



2026 | Science Fiction and Fantasy Writing Contest

“First Contact”

An annual writing contest for Tampa Bay high school students
Entries accepted Jan. 1 – May 15, 2026,
at tampabay.com/nie/storycontest.

Tampa Bay high school students are invited to submit original, unpublished short stories on the theme of “First Contact.”

“First Contact” – The first encounter between humans and intelligent extraterrestrial life, or of any sentient species’ first encounter with another one.

For example, your story may involve a physical meeting, on Earth or elsewhere; detection of an alien signal or other communication; or the discovery of alien artifacts or technology. Learn more at tampabay.com/nie/storycontest.

Entries will be judged by a panel of experts, including:

- Hugo and Nebula Award-winning author and Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Association Grand Master **Joe Haldeman**
- Hugo, Locus, Nebula and John W. Campbell Memorial Award-winning author **Nancy Kress**
- Canopus and Sidewise Award-winning author, editor and educator **Rick Wilber**

The grand prize winner will receive:

- \$200 grand prize
- Grand prize plaque
- Winning story published on the contest website

Runners-up will receive:

- \$100/\$75/\$50 prize
- Award certificate



Learn more and enter at tampabay.com/nie/storycontest.

Rules: Visit tampabay.com/nie/storycontest for more information, complete official rules and to enter. The contest is open to all students 13 and older in grades 9-12 in public, private and home schools in Citrus, Hernando, Hillsborough, Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas and Polk counties. Stories must be previously unpublished and unsold. There is no fee to enter, and no limit to the number of stories a student may submit.