ hr)
- Television Plays (48 minutes script-60 minutes with advertisements)

Plays involving music and choreography will be judged on the merit of their dialogue only.

GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSMENT

- Craft and structure
- Characterization
- Credibility
- Grasp of Human Emotion
- Originality/idea: Theme
- Suitability to genre intended
- Story/Plot
- Dialogue
- Scope for Production
- Novelty and innovation
- Overall Impact/presentation

ESSAYS

The Essays category allows each entrant a maximum of:

- Three (3) Junior Essays
- Three (3) Intermediate Essays
- Three (3) Adult Essays

Entries shall normally be between 3,000 and 5,000 words excepting junior essays, which may be accepted with less words. No less than 1000 words for the Junior Essays.

Credit will be given for originality of thought and treatment of subject matter. Essays will be judged on the following criteria:

- Knowledge of the subject,
- Grammar, spelling, structure,
- Legibility, style and presentation

GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSMENT

- Content and Organization
- Relevance and information
- Originality
- Presentation of arguments
- Organization of material within and among paragraphs
- Linking and sequencing of idea

USE OF LANGUAGE AND MECHANICS

- Appropriate use of language
- Use of literary devices (appropriate to level)
- Spelling/punctuation
- Sentence structure/paragraphs
- Concord
- Novelty and innovation
- Overall Impression/presentation

READERSHIP /VIEWERSHIP GUIDELINES

This refers to the audience that the work is intended for. The readership/viewership is divided into three segments:

- Junior Readers (readers at /or between the ages 7yrs and 12 yrs.)
- Intermediate Readers (readers at /or between the ages of 13 yrs. and 17 yrs.)
- Adult Readers (readers 18 yrs. and older)

GENERAL RULES AND GUIDELINES

1. An entrant may write on ANY theme however, they are encouraged to write about Jamaican themes or otherwise reflect contact with the Jamaican and/ or West Indian environment.
2. a) Entries must be wholly the original creative work of the entrant. The use of artificial intelligence tools— including but not limited to ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Copilot, or any functionally similar software, to generate or produce any portion of a submitted work, whether or not subsequently edited, is strictly prohibited.
b) Where the Commission or an adjudicator has reasonable grounds to suspect AI generation, the entrant will be notified in writing and given seven (7) days to respond with supporting evidence of their creative process. The adjudication panel shall then make a determination on the balance of probabilities. A finding of AI generation will result in disqualification without recourse, with written notice to the entrant. This policy is designed to ensure fairness and maintain the integrity of the competition.
c) All entries submitted must be your original creative works, created by you for the competition and absolutely NO adaptations will be accepted; should the work be proven to be an adaptation it will be immediately disqualified without recourse.
3. Entries/scripts must be submitted in TRIPLICATE (hard copies) and these entries will not be returned. The printed Entries (3 copies) should be:
 - a) Typewritten on plain un-ruled Bond Paper.
 - b) Double-spaced.
 - c) Should be the exact copy of the entry uploaded on the Award Force
4. Each printed entry must be accompanied the **Packing Slip** generated on the Awards Force system. The Packing Slip is generated, once the entry is SUBMITTED. Help can be sought from the Jamaica Cultural Development Commission (JCDC) Head Office or Parish Offices. All entries must reflect the intended readership (i.e. Junior readers/ Intermediate readers / Adult readers)
5. All printed entries will be acknowledged with a receipt.
6. Entries in envelopes marked “Jamaica Creative Writing Competition” must reach the JCDC no later than the date specified on the website (June 30, 2026).
7. The Jamaica Cultural Development Commission reserves the right to have any entry published in suitable publications for up to four (4) years from the receipt of the Award. Please see the legal information printed on the entry form.
8. THE DECISION OF THE JUDGES SHALL BE FINAL.

9. All entrants are invited to the Awards Ceremony. However, winners specifically will be notified specially via online communication channels.
10. Awardees unable to attend the awards ceremony must indicate this at the earliest.
11. Only Entrants gaining awards will be so informed before the date of the Ceremony. The date of the ceremony will be made public and all entrants may attend.
12. Top awardees may be invited to present by reading the winning written item(s) in full or excerpts from sections selected by the Judges.

REGISTRATION

- A. Register on JCDC Awards Platform and upload PDF copy of the entry.
- B. Submit Triplicate Hard copies at the parish office or Head Office and collect the receipt for your entry/entries.
- C. All scripts must be submitted in two (2) formats
 - 1) Via Award Force Platform: All Scripts submitted on the platform must be identified by title, category and readership.
 - 2) In Triplicate hardcopy with the packing slip generated by Awards Force (this is to be used for identification).
- D. **Any script with the full name of the author will be disqualified.**
- E. ENTRIES WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED AFTER THE CLOSING DATE.

THE ADJUDICATION PROCESS

The Competition is judged by a panel of at least three judges in each of the six (6) categories. These will be acclaimed individuals who are not associated with the specific competition except for marking.

The set of scripts is marked individually by each judge according to the marking scheme and individual scores are given. The panel of adjudicators for each category will then meet to compare and deliberate, with an aim of achieving the final score and award for each entry. A general report will be prepared by the panel and signed by each judge before handing over the scripts to the commission. All of this occurs over an approximate eight week period.

Entrants must ensure that they have access to the Awards Force Portal for the duration of the competition, as this is where the Competition's updates will be posted.

THE AWARDS SYSTEM

There are four award categories which are determined by the scores achieved by each individual work.

AWARDS CATEGORY	MARKING SCHEME
Gold	90 - 100
Silver	80 - 89
Bronze	70 - 79
Merit	65 - 69

CATEGORY AND CLASS AWARDS

There shall be eighteen awards covering the six categories and three classes. The award will be made to the piece of work with the highest score in each class and category earning at least a bronze medal.

CATEGORY AND CLASS AWARD
Best Screenwriter For Juniors
Best Screenwriter For Intermediates
Best Screenwriter For Adults
Best Poet For Juniors
Best Poet For Intermediates
Best Poet For Adults
Best Playwright For Juniors
Best Playwright For Intermediates
Best Playwright For Adults
Best Essayist For Juniors
Best Essayist For Intermediates
Best Essayist For Adults
Best Short Story Writer For Juniors
Best Short Story Writer For Intermediates
Best Short Story Writer For Adults
Best Novelist For Juniors
Best Novelist For Intermediates
Best Novelist For Adults

OVERALL AWARDS

This is aimed at awarding the most accomplished writer in that year. The individual who has amassed the most scores as per quality of awards received. Scores will be collated from each work by any gold awarded author then their total scores tallied.

Overall awards will be calculated on the following points systems: **Gold 10, Silver 5, Bronze 2.5 and Merit 1.25.**

THE TOP FIVE SCORERS WILL BE AWARDED AS FOLLOWS, LISTING FROM HIGHEST AWARD TO THE FIFTH AWARD AS BELOW:

- 1st **BEST OVERALL WRITER**
- 2nd **OUTSTANDING WRITER**
- 3rd **SPECIAL WRITER**
- 4th **CHOICE WRITER**
- 5th **NOTEWORTHY WRITER**

THE AWARDS CEREMONY AND LAUNCH OF VIRTUAL EXHIBITION TOUR

This is where the awarded entries will be recognized and presented with their awards. The Commission reserves the right to plan alongside the committee the format of the Awards Ceremony and Exhibition. The winning works once launched are revealed at this ceremony.

***NB.** The Commission reserves the right to amend these awards and/ or to add new awards dependent on the sponsorship attained.*

THE EXHIBITION TOUR - JAMAICA

The Commission reserves the right to determine the items that will make the exhibition for any given year usually these are the awarded items. JCDC usually collaborates with The National Library and all Jamaica Library Service Libraries to host the exhibition. A schedule of the tour will be publicized before the exhibition begins.

LEGAL INFORMATION

Assignment of Rights: The entrant assigns to the Jamaica Cultural Development Commission (JCDC) the exclusive worldwide rights to make and use any photo images, audiovisual and sound recordings, publications and/or anthologies of the entrant's entry(ies) rendered in the course of this competition.

This assignment shall include the right to produce, reproduce, publish, exhibit and distribute mechanical audiovisual, sound and image carriers such as videos, DVDs, compact discs, external drives, cloud storage and or brochures, catalogues, anthologies and books of JCDC entries in the print or digital media as well as the rights to broadcast on radio, television and the worldwide web.

The entrant shall retain all other rights to the entry. This assignment shall apply only to entries successfully selected for a JCDC Award and shall last for a duration of four (4) years taking effect from the date of receipt of the Award.

Warranties: The entrant hereby warrants and represents that he/she is duly authorized to assign the rights of abovementioned and hereby agrees to indemnify and hold JCDC harmless from and against all claims that may arise from third parties as a consequence of the exercise of the rights granted to the JCDC. The entrant agrees to execute such other agreements as may be necessary to give effect to the undertakings herein mentioned.

Minors: Entrants under the age of eighteen (18) years must have their entry submitted and all competition terms accepted by a parent or legal guardian on their behalf. The parent or legal guardian shall be deemed to have accepted these terms, including the assignment of rights set out above, on behalf of the minor entrant. JCDC reserves the right to request proof of parental or guardian consent at any stage of the competition.

Data Protection: JCDC collects personal information from entrants, including name, contact details, and entry submissions, for the purpose of administering the competition. This information will be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act, 2020 and retained for no longer than is necessary for that purpose. Entrants have the right to access, correct, or request deletion of their personal data by contacting JCDC at creativewriting@jcdc.gov.jm. By submitting an entry, entrants consent to the processing of their personal data for competition purposes.

Compensation to Entrant: In the event that the JCDC shall receive cash remuneration from the commercial use of a programme, recording or printed matter, which includes the entrant's entry, the entrant shall be entitled to share equally with all entrants included in the programme, recording or printed matter, fifty percent (50%) of the net proceeds received by the JCDC. Net proceeds shall be determined after deduction of all recording, production, packaging, promotional and distribution costs.

Cancellation or Amendment: JCDC reserves the right to cancel, suspend, or amend the competition or these terms at any time. In the event of cancellation prior to the awards ceremony, no rights assignment shall take effect and all submitted entries shall remain the sole property of their respective entrants. Entrants will be notified of any material amendment or cancellation via the Awards Force platform and the JCDC website.

Dispute Resolution: Any dispute arising from or in connection with this competition, other than a dispute concerning the outcome of adjudication (which shall be final), shall be referred first to JCDC in writing for internal resolution. If the dispute is not resolved within thirty (30) days of referral, either party may refer the matter to mediation before a mutually agreed mediator. If mediation fails or is

not agreed within fourteen (14) days of the expiry of the resolution period, either party may pursue the matter through the courts of Jamaica.

The entrant is free to seek independent legal advice. Entrants are encouraged to become members of Jamaica Copyright Licensing Agency (JAMCOPY) Tel: 754-8910 Fax: 920-9444 Email: jamcopy@cwjamaica.com

CONTACT JCDC

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