

# YOUTH ACTIVITIES AMBASSADOR

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During my childhood and teenage years in the late 1960s and early 1970s, we all watched Walter Cronkite on the CBS Evening News. I would listen for the reports about American soldiers who were either killed or missing in action. It's important to remember these soldiers. They allowed us the freedom and rights that we continue to enjoy. We must remember the everyday folk who fought for what we have today. Our youth should know our history and the sacrifices made by those who served. They need to remember their names.

### Grave Beautification

Honoring veterans shouldn't cease upon death. Whether they die in battle or after living a long life, they continue to deserve our respect and remembrance. Teaching this to our youth can be accomplished by beautifying the gravesites and headstones of our veterans. While cemeteries take care of general lawn maintenance, often they do not clean the headstones.

Organize an event for youth to clean and beautify the gravesites of veterans at a national, private or municipal cemetery.

- The first step is to approach the cemetery for permission to beautify headstones and markers.
- Access the VA's National Cemetery Administration's guidelines for cleaning headstones and markers at <https://www.cem.va.gov/hmm/cleaning.asp>. Here you will find detailed information regarding acceptable cleaning practices. Please follow these instructions to avoid causing damage or harm to the participants or the headstones.
- Refer to YouTube for videos demonstrating safe practices.

### Requirements for Reporting

1. Take a before and after picture of every headstone.
2. Keep a log of gravesites beautified during your event. Record the names of veterans in the log with the name of the cemetery, including town/city and state.
3. Place a Flag on the gravesites. Follow the guidelines of individual cemeteries before placing a Flag holder near the headstone. Civilian cemeteries may prefer the placement of Flags on wood sticks that are placed directly in the ground. If allowed, create Flag holders using PVC pipe:
  - o Cut ½ inch PVC pipe to appropriate length.
  - o Placement of the pipe is one combat boot length (10") from the front of the headstone in the center.
  - o Once pipe is placed, insert Flag in pipe.
  - o Always step back and check to see if the Flag is straight.

### By Youth, For Youth

By Youth, For Youth speaks to the need to help develop our young people to become leaders, acknowledge and identify needs in their community and encourages them to care for those in need. Our veteran families often include youth who also make sacrifices for our country. and in some situations, they lose a parent for the cause of freedom.

With the help of youth, hold an event to benefit other youth in your community. Youth should help plan and organize the event.

- Collect food donations and distribute to military families in need.
- Hold a fundraiser to benefit a school supply drive for military families or other families in your community. Use funds from the event and other donations to purchase backpacks and stock them with school supplies using lists provided by your local school district.
- Assist youth to organize and promote a holiday gift collection drive. Collect toys, clothing and gift cards for youth who may otherwise not receive Christmas gifts.



# YOUTH ACTIVITIES PROGRAM

## Creating, Sponsoring and Working with Youth Groups Youth Groups Supporting Our Veterans Citations • Patriotic Youth Award Get Excited for the Red, White and Blue! • Patriotism through Literacy • Illustrating America

The VFW Auxiliary is in a unique position to help teach our youth the skills to become responsible adults through serving our country, communities and veterans. We have a new generation of veterans who need the support of family, friends and country as they serve overseas and when they come home from conflicts abroad. Today's youth are the future of our nation.

### Creating, Sponsoring and Working with Youth Groups

As part of the Auxiliary Youth Activities Program, an Auxiliary can sponsor a youth group and engage youth in any one of our programs, including activities to honor our veterans or assist our service members and their families.

Take advantage of the service aspects some youth groups require. Many youth-focused organizations require various types of community service or activities to earn merits in their units. College-bound seniors earn school credit for some of these same activities. Remember that involving youth in service to veterans in conjunction with your Auxiliary can bring new membership to your Auxiliary. When youth and the whole family are included, members feel more invested in your Auxiliary. Sponsorship of a youth group can create a bright future for your Auxiliary, veterans and the community as a whole.

### Youth Groups Supporting Our Veterans Citations

The Youth Groups Supporting Our Veterans Citation is one way for Auxiliaries to recognize youth groups for their efforts and service projects honoring our veterans, and assisting service members and their families. The Youth Groups Supporting Our Veterans Citation is available at [vfwauxiliary.org/resources](http://vfwauxiliary.org/resources) under Youth Activities.

### Patriotic Youth Award

The Patriotic Youth Award is designed to recognize individual youth for their patriotism and/or support of our veterans, service members and their families. A fillable, printable version of The Patriotic Youth Award is available at [vfwauxiliary.org/resources](http://vfwauxiliary.org/resources) under Youth Activities.

### Get Excited for the Red, White and Blue!

Open to youth in grades K-12 at the time of local entry and a U.S. citizen or U.S. national. Entry will be judged on vocal ability, mastery of lyrics, originality or interpretation and entertainment value. The contest consists of two grade divisions: K-8 and 9-12. The Department first-place winner in each grade division will be forwarded to Auxiliary National Headquarters. There is one National winner in each grade division, with awards for first, second and third place in each grade division. Please see entry form at [vfwauxiliary.org/what-we-do/youth-activities](http://vfwauxiliary.org/what-we-do/youth-activities) for eligibility requirements and contest rules.

Deadlines:

Entries received by:

Local Auxiliary – March 31

Department – April 15

National Headquarters – May 5

### Contest Rules:

- Video of contestant's solo vocal performance of "The Star-Spangled Banner" must be recorded between July 1, 2021 and March 31, 2022.
- Contestant may sing a cappella, with backing tracks or instruments.
- Contestant may sing in the arrangement and genre of their choice.
- Contestant may **NOT** change the words.

### Patriotism through Literacy

Promote and support reading among youth with this simple, fun and potentially free (use your local library) initiative. Introduce youth to historical figures and teach them about events in our nation's history while fostering a love of reading that can lead to a lifetime of learning.

### Benefits of Patriotism through Literacy:

- Teach kids about various times in American history.
- Promote empathy and expose students to experiences unlike their own.
- Foster a love of books that leads to a lifetime of learning.

- Spend time with kids in the community in new, creative ways.
- Help youth gain better understanding of American history through nonfiction.

#### How can I participate in Patriotism through Literacy?

- Volunteer to read a historical or creative nonfiction picture book to kids at your local library.
- Donate historical fiction or creative nonfiction books to local schools, shelters or libraries.
- Host a read-a-thon and award small prizes (stickers, pins) for number of books or hours read.
- Run a writer's workshop for aspiring teen and tween authors at your Post Home.
- Invite an author of historical fiction or creative nonfiction to do a book talk/signing in your area.

Reading has many benefits, including improved grammar and writing skills, improved focus and concentration, and it helps children to understand and share the feelings of others; reading stretches our imagination. As Dr. Seuss said, "Reading can take you places you have never been before."

#### Illustrating America

Open to any student in grades K-8 by the March 31 deadline who is enrolled in a public, private or parochial 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. Student must be a U.S. citizen or U.S. national. Foreign exchange students and students age 15 or older are ineligible. 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. Entries will be judged on patriotic theme and technique. The contest consists of three grade divisions: K-2, 3-5 and 6-8. The Department first-place winner in each grade division will be forwarded to Auxiliary National Headquarters.

There are National awards for first, second and third place in each grade division. The first, second and third place in each grade division will be displayed at National Convention. Please see the student brochure and entry form at [vfwauxiliary.org/what-we-do/youth-activities](http://vfwauxiliary.org/what-we-do/youth-activities) for more details on requirements and contest rules.

Deadlines:

Entries received by:

Local Auxiliary – March 31

Department – April 15

National Headquarters – May 5

#### Contest Rules:

- Art must be two-dimensional.
- Art must be on canvas or paper.
- Watercolor, pencil, pastel, charcoal, tempera, crayon, acrylic, pen, ink, oil, marker or other media may be used.
- Submit canvas entries on a stretcher frame or canvas board. Other entries must be matted in white or reinforced with heavy paper.
- The art should be no smaller than 8" x 10" but no larger than 18" x 24", not including mat.
- **Coloring sheets, digital art and photography are not accepted.**

#### Involve Youth in ALL Auxiliary Programs

Youth play such an important role in our future. Encourage involvement from an early age in all Auxiliary Programs. Every young person can find their place to serve when they are presented with a variety of opportunities to serve their communities and veterans.

Teach youth about Auxiliary efforts to:

- Respect and take pride in our country.
- Serve hospitalized veterans.
- Elect leaders who appreciate our military.
- Pass legislation that secures benefits for our veterans.
- And many other worthy efforts!

#### Project Examples

- Visiting and volunteering in VA and non-VA facilities.
- Raising funds for a community veterans memorial.
- Marching in patriotic holiday parades.
- Volunteering to help veterans and service members and their families with yard work or household repairs.
- Sending cards or small gifts to the VFW National Home for Children to support families.
- Planning a card- and letter-writing campaign in local schools to send mail to our troops overseas or veterans in VA facilities.
- Organizing assembly, collection and delivery of care packages for troops.
- Teaching veterans computer skills.

## Youth Group Examples for VFW Auxiliary Sponsorship

- Youth sports teams
- Church youth groups
- After-school programs
- Youth-focused organizations
- School clubs
- Home-school associations
- Youth community service groups
- Nonprofit organization youth advisory councils
- Service learning and civic engagement departments in high schools and colleges

## Make Your Auxiliary Accessible to Today's Youth

It has never been so easy to communicate your cause and events to the world. Social media as teaching and information tools have natural collaborative elements allowing our youth to view and comment on each other's activities. They are tweeting on Twitter, posting on Facebook, instantly sending pictures on Instagram and subscribing to YouTube channels.

If you don't know what any of this is – **LEARN.**

### POPULAR SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS

Facebook | Twitter | LinkedIn | YouTube  
Pinterest | Instagram | Snapchat | TikTok

**Get online and see what's new!**

Visit [vfwauxiliary.org/resources](http://vfwauxiliary.org/resources) for publicity tips, social media guidelines and other helpful tips.

**DRAFT**

# YOUTH ACTIVITIES PROGRAM AWARDS

## **AWARDS FOR AUXILIARIES**

1. Most outstanding veteran grave beautification activity and/or event by an Auxiliary with youth involvement.
- Citation to every Auxiliary that hosts a veteran grave beautification activity and/or event with youth involvement. Criteria and entry form (required) available at [vfwauxiliary.org/resources](http://vfwauxiliary.org/resources). Auxiliaries must send the entry form to their Department Youth Activities Chairman by March 31, 2023.

The Department Youth Activities Chairman must send a copy of all submitted entry forms to National Headquarters by April 30, 2023.

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 veteran grave beautification activity and/or event with youth involvement. Winners will be announced and awards presented at the 2023 National Convention in Phoenix, Arizona.

The Department Youth Activities Chairman must sign and send a copy of the completed Department-winning entry form to the National Youth Activities Ambassador by April 30, 2023 for judging.

## **AWARDS FOR DEPARTMENTS AND DEPARTMENT CHAIRMEN**

1. Citation to each Department Youth Activities Chairman for participation in this Program. Citation will be presented at the 2023 Department Convention.
2. \$25 VFW Store Gift Certificate to one Department Youth Activities Chairman in each of the 10 Program Divisions for the best promotion of an activity by youth for youth. Winners will be announced and awards presented at the 2023 National Convention in Phoenix, Arizona.
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 listed at the top of Page 63. Winners will be announced and awards presented at the 2023 National Convention in Phoenix, Arizona.