VOICE OF DEMOCRACY

VFW
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS.

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: youthscholarships@vfw.org

Local VFW Post Information:

Contact: _____

Phone: _____ Best Time To Call: _____

Alternate Contact: _____

Phone: _____ Best Time To Call: _____

VFW VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS.

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