

# voice of democracy



## WHAT IS THE VOICE OF DEMOCRACY PROGRAM?

Since 1947, the Voice of Democracy has been the Veterans of Foreign Wars' (VFW's) premier scholarship program. Each year, more than 50,000 high school students compete for more than \$2.3 million in scholarships and incentives. Students compete by writing and recording a broadcast script on an annual patriotic theme. This year's theme is, *Is There Pride in Serving in Our Military?*

## WHY SHOULD I ENTER?

Prizes and scholarships are awarded at the local, district, state and national level. Department (State) winners receive an all-expense paid trip to Washington, D.C., March 3-7, 2012, to tour the city, meet our nation's leaders, be honored by the VFW and its Ladies Auxiliary and receive their portion of \$151,000 in national awards, the top scholarship being \$30,000.

## THE RULES

### Who can enter?

The Voice of Democracy is open to students in grades 9-12, who are enrolled in a public, private or parochial high school or home study program in the United States, its territories and possessions; or in an overseas U.S. military/civilian dependent school. Foreign exchange students, students age 20 or over and previous Voice of Democracy first place state winners are ineligible.

### What do I need to enter?

Record your original 3-5 minute (+ or - 5 seconds max.) essay on a standard cassette tape or CD. One student per CD or cassette. Preferred format for CD's is the audio CD format. When burning your CD, make sure that "Create Audio CD" option (or similar) is selected so the program can properly convert your sound file and burn it to CD. After it has finished, be sure to play back your audio CD on a system other than your computer, such as a standard radio or car CD player, to verify that the conversion/burning process was successful. Label the recording, neatly typed essay and attach this completed entry form. Provide these items to your school/group competition or local VFW Post for judging. All recordings must be in your own voice. Hearing/speech impaired students should contact the Voice of Democracy National Office at (816) 968-1117 for special instructions. No music, singing, poetry or sound effects are allowed. The body of the essay must not identify you in any way, although the recording & typed essay should be labeled with your name, to show ownership. You may enter only one Voice of Democracy competition per year.

### Where do I submit my entry?

All entries begin at the Post level. The only exception is where schools/classes/youth groups have large numbers of students and wish to conduct their own competition, submitting one winner for each 15 students to the local VFW Post competition. Individual students may submit their entry directly to the Post providing they have not competed at a school/class competition.

One winner for every 15 entries from each Post advances to District and one District winner advances to the state (Department) competition. State winners are invited to Washington, D.C where their essays compete in the finals competition.

If you need help finding a participating VFW Post in your area, call (816) 968-1117, e-mail to [kharmer@vfw.org](mailto:kharmer@vfw.org) or visit our website at [www.vfw.org](http://www.vfw.org).

## 2011-12 OFFICIAL ENTRY FORM VOICE OF DEMOCRACY COMPETITION MUST BE COMPLETED BY ALL CONTESTANTS

Name: First, M.I., Last

Address

City, State, Zip

( )

Home Phone

E-mail

Date of Birth

Grade in School

School Name, City, State

First Name You'd Like on Your Badge

Jacket Size

## TO BE COMPLETED BY STUDENT'S PARENT/GUARDIAN

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

( )

Parent/Guardian's Daytime Phone

Parent/Guardian's E-mail

## I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE RULES (ON OPPOSITE SIDE)

I certify that I am the sole author of the enclosed audio/essay entry and that I have only entered the competition once. I understand that if it is found that I have entered any other Post's competition or used this essay for another VFW competition, I face elimination from the competition and will return any and all prizes or incentives awarded.

Signature of Student Participant

Date

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## OFFICIAL RULES FOR STUDENTS ADVANCING TO NATIONAL LEVEL

If selected as a first-place state winner, I have the consent of my parent/guardian and school to attend the Voice of Democracy National Finals in Washington, D.C. as a guest of the VFW National Organization.

I understand that state winners who do not attend as stated above will forfeit all rights to compete in the National Finals and will be replaced by their state's second place winner.

In the event my tape is selected for entry into the National Voice of Democracy Competition, I do hereby for myself, for my heirs, executors, administrators and assignees; waive, release and discharge all rights and claims which I have or which may hereafter accrue against the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) and/or the several Departments (state organizations) of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and their respective officers, agents, successors and assigns from any damages which may be sustained by me in connection with my participation in or association with the VFW Voice of Democracy Competition and/or arising out of my travel to and during the Competition. In the event of sickness, accident or injury in connection with the Competition, I consent to and accept the services of a duly licensed medical, surgical or dental specialist selected on my behalf and for such treatments, as they may deem necessary. I understand that VFW will not be liable for such treatment. I further understand that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States retains non-exclusive rights to use my tape, essay and likeness in the promotion and execution of the organization's programs and activities.

## TO BE COMPLETED BY THE VFW/AUXILIARY POST

I certify that this student is an authorized entry in our VFW Post Level Voice of Democracy Competition.

Post Commander's/Chairman's Signature

Post #

Ladies Auxiliary President's/Chairman's Signature

Post Address

City, State, Zip

No. of students participating

No. of winners advanced to District

Amt. of Post/Aux. scholarship awards \$

Amt. of Post/Aux. additional expenses (banquet, pins, etc.) \$

## TO BE COMPLETED BY THE VFW/AUXILIARY DISTRICT

I certify that the student named in the previous section is the duly selected winner of the Voice of Democracy Contest District Competition and is our sole entry into the Department finals.

District Chairman's Signature

Dist. #

Address

City, State, Zip

( )

Phone

E-mail

## TO BE COMPLETED BY THE VFW DEPARTMENT CHAIRMAN

I certify that the student named in the previous section is the duly selected first-place winner of the Voice of Democracy Department Competition, is our sole entry into the National Judging and will attend the National Finals in Washington, D.C.

Department Chairman's Signature

( )

Daytime Phone

( )

Fax

E-mail

The winner ☐ has been ☐ will be (check one) notified that they are the first place Department winner on \_\_\_\_\_. Note: National Headquarters will contact your winner after this date to make travel arrangements for them to be in Washington, D.C.

What is the deadline for my entry?

All entries competing at the Post level must be in the hands of that VFW Post by midnight, Nov. 1, 2011. It is the responsibility of the student to meet this deadline by submitting their entry to the proper location by ensuring it is a participating Post.

## WHAT ARE THE JUDGING CRITERIA?

Originality is worth 30 points:

Treatment of the theme should show imagination and human interest.

Content is worth 35 points:

Clearly express your ideas in an organized manner. Fully develop your theme and use transitions to move smoothly from one idea to another.

Delivery is worth 35 points:

Speak in a clear and credible manner.

## THE IMPACT OF THE VOICE OF DEMOCRACY

National finalist Stephanie D'Abruzzo Shemin is a graduate of Northwestern University in Speech and a performer with the Jim Henson Company's Muppets.

**"What VOD did was prepare me for college and the real world. I saw how I could find my place in this world."**

Past national winner Dr. Gary Belkin is a psychiatrist and ethicist at Harvard and Brown Medical Schools.

**"The whole Voice of Democracy program was an experience that is still with me."**

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NAASP) has again approved this contest for its National Advisory List of Contests and Activities.



**TARGET.**

**A Proud Sponsor**



Veterans of Foreign Wars & Ladies Auxiliary  
Kansas City, Missouri

816.968.1117

E-Mail: [kharmer@vfw.org](mailto:kharmer@vfw.org)

[www.vfw.org](http://www.vfw.org)

EMBLEM AND SUPPLY ORDER NO. 4420

## LOCAL VFW POST INFORMATION:

CONTACT: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

BEST TIME TO CALL: \_\_\_\_\_

ALTERNATE CONTACT: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

BEST TIME TO CALL: \_\_\_\_\_

# **VOICE OF DEMOCRACY**

## **FIRST PLACE 2011 NATIONAL WINNER**

**Kelsey Woo  
California**

**Kelsey Woo**, a senior at Harvard-Westlake School has been named the first place winner in the 2011 National Voice of Democracy Program and recipient of the \$30,000 T.C. Selman Memorial Scholarship Award provided by the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Kelsey plans a career in journalism, writing, music, classics, and possibly teaching. She was sponsored by VFW Post 10694 and Ladies Auxiliary in Santa Ana, California.

### **“Does My Generation Have a Role in America’s Future?”**

**By Kelsey Woo**

It is hot; obscenely hot. Suddenly, Bruce Springsteen’s voice blasts through the crackling heat, singing “Born in the USA.” It wakes the teenage boy. The first thing he sees when he opens his eyes is a picture of his little sister. For a moment, he is back in Nashville, waking up hungry for one of his mom’s famous Sunday breakfasts. Only something isn’t right. Where are those wonderful smells of coffee brewing and hash browns frying? And why is it still dark outside? As his eyes adjust, he remembers: he is not at home in his bed; he is in his barracks in Afghanistan. It is midnight, and his platoon is getting ready for a mission. When he opens his footlocker, a family photo reminds him to email his sister: her interview for West Point is tomorrow. Tennessee seems light years away as the young private spends his days and nights defending our nation. Forty eight hours later, two soldiers knock on the front door of a yellow house in Nashville. When the tall, blonde woman opens the door and sees the uniforms, she crumples to the ground, knowing, before a word is uttered, that her son is dead. This soldier was the boy next door, the boy who delivered your newspapers, the young man who cut your lawn. This fallen soldier proves that my generation is already playing a major role in America’s future. His unselfish sacrifice is a mirror of the best of my generation.

I want to remind everyone, that while I stand before you and deliver this speech; my generation is in Iraq and Afghanistan, boots on the ground, fighting a war that will determine America’s future. The news footage from Afghanistan is the Reality TV show that represents my generation; not Jersey Shore, not the Kardashians. Young Americans are fighting and dying on the battlefield, coming home to be fitted for artificial limbs, in order to defend democracy and our way of life. It is this generation of selfless young men and women that are playing a major role in America’s future. That is why my generation will not allow ourselves to be defined by the media as selfish, spoiled young adults.

Instead, my generation is ensured a role in determining our country’s future because we are defined by men like Corporal Matthew Bradford, who at 19 became a blind, double amputee when a roadside bomb in Iraq detonated. He learned to walk on prosthetic legs and has reenlisted; he is serving at Camp Lejeune where he works with wounded Marines to encourage them in their recovery. We are defined by women like Private Melissa Strock, who at the age of 19 lost both legs while serving in Iraq, when an IED exploded under her Humvee. With both legs severely injured, Private Strock crawled to the burning vehicle and rescued a fellow soldier. That is how my generation secures its role in America’s future, we never give up. We are defined by the courage of an Afghan girl, Bibi Aisha. At 13 she was sold into a forced marriage; when she tried to flee her nose and ears were cut off. She chose to seek justice against the Taliban and show the world her face. Now 18, she has come to America to start a new life. That is how my generation secures its role in America’s future, we never give up.

In every generation there is a defining moment. For our parents, it was the day President Kennedy was assassinated. For our older brothers and sisters, it was 9/11. Many wonder: will there be a defining moment for my generation? Is it yet to come? My answer is simple; it is already here. My generation will forever be defined by how we defeat the terrorists and win the war on terror. That is how my generation secures its role in America's future. We never give up.

It will take all these groups of young adults: from our soldiers fighting on the front lines to college bound young Americans, working in harmony to solidify our role as the foot soldiers, the first line of defense for America's future. And so, I offer the following challenge to my generation: in order to continue to have a significant role in our country's future, we must support each other. To my college bound peers I say: remember our brothers and sisters in the military; be aware of their sacrifice and email your Senator to improve the GI bill and ensure better education and job training once our bravest and best come home. However, my generation can only have a role in America's future by exercising our right to vote, to ensure that our voices are heard. Elect those who will protect, honor, and defend America's interests. We must do this in the name of all those generations before us who have fought and died protecting our country, so that they will not have died in vain. We must do this to honor those of my generation that have given so much and have already made the ultimate sacrifice. Finally, we must do this for that Private from Tennessee. He will not be home for Christmas, he will not see his sister begin her career at West Point; but he will live on as an inspiration for my generation, living and dying to protect America's future.