PATRIOT'S PEN

VFW
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS.

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# 6690

VFW Auxiliary President/Chairperson Signature (If applicable) Jean Opatrny, Chairman

Post Address 1323 Sibley Memorial Highway

City, State, Zip Mendota, MN 55150

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: Jean Opatrny, VFW Auxiliary

Phone: 651-644-5640 Best Time To Call: 9AM to 9PM

Alternate Contact: VFW Post 6690 Ron or Don

Phone: 651-688-7408 Best Time To Call: _____

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