

# 2nd Annual Halloween Horror Student Flash Fiction Contest

Writer's Entry Guide · For students entering on their own · Fall 2026

Dear Writer,

Welcome. Walpurgis Words for Literacy is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit supporting young readers and authors, and this contest gives you something most writing assignments never offer: an outside audience. It may also be your first opportunity to earn a publication credit and experience the professional submission process used by working authors.

You'll write an original horror, thriller, or dark fantasy flash fiction piece on this year's theme, **Urban Legends**, and submit it directly to us. Entries are judged anonymously by published horror, thriller, and dark fantasy authors from The Dark Veil Society. Their members include award-winning writers, editors, anthology contributors, and independently and traditionally published authors with experience evaluating fiction for publication.

## At a Glance

|                 |                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Who can enter   | Students in grades 9–12 (or international equivalent of secondary education), including homeschool students                    |
| Theme           | Urban Legends — an original urban legend of the student's creation, written as horror, thriller, or dark fantasy flash fiction |
| Length & format | 500–1,500 words · Classic Shunn manuscript format · .docx or .pdf                                                              |
| Window          | Opens September 1, 2026 · Closes October 15, 2026, 11:59 PM ET                                                                 |
| Entry limits    | 1 entry per student · Individual entries are accepted first come, first served (the contest is limited to 100 total entries)   |
| Judging         | Anonymous judging by published horror, thriller, and dark fantasy authors from The Dark Veil Society                           |
| Prizes          | 1st: \$150 · 2nd: \$75 · 3rd: \$25, plus certificates and publication in our online student showcase · Free to enter           |
| Required        | Parent/guardian consent — completed as part of the submission form                                                             |

## Why Enter?

- **Your work gets read by working authors.** Not a grade, not an algorithm — published writers reading your story and judging it blind, on the words alone.
- **A real publication credit.** Winning stories are published in our online student showcase, a credit you can put on college applications.
- **Cash prizes, free entry.** \$150 / \$75 / \$25 for the top three, and it costs nothing to enter.
- **Don't wait.** Individual entries are accepted first come, first served, and the contest is capped at 100 total entries.

Questions? Reach us at [contests@walpurgiswords.org](mailto:contests@walpurgiswords.org) · Full official rules at [walpurgiswords.org](http://walpurgiswords.org)

The next pages have everything you need. We can't wait to read your legend.

**The Walpurgis Words for Literacy Team**

# Write an Urban Legend

Halloween Horror Flash Fiction • 500–1,500 words

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## The Prompt

Every town has one. The road you don't drive after midnight. The house nobody will buy. The thing that happened to a friend of a friend—everybody swears it's true, and nobody can prove it. **Invent an original urban legend and tell it as a piece of flash fiction.**

Your story can be horror, thriller, or dark fantasy. It should feel like a legend: local, and just plausible enough to keep someone up at night. Don't retell an existing legend (no Bloody Mary, no Slender Man, etc.). The judges want the story only *you* could invent.

## Requirements

- **Length:** 500–1,500 words. Stories under or over the limit will be disqualified, so check your word count.
- **Original work:** Written entirely by you; no AI-generated text and no previously published work.
- **Content:** Keep it PG-13: no graphic gore, no explicit language, nothing you couldn't read aloud in a classroom. The judges are much more impressed by dread than by shock.
- **Format:** Classic Shunn manuscript format (a free guide is linked on the contest page). This is how authors submit to magazines and publishers, so treat it as practice.
- **File type:** .docx or .pdf

## What Makes an Urban Legend Work

- **Specificity of place.** “A town” is forgettable. “The drainage tunnel behind the Route 9 Park-and-Ride” is a legend.
- **The friend-of-a-friend trope.** Legends are always secondhand, retold orally at slumber parties and campfires. Write yours the way it would be told: by someone who heard it from someone who swears it really happened.
- **A rule.** Don't look in the mirror. Don't stop the car. Don't say its name. The best legends give you a rule, and a character with a very human reason to break it: a dare, a doubt, a shortcut home.
- **A memorable, unresolved ending.** The legend shouldn't feel finished, as all great urban legends never really die. Someone, somewhere is bound to break the rule again.

## What You Could Win

Entries are judged blind by published horror, thriller, and dark fantasy authors from The Dark Veil Society. Winners receive cash prizes (\$150 / \$75 / \$25), a certificate, and publication in our online student showcase, which is a publication credit you can put on college applications.

**Contest deadline: October 15, 2026, 11:59 PM ET**

# How to Enter

*Your checklist from first draft to submitted entry*

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## Before You Write

- ☐ Read the full official rules on the contest page at **walpurgiswords.org**
- ☐ Go over the **consent & publication release** (the last page of this guide) with your parent or guardian — the submission form asks for their consent, and no entry can be accepted without it
- ☐ Grab the free Shunn manuscript format guide linked on the contest page and set up your document before you start writing

## Before You Submit

- ☐ Your story is 500–1,500 words (it's a hard limit, so check the word count)
- ☐ Your file is .docx or .pdf, in Classic Shunn manuscript format
- ☐ Content is PG-13: no graphic gore, explicit language, or sexual content
- ☐ Your parent/guardian has read the consent & publication release and given their permission, and you have their email address ready

## Submitting

1. Go to the contest page at **walpurgiswords.org** — the submission form opens September 1, 2026
2. Enter your name, grade, and school (homeschool students: just write “homeschool”)
3. Complete the consent section: check the parent/guardian consent box (only after they've read it and agreed) and enter their email address
4. Upload your story file and submit before **October 15, 2026, 11:59 PM ET** — remember, entries are first come, first served

## After You Submit

- ☐ You'll receive a confirmation email within 3 business days; if you don't, contact **contests@walpurgiswords.org**
- ☐ Winners are announced Halloween night, October 31, 2026, at walpurgiswords.org and on our social channels
- ☐ Every entrant receives a participation certificate — watch your inbox in early November

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Walpurgis Words for Literacy is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit supporting young readers and authors. Full official rules: **walpurgiswords.org** · Questions: **contests@walpurgiswords.org**

# Consent & Publication Release

*For parents and guardians · What you'll be agreeing to when your student submits*

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This page is informational — there's nothing to sign or return. When your student submits an entry, the online submission form will ask them to confirm your consent and provide your email address. Checking the consent box on that form confirms the statements below, which also appear on the contest page at **walpurgiswords.org**.

**By consenting, you confirm that:**

1. You are the parent or legal guardian of the student entering, and you give permission for their story to be entered in the contest.
2. The story is the student's own original work.
3. If the story is selected as a winner or for publication, Walpurgis Words for Literacy and its partner, The Dark Veil Society writing collective, may publish it in the online student showcase at walpurgiswords.org and at darkveilsociety.com, along with the student's first name, last initial, grade, and school. The student keeps full ownership and copyright of the story.
4. Submitting a photo of the student is optional. If we receive one from you or your student, it may be published alongside the story in the online showcase on either site.
5. If the student wins a cash prize, it will be issued to you, the parent/guardian, on the student's behalf.
6. The contact information provided with the submission will be used only to administer the contest (confirming consent, notifying winners, and delivering prizes and certificates). It will not be added to any mailing list or shared outside the organization.

We publish first name and last initial by default to protect students' privacy. If your student wins and you would prefer their full name appear with their story, just let us know when we contact you.

Questions about any of this? We're happy to talk: **contests@walpurgiswords.org**

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