

YOUTH ACTIVITIES PRESENTATION

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The last year and a half has given us quite a few challenges to be sure. But it has also presented us with some great opportunities. If we didn't know how to use social media to reach out to our youth before, then we are a little wiser now. Students today are learning in various ways and at various times. Some students are attending classes fully remote via their computers. Others have chosen the hybrid route with a mix of classroom and online. Still others are micro schooling or traditional homeschooling. However, the common thread in each of these educational approaches is technology. We are fortunate enough to live in a time where we have access to such great online resources. However, all of this online time is not necessarily good for the youth of today. What a great time to present students with an opportunity to ditch the computers and use some of their creative and artistic abilities with the Illustrating America art contest.

What is Illustrating America? It's a patriotic art contest for elementary and middle/junior high school students. This contest is open to 3 grade divisions: K-2, 3-5 and 6-8 with one (1) Department winner in each grade division being forwarded to Auxiliary National Headquarters for judging. National grade division winners of previous Illustrating America contests may enter the subsequent grade division but are ineligible for the same grade division of which they are a previous national winner.

It will be fun to see how these students view America through their paintings and drawings. Hopefully participation in Illustrating America will lead to participation in the Young American Creative Patriotic Art Contest in their high school years.

- Entries will be judged on patriotic theme and technique.
- Art must be 2D (no sculptures, dioramas, etc.).
- Art must be at least 8"x10" and no larger than 18"x24".
- Art must be on paper or canvas – no frames
- No coloring pages, photography, or computer-created designs.
- No specific themes are required: Encourage kids to share their own view of America.
- They may use paints, crayons, colored pencils, charcoal even glitter is accepted.
- If the American Flag is used, it DOES NOT need to conform to the Federal Flag Code in relation to colors or number of stars and stripes.

Deadlines are crucial! Chairmen should stress the importance of collection, judging and forwarding. It would be a shame for an entry to be missed because of lack of communication.

- Student deadline to local Auxiliaries will be March 31, 2022.
- Auxiliaries and Districts (if you choose) will need to send their entries to Department by April 15, 2022.
- Departments will need to send their 1st place winner in each grade division to National Headquarters by May 5, 2022.

National Awards for each of the three grade divisions are:

- 1st place - \$100 gift card
- 2nd place - \$50 gift card
- 3rd place - \$25 gift card.

The winning pieces of art will be displayed at our National Convention.

NOTE: Artwork is the property of the student and will be returned to the address provided on the entry form no later than September 1 of the contest year.

I spoke of one contest already but there is a second one! **“Get Excited for the Red, White and Blue!”** is a singing contest. **New this year** youth in two grade divisions K-8 and 9-12 are encouraged to display their patriotism by singing the National Anthem. Individuals are asked to record a video singing “The Star-Spangled Banner” in the style of their choice such as rock, pop, hip-hop, country, just to name a few. It can be sung with or without music. The only requirement is they cannot change the words to the song.

Videos will need to be saved to a flash drive or uploaded to an online platform such as YouTube or Vimeo. The application must filled out and submitted with the flash drive or online link to a local Auxiliary.

National Awards for each of the two grade divisions are:

- 1st place - \$500 Visa gift card
- 2nd place - \$300 Visa gift card
- 3rd place - \$200 Visa gift card

Patriotism is the theme running through our VFW Auxiliary so why not do a little reading with **Patriotism through Literacy**. This initiative is designed to promote and support reading among youth by introducing them to historical figures in our nation’s history. Here are some ideas of

how this can be done: members can volunteer to read in classrooms or libraries, start a book club where members participate with students, host a read-a-thon or a contest with small incentives, collect books and donate to libraries, bookmobiles or classrooms and there is a book donation label in honor of National President Jean Hamil available on the resources page of the national website. All of these activities can be done in person or remotely. Feel free to get creative to really make history come alive for our students.

To make it easy for you to start we have a suggested book list. The books are historical fiction and creative non-fiction.

Two ways to recognize youth are our Patriotic Youth Award and Youth Groups Supporting Our Veterans Citations.

Our **Patriotic Youth Award** is designed to recognize individual youth for their patriotism or who have volunteered their time helping our veterans, active-duty military and their families. Displaying their patriotism should not go unrewarded.

As an example, ask your members if they are or know of someone schooling their children remotely. If so, do they see their child recite the Pledge of Allegiance? This is a great opportunity to present their child with a Patriotic Youth Award. Remember, there are a great number of youth whose parents, grandparents or family members are or have recently been deployed. Keep an eye out for the patriotic things these children do because they live with patriotism around them all the time.

There are three designs of the Patriotic Youth Award to choose from online.

A Citation is a wonderful way to recognize **Youth Groups Supporting Our Veterans**. Remember to promote these Citations for assisting veterans and active-duty military members and their families. Just a few examples of some youth groups are Girl Scout Troops or Boy Scout Troops/ JROTC units/sport teams/faith-based youth groups and homeschool groups.

Auxiliary members should keep an eye open for these youth groups. You know the ones that volunteer at food distributions, march in patriotic holiday parades, teach veterans more about technology, help active-duty service members' families with learning stations for remote schooling, deliver meals or groceries to homebound veterans or do yard work for veterans or active-duty service members' families. The list goes on and on.

On Veterans Day in my hometown, it is tradition to hold a parade and ceremony honoring our veterans. Over the year's students from elementary schools in the county have marched in the

parade following veterans and veteran organizations. The high school students marched last in the parade following their school band. Each school represented then delivered speeches honoring the local veterans. Our Auxiliary requested citations for each of the schools represented and the High School Band. Presenting these citations was an honor for us. New this year these citations will be available and fillable online. The hope is to present many more of these citations.

Recognizing these groups for their good work ensures that these activities become part of their daily lives.

And finally **Creating and/or Sponsoring Youth Groups**.

Youth Group Examples for VFW Auxiliary Sponsorship:

- Youth sports teams
- High school service learning and civic engagement departments
- Church youth groups
- School clubs
- Homeschool Associations

Ask your Auxiliary when planning an event or project whether they could include a youth group. It could be a fundraiser for VFW National Home or under Americanism marching in a patriotic parade, under Veterans & Family Support packaging items for the troops overseas, under “Buddy”® Poppy & National Home distributing “Buddy”® Poppies or Under Veterans & Family Support preparing a dinner for Gold Star Families. The extra energy these groups bring to the table might be just what is needed to put that project over the top.

Visit vfwauxiliary.org/resources for applications, scoresheets, flyers, awards, citations and more.

Some goals might still be challenging to attain. But challenging is not impossible. Let’s take this opportunity to think outside of the box for our veterans.