THE AMERICAN LEGION, DEPARTMENT OF VIRGINIA

MIDDLE SCHOOL ESSAY CONTEST - 07 October 2026

"I LIKE LIVING IN THE UNITED STATES BECAUSE…"

Eligibility:
Open to all accredited Middle School Students at participating schools, Public, Private, or Parochial within the sponsoring jurisdiction of established American Legion Posts in the Department of Virginia. Home-schooled children are eligible to compete *provided* the Division Superintendent, his/her assistant, or other designated person of the public school system certifies on the attached Declaration Form, the student's grade level and their adherence to contest rules. It shall be the responsibility of the home schooler's parents to contact the sponsoring American Legion Post and have the above certifications completed.

Rules:

- Each essay **MUST** start with the phrase: "**I like living in THE United States because**…"
- Each essay is to be handwritten on the front side of one 8 1/2" X 11" page of lined notebook paper (typed or computer-generated essays **will be allowed** for students with disabilities) meeting the following requirements:
  - ✓ The digital essay must be under 160 words.
  - ✓ The teacher of the student must certify that the essay received was the work of the student author.
  - ✓ The essay is to be written by the competing Middle School Student at their desk in school (during structured class time if home-schooled), not at home.

Judging:

- Middle School – The competing school's Language Arts/English/Civics Department will judge each entry on originality, sincerity, and the student's ability to convey thought. The Language Arts/English/Civics Department may add such additional criteria as composition, spelling, and proper punctuation. **ONLY ONE** essay should be forwarded to the sponsoring Post.
- Post Level – The winning essay from each Middle School will be mailed to the sponsoring American Legion Post Contest Chairman (his/her name and address appear on the attached Declaration Form). It is suggested that each Post's Executive Board/Committee or contest Chairman, with a committee of at least three judges, select the best essay. **ONLY ONE** essay should be forwarded to the District.
- District Level – It is suggested that each District will convene a panel of at least three judges, chaired by their District's Americanism or Essay Contest Chairman to select the best essay. **ONLY ONE** essay should be submitted per District to the Department.
- Department Level – the Department Americanism Chairman will convene a panel of judges, at the Department Spring Conference, consisting of members of the Americanism Committee and/or other professionals, who will make the final selections.

Timeline:

- Middle School/Home School – Each participating Middle School/Home School should mail their winning essay and Declaration Form to the sponsoring American Legion Post no later than **December 15, 2026**.
- Posts – Each Post will judge and mail their winning essay to their District Americanism Chair or Middle School Essay Contest Chair to arrive before their District's Spring Conference in **January 2027.**
- Districts – Each participating District will mail their winning essay with the attached Declaration Form to Americanism Committee Chair, John Schenk, 406 E. Randall Ave, Norfolk, VA. 23503, **to arrive no later than January 20, 2027**. Winners will be announced at the Department Winter Conference **22-24 January 2027.**

Awards:

- **Post Level:**
  - ✓ Each Middle School Language Arts/English/Civics Department that sends a winning essay will receive an American Legion "Certificate of Participation" signed by the Post Commander and the Essay Chair along with a $50.00 check for the school's use.
  - ✓ Each winning essay student at the Post Level is presented with an American Legion "Certificate of Appreciation" signed by the Post Commander and the Post's Essay Chair along with a $50.00 check.
  - ✓ The winning essay student's teacher receives a $25.00 check from the sponsoring Post to be used to assist in the purchase of classroom materials.
- **District Level:**
  - ✓ The winning essay student from your District receives an American Legion "Certificate of Appreciation" signed by your District Commander and Americanism Chair or Essay Contest Chair.
  - ✓ The winning essay student receives a $50.00 check.
  - ✓ The winning essay student's Language Arts/English/Civics teacher receives a $50.00 check to go toward assisting in purchasing supplies and materials for their school's department.
- **Department Level**:
  - ✓ The First Place Winner will receive a $250.00 check.
  - ✓ The Second Place Winner will receive a $100.00 check.
  - ✓ The Third Place Winner will receive a $50.00 check.
  - ✓ The First, Second and Third place winning essay student's teacher will receive a $50.00 check to be used to assist in his/her purchase of classroom materials.

DECLARATION FORM MIDDLE SCHOOL ESSAY CONTEST

Certification by Student:

I certify that no assistance was received from any teacher, peers, or family member in preparing this essay and that this work is entirely my original.

Student's Name:

_____

(Please Print)

Signature: _____

Parent's Name: _____

(Please Print)

Parent's Signature: _____

Certification by Teacher:

This certifies that the attached essay was written entirely in class by:

_____,

(Please Print the Student's Name)

STUDENT ATTENDING: _____

(Name of Middle School)

_____.

(School's Address with Zip Code)

This essay was written during the school week of _____.

Class Subject Name: _____

Class Teacher's Name: _____

(Please Print)

Class Teacher's Signature: _____

Certification by Principal or Department Head or Superintendent or Designee, if Home Schooled: This essay was judged best by faculty representatives of this school on the criteria of originality, sincerity, and ability to convey thought out of a total of (#) _____ essays submitted.

Name and Title: _____
(Please Print)

Signature: _____

Please return the selected essay and this completed form to:

American Legion Post (Sponsoring Post number)
Attn: Middle School Essay Contest
(Address)