

VFW - Voice of Democracy - Illinois - District 12 - Post 1104

 Veterans of Foreign Wars  10/31/26 CST

STEP 1 OF 1

General

Student Information



First Name

Required

M.I.

Required

Last Name

Required

Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy)

Required

Phone Number (xxx) xxx-xxxx

Required

Email

Required

Age

Required

Jacket Size (XS, S, M, L, XL, XXL, XXXL) (indicate womens or mens)

Required

Current Address

Address

Required

City

Required

State

Required

Zip Code

Required

Education

What grade are you currently in?

Required

I am in the 9th grade

I am in the 10th grade

I am in the 11th grade

I am in the 12th grade

Current School

School Name

Required

School City

Required

School State

Required

School Contact

Teacher's Name (If applicable)

Teacher's Email (If applicable)

Parent/Guardian Contact Information

(Required even if student is 18 or over)



Parent/Guardian Name	Required
Parent/Guardian's Daytime Phone (xxx) xxx-xxxx	Required
Parent/Guardian Email	Required
Date	Required

Contest Rules and Judging Criteria

Please read them carefully.



CONTEST RULES

Who can enter?

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, previous Voice of Democracy first place state winners, GED or Adult Education Students are ineligible.

What do I need to enter?

- Record your original 3–5 minute (+ or – 5 seconds max.) audio essay
- You will submit the recording and typed essay via an upload (.mp3) to your Scholar's App application.
- You must be the sole author of your essay. The recording must be in your own voice and in English.
- Inappropriate use of ChatGPT or other AI tools is not allowed.
- Hearing/speech impaired students should email the Voice of Democracy National Office at youthscholarships@vfw.org for special instructions.

Note:

- 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.
- 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.
- Personal identifiers tied to your individual background or experience should be avoided.

JUDGING CRITERIA

1. **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.
2. **Originality** is worth 35 points: Treatment of the theme should show imagination and human interest.
3. **Delivery** is worth 35 points: Speak in a clear and credible manner.

Essay

A new theme is chosen annually.



This year's theme is: "What a Veteran Taught me about America"

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- Personal identifiers tied to your individual background or experience should be avoided.

Audio length must be 3 – 5 minutes. How long is your audio file?

Required

You must not identify yourself in anyway (including, but not limited to, your name, school, city, state, race or national origin.) No music, singing, poetry or sound effects are allowed.

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.

I did not put my name on the essay/audio file or identify myself in anyway.

Required

☐ Yes

Please type your essay here. You can also copy and paste your essay text.

Required

B I   **H₁ H₂**

Word count: 0 words

*** The word count displayed here will serve as the definitive reference to word limits

Below is the field to upload or record the audio essay. The first option with the blue play button on the left is when the student wishes to record the audio right from the platform. Select the blue play button on the left to record.

Upload your .MP3 audio essay here. MP3 file format accepted.



Reording Time: 0 seconds

[Upload audio file instead](#)

The below image is what will display once the blue play button is selected with the option to stop & discard OR stop & save with the recording time running.

Upload your .MP3 audio essay here. MP3 file format accepted.

 Stop & Discard Stop & Save Reording Time: 3 seconds

If you select the Upload audio file instead button **INSTEAD** of the blue play button, then the below option will display for the student to “click to upload a file”. The student should then click on the field to upload their .MP3 file to their application.

Upload your .MP3 audio essay here. MP3 file format accepted.

Click to upload a file

Record audio instead

Third option if the above two options does not work for the student is to provide a link to their audio that was uploaded to another site (typical options are google drive, dropbox, microsoft onedrive, etc)

If you're unable to upload the audio file, please add a link to your original 3-5 minute (+ or - 5 seconds max.) audio essay in the textbox below.

Link to your audio essay:

Hearing/speech impaired students should email the Voice of Democracy National Office at youthscholarships@vfw.org for special instructions.

As you can see in the below image, a photo is **not REQUIRED** - only if the student wishes to upload their photo then there is an option to provide the photo already, but this does not hinder the student to be able to submit their application.

Photo

Include a high resolution, forward-facing color headshot of the applicant, 300KB or larger.



Headshot

Click here to upload the required file

Participant Agreement



You must truthfully answer "Yes" to all the statements to be eligible for this scholarship.

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 Voice of Democracy National Finals in Valley Forge, as a guest of the VFW National Organization

Required

☐ Yes

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.

Required

☐ Yes

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.

Required

☐ Yes

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.

Required

☐ Yes

Rules and Participant Agreement

I certify that I am the sole author of the enclosed audio/essay entry and that 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.

Required

☐ Yes

I did not use ChatGPT or any other AI tool to write my essay.

Required

☐ Yes

The recording is in English.

Required

☐ Yes

No music, singing, poetry or sound effects are in my voice recording.

Required

☐ Yes

I certify that the body of the essay does NOT identify myself in any way, (including, but not limited to your name, address, school name, or any other personal identifiers). I have avoided references to my race, sex, religion, national origin, or other specific personal characteristics that could reveal my identity.

Required

☐ Yes

I understand I can 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.

Required

☐ Yes

Student Signature

Signature of Student Participant (Type Name)

Required

Date

Required

Parent Signature

Signature of Parent/Guardian (Type Name)

Required

Date

Required