

## 2026–2027 PARTICIPATION GUIDE

### 1. PATRIOT’S PEN — GRADES 6–8

**Theme:** “What a Veteran Taught Me About America”

**Entry:** Original written essay, 300–400 words

**Deadline:** October 31, 2026

**National First-Place Award:** \$5,000

Eligible students include sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students enrolled in public, private, or parochial schools, as well as eligible home-schooled students. The essay must be the student’s own work, written in English, and responsive to the annual theme. Poetry is not accepted.

### 2. VOICE OF DEMOCRACY — GRADES 9–12

**Theme:** “What a Veteran Taught Me About America”

**Entry:** Original 3–5 minute recorded audio essay in MP3 format, plus typed essay

**Deadline:** October 31, 2026

**National First-Place Scholarship:** \$35,000

Eligible students include students in grades 9–12 enrolled in public, private, or parochial high schools or eligible home-study programs. The recording must be delivered in the contestant’s own voice and in English. Video, music, singing, poetry, and sound effects are not permitted.

### RULES COMMON TO BOTH STUDENT COMPETITIONS

Student work must be original and the product of the contestant’s own thinking. Inappropriate use of ChatGPT or other artificial-intelligence tools is not permitted under VFW National rules. Teachers, counselors, or parents may assist with proofreading for punctuation, grammar, and spelling, but the ideas and content must remain the student’s own.

Judging is anonymous. Students should not place their name, school, address, or other identifying information within the essay itself. Personal information belongs on the entry form.

A completed official entry form, including the required parent or guardian certification, must accompany the entry. Students may enter only one VFW Post competition in a program during the contest year.

Schools or classes conducting their own Patriot’s Pen or Voice of Democracy competition may forward one winner for every 15 participating students to the sponsoring VFW Post.

Individual students may also enter directly through a participating Post.

### **3. SMART/MAHER VFW NATIONAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION TEACHER AWARD**

**Categories:** K–5 | Grades 6–8 | Grades 9–12

**Deadline:** October 31, 2026

Eligible nominees must be current certified or licensed K–12 teachers. Previous National VFW Teacher Award winners are not eligible.

Nomination packages include the completed and signed entry form and at least a one-page résumé documenting the teacher's experience. Supporting documentation may be included, with the entire documentation package limited to five pages including the résumé. A head-and-shoulders photograph should also be included when available.

Teacher candidates are evaluated on four equally weighted areas:

**Citizenship • Innovation • Resources • Passion**

Each participating VFW Post may advance one teacher in each grade category to District competition. District winners may advance to the Department of New York and, ultimately, to National judging.

### **HOW TO PARTICIPATE**

1. **Select the program.** Students choose Patriot's Pen or Voice of Democracy according to grade level; schools and community members may nominate deserving teachers for the Smart/Maher Award.
2. **Obtain the current entry form and rules.** Visit [vfw.org/YouthScholarships](https://vfw.org/YouthScholarships) for Patriot's Pen and Voice of Democracy, or [vfw.org/TeacherOfTheYear](https://vfw.org/TeacherOfTheYear) for the Teacher Award.
3. **Coordinate with a participating local VFW Post.** The Post will provide its contact information and tell participants whether entries should be delivered in person, by approved electronic means, or through the VFW's Scholars App where available.
4. **Submit the complete entry no later than October 31, 2026.** Do not submit entries directly to VFW National Headquarters.

## LOCAL SPONSORING VFW POST

VFW Post Name & Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Submission Address/Instructions: \_\_\_\_\_

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DISTRICT 2 Point of Contact is:

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