

Americans Who Tell **the Truth**

The Samantha Smith Challenge *Engaged and Passionate Students Learn More!* *Truth, Hope, and Creativity* **Guidelines 2022-2023**

KEY DATES

NOVEMBER 21, 2022:	Registration opens for SSC
JANUARY 15 - MARCH 15, 2023 FEBRUARY 1, 2023	Connect with Americans Who Tell the Truth Registration deadline for SSC
APRIL 28, 2023	Teachers confirm participation in Samantha Smith Challenge Celebration and submit participation reports.
MAY 24, 2023:	Samantha Smith Celebration



WHY THE SAMANTHA SMITH CHALLENGE?

Americans Who Tell the Truth (AWTT) included Samantha Smith's portrait to honor her initiative as she engaged a crisis -- the Cold War and the nuclear arms race -- and did something to make the world better, advocating for truth, hope, and peace. Samantha not only worked for the common good, but in a simple, but important way, left us a legacy and **a challenge: What can we do to encourage more people -- especially young citizens -- to seek truth and share hope by speaking out and engaging in positive service to improve our world?** For our eighth year, AWTT asks students to join us as partners to seek truth, share hope, and honor Samantha with the **Samantha Smith Challenge**.

Samantha's Story

In December 1982, ten year old Samantha Smith of Manchester, Maine, asked her mother if there was going to be a war. She said, "I asked my mother who would start a war and why. She showed me a news magazine with a story about America and Russia, one that had a picture of the new Russian leader, Yuri Andropov, on the cover. We read it together. It seemed that the people in both Russia and America were worried that the other country would start a nuclear war. It all seemed so dumb to me. I had learned about the awful things that had happened during World War II, so I thought that nobody would ever want to have another war. I told Mom that she should write to Mr. Andropov to find out who was causing all the trouble. She said, 'Why don't you write to him?' So I did."

From that one question, a peace-making venture unfolded that brought Russian and American students together to seek truth, build understanding and appreciation of one another, and create hope by building connections instead of armies. Sadly, in August 1985, both Samantha and her father were killed in a plane crash. But Samantha's memory lives on in her courageous example.

Following this example of **seeking truth and hope through engaged citizenship**, the **Samantha Smith Challenge** builds a bridge between the classroom and the community and shows students that, no matter what age, they can be part of solving the challenges and problems they see in the world.

Samantha's journey began 40 years ago when she wrote a letter to Soviet Premier Yuri Andropov asking him to, "Please tell me how you are going to help to not have war." Just a year later she was an eleven year old teaching adults and children how seeking truth leads to hope for peace and understanding. Her progress from concern to seeking truth and finding hope began with courageous engagement and a series of small steps and decisions—something each of us can do!

The Samantha Smith Challenge encourages every student and classroom to take the journey of truth and hope right now

Although these Guiding Principles are from the Maine Learning Results, AWTT believes that these should guide all students across our country. The Samantha Smith Challenge creates ways for educators to make these principles come alive for their students.

www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doe/files/inline-files/THE%20GUIDING%20PRINCIPLES.pdf

Watch the Samantha Smith interview with Ted Koppel

www.youtube.com/user/SamanthaSmithINFO

All you have to do is take the first step. Accept the challenge!

What does it mean to be a Truth Teller?

Discuss the following ideas of Truth:

- 1. Foundational Truths:** The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution express our ideals of equality and justice, which are defined truths of our nation.
- 2. Truth and Trust:** Unless people try to tell each other the truth as they know it, they cannot trust each other. And, obviously, any relationship, personal or public, fails without trust.
- 3. True Challenges:** Unless we are willing to name the true causes of a problem, we cannot fix it. For instance, if we deny that the burning of fossil fuels plays a role in climate change, we will not be able to avert climate catastrophe.
- 4. True Knowledge:** If we don't teach our true history, its shame as well as its nobility, we cannot know who we are. People who don't know themselves are dangerous to themselves and to others because they act from ignorance and self-serving myths.

Essential Questions:

Why is truth important in our world?

What causes truth to be compromised?

Complete the Lesson: Who are AWTT Truth Tellers?

www.americanswhotellthetruth.org/lesson_plans_posts/awtt-intro-lesson

Complete: Introductory Lesson for Speaking Truth to Youth videos

www.americanswhotellthetruth.org/programs/education/speaking-truth-to-youth/

STEP ONE

Identify your issue!

Ask students to choose an issue that is important to them.

Individual students, a group, or an entire class should pick a meaningful issue – a problem in their community, state, country or the world that matters to them and that they are motivated to help solve.

Possible approaches to choosing an issue:

- Have the class brainstorm together.
- Present an issue that you know is of concern in the community.
- Invite a panel of community members to talk with your class about community concerns/issues.
- Go to the AWTT website for ideas. Check out the Themes section on the [Portrait Galleries page](#) or review issues that are of concern to specific portrait subjects.

STEP TWO

Discovery! Do research and find the facts about the issue.

Suggestions

- Students generate a list of questions about all the things they don't know or understand about their chosen topics.
- Individually or in teams, students find answers to the questions and become fact-gathering machines!
- Go to the [Portrait Galleries on the AWTT](#) website and explore by themes. See if the student-chosen issue is represented there. If so, read about the portrait subjects who have addressed that issue. Use them as starting points.
- Use the resources listed beside the portraits.
- Contact AWTT if there is a living portrait subject with whom your students may want to connect. Many of them are happy to speak with students! (connie@americanswhotellthetruth.org)
- Interview local stakeholders (people concerned about the issue).
 - Why is this issue important to them?
 - What connection does this issue have to their identity?
 - What are they doing to address the issue?
 - What is their strategy/plan for making a long-term difference?
 - What are the obstacles to improving this issue?
 - What else needs to be done?
 - How can we help?

STEP THREE

Create the message or the action!

- Who is the audience for your message/action? Parents? Teachers? Lawmakers? Other students? People in your community?
- Tell the story of your issue
 - Pick one incident or critical moment and tell it as a first person story (as though you were Barbara Johns, Samantha Smith or Abraham Lincoln).
 - Check out storytelling suggestions from **This I Believe** in association with National Public Radio (<https://thisibelieve.org/guidelines/>) and **The Writing Cooperative** referencing *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott (<https://writingcooperative.com/anne-lamotts-top-13-writing-tips-7577eb5d5c24>)
- State the issue the individual, group, class has selected as a question, e.g.,
 - Why are there homeless people in my community?
 - What should the minimum wage be?
 - What kind of energy can take us sustainably into the future?
 - How can our school/town reduce its carbon footprint?
 - What can we do to address bullying in our school?

Decide the purpose of your message or action!

Consider the following possibilities:

- Help people in their communities to re-imagine where they live.
- Provoke local authorities by calling out an injustice in the community.
- Inspire people to join the fight against climate change, homelessness, inequality, etc.
- Shed light on a practice or event most people don't know or don't understand.
- Encourage or challenge people in power who are doing good/not good work.
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STEP FOUR

Bring your message and action to life!

Use the Arts! Remember... Use the power of the arts to make your message come alive!

- The arts create a context for conversation. The creative arts cause people to ask questions that need to be asked.
- Make paintings, original musical compositions, essays, theater skits or any other form of creative expression that communicates the identified concern and responds to the academic needs of your classroom. (*Some students may choose their medium while*

others may be working in a specific class that teaches drawing or painting, theater or film-making where the medium will be defined by the teacher.)

- Check out some examples of delivering messages of truth and hope using the creative arts
 - "Lost Voices" (Button Poetry video)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpPASWlnZIA>
 - *One Person* by Monte Selby and the 2017 SSC Participants
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JcBuwzSH4sY>
 - And, for Broadway musical fans, *Naughty* from *Matilda*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKm1h0X6CB0>
 - *Hope* by Jason Robert Brown
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YStjIaujnTA>
- Get a response!! Contact the target audience/s and schedule an exhibit, performance, forum or other method of presentation, connection, march, or happening.

AND FINALLY...

Submit your project participation reports by April 28, 2022 to
connie@americanswhotellthetruth.org

Join the Samantha Smith Challenge Celebration and share your project with other Samantha Smith Challenge participants!
Look for Celebration details in early May!