

## Youth Activities Program

### January 2026 Promotion

#### Illustrating America Contest

Currently, we have just a little over two months to follow up with those who we have handed out the **Illustrating America Art Contest** information and applications. It is very important to make sure they are reminded of the deadline to submit entries to your Auxiliary is **March 31, 2026. If you plan on doing a District Judging for all the entries for your District, please set up the date and judges now.** They must be sent to me by **April 15, 2026.** I need time to have them judged and sent to National Headquarters by **May 5, 2026.** Double check to make sure it is the newly updated application that they are using along with the child's name, age, and grade level must be written on the back of the artwork. Please make sure you are reading and following the size of the canvas or the art paper. There are size dimensions listed in the rules. Also, when shipping, if you roll it up and put it in a tube it makes it difficult to get it to flatten out without damaging the art/picture. If you are having problems getting into the schools, think outside the box. Check with local art museums, the libraries, church groups, scouting groups, friends, and family.

Please do NOT mail to the Department Office. My address is:

Gaylene Ramos

2305 E Marshall St

Turlock, CA 95380-4319

#### Marie Klugow Scholarship

The 13-page packet can be found on the VFWA Department website, [vfwauxca.org](http://vfwauxca.org) – Members Only > Department Headquarters Information Resources.

Pages 1 and 2 have the four parts of information that you need to know for this scholarship.

- **Part I – Application Criteria**
- **Part 11 – Awards** – gives a great explanation on what it entails and procedures.
- **Part III – Application Procedure** – Deadline for the application to be received in Department. Address to mail the application to. Any questions should be directed to Department headquarters 916 – 509 – 8724 or 916 – 818 – 8595
- **Part IV – Additional Requirements** – Applicants 6 responsibilities to complete the process.

Looking forward to the announcement of the 3 recipients for the year 2026.

#### Patriotism Through Literacy

Now is the time to contact your schools, libraries, and teachers to set up a read in for Martin Luther King Day and Presidents Day . **March 2, 2026** is Dr. Seuss Day which falls on a Monday. Something could be set up at the local library for that day. March 2 will be a busy day at the local schools. See how you can help. Maybe do a basket of books for the class. Have your members purchase a book off the list and bring it to your meeting to make a basket to donate to the class. The more the merrier. If you have duplicate books donated, then make up a basket for your local library.

Ask your local teachers if any of their students need a **Reading Buddy** for that student who may be struggling with reading comprehension, etc.

### **Awards for Auxiliaries**

A reminder of the date to submit your auxiliary application for the Youth Activities Award.

1. Most outstanding activity and / or event of youth reading to veterans and / or veterans reading to youth.
  - Citation and \$25.00 to one VFW Auxiliary in each of the 10 Program Divisions for the most outstanding activity and / or event of youth reading to veterans and / or veterans reading to youth.

The entry form for this award is attached below and your completed entry should be sent to me by email: [grmagaylene1953@sbcglobal.net](mailto:grmagaylene1953@sbcglobal.net) by March 31, 2026 for judging.

### **Citations**

Remember to use the Award / Recognition Citations listed on Malta under Member – Resources – Youth Activities for Youth groups and Individuals who have shown support, promotion of veterans and their families.

### **Youth Acts of Kindness Certificate**

A certificate was created this year for Acts of Kindness. You can find it in Malta – Member resources – Youth Activities. The more we are seen promoting the great things our young people and families are doing; it helps us to build that bridge between our organization and the community.

### **Illustrating America Art Obligation**

If your Auxiliary has not made their donation to the Illustrating America Art program, please make sure it is brought on your auxiliary floor and added to your yearly obligations. If God puts it on your heart to give a generous donation, it will help build up the account for the future years ahead. We need at least \$600.00 per year to keep this program solvent without creating a hardship on the chairman for the awards. This is the fourth year for this program, and we want to make it as successful as the Patriotic Art program. The younger students are our future Patriotic Art contestants. We need to do everything possible to make it a success.

I want to thank the following auxiliaries for their donation to the program:

D2 9557

D10 1525

D13 2600 & 5059

If you have sent in a donation and do not see it on the Dashboard, please follow up with the Department Treasurer.

Please see the attachments from our National Ambassador, Shannon Stanley.



**Youth Activities Promotion #3 | January 2026**  
**Shannon Stanley**  
**2025-2026 National Youth Activities Ambassador**  
[Stanleyshannon98@gmail.com](mailto:Stanleyshannon98@gmail.com)

**Promoting our Illustrating America Contest**

Did you know that art can be therapeutic for youth as well as a wonderful way for our children to express themselves and show their creativity? I am encouraging all of our members to work on promoting our Illustrating America Contest. The Illustrating America Contest is open to our elementary and junior high school students, with three age groups: kindergarten – second grade, third – fifth grade and sixth – eighth grade. I do know how hard it is to get into the schools, so once again I challenge you to take information to your local art studios, churches, day cares and scouting groups and to always think outside the box. Please check out the rules and regulations; remember that the information for the Illustrating America contest can be found on the Member Resources page on MALTA and on our National website.



**Upcoming Dates and Deadlines**

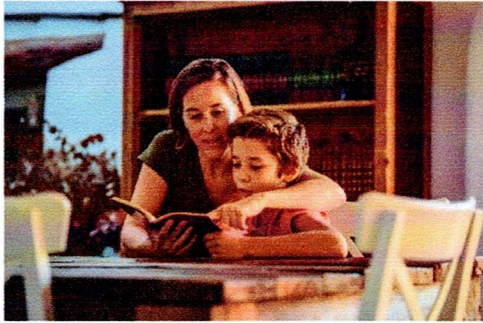
- **March 31:** Student entries are due to participating/sponsoring VFW Auxiliary for judging.
- **April:** (Optional) First-place winner from each participating/sponsoring VFW Auxiliary due to VFW Auxiliary District for judging.
- **April 15:** First-place winner from each participating/sponsoring VFW Auxiliary or optional VFW Auxiliary District judging due to the VFW Auxiliary Department for judging.

Please remember that artwork is the property of the student and must be returned immediately to the student if not advancing to the next level.

Please remember to follow all the rules and regulations when promoting our contests and that everything you need, from the entry form and certificates to a press release can be found in MALTA Member Resources under the Youth Activities tab and on the National website.

## Reading Buddies

Open a book, and you can take a child's imagination soaring. Through this year's focus, Reading Buddies, Auxiliary members have been able to make a difference with children's reading

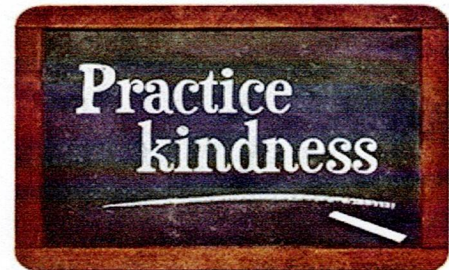


comprehension. For anyone who may be interested, see page 62 of the Program Book for ideas and always make sure to get proper permission from schools and parents and require that parents/guardians also attend any Reading Buddy Post events. Remember to also find out what interests students have and what reading materials they would enjoy.

## Youth Acts of Kindness

Showing kindness is one of the most important things we can pass down to young people. This year we have created a Youth Acts of Kindness Certificate which is given to youth caught in the acts of kindness. Find these certificates in MALTA Member Resources.

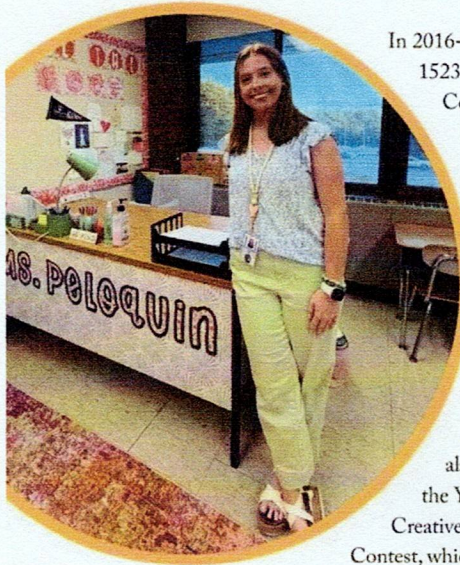
I want to say thank you to all of the Auxiliaries that are working hard with our youth. When working with our youth, we are building a bridge between the VFW Auxiliary and our community. The more we are seen promoting the wonderful things we can do for young people and their families, the more we ensure future members of the Auxiliary.





## ILLUSTRATING AMERICA

## ILLUSTRATING AMERICA COMES FULL CIRCLE: FORMER WINNER, NOW TEACHER, SHARES CONTEST WITH CLASS



In 2016-2017, Auxiliary 1523 in Putnam, Connecticut held the first-ever Illustrating America contest. It was created to encourage artists in grades K-8 to show their view of America while also promoting the Young American Creative Patriotic Art Contest, which students

would be able to enter upon reaching high school. Illustrating America would go on to be a Department of Connecticut contest and, as of 2019-2020, a National contest, which it has remained since.

That first year, there were more than 100 student entries between Putnam Elementary and Putnam Middle schools. The first-place winner for grades 6-8 was Mackenzie Peloquin, an eighth grader whose watercolor painting of silhouetted people against a twilight sky depicted an America of peaceful protest. In her own words: "The intention of my piece was to spread a message of peace and unity in America." Mackenzie went on to graduate both middle and high school as salutatorian (her identical twin sister, Brooke, was valedictorian) and to study elementary education at Endicott College in Massachusetts.

Now she is back at Putnam Elementary School – this time, as a fourth grade teacher. And she is preparing her

own students to enter the Illustrating America contest. In October, Peloquin sat for an interview in her brightly-decorated classroom during the tail end of Spirit Week, ahead of Halloween, during which she talked about her childhood experience with the contest, her first year commanding her own classroom and those who have inspired her along the way.

"My third grade teacher was Ms. Simanski; I actually went back and did an internship with her in college," says Peloquin. "She made her classroom very safe and welcoming. I made a lot of friends that year and she did a lot of hands-on, really engaging projects that made me excited about learning at the time."

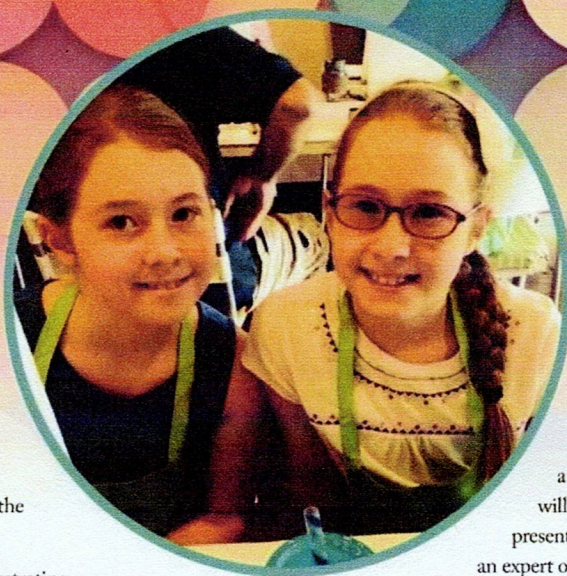
Peloquin hopes to inspire her students the same way, giving them room to be creative while also stressing that perfection isn't required, including when working on their Illustrating America entries.

"I encourage them not to worry about making mistakes. If they're putting in an effort, it doesn't have to be perfect. It just has to be their best. Start and see what happens; you usually end up with something good by the end!"

In middle school, Peloquin dealt with insecurity in her after-school art club, as art was a challenge that did not come naturally to her. This made winning Illustrating America all the more exciting.

"I remember comparing myself to the other kids in art club and thinking my (work) was not as good as theirs. I would get frustrated and start over a million times. It was a good self-esteem boost to win the competition... I remember working really hard on it in art club!" When asked about her win for an E-Newsletter "Where Are They Now?" article in 2022, Peloquin noted, "Placing in the competition was one of the first times I had placed in any contest... I was so excited to tell my friends and family that I won because it felt good to be recognized for





the hard work I put into the project. Winning gave me a sense of confidence and made me feel like I can accomplish the things I set my mind to."

She hopes participating in Illustrating America this year will bring the same sense of accomplishment and confidence to her students, some of whom are dealing with difficult home lives or academic struggles, and many of whom came to her not reading at grade level. "I think it's important for students to be able to express themselves and have an outlet for all the many things that are going on in their lives in a healthy way," Peloquin explains. "Just to have something they can take ownership of and be proud of, to feel like they can accomplish anything."

While Peloquin has danced from an early age and tried her hand at ceramics in college, she doesn't consider herself an artist today, but she is still creative and has therefore incorporated her art skills in the decorating of her classroom. When teachers are starting out, their classrooms are bare. Peloquin wanted hers to be inviting, interesting and engaging, to inspire students to do their best in a clean, creative, comfortable space.

"She's obsessive-compulsive with detail," says her mother, Kris Allard, also a Putnam Elementary School teacher.


Working alongside her mother has been wonderful, says Peloquin, who watched her mom carefully when growing and playing school in the basement, which involved "bossing Brooke around." (Brooke Peloquin, who now works in the robotics field, placed twice in the VFW's Patriot's Pen competition and won second place in the VFW's Voice of Democracy competition.)

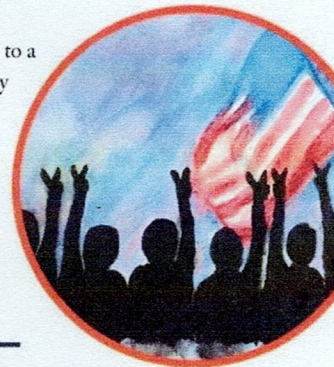
Peloquin's students are currently doing a lesson on maps (geography and reading maps) and they will do a unit on

the states later in the year. She will assign each student a state to cover, which they will research, do a project on and present to their peers. "They become an expert on their own state and then they share with each other." The inspiration for this

came, in part, from her own elementary education, especially "the student-led part." When she was about their age, one of her favorite projects was on the Oregon Trail – "We made little journals like we were going west!" – and for a grade five presentation, everyone was assigned a different historical figure to research and bring to life. "I dressed up as Martha Washington," says Peloquin, who notes that her students say the Pledge of Allegiance every morning.

Peloquin looks forward to seeing what her students come up with for their Illustrating America entries, which will be collected by Auxiliary 1523 Secretary-Treasurer Lisa Salisbury. Will one of her students follow in her footsteps and win this year? Time will tell!

Get ready, student entries are due to a participating/sponsoring Auxiliary VFW Auxiliary by March 31. Learn more about this contest here.  NP/Illustrating America Contest creator when she served as National Youth Activities Ambassador in 2019-2020



**PREVIOUS PAGE:** Mackenzie Peloquin poses by her desk at the start of the school year; this is her first year teaching fourth grade. **TOP:** Mackenzie Peloquin (left) won the VFW Auxiliary's Illustrating America contest in middle school, while twin sister Brooke (right) placed twice in the VFW Patriot's Pen competition. **ABOVE:** Peloquin's winning artwork.