

## 2024-2025 Theme

# “Is America Today Our Forefathers’ Vision?”

Student Entry Deadline: October 31, 2024

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 27,000 high school students compete for more than \$2 million in scholarships and incentives. Students compete by writing and recording an audio essay on an annual patriotic theme. This year’s theme is, “Is America Today Our Forefathers’ Vision?”

### Why Should I Enter?

Prizes and scholarships can be awarded at the Post, District, state and national level. Department (State) winners receive an all-expense-paid trip to Washington DC, to tour the city, be honored by the VFW and its Auxiliary and receive their portion of \$171,000 in national awards, the top scholarship being \$35,000.

### The 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 intends 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.

#### What do I need to enter?

Record your original 3-5 minute (+ or – 5 second max.) audio essay on a flash drive, or other electronic device. You will submit the recording, typed essay and this completed entry form. Provide these items to your school/group competition or VFW Post for judging. In addition you can submit your emailed entry form, essay, and audio file to the VFW Post upon approval. 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](mailto:youthscholarships@vfw.org) for special instructions. No music, singing, poetry or sound effects are allowed. The body of the essay must not identify you in any way, (including, but not limited to your name, school, city, state, race, or national origin) although the recording & typed essay should be labeled with your name, to show ownership.

### Where Do I Submit My Entry?

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. Entries sent to VFW National will be returned. One winner for every 15 entries from each Post advances to District and one District winner advances to the state (Department) competition. If you need help finding a participating VFW Post, follow these instructions: First, visit this website [vfw.org/FindaPost](https://www.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](mailto:youthscholarships@vfw.org)

### 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, 2024**. It is the responsibility of the student to meet this deadline by submitting their entry to the proper location by ensuring it is a participating Post.

### What Are the Judging Criteria?

#### Originality is worth 30 points:

Treatment of the theme should show imagination and human interest.

#### Content is worth 35 points:

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

#### Delivery is worth 35 points:

Speak in a clear and credible manner.

# 2024-2025 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 Voice of Democracy National Finals in Washington, D.C. 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:

816.968.1155

Email: [youthscholarships@vfw.org](mailto:youthscholarships@vfw.org)

Local VFW Post Information:

Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Best Time To Call: \_\_\_\_\_

Alternate Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Best Time To Call: \_\_\_\_\_



# Youth Scholarships

The VFW is dedicated to promoting patriotism and investing in our future generation. If you are a democracy-loving high school student interested in a \$35,000 college scholarship or a patriotic middle school student interested in winning \$5,000, these scholarships may be for you.

## Voice of Democracy

Established in 1947, our **Voice of Democracy** audio-essay program provides high school students with the unique opportunity to express themselves in regards to a democratic and patriotic-themed recorded essay. Each year, nearly 25,000 ninth through 12th grade students from across the country enter to win their share of more than \$1 million in educational scholarships and incentives awarded through the program.

The national first place winner receives a \$35,000 scholarship paid directly to the recipient's American university, college or vocational/technical school. A complete list of other national scholarships range from \$1,000-\$21,000, and the first place winner from each VFW Department (state) wins at least a scholarship of \$1,000. Before submitting your essay, download the [2024-2025 entry form here](#) and find your sponsoring [local VFW Post](#) as applications must be turned in by **midnight, Oct. 31**.

## The 2024-25 theme is:

*"Is America Today Our Forefathers' Vision?"*

### About the 2023-2024 winner ...

Sophia Lin, a high school junior at BASIS Scottsdale in Scottsdale, Arizona, was named the 2023-2024 Voice of Democracy first place winner. Sophia's speech on the theme, "What Are the Greatest Attributes of Our Democracy?" won her a \$35,000 college scholarship. Sophia was sponsored by Scottsdale VFW Post 3513. [Watch as Sophia delivered her speech during the VFW's Parade of Winners award ceremony](#) or [read it here](#).

Want to catch up on everything that happened this year? You can watch the full Parade of Winners ceremony which was streamed live on Facebook, or [see this year's complete list of winners](#).

## Patriot's Pen

Each year, nearly 68,800 students in sixth through eighth grades enter the VFW's **Patriot's Pen** youth essay contest for a chance to win their share of nearly \$1 million in state and national

awards. Each first place state winner receives a minimum of \$500 at the national level, and the national first place winner wins \$5,000!

The essay contest encourages young minds to examine America's history, along with their own experiences in modern American society, by drafting a 300- to 400-word essay, expressing their views based on a patriotic theme chosen by the VFW Commander-in-Chief. Before submitting your essay, [download the 2024-2025 entry form here](#) and find your sponsoring [local VFW Post](#) as applications must be turned in by **midnight, Oct. 31**.

**The 2024-25 theme is:**  
***"My Voice in America's Democracy?"***

**About the 2023-2024 winner ...**

Bryant Day, an eighth grade student from Ashland, Ohio, was named the 2023-2024 Patriot's Pen first place winner. His essay on the theme, "How Are You Inspired by America?" won the national first place \$5,000 award. Bryant was sponsored by VFW Post 9943 and its Auxiliary in Mansfield, Ohio.

[Watch as Bryant delivered his winning essay](#) during the VFW's Parade of Winners streamed live on Facebook, or read his essay here. [See the complete list of 2024 national winners.](#)



# VFW 2024 National Youth Scholarship Winners Named

## Arizona high school junior takes home first place \$35,000 scholarship

Mar 04, 2024

**WASHINGTON** – Tonight the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) proudly presented more than \$173,000 in scholarships and awards as it named the national winners of its 2023-2024 Voice of Democracy and Patriot’s Pen youth scholarship competitions.

This year’s national winners were announced at the 2024 VFW Washington Conference in Washington, D.C., during the 77th annual Parade of Winners ceremony, sponsored by Twisted X.

VFW National Commander Duane Sarmiento was joined by VFW Auxiliary President Carla Martinez to announce this year’s national Voice of Democracy first place winner, Sophia Lin, and present her with the top \$35,000 T.C. Selman Memorial Scholarship first place prize. Lin, a high school junior at BASIS Scottsdale in Scottsdale, Arizona, was sponsored by Scottsdale VFW Post 3513. She delivered her winning essay on this year’s theme, “What Are the Greatest Attributes of Our Democracy?” during this evening’s ceremony.

Second place winner Ella Catchpole, a senior at Kelly Walsh High School in Casper, Wyoming, sponsored by VFW Post 9439 and its Auxiliary in Casper, was awarded the \$21,000 Charles Kuralt Memorial Scholarship. Lydia Prout, a junior at Melrose Area High School in Melrose, Minnesota, who was sponsored by Melrose VFW Post 7050 and its Auxiliary, was named the third place winner and awarded the \$15,000 VFW Scholarship. All other state winners received at least a \$1,000 college scholarship. See the complete list of 2024 Voice of Democracy national winners.

Also featured during tonight’s awards ceremony was the 2024 Patriot’s Pen first place winner, Bryant Day. Sponsored by VFW Post 9943 and its Auxiliary located in Mansfield, Ohio, Day was awarded the top Patriot’s Pen award of \$5,000. Watch as he delivered his winning essay during this evening’s ceremony on this year’s theme, “How Are You Inspired

### NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street      Office 816.756.3390  
Kansas City, MO 64111      Fax 816.968.1157

### WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.      Office 202.543.2239  
Washington, D.C. 20002      Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org  
www.vfw.org

by America?”

The Patriot’s Pen second place winner, Peeradon Bauman, sponsored by VFW Post 12146 located in Ban Chang, Rayong Province, Thailand, will receive a \$4,000 award, while third place winner Anisha Hiremath, sponsored by VFW Post 12104 in Bastrop, Texas, will receive a \$3,500 award. [See the complete list of 2024 Patriot’s Pen national winners.](#)

Learn more about the VFW Voice of Democracy and Patriot’s Pen programs [here](#).