



2026

DEPARTMENT OF ILLINOIS

AMERICANISM ESSAY CONTEST

2026 Essay Subject & Title:
**What are the Core
American Values?**



Sponsored by:

**THE
AMERICAN
LEGION
DEPARTMENT
OF ILLINOIS**

**THE
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DEPARTMENT
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**THE SONS
OF THE
AMERICAN
LEGION
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OF ILLINOIS**

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The 2026 Essay Contest Subject & Title is:

The American Legion - Department of Illinois, American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion are co-sponsors of this AMERICANISM ESSAY CONTEST.

Its purpose is to aid the schools of Illinois in the teaching of AMERICANISM and GOOD CITIZENSHIP.

THREE CLASSES

The contest is divided into the following three classes.

CLASS I - 7th and 8th grades

CLASS II - 9th and 10th grades

CLASS III - 11th and 12th grade

All Illinois School students in the 7th and 8th grades and Junior and Senior High School are invited to participate in this contest. All contestants must be a lawful permanent resident of the United States of America and a bona fide student in a Junior or Senior High School. Home schooled will be competing at their own grade level according to age. Eligible participants in the contest shall be citizens or lawful permanent residents of the United States. Competition will be on a Post, Unit or Squadron level and continue on to the Auxiliary District and Division level. Division 1st place winners in each class will compete for the following State Awards.

AWARDS

CLASS III	1st	Place	\$1200.00 Scholarship
	2nd	Place	\$ 700.00 Scholarship
	3rd	Place	\$ 400.00 Scholarship
	4th	Place	\$ 375.00 Scholarship
	5th	Place	\$ 300.00 Scholarship
CLASS II	1st	Place	\$200.00 Cash Award
	2nd	Place	\$175.00 Cash Award
	3rd	Place	\$150.00 Cash Award
	4th	Place	\$125.00 Cash Award
	5th	Place	\$100.00 Cash Award
CLASS I	1st	Place	\$200.00 Cash Award
	2nd	Place	\$175.00 Cash Award
	3rd	Place	\$150.00 Cash Award
	4th	Place	\$125.00 Cash Award
	5th	Place	\$100.00 Cash Award

DEADLINES FOR ENTRIES

The essay must reach the local American Legion Post, American Legion Auxiliary Unit, or SAL Squadron on or before **FEBRUARY 6, 2026** (first Friday in February)

ESSAYS MUST BE SENT TO THE LOCAL POST, UNIT OR SQUADRON!

Essays received from schools **MUST** be judged by ****Post, Unit or Squadron** and only the 1st place winning essay from each Class forwarded by **March 1st** to the respective **District AUXILIARY Chairman**. District AUXILIARY Chairman judge essays and send 1st Place winners to the respective **Division AUXILIARY Chairman by April 1st**. Division AUXILIARY Chairman judge essays and send 1st Place winners to **Department AUXILIARY Chairman by May 1st**. Names and addresses may be obtained by calling Department Auxiliary Headquarters - (309)-663-9366 *****Reminder: ONLY ONE ENTRY PER CLASS PER POST NUMBER IS SENT ON TO THE DISTRICT CHAIRMAN.***

CONTEST RULES

IDENTIFICATION: Essay entry must include —

- Title page with Essay subject name on it
- Student's name, home address (incl. city/state/zip), phone number and email.
- Parent (or legal guardian) name & phone #
- Grade in school
- Name of school
- Name of sponsoring Post, Unit or Squadron.

THIS INFORMATION MUST BE ON COVER PAGE

LENGTH: The essay shall be no more than 500 words in length (*not counting a, an, and, the*).

FORMAT: The essay may be either typed on a typewriter or through Word Processing or written in ink on regular theme paper. No decorative borders, pictures or other graphics. ***PAGES MUST BE NUMBERED AT THE CENTER BOTTOM, STARTING WITH FIRST PAGE OF ESSAY AND PAPER CLIPPED TOGETHER(NO STAPLES!)* - DO NOT NUMBER THE COVER PAGE!**

IMPORTANT: All essays must be submitted to a local American Legion Post, American Legion Auxiliary Unit or Sons of The American Legion Squadron.

What are the Core American Values?

BASIS FOR JUDGING

		Points - Total	
1.	Content		
A.	Creativity, use of original subject matter, Presentation	25	
B.	Relation to topic	15	
C.	Essay must be factual	10	50
2.	Organization of Subject Matter		
A.	Unity (avoid irrelevant matter)	10	
B.	Emphasis (good proportion and arrangement of parts)	10	
C.	Coherence (clearness)	10	30
3.	Correct Usage		
A.	Choice of words (free from overused expressions)	10	
B.	Effective sentences (correct grammar, spelling, punctuation and neatness)	10	20
TOTAL			100

PRINCIPLES OF AMERICANISM

The characteristic which distinguishes our form of government from others is the recognition of the truth that the inherent and fundamental rights of its people are derived from God and not from governments, dictators or majorities.

These inalienable rights, which are the gifts to its people from their Creator, are Freedom of Worship; Freedom of Speech and Press; Freedom of Assemblage; Freedom to Work in such occupation as the experience, training and qualifications of its people may enable them to secure and hold; Freedom to enjoy the fruits of their work, which means the protection of the property rights; and the Right to pursue their happiness so long as they do not harm others in the pursuit of happiness.

AMERICANISM -- DEFINITIONS

AMERICANISM is Love of America -- loyalty to its institutions as the best yet devised by its people to secure life, liberty, individual dignity and happiness; and the willingness to defend our Flag against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

AMERICANISM is a vital, active living force, Americanism means peace, strength, the will and the courage to live as free people in a free land. It means a friendly hand to people everywhere who respect our institutions and our thinking. It is not a word. It is a cause, a way of life, a challenge and a hope in this world of turmoil.

AMERICANISM is an ideal of loyal patriotism, religious tolerance, righteous freedom, fearless courage, honest integrity, abiding faith in the commanding destiny of the United States, and a fathomless love for the principles which led our forefathers to found this country.

AMERICANISM is complete and unqualified loyalty to the ideals of government set forth in the Bill of Rights, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution of the United States. It is respect for, and ready obedience to, duly constituted authority and the laws of the land. It is freedom without license, religion without bigotry, charity without bias or race hatred, love of Flag and a readiness to defend that for which it stands against every alien and subversive influence from without or within.

AMERICANISM is an unfailing love of country, loyalty to its institutions and ideals; eagerness to defend it against all enemies; individual allegiance of the Flag; and a desire to secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and posterity.

Official State Song

"Illinois"

By the rivers gently flowing,
Illinois, Illinois,
O'er thy prairies verdant growing,
Illinois, Illinois,
Comes an echo on the breeze,
Rustling through the leafy trees, and its mellow tones are these,
Illinois, Illinois
And its mellow tones are these, Illinois.

From a wilderness of prairies,
Illinois, Illinois,
Straight thy way and never varies,
Illinois, Illinois,
Till upon the inland sea,
Strands thy great commercial tree, turning all the world to thee,
Illinois, Illinois
Turning all the world to thee, Illinois.
When you heard your country calling,
Illinois, Illinois,
Where the shot and shell were falling,
Illinois, Illinois,
When the Southern host withdrew,
Pitting Gray against the Blue, There were none more brave than you,
Illinois, Illinois
There were none more brave than you, Illinois.

Not without thy wondrous story,
Illinois, Illinois,
Can be writ the nation's glory,
Illinois, Illinois,
On the record of thy years,

Abraham Lincoln's name appears,
Grant and Logan, and our tears,
Illinois, Illinois,
Grant and Logan, and our tears,
Illinois.



THE AMERICAN'S CREED

I BELIEVE IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AS A GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE, WHOSE JUST POWERS ARE DERIVED FROM THE CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED. A DEMOCRACY IN A REPUBLIC: A SOVEREIGN NATION OF MANY SOVEREIGN STATES. A PERFECT UNION, ONE AND INSEPARABLE, ESTABLISHED UPON THOSE PRINCIPLES OF FREEDOM, EQUALITY, JUSTICE AND HUMANITY FOR WHICH AMERICAN PATRIOTS SACRIFICED THEIR LIVES AND FORTUNES.

I THEREFORE BELIEVE IT IS MY DUTY TO MY COUNTRY TO LOVE IT, TO SUPPORT ITS CONSTITUTION, TO OBEY ITS LAWS, TO RESPECT ITS FLAG, AND TO DEFEND IT AGAINST ALL ENEMIES.

(Authorized Version)