

Oregon Secretary of State

Oregon Student Essays 2023 Web Exhibit

Our 2023-2024 Oregon Blue Book Student Essay Contest prompted students to share their COVID-19 pandemic experience. Students sent in both a written portion and an illustration to go with their essays.

Ten of the submitted essays were selected for publication in our print edition and we have published them here as well. Oregon Secretary of State Shemia Fagan's selection is the essay by Ashlyn Huang.



Drawing by Anileh Chen

Oregon Secretary of State

Oregon Student Essays 2023 – Marin Busmalis Temple

My Pandemic Experience

Written by Marin Busmalis Temple

Teacher: Amy York, 8th Grade
Mitchell School

It all started on March 15, but the day before was 3/14/20 also known as pi day. I like to compete in reciting pi. I got the school record again with 151 digits. Then we got the call that changed everything. Not seeing friends online, stores closed. I was in 6th grade after the school year. We were lucky that we could go back to school but with masks. November 27, 2020 my mom got bad news that she has a kind of cancer called Myelodysplastic Syndrome. Because of this my mom will had to go to Boston for treatment.

Traveling in Covid is hard. KN95 masks, tests lots of tests, face shield you name it. After about ten hours of traveling I was in a very different place. Boston was really cautious unlike Central Oregon. Being in Boston I felt like I wasn't being judged the way I felt when I was in Oregon. There was an unexpected delay with my mom's transplant, I was stuck in Boston for three months because of that. I did online school while everybody was together. That was really hard I remember. When I came back from Boston it was the same how I left it being judged and feeling left out. The rest of 6th and 7th I started getting tired of masks and testing. This year I am still traveling but not as safe as I was before.



(<https://sos.oregon.gov/blue-book>)

Oregon Student Essays 2023 - Anileh Chen

Oregon Blue Book Covid-19 Essay

Written by Anileh Chen

Teacher: Frederic Germer, 2nd Grade
Hope Chinese Charter School



Covid-19 marked an epoch in my life. It was a whirlwind; mixing feelings. I said goodbye to Ms. Dennis for Spring Break, and it was like that Spring Break never ended. We had changed from rarely using computers to relying on them for everything concerning our learning. Sometimes I missed lessons because the computer wasn't working. Often I'd stay up late trying to type out essays. School had clearly changed along with the rest of the world. Even two years later, I couldn't go to school without hearing 'Covid-19' thrice a week. To add on, we had to wear masks each day, which was rather unpleasant.

Change is contrary and often confusing. It's like the wind, quickly turning course. Yet sometimes change is good, like a new friend who becomes such an important part of your life that you wonder how you'd lived without her. My family was able to have more R.V. trips or "Great Explorations". Not only that; as people became less interactive, we'd find welcoming silence replacing the crowds. Another bright side was that my sisters could watch my zoom lessons, so they'd be prepared for Second Grade.

Covid-19 was a hard change, so desperately hard that some people still aren't adjusted to it. It came thundering down on us, taking us by surprise. Despite this, I believe we need not be discouraged. Nowhere in the world is without love and joy, even in difficult times. We should understand this pandemic not merely as another obstacle on our path but a reminder to be grateful for our blessings. I have learned to always hold on to hope. Hope is the joy of sailors reaching a lighthouse full of guidance. Through the darkness Coronavirus brings, hope is light for the world. We surely needed it for ours.

(<https://sos.oregon.gov/blue-book>)

Oregon Student Essays 2023 – Saffron Estrada

The Effects of COVID-19

Written by Saffron Estrada

Teacher: Aaron Franklin, 5th Grade
Awbrey Park Elementary School

COVID-19 has been a part of our daily basis for about 2 and a half years. It has affected our daily lives and has caused strong emotions to a lot of people.

I would like to tell you about my experience with the pandemic of COVID-19.

COVID-19 has affected me and my family in many ways and still is. I remember a normal day of third grade. It was a Friday and we were living a normal happy mask-free life.

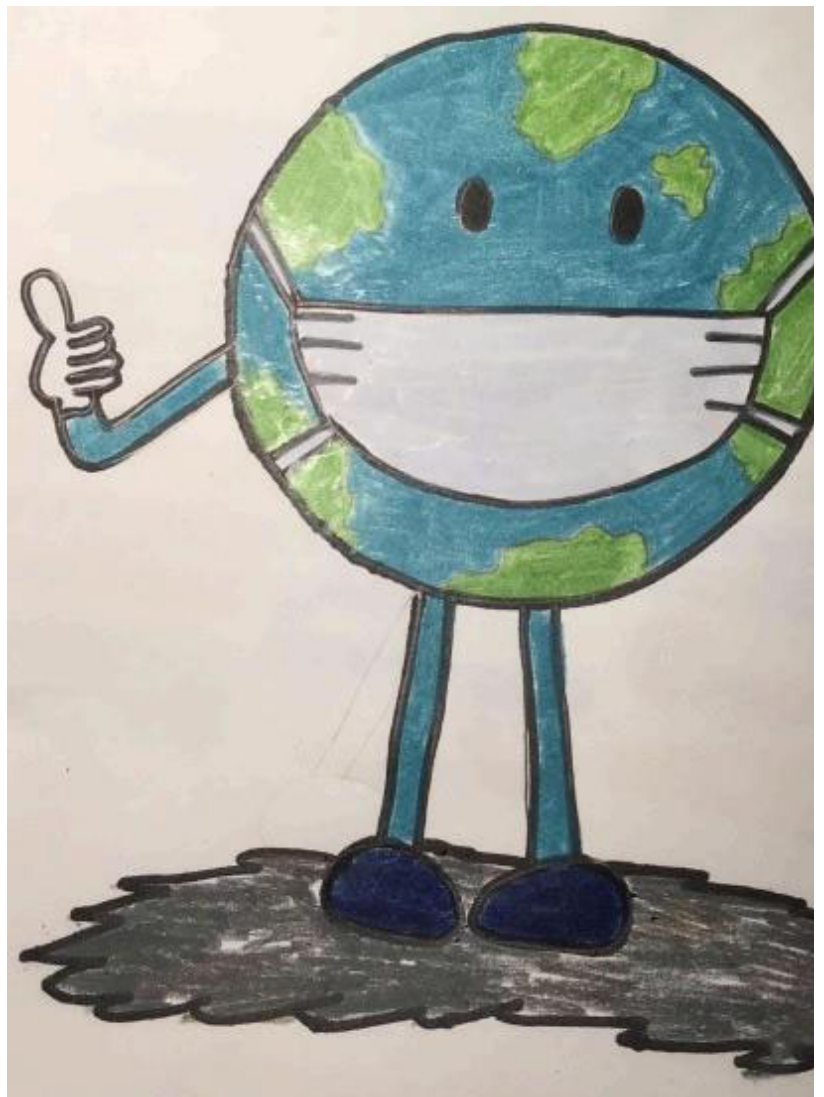
That weekend there was a lot of news about Covid possibly entering our state. Well it was true, the next week of school was cancelled due to staff members catching COVID.

We had to proceed with school online. It was confusing and hard to learn so far apart from our friends and teachers. I finished the year and so I became a fourth grader after the summer.

In fourth grade we still had to learn online. It became "The new normal". During that year I was on the computer more than 7 hours a day.

That summer I ended up needing glasses. Apparently the online school and being on the computer all day made me nearsighted.

Covid-19 affected me and other people so much. Such as wearing a mask, or online school, and even social distancing. Covid has taught me to "Be careful". You never know who has a sickness or not. I'm



sure the COVID-19 pandemic will be a big part of our history.

It will also frighten some people about who's got it and who doesn't. No matter what the witnesses will always have a memory of how covid affected the world.

(<https://sos.oregon.gov/blue-book>)

Oregon Student Essays 2023 - Keina Ga

Time of Lost Smiles

Written by Keina Ga

Teacher: Jennifer Hellman, 8th Grade
ACCESS Academy Alternative Program



In the efforts to manage Covid, we masked up and hid a lot of our faces. As we avoided Covid, we avoided each other. Where did the smiles go? Back then, school was fun. We received unconditional smiles from friends, as well as the occasional grins from strangers in the hallway. Now, people have to hide it. No more bright toothy beams. Because of Covid, school became gloomy. Smiles were lost.

A smile is a chain reaction. Like how Covid infects people, passing from host to host, a smile infects people with happiness, passing from person to person. Anyone who receives it, is bound to give back. So much of our joy derived from day-to-day smiles. Without them, I became heavy from drudgery and lost the bounce in my step.

One day, I felt my friend smile. I was heartened. But how could I understand that she was smiling if her face was covered up by her mask? Later in the day, I somehow sensed another smile. It made me realize that even as Covid changed our lives, happiness could never really be hidden. Even if we were unable to smile with our mouths, we still had our eyes. We can all learn to smile better with our eyes, passing on kindness and still feel connected to each other. Covid, recalled differently, as the time of seeking eyes.

<https://sos.oregon.gov/blue-book>

Oregon Student Essays 2023 - Chazlyn Hale

My Pandemic Experience

Written by Chazlyn Hale

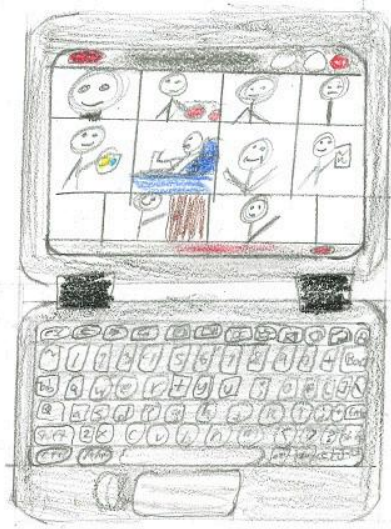
Teacher: Amy York, 8th Grade
Mitchell School

Covid-19 started back when I was in 5th grade during our Spring Break. At first we thought it was just going to be a longer Spring Break, but we were all wrong about that. After a week or two we got our computers to use at our homes. We started to use them everyday for school work. At first, it was a little hard, because it was all online. That summer everything was shut down.

When I got into 6th grade it got way easier to work on the computer because we all had the time to work and figure out how they worked fully and what to do on them. Halfway through the year we went into a hybrid school system where we switched with a “B” group. When you got to school you had to have a mask on whether you rode the bus or not.

During the summer most things were closed and you could not do a lot but some states had almost everything open. Texas was one of the places that I got to go to and it had everything open to the public. We went to a lot of things that a lot of people recommend you do in Texas.

Seventh grade was a bit harder because I changed schools. I used to go to Crook County Middle School. I now go to Mitchell. Mitchell is small so everyone knows everyone so it was a lot easier to spread Covid there. When it hit Spring Break of 2021 we were finally free from the masks and we did not have to wear them any more. I finally felt free from the mask and everyone in the school did too.



(<https://sos.oregon.gov/blue-book>)

Oregon Student Essays 2023 - Ashlyn Huang

My Pandemic Experience

Written by Ashlyn Huang

Teacher: Desiree Chiu, 6th Grade
Corbett Grade School



Life isn't always fair. Sometimes that's the case with those who are being treated differently. Being paid less, or being assaulted. But sometimes, it's seen and dismissed. It's hidden in the classrooms. Hidden in the laughs in the cafeteria.

In April, 2020, I was in the cafeteria. "Have you heard of the Coronavirus?" The kids chattered. Kids would walk around the cafeteria. "Wanna join me at Recess?" I'd watch from the swings. They scampered around. They chased each other, and tagged each other. It was Covid Tag. How could they make it a game? That was only the start.

Asian hate crimes rose after the start of the Pandemic. According to the NYPD, Anti-AAPI hate crimes rose by 1900% in the last year. Many Asian people stayed home in fear ...what if they got hurt? My great

grandmother is one of these people. She feared being attacked. Through media and personal stories, we've learned about the hardships that people face for their race. How can our society improve?

I know that most people aren't racist, even though they seem like they are. It's only ignorance. I understand that. I've been told to go back to my country, I've been asked if I really ate bats or not, I've been looked at whenever someone mentions the Coronavirus, I've been told by other people about the "China virus", and I've been mocked for speaking Chinese. I know it's not much, but people can do better and be more considerate. My parents have always told me, "You're lucky that you can experience two cultures." I try to remember this when people are thoughtless.

I have come to realize that the obstacles I have faced make me stronger. I desire to celebrate my roots, to bring my culture out into the open. I want to learn Chinese, to help translate English to Chinese for people who need help. The pandemic taught me to embrace sharing my culture. I feel like it's important to teach this to students. People need to learn it. Awareness can change things, and make people more understanding.

Official web site of
Oregon Secretary of State

(<https://sos.oregon.gov/blue-book>)

Oregon Student Essays 2023 - Bairon Lai

My Life After Covid

Written by Bairon Lai

Teacher: Katie Lukins, 3rd Grade
FLEX Online School



I opened my eyes. "Is it another normal day?" I thought. When I looked out the window, I started to remember the day, March 22, 2020, when the principal announced the Covid-19 outbreak. We couldn't go to school in person, but we could learn online. The change affected my school life, and made me learn how to protect myself more.

In the beginning of the virtual learning, I was actually very happy. However, soon the happiness went all the way to disappointment because I could not have the same ongoing life. I missed sharing ideas during circle time with my friends and teachers, eating in the cafeteria, reading books in the library, and hanging out with my friends in recess. I missed hearing all the chit-chatting sounds, giggling sounds, munching sounds, and pages flipping sound. All those images of boring normal life were in my head, but, suddenly, were snapped off by a loud bang! Covid-19, the abstract foe, swarmed around my head, covering all the happy images of my happy school life.

Covid-19 is a contagious virus. However, I am strong and not letting the virus terminate me. I learned to protect myself. For example, I need to wash my hands before eating something. I also keep social distance with other people. Wearing masks is an important way to protect myself and others. Finally, I get a Covid-19 vaccine. These are strategies to stay safe from Covid-19.

Covid-19 doesn't just change my life, but also the people around the world. There is a good saying that goes, "Every cloud has a silver lining." We should be cherishing our everyday lives and finding ways to prevent the virus, so we will prosper and not be ruined by this dangerous enemy.

(<https://sos.oregon.gov/blue-book>)

Oregon Student Essays 2023 - Charlie Ryno

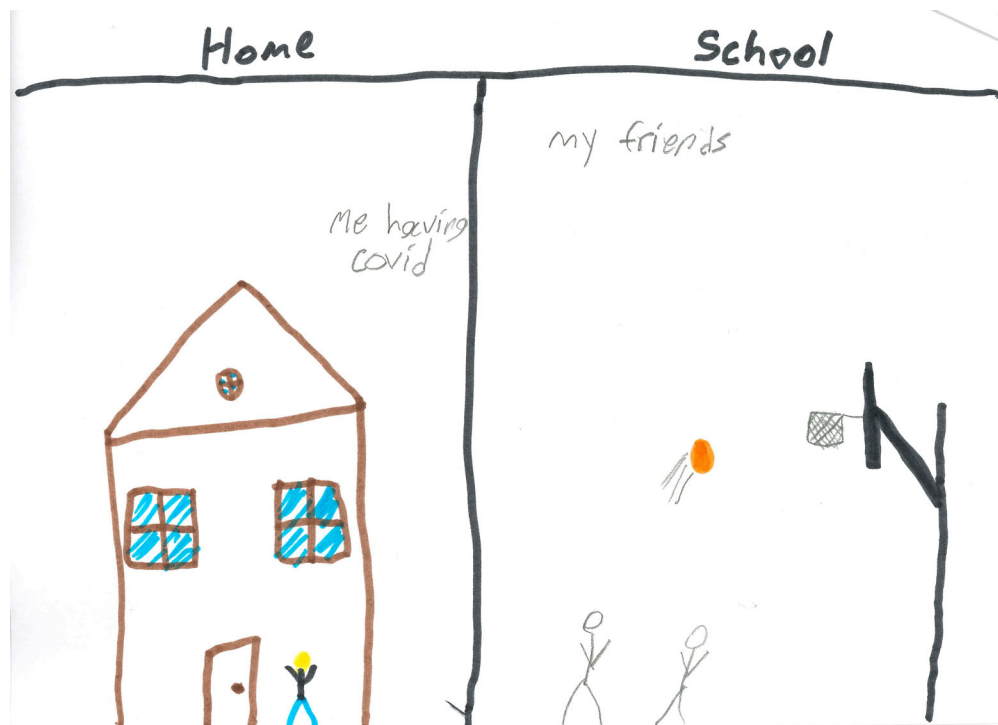
My Pandemic Experience

Written by Charlie Ryno

Teacher: Amy York, 8th Grade
Mitchell School

One of the harshest things in the Covid 19 pandemic fo me was not being able to see my friends. When school and sports shut down I was bummed, because those were the two events I saw my friends at the most. When the pandemic was really bad I could only see my friends on Zoom. Once school opened again my family got Covid. That meant I had to stay home from my friends and they also had to quarantine, because they were around me.

I have learned a lot from Covid for example, I know what it feels like to have a pandemic going through the world. I also know that scientists have learned a lot as well.



(<https://sos.oregon.gov/blue-book>)

Oregon Student Essays 2023 - Anuva Shah

My Pandemic Experience

Written by Anuva Shah

Teacher: Allyson Edwards, 7th Grade
Tumwater Middle School



When COVID-19 first started affecting me, I was only in fourth grade. I remember hearing rumors, and being quick to ignore them. However, slowly, I started noticing more and more of my friends bringing wipes and sanitizer to school. More whispers of a terrifying, life-changing virus.

Suddenly, spring break was extended, and the rest of the in-person school year canceled. Then, we were to learn on an alien platform called “Zoom”. I was excited at first when I realized we had more time for break - clearly remember contacting my friends in the happiness of more freetime. But when the online school year began, I realized how different online school was to the real, in person school I was used to.

There were certainly benefits of online school, considering how I learned ways to better understand technology, and loved being able to have more independent time without my class and teacher. However, COVID-19 impacted me and my life far more negatively than positively. Not being able to communicate with my friends in person was impossible for me, since I was so used to meeting them almost every day of the week. I didn't realize how much of an impact my friends had on me, my mood, and my lifestyle.

Overall, even though the pandemic had negative aspects, like losing much of my in-person social interaction, and not being able to go out without a mask smothering my face, I tried to remember positive parts, like staying in the comfort of my own home, and being able to talk to any of my friends by simply sending them a text or link. The virus changed me thoroughly, and was a vital part of my life. It helped create who I am now, two years from when the pandemic first began.

Oregon Secretary of State

Oregon Student Essays 2023 - Mieko Soria

My Pandemic Experience

Written by Mieko Soria

Teacher: Ashley Baker, 4th Grade
Yujin Gakuen Japanese Immersion School

The pandemic has been hard on everyone. But, like everything else, it has its ups and downs. As we all know it came as a surprise to everyone. We all found ways to keep ourselves busy, and even found new hobbies. Though I didn't find a new hobby I got to know more about the people I loved. Being stuck in a house with three other people and two crazy dogs (for a lot longer than a few days) meant that I would get to know a lot more about them without even realizing it. I even got to know more about my new neighbors!

This may not seem like something very interesting but, the kids next door to me are now some of my best friends! Even though we had a lot of free time on our hands, that didn't mean we didn't have fun. We did some awesome arts and crafts, made delicious desserts and watched movies together! Sometimes I am secretly glad that Covid happened because it meant that I could spend more time with my family. I think I speak for my whole family when I say "You can find light even in the darkest of times." And of course we made unforgettable friends along the way of this long and crazy adventure.

