

TRINITY COLLEGE
CAMBRIDGE

Robert Robson History Prize (2025)

The Robert Robson Prize for essays in History is a competition that can be entered by students in Year 12 or the Lower 6th. Candidates are invited to submit an essay on a topic to be chosen from a list of general questions announced in March each year, and to be submitted in August.

The Prize is organised by Trinity College Cambridge. It was established by a generous bequest from the estate of a dedicated former teacher of History at Trinity, Dr Robert Robson.

The objectives of the Robson Prize are to encourage school students with an interest in modern politics and world affairs to think about undertaking university studies in History or a related discipline. It further seeks to recognise the achievements both of high-calibre students and of those who teach them.

The Prize is for students in the penultimate year of their school when the questions are released in March. For students in England and Wales, that means you would be eligible if you are in Year 12 in March 2025; for Scotland, the eligible year is S5. Students from any country are most welcome to participate. The general rule is that to be eligible for the 2025 competition, you should be expecting to receive your final school results in the year from September 2025 to August 2026. This condition is held to strictly and, to be fair to the participants, no exceptions are made. Each entrant to the competition is allowed to submit only one essay.

Answer one of the questions. You are encouraged to go beyond material that might be taken from school courses and undertake your own reading in historiographical and historical sources. Essays should be no longer than 3,000 words, including any footnotes.

All words submitted must be written by you, without the assistance of generative artificial intelligence.

The essay should be submitted via the form on the Trinity College website.

The deadline for submission is 12 noon (BST) on 1st August 2025.

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QUESTIONS

1. Did the Emperor Justinian ruin the empire he set out to restore?
2. How can the expansion of Islam in the seventh century best be accounted for?
3. What were the functions of medicine in later-medieval European society?
4. What were the historical consequences of the adoption of moveable-type printing in the early-modern world?
5. How united were England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland in the century before the Act of Union of 1707?
6. Should we regard the transition from Ming to Qing China as rapid, or protracted?
7. How significant was Islam in the governance of the Mughal empire?
8. What is the role of fear in the political theory of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651)?
9. What were the consequences for the understanding of nature of the new scientific instruments developed across the seventeenth century?
10. How far did the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century change conceptions of women's nature and role in society?
11. To what extent does Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Social Contract* (1762) articulate a democratic political theory?
12. In what ways has the geography of the Caribbean shaped its history?
13. Why did the United States become so much bigger between 1800 and 1850?
14. Why were the middle years of the European nineteenth century so revolutionary?
15. In what ways can railways be regarded as vehicles of foreign imperialism in the hundred years before 1930? (Answer with reference to **one or more** global region.)
16. How far did colonial rule depend on negotiation and collaboration rather than brute force? (Answer with reference to **either** East Asia **or** South Asia **or** Africa.)
17. What has been the role of coal in shaping planetary existence? (Answer with reference to **any hundred-year period of human history**.)
18. Why did the crisis that triggered the First World War begin in the Balkans?
19. What answers did Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* offer to questions about the nature of civilisation?
20. Which was the more consequential form of media in the second half of the twentieth century: radio or television?