

YOUTH ACTIVITIES AMBASSADOR



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*Like seashells, we are beautiful and unique
with a story to tell.*

When I joined the Auxiliary 20 years ago, I would never have dreamed that I would find such a great passion in working with today's youth and how it would help my love and commitment to the VFW Auxiliary grow. The youth of today are the members of the future and what we show them now by promoting patriotism, being kind and active in our veterans' lives and communities, will make the difference to how we are portrayed by their families.

Reading Buddies

Be a "Reading Buddy." We sometimes forget that we have many children that are being left behind in schools due to issues concerning reading and comprehension, but if just one person in each Auxiliary could reach out and help a child become a better reader through reading one-on-one or electronically, imagine what an impact we could make in their daily lives and self-confidence. You can use the Patriotism through Literacy reading list in MALTA or talk with the child's parent, teacher or guardian that you have buddied up with to help find out what their interests are, and what reading level books to look for.

- Contact your local Family Readiness Groups, Scouts, schools and after-school program coordinators to see if they need volunteers to help read with the kids.

- Hold a Reading Buddy day at your VFW Post.
- Be a Reading Buddy by using Zoom or the telephone.
- Use the **#auxreadingbuddy** to promote what you and your Auxiliary are doing in our Reading Buddy program.
- Be sure to get proper permission from schools and parents and require that parents/guardians also attend Reading Buddy Post events.

Youth Groups

The VFW Auxiliary is no stranger to working and assisting today's many different youth groups, but have you thought of thinking out of the box and sponsoring a school or after school program involving our youth? This could be a local youth Theatre group, Robotics/STEM group, Academic Challenge team, Key Club and Good News Clubs. Being an Auxiliary member and a part of something as special as the VFW Auxiliary gives us a family of brothers and sisters with a variety of special skills and ideas that can be shared to make a difference with today's youth.

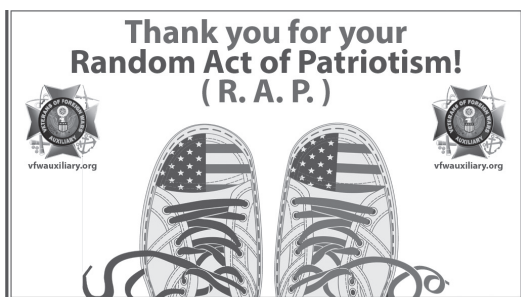
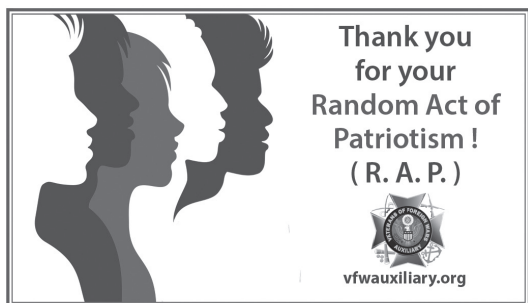
Be sure to get proper permission from schools and parents and require that parents/guardians also attend Reading Buddy Post events.

Illustrating America

The Illustrating America Contest is a phenomenal way to get our younger students, and their families interested in learning more about what the VFW Auxiliary does for our heroes and communities. This contest is a way to not only give our elementary and middle school students a chance to be creative but to also promote the VFW Auxiliary Young American Creative Patriotic Art scholarship contest. Please see more information on page 52.

R.A.P. Cards and Youth Acts of Kindness Certificates

Encouraging today's youth by letting them know that they have been seen is priceless in their eyes. I want to encourage you and your Auxiliary to continue to use the Random Acts of Patriotism cards for children that you see showing respect to the Flag, saying the pledge of the allegiance or honoring our country and heroes, but this year I would like to see our Auxiliaries using the Youth Acts of Kindness Certificate that is available in MALTA Member Resources. This would be given to youth being caught in the act of kindness. This is another way to celebrate our youth and to let them know that we see them. See examples as listed on this page.





YOUTH ACTIVITIES PROGRAM

Sponsoring and Working with Youth Groups

Youth Groups Supporting Our Veterans Citations • Patriotic Youth Award

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.

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 in MALTA Member 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 in MALTA Member Resources under Youth Activities.

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 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. 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 intend to become a U.S. citizen. 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 entry in each grade division will be displayed at National Convention.

Contest Rules:

- Entry must be completed during the current school year.
- Entry must be two dimensional.
- Entry must be on canvas or paper.

- Submit canvas entries on a stretcher frame or canvas board.
- Reinforce the back with heavy paper.
- Do not frame art with wood, metal, plastic or glass.
- Mats, including mounted and floating mats, may be used.
- Entries may not be smaller than 8" x 10" and not larger than 18" x 24", **INCLUDING** mat.
- Watercolor, pencil, pastel, charcoal, tempera, crayon, acrylic, pen, ink, oil, glitter, marker or other media may be used.
- If the American Flag is used, it **DOES NOT** need to conform to the Federal Flag Code in relation to colors or numbers of stars and stripes.
- Complete the contest entry form and submit it with art entry.
- Parent or guardian signature required on contest entry form.
- **Coloring sheets, digital art and photography are NOT accepted.**

Deadlines:

Entries received by:

VFW Auxiliary – March 31

Department – April 15

National Headquarters – May 5

Official form, details on requirements and contest rules can be found in MALTA Member Resources or on the VFW Auxiliary website.

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 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.

Project Examples

- Marching in patriotic holiday parades.
- Help veterans, service members and their families with yard work or household repairs.
- Sending cards or small gifts to the VFW National Home to support families.
- Planning card- and letter-writing events to send mail to our troops overseas or veterans in VA facilities.

- Organizing assembly, collection and delivery of care packages for troops.
- Teaching computer skills to veterans.
- Visiting and volunteering in VA and non-VA facilities. Raising funds for a community

Youth Group Examples for VFW Auxiliary Sponsorship

- Youth sports teams and church youth groups
- School clubs and after-school programs
- Home-school associations
- Youth community service groups
- Service learning and civic engagement departments in high schools

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 X, posting on Facebook, instantly sending pictures on Instagram and Snapchat and subscribing to YouTube channels. Get online and see what's new!

VFW Scout of the Year Program

Some of our earliest ties to the community involve youth groups and perhaps none are stronger or more lasting than the relationship between the VFW and America's scouting organizations.

The VFW Scout of the Year program recognizes members of the Boy Scouts of Scouting America and Girl Scouts of the Girl Scouts of America for their standout citizenship, patriotism and love of country.

Official form, details and rules are located at:
<https://www.vfw.org/community/youth-and-education/scout-of-the-year>

YOUTH ACTIVITIES PROGRAM AWARDS

Awards for Auxiliaries:

1. Most creative and/or unique activity and/or event of the VFW Auxiliary working with a youth group.
 - Citation and \$25 to one VFW Auxiliary in each of the 10 Program Divisions for the most creative and/or unique activity and/or event of the VFW Auxiliary working with a youth group.

Entry form is required and available in MALTA Member Resources.

VFW Auxiliaries must send the required entry form to the Department Youth Activities Chairman by March 31, 2026 for judging.

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, 2026 for judging.

Citations will be mailed directly to the winning VFW Auxiliaries from National Headquarters and money will be deposited into the winning VFW Auxiliary account after the 2026 VFW Auxiliary National Convention.

Awards for Departments and Department Chairmen:

1. \$25 VFW Store gift certificate to one Department Youth Activities Chairman in each of the 10 Program Divisions for the best promotion of the reading buddy initiative.

Winners will be announced and awards will be presented at the 2026 VFW Auxiliary National Convention in Reno, Nevada.

2. The Outstanding Performance Award and Second-Place Outstanding Performance Award will be awarded in each of the 10 Program Divisions based on the criteria on page 5 and for the promotion of the Program goals listed at the top of page 64.

Winners will be announced and awards will be presented at the 2026 VFW Auxiliary National Convention in Reno, Nevada.