

AMERICAN LEGION
ARNOLD HELTNESS POST 403
ROCHELLE, IL 61068



Date: January 5, 2026

Subject: 2026 American Legion Americanism Essay Contest:

"What are the Core American Values?"

To: School Representative

The Illinois American Legion is happy to announce the Department of Illinois "American Legion Essay Contest" for 2026. This is the 10th year it is being offered in Rochelle. The contest provides an opportunity for students to research what it means to be an American Citizen and think about what is really important to keep America strong for the future.

American Legion Post 403, Rochelle, is looking forward to 2026 with many elementary schools and the high school participating.

There are three Classes: Class I for grades 7 & 8, Class II for grades 9 & 10 and Class III for grades 11 & 12. Cash Prizes will be awarded to the 1st Place and 2nd Place essay at each elementary school and each Class at the High School level. The best essay at each Class level; I, II, III locally will be forwarded to the next Legion level to compete with other schools. The essays are judged at four different levels in the Illinois Legion Organization; Local, District, Division and State and prizes are awarded for the best essay at each level.

Every year of the contest, we have many really good essays that make judging difficult. Some of the students really put some thought into their past presentations and a little encouragement from an adult in their life is noticeable in the end result! Last year we had 67 essays turned in! Two of our essayists went on to win at higher levels!

This is an opportunity for young people to pause for a moment and think about their American Heritage. All participants will receive a reward for their essay. In passed years, this has been an ice cream sundae from Culvers! This will be continued this year! All essays will be returned to the individual school. The winning essays will be forwarded to the next level. We will ask for a Photo with the winners for piblication in the "News Leader".

We are in a time when young people can be bombarded with all kinds of ideas about who is considered an American Patriot and who or what values have made contributions to make our great Country what it is.

"What are the Core American Values?"

PLEASE SEE THE REVERSE SIDE OF THIS LETTER FOR SOME GUIDANCE:

AMERICAN LEGION
ARNOLD HELTNESS POST 403
ROCHELLE, IL 61068



This is our 10th year of offering this program. We have had over 400 essays turned in during this time!

While this program is designed to limit effort required by teachers or advisors, we can certainly see the effect if each teacher takes a moment to present the topic in class and encourage a little discussion. But it is not required!

Attached to this letter is the official contest brochure with a description of the contest, the rules, the awards for winners in each class at the State level and dates of the judging at the various levels. The due date locally is **February 6th**, the first Friday in February. The essays will be collected the following **Monday, February 9th**, by a Legion Member from Post 403. The essays will be judged by appointed Legion Members and the winners announced in March.

As important as the content is of each essay, the essays are also judged on neatness, following the rules, spelling and punctuation. Mistakes in numbering the pages or leaving out required information on the title page are sufficient to disqualify an entry. So this is also an exercise in accuracy! Even if an essay is the best in content, if there are violations of these rules, we cannot forward to the next level and the essay will be disqualified. The Program brochure may be copied as many times as necessary so that each STUDENT HAS A COPY.

Please! Express the importance of the **COVER PAGE!** The best essay cannot be a winner if the format isn't followed! A sample is provided with the example in **black print**.

Also, if a student's parent will not allow the address to be included, we cannot forward the winning essay. One school last year listed the school address as the student's address for all students. That's OK locally, but will need the student's address later if the essay is to be forwarded for future competition.

*Included for teacher/counselor's review is the "Grading the essay on merit" to show how the judges reach their decision.

Post 403 looks forward to participation from all schools this year and are excited to provide this opportunity!

For questions or more information please contact:

Steve Korth
815-766-0208
skorth62@gmail.com

John Gruben
815-761-6883
jgruben@comcast.net