

# Americanism Ambassador/ Patriotic Instructor

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### What is Americanism?

Americanism is an idea we talk about a lot in the VFW Auxiliary, but how do you define it?

In the words of Theodore Roosevelt, "Americanism is a question of spirit, conviction, and purpose, not of creed or birthplace."

As defined by Merriam-Webster, Americanism is "an attachment or allegiance to the traditions, interests, or ideals of the United States."

To me, Americanism is pride and devotion. Pride in being from and living in the United States of America, and devotion to our Flag and our nation's traditions.

What does Americanism mean to you? Have you ever put it into words? Each of you is encouraged to do so.

### Teach America's Patriotic Traditions

It is our responsibility as members of the VFW Auxiliary to teach children about America's patriotic traditions, and to honor and respect our Flag. Visit your local school, day care center or youth group and instruct children in learning the Pledge of Allegiance or the first verse of the "Star-Spangled Banner." Explain what the colors and numbers of stars and stripes on the U.S. Flag represent. Provide a 30-minute lesson on Flag education. These are several ways to educate our children about patriotism. Be sure to recognize their hard work with a sticker, pencil or other small patriotic item.

### Community Flag Education

It is such a great feeling to see our U.S. Flag flying. Our Flag is a living symbol of national pride and the freedoms we hold dear. We need to reach out to our communities and teach others about our Flag's history, respect for our Flag, Flag etiquette and how to properly retire the Flag. Ways to do this include:

- Recognize businesses and individuals in your community who display the Flag. Patriotic certificates are available from the VFW Store and online at [vfwauxiliary.org/resources](http://vfwauxiliary.org/resources).
- If you see a tattered or worn-out Flag flying, offer to exchange it for a new one.
- Host a Flag exchange at your Post Home or another location in your community.
  - Businesses and/or individuals can trade their tattered or worn-out Flag for a brand-new one.
- Provide a community flag disposal receptacle to collect Flags that should no longer be displayed.
- Invite members of your community to a Flag retirement ceremony so they can learn how to properly retire the Flag.

By doing these things, we have the opportunity to educate others about our nation's most prominent symbol and to share the great work our organization does to promote patriotism.

### Recognize and Honor Blue Star, Gold Star, Silver Star and White Star Families

Service members don't serve without the support of their families. Several groups I am very passionate about and highly respect are our Blue Star Mothers and Families; Gold Star Mothers and Families; Silver Star Families; and White Star Families.

You may have seen a blue star, gold star, silver star or white star service flag or service banner in the window of a home in your area. A service flag or service banner is a banner approved by the Secretary of Defense that family members of those serving in the United States Armed Forces can display.

- Blue Star Families can display a flag or banner that is officially defined as a white field with a red border, with a blue star for each family member serving in the United States Armed Forces during any period of war or hostilities.
- Gold Star Families can display a flag or banner with a gold star (with a blue edge) that represents a family member who died during military operations.
- Silver Star Families can display a flag or banner with a silver star that represents a family member who was injured, wounded or became ill in combat.
- White Star Families had a family member who served in the military and lost their life to suicide. This service banner has yet to be approved by the Secretary of Defense.

I encourage everyone to recognize and honor these mothers and families in your community every day!

### **Keep Patriotism Alive**

Through the Americanism Program, we show support for our nation's veterans, service members and their families, and keep patriotism at the forefront of our lives. It begins by educating others about America's patriotic traditions; displaying the Flag and recognizing others for doing so; recognizing and honoring Blue Star and Gold Star Families; dressing the part by wearing our Official Look and cap when participating in patriotic activities; and hosting patriotic events that are open to the entire community.

As members of the VFW Auxiliary, we have the knowledge and know-how to promote and celebrate our nation's patriotic holidays and traditions. We keep these traditions alive by promoting and celebrating them. I encourage everyone to be open to new ideas and suggestions while staying true to the red, white and blue!



# Americanism Program

**Flag Education • Promote Patriotism • POW/MIA Recognition  
Smart/Maher National Citizenship Education Teacher Award**

This definition of “Americanism” was originated by the Commanders-in-Chief of the Grand Army of the Republic, United Spanish War Veterans, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, the National Commanders of the American Legion and the Disabled American Veterans of the World War at a conference held in Washington, D.C., in February 1927:

“Americanism is an unflinching love of country; loyalty to its institutions and ideals; eagerness to defend it against all enemies; undivided allegiance to the Flag; and a desire to secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and posterity.”

## **Patriotic Instructors**

The Patriotic Instructor educates members on the proper salute to the U.S. Flag, as well as the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. He or she also takes the time to understand the VFW Auxiliary Ritual and the Federal Flag Code. He or she helps members to understand the traditions and ceremonies of the organization. The *Understanding Auxiliary Traditions* helpsheet and video are available on the website at [vfwauxiliary.org/resources](http://vfwauxiliary.org/resources).

For detailed information on Auxiliary traditions, rituals and patriotic ceremonies, reference the VFW Auxiliary *Podium Edition: Bylaws and Ritual*. Patriotic items and educational materials are available for purchase through the VFW Store at 1-833-VFW-VETS or online at [vfwstore.org](http://vfwstore.org).

## **Flag Education**

A large part of showing Americanism and demonstrating patriotic spirit is respecting and properly caring for the U.S. Flag. Flag etiquette covers everything from proper display of our Flag to acceptable conduct around this symbol of our nation.

For more information about Flag etiquette, the history of our Flag and to read the U.S. Flag Code, visit [vfw.org/community/flag-etiquette](http://vfw.org/community/flag-etiquette).

## **Respect for the Flag - Engaging the Community**

- **Flag Education in Schools** – Educating our youth about patriotism is an important step on the path to good citizenship. Encourage members of your Auxiliary to volunteer in schools and educate youth on the importance of respecting our Flag. Volunteers can visit individual classrooms or do a presentation at a school assembly. For more resources, visit [vfwauxiliary.org/what-we-do/americanism](http://vfwauxiliary.org/what-we-do/americanism).
- **Recognition of Outstanding Community Flag Display** – When a community member, business or organization takes the care and time to display our “Stars and Stripes,” it reinforces patriotism to the entire community. You may recognize this display of patriotism by presenting a certificate of appreciation from your Auxiliary.
- **Flag Retirement Ceremonies** – These ceremonies honoring our Flag serve as one of the most beautiful forms of respect for our country. This is the perfect way to involve the whole family of Auxiliary and VFW members. Flag retirement ceremonies can also serve as an event to involve the entire community. For more information on this and other Flag etiquette, visit [vfw.org/community/flag-etiquette](http://vfw.org/community/flag-etiquette).

## **Promote Patriotism – Celebrating Patriotic Holidays**

Patriotic holidays are an opportune time to involve the whole family and bring community attention to your Auxiliary. When fun family events are presented to the community, prospective new members will walk through your door. Patriotic holidays can serve as the perfect way to show that your Auxiliary supports patriotism, veterans and their families as a top priority. For more information about patriotic days and ways to celebrate, visit [vfwauxiliary.org/what-we-do/americanism](http://vfwauxiliary.org/what-we-do/americanism).

### **National Vietnam War Veterans Day – March 29**

National Vietnam War Veterans Day honors a generation of men and women who served and sacrificed during the longest conflict in U.S. history. March 29 marks the anniversary of when combat forces departed South Vietnam in 1973, even though some troops remained until their final departure in 1975.

### **Loyalty Day – May 1**

On May 1, 1930, 10,000 VFW members staged a rally at New York's Union Square to promote patriotism. Through a resolution adopted in 1949, May 1 evolved into Loyalty Day.

### **Armed Forces Day – Third Saturday in May**

A day to pay tribute to the men and women currently serving in our nation's armed forces.

### **Memorial Day – May 30 (Traditional)**

Patriotism calls for all citizens to be reminded of the deaths of their fellow countrymen during wartime. By honoring the nation's war dead, we preserve their memory and thus their service and sacrifice.

### **Flag Day – June 14**

This day celebrates the official symbol for the United States: our "Stars and Stripes." Flag Day was first recognized by Congress on June 14, 1777.

### **Independence Day – July 4**

On this day in 1776, our forefathers formed a new nation by adopting the Declaration of Independence.

### **Patriot Day – September 11**

This day is to perpetuate the memory of those who perished in the attack on America that occurred on this date in 2001.

### **POW/MIA Recognition Day - Third Friday in September**

POW/MIA Recognition Day honors the commitments and the sacrifices made by our nation's prisoners of war and those who are still missing in action. National POW/MIA Recognition Day, traditionally on the third Friday in September, is one of the six days specified by law on which the black POW/MIA flag shall be flown over federal facilities and cemeteries, post offices and military installations.

### **Gold Star Mother's & Family's Day - Last Sunday in September**

On this day, Americans are encouraged to display the Flag and hold appropriate ceremonies as a public expression of our nation's gratitude and respect for our Gold Star Mothers and Families.

### **Veterans Day – November 11**

This is an opportunity to honor the brave men and women, both living and deceased, who fought America's battles past and present.

### **Pearl Harbor Day – December 7**

This day is in remembrance of the same date in 1941 that Japanese bombers staged a surprise attack on U.S. military and naval forces in Hawaii.

### **POW/MIA Recognition**

Auxiliary members are passionate about bringing attention to former Prisoners of War and those Missing in Action by holding ceremonies to both educate their communities and honor these special veterans. One way to honor these veterans and educate youth and the community on this subject is by having a Missing Man Table Ceremony. This practice provides a visual demonstration of the significance of POW/MIA Recognition Day. You are encouraged to share this ceremony with youth groups partnering with the Auxiliary.

Find a sample of the ceremony wording and table setup at [vfwauxiliary.org/resources](http://vfwauxiliary.org/resources).

### **Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award**

The VFW Teacher of the Year award contest recognizes three exceptional teachers for their outstanding commitment to teaching Americanism and patriotism to their students. Each year, a certified/licensed elementary, junior high and high school teacher whose curriculum focuses on citizenship education topics can be nominated for the Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award.

### **Examples of Activities from Award-Winning Teachers**

- Field trips to city hall
- Community volunteer projects
- Hosting veterans to discuss their military experiences
- Special projects that foster the development of democratic values and beliefs

### **How the Contest Works**

Based on the nominees submitted, VFW Posts and Auxiliaries will recognize one outstanding teacher in grades K-5, 6-8 and 9-12. Posts then submit these winners' names and required documents to their District-level judging. From there, the selected winners are forwarded to the Department level. After judging, each Department then forwards the entries of its winners to VFW National Headquarters for consideration in the national awards contest.

For more information, instructions for nomination and nomination forms, visit [vfw.org/community/youth-and-education](http://vfw.org/community/youth-and-education).

# Americanism Program Awards

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## AWARDS FOR AUXILIARIES

1. Most outstanding promotion of patriotic holidays in the community.
  - Citation to every Auxiliary that promotes patriotic holidays in their community. Criteria and entry form (required) available at [vfwauxiliary.org/resources](http://vfwauxiliary.org/resources). Auxiliaries must send the entry form to their Department Americanism Chairman by March 31, 2021.  
The Department Americanism Chairman must send a copy of all submitted entry forms to National Headquarters by April 30, 2021.  
Citations will be mailed directly to participating Auxiliaries from National Headquarters.
  - Citation and \$25 to one Auxiliary in each of the four Conferences with the most outstanding promotion of patriotic holidays in the community.

The Department Americanism Chairman must sign and send a copy of the completed Department-winning entry form to the National Americanism Ambassador by April 30, 2021 for judging.

## AWARDS FOR DEPARTMENTS AND DEPARTMENT CHAIRMEN

1. Citation to each Department Americanism Chairman for participation in this Program.
2. \$25 VFW Store Gift Certificate to one Department Americanism Chairman in each of the 10 Program Divisions for the best promotion of Blue Star Mothers and Families; Gold Star Mothers and Families; Silver Star Families; and White Star Families.
3. Outstanding Performance Award in each of the 10 Program Divisions based on criteria listed on Page 5 and for the promotion of Program Goals on Page 9.