



YOUTH PROGRAMS

YOUTH PROGRAMS

Youth Activities

- Voice of Democracy**
- Patriot's Pen**
- Youth Programs**
 - *JROTC/SROTC*
 - *Civil Air Patrol*
 - *Navy Sea Cadets*
 - *Support of Community Youth Activities*
 - *Youth Recognition Programs*
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- Teacher of the Year**

Scouting

- Scout of the Year**
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 - *Eagle Scout*
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- Support of Scout Troop or activities**

VOICE OF DEMOCRACY

The 2026-2027 Theme is:
"What a Veteran Taught Me About America"

Program Overview

The Voice of Democracy Scholarship competition is especially designed for high school students grades 9 through 12 including home-schooled students. It is a valuable, educational experience for students and a wonderful opportunity for positive publicity for students, teachers, and schools, as well as the VFW in your community. The program dates back to 1946 and continues to be one of the VFW's most exciting programs. The VFW annually commits \$3 million in scholarships and incentives at the Post, District, State and National levels. Participants write and then record a three-to-five-minute audio essay on a patriotic theme selected annually. The Voice of Democracy Program is endorsed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and is designed to foster patriotism in the participants and enhance their written and oral communication skills. In addition, this program demonstrates the VFW's willingness to partner with local schools and the community.

Key Information for Posts

NOTE: Posts can no longer receive credit for Voice of Democracy participation by making a cash donation to the Department of Illinois. Posts must advance at least one student entry to District judging.

You may make this a joint effort with your Post Auxiliary. Prior planning ensures high-level performance. As most know by now, the National VFW Organization has contracted with a company named Scholars App, which has digitized the Student Application process and has modernized the reporting of the Patriot's Pen and Voice of Democracy programs. Illinois VFW is in the process of transitioning to the new platform. Posts may utilize much of the conventional methods of conducting the contests this year but will be required to implement some portions of the new method.

Video Training modules will be available to assist post and district volunteers to adapt to the new system over time. Videos and a list of VFW Scholars App Coordinators are available at the department website, vfwil.org, under "Resources/Scholars App". Currently the post commander/chairperson can easily download, copy, and disseminate flyers created by Scholars App to promote the contests. They can be published in local newspapers or displayed in any public places that will allow. The posters contain a QR Code and link that allows students to use their computers to enter the contests directly through Scholars App, which in turn deliver those entries complete with application, essay and MP3 audio/essay directly to your post in Scholars App. The flyers allow students access to the contests even if schools don't offer them. Remember there are many home-schooled students that can be reached through your local R.O.E (Regional Office of Education) or in some areas D.O.E. (District Office of Education). They will have a list of all home-schooled students who register with the R.O.E. or D.O.E. Home schooled students are not required to register but most do to insure accreditation. They are generally grateful for the opportunity to advertise student scholarship information, and home-schooled students and their parents are often grateful as well. Posts can also use the conventional methods used in past years of providing Voice of Democracy materials to local school boards, principals,



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Chairman

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Post 3912-12

teachers or other contacts within the school or schools in your community. Let's make the effort to reach as many students as possible this year. You may offer your Scholars App flyers to teachers as a possible way to conduct the contest, but don't wear out you welcome by pushing them to adopt that method. There will be a video and Teacher Resource available to advise the post and teachers about remedies to some problems that occurred with schools during the last cycle.

It will be the Post Commander/ VOD Chairperson's responsibility to submit their name and email address to the District VOD Commander/Chairperson. In turn, the District Chairperson will use the Post Chairperson's name and email address to create an account in the Scholars App Suborganization List. Scholars App will then email the Post Chairperson with an invitation to login to their account. This year all post chairmen must login if the post is going to conduct the VOD contest even if you plan to use the conventional method for conducting most of the contest. Once logged in the post chair will have access to the entire post level Scholars App platform. The login process is simple and self-explanatory but new video training will be available at the department website and will be emailed to you in a timely fashion.

Other new, short and easy-to-follow video training modules will be available to instruct each individual action that is required, if one is to participate extensively in the Scholars App platform, as well as the conventional paper methods, to avoid problems that have caused confusion in the past. For those who have promoted and conducted the youth essay contests in the past but are tech-reluctant, keep up the enthusiasm and experience in conducting the contests. Recruit someone with the necessary computer skills and who is able to donate the minimal time necessary. And if you choose to be patient and learn the necessary skills, you will be glad you did. There will be a list of Scholars App Coordinator contacts to assist you also at vfwil.org, "Resources/Scholars App".

Judging Post Entries

As soon as possible, after the Oct. 31st deadline for student entries, assign your judges through Scholars App or by conventional methods. A video training module will be available to demonstrate judging methods. Note: The judging criteria supplied by national is not comprehensive. The Judges Guideline that is used at the department II level gives judges more quantifiable guidelines and is available at vfwil.org, under "Programs/VOD". Department recommends you send the Judges Guideline to your post judges in addition to what Scholars App provides.

The deadline for Post judging is Nov. 15, 2026, unless otherwise specified by your District VOD Chairperson. Once the post judging is completed, posts may advance their "winner(s)" based on the following schedule;

- 1-15 essays – One (1) entry to District
- 16-30 essays – Two (2) entries to District
- 31-45 essays – Three (3) entries to District
- (NOTE: Each additional 15 essays, entitles another entry. The number of schools participating does not affect the number of entries allowed

Once you have identified your post winner(s), you can advance (promote) them directly to your District Chairperson directly through Scholars App, if the student entries came through the Scholars App platform. This year, if post winner(s) were submitted to your post as paper applications, essays, and MP3 audio/essays, the post will need to manually upload the application, essay, and MP3 audio/essay for each post winner to Scholars App and then promote them directly to your district chair. Posts are asked to submit a good quality, color "head and shoulders" photo of your Post Winner(s). Digital photos are preferred and cell phone pictures are acceptable.

Do not forget to heap loads of recognition and praise on your post winner(s). Completing a press release for the local paper with a picture and or a Social Media post. Also, some type of prize for the winner(s), would be most appropriate.

Key Information for Districts

District Chairpersons are urged to aggressively promote the Voice of Democracy Program. After coordination with your auxiliary counterpart, please reach out to every post and auxiliary in your district. It will be the District VOD Chairperson's responsibility to submit their name and email address, if different from last cycle, to the Department VOD Chairperson asap. The Department chairperson will then create and account for the District Chairperson in the Scholars App Suborganization list. Scholars App will send an email inviting the District Chairman to login to their account. Once logged in, it will be the District VOD Chairperson's responsibility to enroll all post VOD chairpersons from their district into the Scholars App Suborganization List if different from last cycle, as soon as possible. In the event a chairperson is not submitted from a post by July 15th, the District VOD Chairperson shall enroll the Post Commander as Post Chairperson. This will ensure that all posts have been given the opportunity to participate in the VOD contest. These are very simple tasks. Video training will be available with login assistance and adding or removing Post Chairpersons to Scholars App. District chairpersons shall create and maintain an email list of all Post Chairpersons in their district asap to facilitate efficient communication between post, district and department chairpersons. As the district meeting is to be a School of Instruction, it would be advantageous for the District Voice of Democracy Chairperson to ask for time to present training materials to post Voice of Democracy chairmen and commanders on the program requirements.

Posts have been advised to have their post judging completed by November 15, 2026, please advise posts in your district of your deadline to receive post entries via Scholars App This will allow adequate time to assign judges, complete district judging and advance the District Winner to Department in Scholars app by December 15, 2026.

Headshots of students can be uploaded to Scholars App but is not a required field. If the headshot (photo) is not uploaded to Scholars App, a good quality, color "head and shoulders" photo of your district winner (digital photos are preferred and cell phone pictures are acceptable) must be submitted to Department Headquarters to arrive no later than December 15, 2026. This will allow time for the printing of the program books that are distributed at the State Awards Banquet.

Key Dates (Please Note New Deadlines)

- October 31, 2026- Student entries to post
- November 15, 2026 - Post judging complete unless otherwise specified your District
- December 10, 2026 - District judging complete
- December 15, 2026 - District winners due to the State Headquarters
- January 1, 2027- District Participation Reports due to State Headquarters
- January 10, 2027- State Judging will be completed
- January 15, 2027 - Department winners due to National
- January 31, 2027 - Department reports due to National
- February 6, 2027- State Voice of Democracy Awards Banquet, Springfield

Prize Structure at the National and State Level

The winner from each state competition earns a trip to Valley Forge Pennsylvania and competes for national awards which range from a minimum \$1,000 up to \$35,000 for first place.

The State Awards are:

1st Place - Commander-in-Chief Fritz Mihelcic award	\$4,000 Cash
2nd Place - John H. Emery Youth, Pageantry and Patriotism Fund First Place Award in Memory of George G. Gorin, Jr	\$2,500 Cash
3rd Place – George Cramer/Ray Soden Scholarship Award	\$1,500 Cash
4th Place – Terry L. McKinney Memorial Award	\$1,250 Cash
5th Place – Dale & Catherine Clifton Award	\$1,000 Cash
6th Place – Johnson Phelps Post 5220 Auxiliary.....	\$750 Cash
7th Place – Jarnell/Ross Award.....	\$600 Cash
8th Place – William Glenn Britt Memorial Award.....	\$550 Cash
9th Place - Dick Cosner Memorial Award.....	\$500 Cash
10th Place – Vern & Lorraine Umphery, Post 6863 & L.A. Award.....	\$450 Cash
11th Place – Robert C. Holysz Post 2200 Award.....	\$400 Cash
12th Place – Grant-Parkholme Post 9115 Award.....	\$375 Cash
13th Place – West End VFW Post 2004 Memorial Award.....	\$350 Cash
14th Place - Chester Spears Memorial Award.....	\$325 Cash
All other District Winners will receive an award of	\$300 Cash

Districts and posts wishing to become an award sponsor should forward their donation of \$300 to Department Headquarters by December 1, 2026; it should be earmarked “VOD Award Sponsorship”. Thank you for this valuable support of the state program. Sponsorships will be awarded in the order received. Districts wishing to sponsor the Annual PP/VOD Pizza Party or the Annual PP/VOD Ice Cream Social for 2026-2027 can donate \$300, but their donation must be earmarked “PP/VOD Pizza Party Sponsor” or “PP/VOD Ice Cream Social Sponsor.” The first district to respond will receive the sponsorship. Districts wanting to sponsor other Voice of Democracy weekend events, such as Saturday’s student luncheon, the Springfield tour or the tour of The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum should forward a donation of \$300 to Department Headquarters. The Donation should be earmarked Springfield Tour. Gifts can also be given to cover the cost of the flowers for the students to wear at the Awards Banquet, room expenses, and the backpacks that are given to all district winners. Donations for the backpacks could be cash to purchase the backpacks and or snacks that we include in each backpack.

Each District Winner and family will be provided two nights free lodging in Springfield and one ticket to the PP/Voice of Democracy Awards Banquet. District is expected to pay for the tickets for family members accompanying their district winner.

The post sponsoring the state winner will receive a beautifully engraved plaque at the State Convention.

The school that the state winner attends will receive a \$500 award. In the event the student is home-schooled, the Department of Illinois VFW will donate \$500 to the charity of the parents’ choosing.

The district sponsoring the largest number of students participating in the VOD contest will receive \$100. Because districts are comprised of varying numbers of posts, the award will be calculated by dividing the total number of students participating by the total number of posts in the district (regardless if those posts participate or not). This is intended to level the playing field among larger and smaller districts. The award will be known as the Voice of Democracy Participation Quotient.

Additional Resources

All the information needed to conduct the PP/VOD programs is online at <https://www.vfw.org>. After you log in, (or create an account and log in), click on My VFW and then on the VFW Training and Support heading. There you will find a wealth of information about VFW programs! Scroll down and click on Community Service & Youth Activities for more information specific to Voice of Democracy.

You can download and print the student entry forms for Voice of Democracy at the National website also by visiting the following link: <https://www.vfw.org/community/youth-and-education/youth-scholarships> or at the Department website: 2025-2026 Voice of Democracy - VFW Dept of Illinois

National's Supply Catalog has printed entry forms, posters, and a wide variety of awards and gifts designed for use in the Voice of Democracy program. Telephone: (800) 821-2606 or <https://www.vfwstore.org/>

State Dashboard Reporting

The participation entry for the Voice of Democracy Contest will be posted to the dashboard in February based upon the report submitted by each District Voice of Democracy Chairperson to the State Chairperson.

NOTE: Posts can no longer receive credit for Voice of Democracy participation by making a cash donation to the Department of Illinois. Posts must advance at least one student entry to District Judging.

Promote patriotism in our youth through the Voice of Democracy program as we embrace the motto of 2026-2027 IL VFW State Commander Robert Bailey "All In, All the Time"



Voice of Democracy Introduction Questionnaire

Representing VFW Post _____ and its Auxiliary,

a _____ at _____
GRADE (FRESHMAN, SOPHOMORE, JUNIOR, SENIOR) SCHOOL NAME

in _____
CITY

STUDENT'S NAME

PRONUNCIATION OF STUDENT'S NAME

The student is the Son/Daughter of

Mother: _____

and

Father: _____

VOICE OF DEMOCRACY



2026-2027 Theme "What a Veteran Taught Me About America"

Student Entry Deadline: Oct. 31, 2026
Patriotic Audio Essay Competition Grand Prize: \$35,000 Award

What is the Voice of Democracy Program?

Since 1947, the Voice of Democracy has been the Veterans of Foreign Wars' (VFW's) premier scholarship program. Each year, nearly 26,000 high school students compete for more than \$2 million in scholarships and incentives. Prizes and scholarships can be awarded at the Post, District, state and national level. National winners will be notified of their scholarship & placement. Students compete by writing and recording an audio essay on an annual patriotic theme. This year's theme is, **"What a Veteran Taught Me About America"**

The Rules

The Voice of Democracy is open to students in grades 9-12 by the Oct. 31 deadline who are enrolled in a public, private or parochial high school or home study program in the United States, its territories and possessions: or dependents of U.S. military or civilian personnel in overseas schools. Although U.S. citizenship is not required, students must be lawful U.S. permanent residents or have applied for permanent residence (the application for which has not been denied) and intend to become a U.S. citizen at the earliest opportunity allowed by law. Foreign exchange students, students age 20 or over, GED or Adult Education Students are ineligible.

You must be the sole author of your essay. Inappropriate use of ChatGPT or other AI tools is not allowed. The recording must be in your own voice and in English. Hearing/speech impaired students should email the Voice of Democracy National Office at youthscholarships@vfw.org for special instructions. No music, singing, poetry or sound effects are allowed. To ensure fairness and impartiality in judging, essays **must be anonymous. Please do not include your name, address, school name, or any other personal identifiers in the body of your essay.** Additionally, avoid references to your race, sex, religion, national origin, or other specific personal characteristics that could reveal your identity. General references to nationality or patriotic identity (such as being an American or referencing American values) are permitted if they are relevant to the essay theme. However, personal identifiers tied to your individual background or experience should be avoided.

You may enter only one competition at one Post (if otherwise eligible) per year. At any time during the contest, additional participant personal information could be requested by the VFW, including but not limited to a photograph, SSN, or biographical information.

Advancement

Decisions of Judges at all levels are final. One winner for every 15 entries from each Post advances to District and one District winner advances to the state (Department) competition. Contact the post where you entered at to check on your advancement

What Is the Deadline for My Entry?

All entries competing at the Post level must be in the hands of that VFW Post by midnight, Oct. 31, 2026. It is the responsibility of the student to meet this deadline by submitting their entry to the proper location - ensuring it is a participating Post.

How do I enter?

Record your original 3-5 minute (+ or - 5 second max.) audio in MP3 format (no videos) on a flash drive, or other electronic device. You will submit the recording, a typed essay and this completed entry form. Provide these items to your school/group competition or VFW Post for judging.

All entries begin at the VFW Post level. The only exception is where schools/classes/youth groups have large numbers of students and wish to conduct their own competition, Submitting one winner for each 15 students to the VFW Post. Individual students may submit their entry directly to a Post. Your local post will give instructions on how to turn in your entry to them. Audio may be submitted physically on a Flash Drive, emailed to the Post (with permission) or submitted through our online platform using Scholars App. **To submit through Scholars App you must first receive a QR code or link from your local post.** Entries sent to VFW National Headquarters directly will not be considered.

If you need help finding a participating VFW Post, follow these instructions: Visit this website vfw.org/FindaPost to "Find A VFW Post." If you do not have success in finding a Post, or if you have trouble getting in touch with them, you can contact your VFW Department (state) office to see if they can offer any information or assistance. You can visit this link <https://www.vfw.org/ContactUs/> and look for "Find a State Contact" to get your VFW state office's phone number and email. If you still need assistance, please email us at VFW National Headquarters at youthscholarships@vfw.org.

What Are the Judging Criteria?

Originality is worth 35 points:

Treatment of the theme should show imagination and human interest.

Delivery is worth 35 points:

Speak in a clear and credible manner.

Content is worth 30 points:

Clearly express your ideas in an organized manner. Fully develop your theme and use transitions to move smoothly from one idea to another.

2026-2027 Official Entry Form
Voice of Democracy Competition
Must Be Completed by All Contestants

Name: First, M.I., Last _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____
() _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Date of Birth (mm/dd/yy) _____ Grade in School _____ Age _____ Jacket Size _____

School Name, City, State _____

Teacher's Name and Email (if applicable) _____

To Be Completed by Student's Parent/Guardian
(Required even if student is 18 or over)

Parent/Guardian Name (Printed) _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____
() _____

Parent/Guardian Daytime Phone _____

Parent/Guardian Email _____

Participant Agreement for Students
Advancing to National Level

If selected as a first-place state winner, I have the consent of my parent/guardian and school to attend the Founding Forward Spirit of America Leadership trip to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania as a guest of the VFW National Organization. In consideration for permission to participate in the National Voice of Democracy Competition ("Competition") I do hereby, for myself, for my heirs, executors, administrators and assignees, waive, release and discharge all rights and claims which I have or which may hereafter accrue against the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) and/or the Departments (state organizations) of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and their respective officers, agents, successors and assigns from any damages which may be sustained by me in connection with my participation in or association with the Competition and/or arising out of any travel related to the Competition. In the event of sickness, accident or injury in connection with the Competition, I consent to and accept the services of a duly licensed medical, surgical or dental specialist selected on my behalf and for such treatments, as they may deem necessary. I understand that VFW will not be liable for such treatment. I further understand that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States retains non-exclusive rights to use my audio file, essay, name and likeness in the promotion and execution of the organization's programs and activities.

I Have Read and Understand the Rules and Participant Agreement

I certify that I am the sole author of the enclosed audio/essay entry and that I have not inappropriately used any AI tools or Chat GPT. I have only entered the competition once yearly if otherwise eligible. I understand that if it is found that I have entered any other Post's competition or used this essay for another VFW competition, I face elimination from the competition and will return any and all prizes or incentives awarded.

Signature of Student Participant _____ Date _____

To Be Completed by the VFW Post

I certify that this student has an authorized entry in our VFW Post level Voice of Democracy Competition.

Post Commander/Chairperson Signature _____ Post # _____

VFW Auxiliary President/Chairperson Signature (if applicable) _____

Post Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

VFW Post Email _____

No. of students participating _____

No. of winners advanced to District _____

Amt. of Post/Aux. scholarship awards \$ _____

Amt. of Post/Aux. additional expenses (banquet, pins, etc.) \$ _____

To Be Completed by the VFW District

I certify that the student named in the previous section is the duly selected winner of the Voice of Democracy Contest District Competition and is our sole entry into the Departments.

District Chairperson Signature _____ Dist. # _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____
() _____

Phone _____ Email _____

To Be Completed by the VFW Department Chairperson

I certify that the student named in the previous section is the duly selected first place winner of the Voice of Democracy Department Competition and is our sole entry into the National Judging.

Department Chairperson Signature _____
() _____

Daytime Phone _____ Email _____

The winner has been will be (check one) notified that they are the first place Department winner on _____.

For assistance contact:
816.968.2787
Email: youthsponsorships@vfw.org

Local VFW Post Information:

Contact: _____

Phone: _____ Best Time To Call: _____

Alternate Contact: _____

Phone: _____ Best Time To Call: _____



SUMMARY

**DISTRICT VOICE OF DEMOCRACY
PARTICIPATION REPORT**

DISTRICT NO. _____

DEPARTMENT OF _____, VFW

The VFW Posts and Auxiliaries identified in this report in this District participated in the VFW annual Voice of Democracy Program.

GRAND TOTALS FOR POST COMPETITION: list totals taken from District report form(s)

_____	_____	_____	_____
Posts	Auxs	Students	Post Winners Advanced
\$ _____		\$ _____	
Scholarships & Awards		Addl. Money Expended	

MONETARY VALUE OF DISTRICT COMPETITION (add County Councils if applicable):

District Scholarships & Awards \$ _____

District Additional Expenses \$ _____

Signed by: _____ Date _____
District Chairman

***PLEASE ATTACH COMPLETED REPORT FORM(S) AND GIVE
THIS COMPLETED SUMMARY TO YOUR DEPARTMENT
VOICE OF DEMOCRACY CHAIRMAN***

YOUTH ACTIVITIES PROGRAM



Robert Bland
Chairman

2337 Westfield Lane
Belvidere, IL 61008
Phone: (815) 685-1611

Email:
robert.b.bland@outlook.com

Post 1461-6

The purpose of the Youth Activities program, as outlined in our Congressional Charter, is to “foster true patriotism.” and “to maintain and extend the institutions of American Freedom”.

Youth Activities is divided into several categories.

- Youth Programs
- Youth Scholarships
- Youth Cadet Awards
- VFW in the Classroom
- ROTC and JROTC Awards Program

Youth Programs are anything you do with the youth in your local community. It can be as simple as holding an Easter Egg hunt to a separate Post scholarship program. When looking for an event to hold ask yourselves two questions; does this answer a need in the community and does this support the mission of the VFW.

In order to get credit on the Dashboard for Youth Activities, first you must report your activities!

Why is it important to report what your Post does? Your Youth Activities gets rolled up with the rest in the Department and is used to in the Department Fact Sheet to show the impact that we have in the community. The information is also used at National to highlight the great work we are doing when the VFW is on Capital Hill advocating for veterans.

When reporting ensure that you are reporting hours, dollars and members participating. The three Posts, in their membership categories, that have the most will receive a \$50.00 award and certificate presented at the State Convention.

- The membership categories are:
- Membership Category 1: Up to 150 members
 - Membership Category 2: 151 to 300 members
 - Membership Category 3: 301 members and up

The District that has the most reported hours, dollars and member participation will receive a plaque.

Other Youth Activities information can be found at: <https://vfw.org/community/youth-and-education>

When conducting your Youth Activities, remember to work with your Auxiliary. The Auxiliary Youth Program consists of:

PATRIOTISM THROUGH LITERACY: Promote and support reading among young people.

Here are a few ideas you can use to engage with your community:

- Build a Lending Library/Free Little Library. A quick google search will bring up all kinds of ideas, building plans, YouTube instructional videos, etc. Try to choose a location that is easily accessible to kids, and make sure you have permission from the property owner before you proceed. (They may even want to help you with the project- BONUS!) Then, stock it with some patriotic or historic figures fiction or nonfiction books, and be sure to include a variety of reading levels. If you need book ideas, you can find a list of suggestions here: <https://vfwauxiliary.org/what-we-do/youth-activities/> and scroll down to the link about ¾ way down the page. Make sure to share your project on social media and use the hashtag #auxlendinglibrary to get the word out!
- Volunteer to host a story time. This can be hosted at your local library, an afterschool program, or even at your post. If at the library or your post, you'll want to make sure that the parents stay present with their child. Talk to your local library, YMCA, park district, or daycare facilities for volunteer opportunities. They will usually even help you promote the event to their regular patrons.
- Host a read-a-thon or contest with prizes. Offer to donate several copies of a patriotic themed book and ask students to write an essay or even draw a picture about the story. Or work with one of the above groups to provide prizes for a student read-a-thon. Make sure you know the parameters and your budget for prizes up front to avoid uncomfortable surprises.
- Run a Young Writer's Workshop or bring in a local author. Do you have a historical fiction or creative non-fiction author in your community that could help you? A great way to find local authors is by checking with your small local (non-chain) bookstore owners.

ILLUSTRATING AMERICA: This contest is to introduce, encourage and recognize young artists as they express patriotism through art.

- Contest is open to any student in grades K-8 who is enrolled in public, private, parochial, or home school in the United States, it's territories and possessions, or dependents of US Military or civilian personnel in overseas schools. Please see the entry form for specific rules regarding eligibility and contest rules.
- You can download the entry form and rules at <https://vfwauxiliary.org/what-we-do/youth-activities/> and click on the image of the form. It will download a pdf form to your computer that you can attach to emails or print.
- Submit contest information to your local schools, post it at the library, and even to Scout groups and other youth organizations. Send it early so they have time to plan it as part of their activities before the deadlines.
- KNOW THE DEADLINES! How disappointed a student would be to spend time on a creation only to find out they were misinformed (or uninformed) about the project deadlines? NOTE: THESE DEADLINES HAVE CHANGED FROM RECENT YEARS.

DEADLINE TO ENTER:

Local Auxiliary
District (optional)

AUX WINNERS TO DEPARTMENT

Mail entries to:

Illustrating Art Contest
Beth Costa-Bland
2337 Westfield Ln
Belvidere, IL 61008

DEPT WINNERS TO NATIONAL

DATE:

December 15, 2026
January (check w/Dist Program Chair)
January 15, 2027

January 31, 2027

RECOGNIZE PATRIOTISM BY YOUNG PEOPLE AND YOUTH GROUPS

We all know that one of the best ways to encourage good actions is through positive reinforcement!

- Make earning one of your certificates or recognitions a goal in your community by yelling LOUD and PROUD when you give them out.
- Post pictures (only with parent's permission) of kids with their certificates or RAP cards and tag parents on social media.
- Certificates, Patriotic Youth Award citations, and Random Acts of Patriotism (RAP) cards can all be found on Malta>Member Resources>Youth Activities on the left side of the page. Scroll down to the bottom of the page.
- Make sure that youth organization groups know about the opportunity to be recognized for the "Youth Group Supporting Our Veterans" Citation by posting about it on social media or leaving a flyer at their headquarters office to go out in a newsletter sent to all local group leaders. Make a big deal about it when you present the citation and watch how quickly you will get more requests!

SPONSOR A YOUTH GROUP &/OR INVITE THEM TO YOUR ACTIVITIES

There are so many youth groups and activities looking for sponsorships to support their programs. Community youth sports programs, scout programs, 4-H, FFA, Boys & Girls Clubs, Nat'l Honors Society... even local summer camp programs through your park district.

- Don't just send a check, be a part of it if possible! Did you sponsor a Little League team? Go to a game or two, wearing a team tshirt if you can get one! Visit the daycamp or offer to run a craft one afternoon. Let the kids know where you're from and why you are there.
- Many youth programs are looking for community service opportunities! Invite them to help out at one of your events. Maybe they can bus tables at a monthly breakfast or dinner. Grounds pick-up and flags put out for Memorial Day or Veteran's Day.
- Invite them to walk in a parade or visit veterans at a local home or hospital with you (bring their parents too.)

If you do not have an Auxiliary, see if another Auxiliary in the area would like to help or the Auxiliary District. Remember when working with your Auxiliary, we are in this together. The Auxiliary is just one of the many organizations in the community that work with youth. For example, Rotary International has a literacy program, reach out to them and see the impact that we can have together.

Patriot's Pen

2026-2027 Theme: "What A Veteran Taught Me About America"

Patriot's Pen overview along with the rules of the contest are outlined on the Patriot's Pen Entry Form found at: <https://vfw-org-hqagarhxahbybyd9.z01.azurefd.net/-/media/VFWSite/Files/Community/Youth-and-Education/Patriots-Pen-Entry-Form-Fillable.pdf?la=en&v=1&d=20260410T233718Z> or at the end of this section.

Each Post is allowed to forward 1 entry to District for every 15 they receive, for example:

- 1-15 essays – 1 entry to District
- 16-30 essays- 2 entries to District
- 31-45 essays – 3 entire to District
- 46-60 essays- 4 entire to District
- And so on.

Timeline:

- October 31 2026 – completed student entries due to the VFW Post
- November 22, 2026 – winning entries due to District
- December 15, 2026 – winning entries due to Department by Scholars App
- December 30, 2026 – District Report Form and Participation Form due to State HQ
- January 1, 2027 – Department judging completed
- February 5-7, 2027 - State Patriot's Pen Award Banquet, Springfield
- February – State updates the Dashboard for the Posts and the Districts that submitted winners for Patriot's Pen

Completed packet consists of:

- Entry form with all necessary signatures – Scholars App
- Legible copy of speech – Scholars App
- Digital Photo, head and shoulder in color - Scholars App
- Patriot's Pen entry form – email

Judging Post entries is outlined in the Voice of Democracy guidance.

2026-2027 Illinois VFW Commander's Leadership Manual

State Awards:

Top 4 entries will receive 2 nights of lodging at the Department of Illinois Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen Award Banquet. Students will tour sights in Springfield and network with other patriotic students in Illinois.

1st Place – John H. Emery Youth, Pageantry and Patriotism Fund in Memory of Ronald Hubert.....	\$1,000
2nd Place – Gaye Hines Memorial Award.....	\$500
3rd Place – William Glenn Britt Memorial Award.....	\$400
4th Place – Raymond L. Moreland Memorial Award.....	\$300

NOTE: Posts can no longer receive credit for Patriot's Pen participation by making a cash donation to the Department of Illinois. Posts must advance at least one student entry to District judging.

The VFW National Website has material to help with your program. After you log in to the National site go to my VFW. Under training and Support, click onto the Community Service, Scholarships & Awards tab. Under the Patriot's Pen Youth Essay Contest you will see:

➤ Patriot's Pen Youth Essay Contest

- [Patriot's Pen Entry Form](#) - Discover this year's theme, rules and entry form
- [Patriot's Pen Brochure](#) - Help spread the word about our Patriot's Pen competition
- [National Award List](#) - View a complete listing of national awards available
- [Patriot's Pen Judging Guidelines](#) - Understand how to score annual entries
- [Score Sheet](#) - The official Patriot's Pen judges' score sheet
- [Post, District and Department Reports](#) - The official VFW reporting and summary on the Programs Dashboard Tool
- [Department Patriot's Pen Report Instructions](#) - Everything you need to know on forwarding your Patriot's Pen winner to national
- [VOD and Patriot's Pen Scholarship Donor Criteria](#) - If you're interested in sponsoring a scholarship, here's what you need to know
- [Competition Announcement Press Release](#) - Fill in the blanks and send to your local media
- [Patriot's Pen Winner Press Release](#) - Fill in the blanks and promote your local winner
- [Public Service Announcement Script](#) - Ask local TV and radio stations to promote the program

Here are a couple of example press releases:

VFW Kicks-Off Annual Essay Competition

<city>, <state abbreviation>. (<month> <day>, <year>) – Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post <Post name/number> Commander <full name> is proud to announce the kick-off of the VFW's annual Patriot's Pen youth essay competition. Middle school students in grades 6-8 in this area have the opportunity to compete and win their share of nearly \$1 million in local, state and national level awards.

The VFW enacted the Patriot's Pen competition in 1995 to encourage young minds to examine America's history, along with their own experiences in modern American society by composing a 300- to 400-word patriotic-themed essay. The theme for the <20XX-XX> competition is "<insert theme>."

Students begin by competing at the local Post level. Post winners advance to District competition with District winners advancing to the state competition. State first place winners compete for their share of thousands of dollars in awards, and the national first place winner is awarded the top prize of \$5,000.

Each year, more than 60,600 students participate in the competition worldwide. Deadline for student entries is Oct. 31, and interested students and teachers should contact their local VFW Post <Post number> by phone at XXX.XXX.XXXX or email the Post at <Post contact email address> for more information.

For more details on the program or to download this year's entry form, visit vfw.org/PatriotsPen.

-vfw-

NOTE: Although this press release was designed as a sample Department winner announcement, it can also be used to announce your Post/District winner (with slight text modifications.)

VFW Announces Post Patriot's Pen Essay Contest Winner

City, State abbreviation. (Month day, 20XX) – The VFW Post Number is pleased to announce that winner's full name, a 6th/a 7th/an 8th/ grade student from City, State, has been named the Post's first place winner of the VFW's 20XX-XX Patriot's Pen youth essay contest. Winner's first name, who was sponsored by VFW Post name/number and its Auxiliary in Post's city, state, wrote their winning essay based on this year's theme, "Insert theme."

The VFW enacted the Patriot's Pen youth essay competition in 1995 as a way to encourage young minds to examine America's history, along with their own experiences in modern American society while improving their writing skills.

The contest is a worldwide competition that gives students in grades 6, 7 and 8 the opportunity to write a 300- to 400-word theme-based essay expressing their views on democracy while competing for nearly \$1 million in awards and prizes at the local, state and national levels.

Over number of students students in the local community participated in the competition this year. As one of XX finalists worldwide, winner's first name will compete at the national level for individual awards ranging from \$500 to the top first place prize of \$5,000.

-vfw-

PATRIOT'S PEN



2026-2027 Theme

"What A Veteran Taught Me About America"

Student Entry Deadline: October 31, 2026

Patriotic Written Essay Competition Grand Prize: \$5,000 Award

What is the Patriot's Pen Program?

Conducted nationwide, this VFW-sponsored youth essay competition gives students an opportunity to write essays expressing their views on an annual patriotic theme. We invite you to join the more than 60,000 students who participated last year in this contest.

Why Should I Enter?

Prizes and scholarships can be awarded at the Post, District, State and national level. Department (State) winners receive a portion of \$55,000 in national awards. National Winners will receive at least \$500. **The first-place national award is currently \$5,000.**

The Internal Revenue Service requires a recipient awarded more than \$599 be given Form 1099 identifying the proceeds as taxable income. This may require the winner to provide their social security number.

How Does the Contest Work?

All entries begin at the VFW Post level. The only exception is where schools/classes/youth groups have large numbers of students and wish to conduct their own competition, submitting one winner for each 15 students to the VFW Post. Individual students may submit their entry directly to the Post.

The contest consists of four levels. The first level (entry) is sponsored by VFW Posts. Post winners advance, one for every 15 entries, to the VFW District (regional) level where one first-place winner is advanced to the VFW Department (state) level. The first-place winner at the Department level is then advanced into the VFW national competition. Decisions of Judges at all levels are final. Contact the post where you entered to check on your advancement. Decisions of Judges at all levels are final. Contact the post where you entered to check on your advancement.

Who Can Enter?

Patriot's Pen is open to 6th, 7th and 8th-grade students enrolled by the Oct. 31 deadline in public, private or parochial schools in the U.S., its territories or its possessions; or dependents of U.S. military or civilian personnel in overseas schools. Home-schooled students also are eligible. Although U.S. citizenship is not required, students must be lawful U.S. permanent residents or have applied for permanent residence (the application which has not been denied) and intend to become a U.S. citizen at the earliest opportunity allowed by law. (Foreign exchange students are ineligible.)

How Do I Get Started?

- Ask a teacher or youth group/club adult leader to supervise the Patriot's Pen writing contest.
- Contact a participating VFW Post and indicate your interest in participating.
- Establish a contact person who is a member of that VFW Post or its VFW Auxiliary.
- Make sure that your essay is submitted to the VFW Post before the contest deadline of Oct. 31.

- Your local Post will give instructions on how to turn in your entry to them. It may be delivered in person, emailed to the Post (with permission) or submitted through our online platform using Scholars App. **To submit through Scholars App you must first receive a QR code or link from your local post.**

Entries sent to VFW National Headquarters directly will not be considered.

How Am I Judged?

- **Knowledge of the theme is worth 30 points:**
You must show a thorough knowledge of the theme in your work. Demonstrate you have researched the issue extensively.
- **Theme development is worth 35 points:**
Answer all relevant facts about the theme such as the who, what, where, when and why. Relate the theme to your own experiences.
- **Clarity of ideas is worth 35 points:**
Write your essay in an easy-to-understand format. Leave your reader with a clear understanding of your explanation of the theme.

What Is the Theme?

VFW's Commander-in-Chief annually chooses the year's theme. The 2026-2027 theme is:

"What A Veteran Taught Me About America"

Deadline Information.

To qualify, all entries must be submitted to a sponsoring VFW Post by midnight Oct. 31.

Note:

If you need help finding a participating VFW Post, follow these instructions:

First, visit vfw.org/FindaPost to "Find a VFW Post."

If you don't have success in finding a Post, or if you have trouble contacting them, you can contact your VFW Department (state) headquarters office to see if they can offer any information or assistance.

You can visit vfw.org/contactus to look for "Find a State Contact" to get your VFW state office's phone number and email.

**For assistance contact
the VFW National Headquarters at 816.968.2787
Email: youthscholarships@vfw.org**

**2026-2027 Official Entry Form
Patriot's Pen Competition**

Must Be Completed by All Contestants

Name: First, M.I., Last _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

(____) _____
Phone Email

Date of Birth (mm/dd/yy) _____ Grade in School _____ Essay Word Count _____

School Name, City, State _____

Teacher's name and Email (if applicable) _____

To Be Completed by Student's Parent/Guardian
(Required even if student is 18 or over)

Parent/Guardian Name (Printed) _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____

(____) _____
Parent/Guardian's Daytime Phone

Parent/Guardian's Email _____

What Are the Rules?

- You must write your own essay.
- All essays should be typed in English with no color or graphics. 300 - 400 words in length (+ or - 5 word max). Every word is counted regardless of length. The essay title (theme) or added footnotes do not contribute to the word count.
- To ensure fairness and impartiality in judging, essays must be anonymous. Please do not include your name, address, school name, or any other personal identifiers in the body of your essay. Additionally, avoid references to your race, sex, religion, national origin, or other specific personal characteristics that could reveal your identity. General references to nationality or patriotic identity (such as being an American or referencing American values) are permitted if they are relevant to the essay theme. However, personal identifiers tied to your individual background or experience should be avoided.
- Do not put your name on the essay. The entry form is your essays cover sheet. Secure the Official Student Entry Form with a staple or other fastener on top of your essay. Contestants are allowed to enter only once each year if otherwise eligible (one Post competition).
- The essay must be contestant's original work and a product of the contestant's own thinking. Inappropriate use of ChatGPT or other AI tools is not allowed. The approach to the Patriot's Pen theme should be positive and clearly focused. Poetry is not acceptable. Quotations may be used sparingly if plainly identified wherever used. A contestant's teacher, counselor or parent may check the essay for punctuation, grammar and/or spelling, but the content must remain the contestant's. Contestants will be judged on the basis of their essay alone and are not required to present the essay orally. All essays become the property of the Veteran's of Foreign Wars. The VFW retains non-exclusive rights to the use of your essay and likeness in the promotion and execution of the organization's programs and activities.
- At any time during the contest additional participant personal information (i.e. SSN, photo, etc.) could be requested by the VFW.

I Have Read and Understand the Contest Rules

Signature of Student Participant _____ Date _____

To Be Completed by the VFW Post

I certify that this student has an authorized entry in our VFW Post level Patriot's Pen Competition.

Post Commander/Chairperson Signature _____ Post# _____

VFW Auxiliary President/Chairperson Signature (If applicable) _____

Post Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

VFW Post Email _____

No. of participants _____ No. of winners _____

Amt. of Post/Aux. scholarships awards \$ _____

Amt. of Post/Aux. additional expenses (Banquet, Pins, etc.) \$ _____

To Be Completed by the VFW District

I certify that the student named in the previous section is the duly selected winner of the Patriot's Pen Contest District Competition and is our sole entry into the Department.

District Chairperson Signature _____ Dist. # _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

(____) _____
Phone Email

To Be Completed by the VFW Department Chairperson

I certify that the student named in the previous section is the duly selected first-place winner of the Patriot's Pen Department Competition and is our sole entry into the National Judging.

Department Chairperson Signature _____

(____) _____
Daytime Phone Email

The winner has been will be (check one) notified that they are the first-place Department winner on _____.

Local VFW Post Information:

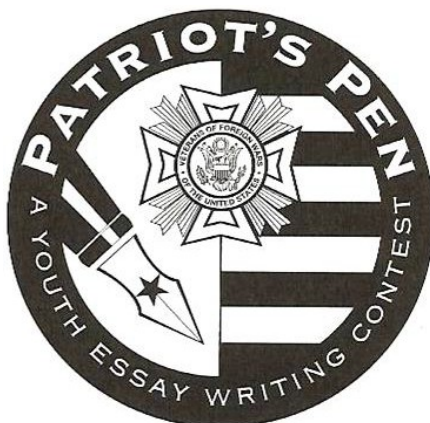
Contact: _____

Phone: _____ Best Time To Call: _____

Alternate Contact: _____

Phone: _____ Best Time To Call: _____





Patriot's Pen Introduction Questionnaire

Representing VFW Post _____ and its Auxiliary,

a _____ at _____
GRADE (6th, 7th or 8th) SCHOOL NAME

in _____
CITY

STUDENT'S NAME

PRONUNCIATION OF STUDEN'TS NAME

The student is the Son/Daughter of

Mother: _____

and

Father: _____

SUMMARY

**DISTRICT PATRIOT'S PEN
PARTICIPATION REPORT**

DISTRICT NO. _____

DEPARTMENT OF _____, VFW

The VFW Posts and Auxiliaries identified in this report in this District participated in the VFW annual Patriot's Pen Program.

GRAND TOTALS FOR POST COMPETITION: list totals taken from District report form(s)

_____	_____	_____	_____
Posts	Auxs	Students	Post Winners Advanced
\$ _____		\$ _____	
Monetary Awards		Addl. Money Expended	

MONETARY VALUE OF DISTRICT COMPETITION (add County Councils if applicable):

District Monetary Awards	\$ _____
District Additional Expenses	\$ _____

Signed by: _____ Date _____
District Chairman

*PLEASE ATTACH COMPLETED REPORT FORM(S) AND GIVE
THIS COMPLETED SUMMARY TO YOUR DEPARTMENT
PATRIOT'S PEN CHAIRMAN*

Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award

The Teacher Award program is a way to recognize the teachers in your community.

There are three categories for the award:

- Kindergarten through 5th grade
- 6th grade through 8th grade
- 9th grade through 12th grade

To be eligible for the award, the teacher must be a currently certified/licensed teacher in grades K-12. Previous national winners are ineligible.

Nominations can be submitted by themselves, fellow teachers, supervisors, family members or other interested individuals.

The nomination packet consists of:

- Official Entry form complete with signature through the District Chairperson
- Resume, minimum 1 page, up to 5 pages, including resume, as a maximum of documentation of their teaching experience.
- Head-and-shoulder photo, if available

Deadlines:

- October 31 - Nomination to Post
- November 15- Post Awardees to District
- January 1 – District Awardees to Department
- January 1 – District participation report to Department
- January 15- Department Awardees to National

Resources can be found by logging in to the National site go to my VFW. Under training and Support, click onto the Community Service, Scholarships & Awards tab. Under the Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award you will see:

➤ Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award

- [Teacher Award Rules and Eligibility](#) - Everything you need to know about the Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award
- [Teacher Award Entry Form](#) - Ensure your Post is using the most up-to-date form
- [Teacher Award Brochure](#) - Help spread the word about the award to your local community
- [Teacher Award Scoring Sheet](#) - The official Teacher of the Year award judges' score sheet
- [Contest Announcement Press Release](#) - Fill in the blanks and send to your local media
- [Teacher Award Winner Press Release](#) - Fill in the blanks and promote your local winner

VFW in the Classroom

Veterans are an important part of the fabric of our community. We can bring unique stories to the lessons that are taught in school. Working with educators, we can provide firsthand knowledge of events that are being taught.

When preparing to visit a classroom, ensure that you coordinate with the teacher on what is expected of you, what they are hoping to get out of your visit to the classroom and the time that you have available.

In you preparing allow time for an introduction, your presentation and for questions and answers. Your presentation will have to change depending on the age of the students. Bring appropriate memorabilia to show the students.

Some possible presentations are:

- Displaying the flag
- Folding the flag
- U.S. Flag History
- History of the U.S. Military
- History of your Branch of Service

Avoid discussions on:

- Politics
- Religion

ROTC and JROTC Awards Program

The ROTC Awards Program offers Posts an opportunity to reach out to future service members. Some of those who choose military service careers will become eligible for VFW membership. This program gives many cadets their first look at what the VFW has to offer.

ROTC Awards are available for both Junior (JROTC) at high school level and Senior (ROTC) at college level. While the VFW outlines eligibility criteria, the selection of the recipient is up to the school. If the school conducts an awards ceremony, it is recommended that a VFW representative be on hand to make the presentation. Awards (medal, ribbon and certificate) can be purchased through the VFW store.

In addition to the National Program, the Department of Illinois also recognizes a JROTC Cadet of the Year at the annual State Convention. A form for submitting candidates is available on the Department website. Submissions to headquarters are due by April 30.

Resources supporting the ROTC Awards Program can be found on the Department of Illinois home page under Programs / ROTC:

- 1) a form by which schools can request awards, providing Posts with the information they need to place the order
- 2) a list of ROTC and JROTC Programs in Illinois (but always contact the school to verify the Program is still active)
- 3) A form by which Posts may submit candidates for JROTC Cadet of the Year
- 4) The ROTC tri-fold pamphlet which can be given to schools with full information on the awards that Post may obtain for them.

Other organizations like the Military Order of Foreign Wars (MOFW) and the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) also have ROTC and JROTC awards programs. Working with other organizations can enhance our impact.



**SMART/MAHER VFW NATIONAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION
TEACHER AWARD CITATIONS FOR ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE
AND HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS AND THEIR SCHOOLS**

Each year, the Veterans of Foreign Wars selects elementary, middle and high school teachers to participate in the Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher program. VFW Post Teacher Award Chairpersons may submit one candidate in each grade level to their District by Nov. 15. If your Department does not have a District judging, then submit to your **Department Headquarters and/or Department Chairperson by Jan.1**. The Department may select a single candidate in each grade level and submit them to **VFW National Headquarters, on the Dashboard by Feb.1, for National judging**. Department Teacher winners that are received at National Headquarters By Feb.1 will receive a VFW National citation for both the winning teacher and their school.

Simply visit vfw.org/#login, log in to My VFW, then look under Member Resources, click on VFW Training & Support, then click on Community Service & Youth Programs, then look under Additional Resources. The Teacher Entry form, Instruction sheet, and Chairperson's Guide are up on the VFW website.

Who Is Eligible?

1. Teachers who promote civic responsibility, flag etiquette and patriotism are prime candidates for this award. For example, do you know a teacher who plans field trips to city hall or organizes community volunteer projects? Maybe you know an instructor who invites veterans into the classroom to discuss their military experiences. Perhaps you are familiar with a teacher who fosters the development of democratic values and beliefs through special projects. If you know of such a teacher, honor them today.
2. All current certified/licensed teachers in grades K-12 are eligible. Previous national winners are ineligible. Nominations can be submitted by themselves, fellow teachers, supervisors, family members or other interested individuals.

Documentation Required for all Candidates:

1. All Post-level nominees should provide a one-page resume as a minimum or up to five pages, including the resume, as a maximum of documentation of their teaching experience (for example: resume, references, news articles, etc.) and a head-and-shoulder photo of themselves, if available. These items will be forwarded on to the District, if applicable, and/or the Department with the winning teacher entry form.

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111

Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002

Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

2026-2027 Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award



Entry Deadline: October 31, 2026

What is the Teacher Award Program?

Founded in 1899, the VFW highly supports the education of America's youth. VFW and its Auxiliary have developed a slate of programs dedicated to helping America's educators. VFW Citizenship Education programs stimulate interest in America's history, traditions, Americanism, civic responsibility, flag etiquette and patriotism.

Teachers care deeply about America and its children. They're concerned about the perpetuation of America's noblest traditions and highest ideals. Wouldn't you like to see them get the honor they deserve? Now you can.

Why Should I Enter?

VFW wants to identify and recognize America's best educators who instill a sense of national pride in students. The national awards include \$1,000 Smart/Maher award for each of the top K-5, 6-8, and 9-12 teachers for professional development expenses, \$1,000 award for each winning teacher's school, commemorative plaques and all-expense-paid trip to the VFW National Convention.

Who is Eligible?

All current certified/licensed teachers in grades K-12 are eligible. Previous national VFW winners are ineligible. Nominations can be submitted by themselves, fellow teachers, supervisors, family members or other interested individuals.

How are teachers nominated?

Fill out the official entry form contained on the next page, and provide a one-page resume as a minimum or up to five pages, including the resume, as a maximum of documentation of their teaching experience (for example: resume, references, news articles, etc.) and a head-and-shoulder photo if available.

Please submit your completed entry form signed, along with the required documentation to your local VFW Post. Visit vfw.org/FindaPost for Post locations or call VFW Programs Department at 816.756.3390 ext. 6287 to find the Post nearest you.

What Is the Deadline for My Entry?

All entries competing at the Post level must be in the hands of that VFW Post by midnight, Oct. 31, 2025. It is the responsibility of the nominator to meet this deadline by submitting their entry to the proper location by ensuring it is a participating Post.

What Are the Judging Criteria?

Citizenship (1-25 points): On a scale of 1-25, to what extent does the teacher encourage and/or model good citizenship and community involvement?

Innovation (1-25 points): On a scale of 1-25, how much innovation (new ideas, new tools, new resources, and new approaches) does this teacher utilize in the classroom? Does this teacher's effort reflect an ongoing desire to stimulate the students with new things?

Resources (1-25 points): On a scale of 1-25, to what degree has this teacher demonstrated an ability to identify and utilize new and exceptional resources to fund, facilitate and provide materials for his or her classroom? Does this teacher tap into outside agencies, organizations and individuals to acquire materials and expertise in the classroom? As an example – bringing speakers, finding in-kind and monetary donations, or utilizing local opportunities like museums, field trips and local events.

Passion (1-25 points): On a scale of 1-25, to what degree does this teacher appear to be passionate about the profession of teaching? Are they regularly seeking to upgrade their skills? Do they try and find ways to encourage their students? Do they take a personal interest in their student's individual success?

*If you have any questions, please call
Mary Spencer, 816.756.3390, ext 6287 or
mspencer@vfw.org.*

Local VFW Post Information:

Contact: Name, Title

Phone Best time to call

Alternative Contact: Name, Title

Phone Best time to call

2026-2027 Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award



Entry Deadline: October 31, 2026

2026-2027 Official Entry Form Teacher Award Competition

Please tell us who you are nominating—below in box.

Name: First, M.I., Last	
Address	
City, State, Zip	
()	
Phone	Email
Grade Level (K-5, 6-8, or 9-12)	
School Name	
School Address	
()	
School Phone	School Email

Person Nominating Teacher

Name: _____
 Address: _____
 City, State, Zip: _____
 Phone: _____
 Email: _____

To Be Completed by the VFW Post

I certify that this teacher has an authorized entry in our VFW Post level Teacher Award Competition.

Post Commander's/Chairperson's Signature Post #

 VFW Auxiliary President's/Chairperson's Signature
 (If Applicable)

 Post Address

 City, State, Zip

 VFW Post Email

No. of teachers participating _____

No. of winners advanced to District _____

Amt. of Post /Aux. scholarship awards \$ _____

Amt. of Post /Aux. additional expenses \$ _____
 (banquet, pins, etc.)

To Be Completed by the VFW District (If Applicable)

I certify that the teacher named in the previous section is the duly selected winner of the Teacher Award District Competition and is our entry into the Department judging.

 District Chairperson's Signature Dist #

 Address

 City, State, Zip

() _____
 Phone Email

To Be Completed by the VFW Department Chairperson

I certify that the teacher named in the previous section is the duly selected first-place winner of the Teacher Award Department Competition, is our entry into the National Judging.

 Department Chairperson's Signature
 () _____
 Daytime Phone Email

The winner has been will be (check one) notified that they are the first-place Department winner on _____.

Where Do I Submit My Entry?

All entries will begin at the local VFW Post level. Individual nominees may submit their entry directly to the Post. This VFW Post should be within your local area and within your U.S. state of residence. Entries sent to VFW National will be returned. One Post winner can be submitted for each level, and to District by Nov. 15. If your Department does not have a District judging, then submit to your Department Headquarters by Jan. 1. Otherwise, one District winner, at each level, may advance to the state (Department) competition. If you need help finding a participating VFW Post in your area, follow these instructions: First, visit vfw.org/FindaPost to find your local VFW Post. Be sure this Post is within the state you reside in. If you do not have success in finding a Post, or if you have trouble getting in touch with them, you can contact your VFW Department (state) office to see if they can offer any information or assistance. You can visit vfw.org/ContactUs and look for "Find a State Contact" to get your VFW state office's phone number and email. If you still need assistance, please email us at VFW National Headquarters at mspencer@vfw.org.

VFW DISTRICT CHAIRMEN ONLY

DISTRICT REPORTING GUIDELINES FOR THE SMART/MAHER VFW NATIONAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION TEACHER AWARD

USE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION TO COMPLETE THE ATTACHED:

The guidelines listed below are intended to help clarify the Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award reporting process and to ensure that all participation and expenses incurred by Posts/Auxiliaries are completely and accurately reported for proper credit:

TOTAL POST PARTICIPATION

List Posts in your District that had a declared winner. Please list the participating Posts in numerical order on the report form.

TOTAL AUXILIARY PARTICIPATION

If Post has an Auxiliary, credit their participation by indicating *YES* or *NO*.

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

Number of schools that had teachers nominated.

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPATING TEACHERS

Number of teachers that actually were nominated.

AWARDS AND MONEY EXPENDED

Total dollar values of awards presented to teacher participants at Post & District level. All additional moneys allocated and expended in conducting their program. (Banquet, gifts, medals, citations, etc.)

Forwarding Smart/Maher VFW Natl Citizenship Education Teacher Award District Winners to Department

District Chairman: The District winner's materials that should be forwarded to the Department Chairman (immediately after the District judging is completed) are:

1. District winner's original nomination form and essay of 350 words or less signed by person nominating the teacher.
2. District winner's official Post Teacher Entry form w/signatures at Post & District level.
3. One page resume (**no more than two sides**).
4. Up to 5 pages (both sides) of additional documentation (i.e. news articles, supervisor's

YOUTH CADETS AWARDS

VFW awards for special recognition of outstanding achievement and exceptional leadership are available for Junior and Senior ROTC programs, Naval Sea Cadets and Civil Air Patrol Cadets. If any of these programs exist in your community, these awards provide your Post an outstanding opportunity to honor these patriotic young people.

JROTC

(Junior Reserve Officer Training Course)

Why should a Post become involved?

Few youth programs provide a greater benefit to a Post than involvement with a Scouting or JROTC unit. Both programs annually produce individuals with an appreciation for patriotism, civic responsibility, and the likelihood of future military service. As Boy and Girl Scouts, Sea Scouts, Venture Scouts and JROTC cadets, these individuals are often a tremendous asset to a Post by helping with Post projects such as placing flags on graves on Veterans Day and Memorial Day, helping with Post maintenance and fix-up efforts, helping distribute "Buddy"® Poppies, providing color guards and assisting with VFW public events.

As young adults, participants in these programs are much more likely than others of their age group to enter the military and, ultimately, become eligible for membership in the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Awards Administration

Cadet awards may be initiated by the local VFW Post or directly by the cadet's unit. In either case, documentation should come from the unit as follows:

- Naval Sea Cadets: from the unit commanding officer in a letter with copy to NSCCHQ.
- Civil Air Patrol Cadets: from the candidate's squadron by submitting a CAPF-120.
- JROTC/SROTC Cadets: from the unit by submitting a letter documenting the criteria.

Criteria for Civil Air Patrol and Naval Sea Cadets

- Good academic standing
- Satisfactory progress in the cadet program
- Outstanding achievement in community service and/or the cadet program
- Outstanding leadership in the cadet program
- High moral character
- Exceptional professionalism in appearance and actions (Officer Award)
- Outstanding military bearing and conduct in and out of uniform (NCO Award)
- Involvement in patriotic programs, drill team, color guard, etc.
- Demonstrated potential and willingness to assume higher levels of responsibility

Additional criteria for JROTC & SROTC awards:

- Positive attitude toward the ROTC program
- For JROTC, must be enrolled as a 10th - 12th grade JROTC student
- For SROTC, must be an undergraduate student enrolled in Military Science I through IV
- Must maintain a "B" average in ROTC curriculum and a "C" average in all remaining subjects with no failing grades in the previous semester
- Active in at least one other student extracurricular activity (music, athletics, government, etc.)

Upon receipt of the letter and documentation, VFW Programs Department personnel will review the submitted materials, approve and contact the VFW Department. The Department or Post may then purchase the award(s) through the VFW Store for presentation.

The VFW has many other opportunities that you can be involved with Youth Activities in your community. Remember, this is a win-win situation for the Post. The Post can support youth in the community.

Here are some other examples of how you can support Youth Activities. This list is not all inclusive. Talk to your community leaders, youth leaders, churches, and other community groups on how you Post or District can become involved and support the Youth of America

Support of Community Youth Activities

- o Coach or sponsor a Youth Team (baseball, soccer, football, basketball, soccer, etc)
- o Host a youth activity or event at your post
- o Work with a youth group on community event (food or clothing collection)
- o Meet with Key Club or National Honor Society at HS on community project
- o Sponsor a pizza party or ice cream for youth group

Youth Recognition Programs

- o Recognize an outstanding young person in your community
- o The VFW Store has numerous certificates that you can purchase to recognize youth
- o Leaders of Youth Program
- o Individual Patriotic Services
- o Individual Appreciation for Community Service
- o Honor Certificates for Youth

Post Scholarships

- o If your Post is one of the lucky Posts that have sufficient funding, you may consider awarding a scholarship to a local High School Student
- o Talk to Key Club or National Honor Society and see if they have any students needing financial assistance to attend leadership conference

VFW in the Classroom

Every day, we strive to thank America's educators by providing them with helpful resources and encouraging our members to visit local classrooms. Let us help you educate America's future leaders and bring history to life!

Veterans play an important role in educating our nation's youth about the founding principles upon which America was founded. As combat veterans, VFW members can provide students with a unique perspective about the sacrifices America's service members make to maintain freedom for all of us.

When visiting a classroom, a VFW member will prepare a brief introduction, a main presentation and a Q&A session. Depending on the topic, a member may bring appropriate memorabilia, uniforms, photographs and other relevant material.

American history is something we all share, and there's no one better to help tell that story than someone who's had a great part in shaping it.

If you are a VFW member or Post interested in becoming active with your local schools, see the tips and suggestions on the following pages.

SCOUTING PROGRAM

Scout of the Year Program



Ron Milton
Chairman

209 Taurus Dr
Shiloh, IL 62269
Phone: 618-604-0423
Email: usafret1@att.net

Post 1739-14

Annually, the VFW honors Scouts who have been the recipient of one of the following awards: Eagle Scout Award, Girl Scout Gold Award, Venture Summit Silver Award, or Sea Scout Quartermasters Award. Also, in order to be eligible for the honor, the Scout must be a Registered, active member of a Scout BSA Troop, Girl Scout Troop, Venturing Crew, or Sea Scout Ship who has risen above their peers in exemplifying the exceptional qualities of their rank.

The Department of Illinois will be making an Award to the First Place nominee from the Scouting America programs and the First Place Girl Scout of America nominee in the following amount however, only one Scout will be advanced to the National Competition:

\$300.00 Cash Award - Scouting America Scout of the Year
\$300.00 Cash Award - Girl Scouts of America Scout of the Year

This is a natural fit for the VFW, and will afford your Posts and Districts an opportunity to create activities that promote good Citizenship and Americanism. Each Post and District is urged to assign a liaison person to work closely with scout groups in your area.

On the Post level you can establish a Post Award of maybe a plaque or cash. Then advance your Scout of the Year entry or entries to your District or directly to the Department if no District program is offered. Districts are encouraged to honor entrants as well, but are not required.

Deadline dates for the Scout of the Year Award:

Student Entry to Post – March 1, 2027
Post Entry to State Headquarters – April 1, 2027
State Winner to National – May 1, 2027

The necessary forms can be found on the state website at www.vfwil.org. Click on resources tab and scroll down to Scout of the Year. Make an extra effort to involve scouts in your Post and District programs and activities. The rewards are great for you as well as the Scouts. By working with your local scouting groups, you may also be able to assist and promote the scouts to work toward achieving all of their scouting goals, not just those that qualify them to enter the Scout of the Year contest.

Let's plan to make Youth Activities a priority in our Posts and Districts. These programs will give your post more visibility in your community, will allow you more opportunity for new member recruitment, as well as encouraging current members to get involved because they have children and grandchildren. Remember too, the Patriot's Pen and Scouting programs can be a precursor for the Voice of Democracy Contest.

I sincerely hope that your involvement with youth activities this year will be a pleasant and rewarding experience for all involved. Always remember that you are invited to call if you have any questions or need any help.

Other Scout Programs

If your Post doesn't have anyone in your area that qualifies for Scout of the Year, there are still plenty of ways you can still meet the requirements to get the green on the dashboard. Here are some examples. The list is not all inclusive but is an example of how other Posts are supporting the Scouting Program. Contact Scout packs or troops in your area and see how you can help.

- Allow a boy scout or girl scout troop to use your facility for meetings
- Volunteer to be a scout leader
- Work with a local scout on their Eagle Scout or Gold Award project
- Teach a class or help the scouts to receive a merit badge
- Work with the scouts on a flag retirement ceremony
- Work with the scouts on a food drive or clothing drive

Don't think that you can't get credit on your dashboard just because you don't have an Eagle Scout in your area. There are lots of ways to be involved with scouting. Remember, you have to fill out the Program Reporting Form and tell what you did to support scouting. I recommend you submit a report after each activity just so you don't forget about it.

VFW SCOUT OF THE YEAR

Judges Score Sheet

DEPARTMENT/STATE _____ DATE OF JUDGING _____

JUDGE'S NAME & SIGNATURE _____

Instructions to Judges: Read and review all letters and data submitted by each applicant with the criteria listed below in mind. Use the input data to develop an overall presentation of the scout's personality that is consistent through all the data and letters submitted and grade each scout in each character areas. Grade each candidate using the following scoring system:

EXCEPTIONAL = 6-10 pts. AVERAGE = 4-5pts. LOW = 1-3 pts.
Ten (10) points are the maximum for each of the sub-elements.

SECTION A: HIGH SCHOOL PARTICIPATION

- _____ Academic achievement
- _____ Extra-curricular activities
- _____ Demonstrated leadership
- _____ Significance of participation
- _____ **Sub-Total (40 pts. Max.)**

SECTION C: COMMUNITY SERVICE RECORD

- _____ Evidence of regular participation
- _____ Impact on the community
- _____ Demonstrated leadership
- _____ Demonstrated achievement (awards, etc.)
- _____ **Sub-Total (40 pts. Max.)**

SECTION B: SCOUTING RECORD

- _____ Timeliness of achieving rank
- _____ Demonstrated leadership
- _____ Participation in events
- _____ Quality of Eagle, Gold, Summit, or Quartermaster Project
- _____ Demonstrated adherence to Scout Code
- _____ Exemplary moral/spiritual character
- _____ **Sub-Total (60 pts. Max.)**

SECTION D: CONTENT OF THE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

- _____ Evidence of exceptional character
- _____ Evidence of leadership qualities
- _____ Willingness to accept responsibility
- _____ Evidence of self-confidence
- _____ Evidence of serving others
- _____ Evidence of respect for authority
- _____ Evidence of patriotism and respect for this nation and its symbols.
- _____ **Sub-Total (70 pts. Max.)**

_____ **TOTAL SCORE (210 PTS. Max.)**

**JUDGES HAVE THE OPTION OF INTERVIEWING TOP FINALISTS
 PRIOR TO FINAL SELECTION.**

SCOUT OF THE YEAR Program



WHAT IS THE SCOUT OF THE YEAR PROGRAM?

Annually, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States recognizes individuals who are: Eagle Scouts, Girl Scout Gold Award recipients, Venture Summit Award recipients and/or Sea Scout Quartermasters who have risen above their peers in exemplifying the qualities of that rank.

AM I ELIGIBLE?

To be eligible for the award, the candidate must:

- Be the recipient of the Eagle Scout Award, Girl Scout Gold Award, Venture Summit Award or Sea Scout Quartermaster Award.
- Be a registered, active member of a Boy or Girl Scout Troop, Venturing Crew or Sea Scout Ship at the time the above reward was received.
- Have demonstrated exemplary citizenship in school, Scouting and community.

Prior National Scout of the Year winners are ineligible. There is no minimum age requirement for applicants as long as all other eligibility criteria has been met. The maximum age requirement for applicants is 18 years old. If an applicant reaches their 18th birthday during the nomination year, they remain eligible as long as they are still in high school at the time of the submission deadline. A Scout may enter through only one VFW Post. A local Post can be identified by zip code at vfw.org/FindaPost.

WHAT ARE THE DEADLINES?

- Deadline for entry to VFW Post is **March 1**.
- One candidate with full entry criteria must be submitted by a VFW Post to the next level of judging by **April 1**. The VFW Department Scouting Chairman can provide this information.
- The Department winner must be selected and submitted by their Department Scouting chairman to the VFW National Headquarters by **May 1**.

Questions should be directed to 816.756.3390, ext. 6787 during normal business hours Monday through Friday or emailed to scouting@vfw.org.

Official Entry Form

SCOUT OF THE YEAR Program

MUST BE COMPLETED BY EACH CONTESTANT and submitted directly to a VFW post in your community.

Name: First, M.I., Last

Address

City, State, Zip

()

Home Phone Email

Date of Birth (dd/mm/yyyy) Scout Troop Number

SCOUT/VENTURE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the foregoing information is accurate and if I am the winner, I will make myself available to receive the award at a presentation ceremony as designated by the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Scout/Venture Signature Date (mm/dd/yyyy)

UNIT LEADER'S CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the above-named Scout/Venture is an active member of our unit or was when the award was received and the information supplied by the candidate is accurate to the best of my knowledge.

Unit Leader's Signature Date (mm/dd/yyyy)

PARENT'S CONSENT

I hereby certify that all information on this application is correct. I willingly submit this name for consideration as the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States' Scout of the Year. If this individual is selected as the winner, I will ensure that he/she is allowed to attend a presentation ceremony as designated by the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Father, Mother or Guardian Signature Date (mm/dd/yyyy)



SCOUT OF THE YEAR Program

**VFW DEPARTMENT
SCOUTING CHAIRMAN**

PHONE: _____

SPONSORING VFW POST

POST NUMBER: _____

ADDRESS: _____

POST COMMANDER'S SIGNATURE: _____

DISTRICT CERTIFICATION
IF APPLICABLE, CHECK WITH THE VFW
DEPARTMENT SCOUTING CHAIRMAN

DISTRICT #: _____

DISTRICT CDR.: _____

DEPARTMENT CERTIFICATION
MUST BE COMPLETED BY DEPARTMENT VFW
SCOUTING CHAIRMAN OR DEPT. COMMANDER

DEPARTMENT: _____

SUBMITTED BY: _____

SIGNATURE: _____

WHAT DOCUMENTATION IS REQUIRED?

The following documentation should be submitted:

- **Photograph of the Scout** — must be attached to this form. The Scout must appear in correct, complete uniform for their current rank. Recommended size 3" x 5".
- **School Participation Record** — a single page, one-sided resume of the candidate's school activities indicating academic achievements, offices held, honors received and significant participation in other activities.
- **Scouting Record** — maximum of three pages, one side only, listing of all Scouting participation beginning with Cub Scouts or Brownies - years of participation, unit numbers and sponsors. Also include when Eagle, Gold, Summit or Quartermaster Award was received and Palms. Identify leadership positions held at all levels, participation in Scouting activities (jamborees, Order of the Arrow conferences, etc.) and the candidate's Eagle Scout, Girl Scout Gold Award, Venture Summit or Sea Scout Quartermaster Project.
- **Community Service Record** — a single page, one-sided resume listing participation in community and religious service organizations (excluding Scouting and school), noting leadership positions held and any recognition received.
- **Letters of Recommendation** — Submit three letters, no more than two pages in length from:
 - A scout leader.
 - A community member.
 - A teacher/faculty member (if homeschooled, a parent letter is allowed).
 - In addition, you may include one or two additional letters, no more than two pages in length from local community members who have special knowledge of the candidate's abilities/accomplishments.
- **Completed Entry Form** – submitted to a local VFW Post. Local Posts can be identified by zip code at vfw.org/FindaPost.

WHO MAKES UP THE VFW SCOUTING TEAM?

The backbone of Scouting in the VFW is the VFW Scouting Team. These VFW members are deeply involved in Scouting, most with decades of experience.

Appointed by their Department Commander, they are responsible for promoting scouting in their state. They are available to encourage Posts to sponsor units, support units and individual Scout projects. They should be the Department's "expert" on all phases of scouting. Many Departments have multiple members of the VFW Scouting Team, but every Department should have at least one individual to promote the values of scouting to youth and to the VFW itself. For more information on the VFW Scouting Team call 816.756.3390, ext 6787, or email scouting@vfw.org



Scouting Tracking Form

The attached scouting tracking form will assist posts and districts in tracking scouting activities and entries into the State dashboard.

Record your scouting contacts as they happen and while they are fresh on your mind. Some of your contacts can also be used for community service and Americanism.

Your contacts will also help in promoting the Scout of the Year Program. If you have any questions or assistance, please contact me at usafret1@att.net.

Ron Milton
State Scouting Chair.



Veterans of Foreign Wars State of Illinois

Scouting Activity Report Form

Due Quarterly: July 31, October 31, January 31, April 30

Post #	Post Name	Dist.	Quarter Ending		
Scouting America Programs		Members	Hrs	Money	Milage
List only things that you do in support of Scouting America					
Girl Scout Programs		Members	Hrs	Money	Milage
List only things that you do in support of Girl Scout, USA					
Donations to Scouting Programs		Members		Money	
List only donations made by your VFW or Auxiliary Unit members					
Scouting America					
Girl Scouts					
USE OF BUILDING		Members		Money	
Total Members this Report				Total Monies Donated	
Total Hours this Report				Total Miles	
VFW State Headquarters 217-529-6688					
3300 Constitution Drive					
Springfield IL 62711					

Also report VFW Scout Activity on your Community Service Report