

Patriotism Through Literacy

RECOMMENDED READS

Updated: 2025-2026

Patriotism Through Literacy is a VFW Auxiliary **Youth Activities** initiative started in 2019, the purpose of which is to foster a love of reading while teaching students about America's past primarily through historical fiction and creative non-fiction, promoting both patriotism *and* literacy, in addition to encouraging empathy and broadening perspectives. The intended age range of readers/listeners of the books below spans from pre-k through grade 12.

In the world of children's literature, there is often talk of "mirrors and windows." In books labeled "mirrors," kid readers get to see themselves reflected in the main characters. In "windows," they see into the lives of characters they'd otherwise never know. That is why the books on our list of Recommended Reads not only showcase a number of periods in history from the Revolutionary War through post-9/11, they reflect a variety of character viewpoints: girls, boys, children, teens, adults, veterans, the children of veterans, etc., of all different backgrounds, cultures, colors, ethnicities, religions, American regions/states and abilities/disabilities.

The Recommended Reads are divided into **Historical Fiction** (fiction taking place in the past, set in the United States), **Americana and/or Educational** (fiction, non- or a mix of both, these books are about America's holidays, history, geography, government, parental deployment, etc., primarily for younger readers/listeners who may not be ready for more complex books yet, with additional titles for young children with a deployed or recently returned veteran parent), and **Creative Non-Fiction, Biography & Memoir** (biographies of important figures in American history, historical accounts from real people/events learned through interviews, letters, or diary entries, and memoirs of childhood that paint a distinct picture of America in the past). The list is periodically updated to include newly published works. While some classics appear among our Recommended Reads, most of these titles or series were published in the past 30 years, with many published within the last decade.

Note: The grade/age levels into which these are divided are suggestions (not rules) based on publishers' guidelines, school curriculums, reading/comprehension levels and story content.

SYMBOLS KEY:

*Indicates it has a character who is, or whose parent, grandparent, sibling etc. is, a veteran, deployed, about to be deployed, returning from deployment, MIA, or was Killed in Action.

^A Indicates that the book was not written for Young Adult readers; it is an adult book with crossover appeal that **mature teen readers** may enjoy/comprehend (discretion advised).

Underlining indicates that the author or co-author of the book is a veteran.

Ellipses... indicates that part of the book's title was redacted because it was too long, so please Google/search for the full title or ask a librarian or bookseller for the full title.

Patriotism Through Literacy

Recommended Reads

Preschool-Kindergarten

Historical Fiction:

**At the Mountain's Base* by Traci Sorell
Dandelions by Eve Bunting
This is a Rope: A Story from the Great Migration by Jacqueline Woodson
Fry Bread by Kevin Noble Maillard
Fairy Floss: The Sweet Story of Cotton Candy by Ann Ingalls
My Life as a Pioneer by Ann Matzke

Americana and/or Educational:

**Missing Momma* by Winsome Bingham, illustrated by Rahele Jomepour Bell
**Tuesday Tucks Me In* by Luis Carlos Montalvan
**Hero Mom* and **Hero Dad* by Melinda Hardin
**My Red Balloon* by Eve Bunting
**Home Again* by Dorinda Silver Williams
**Don't Forget, God Bless Our Troops* by Dr. Jill Biden
**Boyogi: How a Wounded Family Learned to Heal* by David Barclay Moore
**Jaylen's Christmas Wish* by Lavaille Lavette, illustrated by David Wilkerson
**Talking About Deployment: A Sesame Street Resource* by Charlotte Reed
**Mini Military series (Lil Navy Sailor, Lil Army Soldier, etc.)* by RP Kids
This Land is Your Land by Woodie Guthrie, illustrated by Kathy Jakobsen
Apple Pie 4th of July by Janet S. Wong
Juneteenth for Mazie by Floyd Cooper
A is for America: A Patriotic Alphabet Book by Tanya Lee Stone
Red, White, and BOOM! by Lee Wardlaw
America the Beautiful by Katharine Lee Bates, illustrated by Wendell Minor
Aloha, Everything by Keylin Melia George
Fourth of July Fireworks by Patrick Merrick
Elmo Doodle Dandy (a Little Golden Book) by Naomi Kleinberg

Creative Non-Fiction, Biography & Memoir:

**He Looks Like Me* by Lawanda Warthen
**John, Paul, George, and Ben* by Lane Smith
**John McCain: A Little Golden Book Biography* by Gram Adams
**Wat Kept Playing: The... Story of Wataru Misaka...* by Emily Inouye Huey
Can You Sing 'The Star-Spangled Banner?' by Martha E. H. Rustad
What Your Ribbon Skirt Means to Me: Deb Haaland... by Alexis Buntin
Mae Among the Stars by Roda Ahmed
Journey to the Stars: Kalpana Chawla, Astronaut by Laurie Wallmark
Ron's Big Mission by Rose J. Blue
Blue Sky, White Stars by Sarvinder Naberhaus, illustrated by Kadir Nelson
I Am series (I Am Abe Lincoln, Rosa Parks, Amelia Earhart, etc.) by Brad Metzger

Patriotism Through Literacy

Recommended Reads

Grades 1-2

Historical Fiction:

**Mama Played Baseball* by David A. Adler
Ellis Island Passover by Marissa Moss
Do You Know Them? by Shana Keller, illustrated by Laura Freeman
Coming On Home Soon by Jacqueline Woodson
Show Way by Jacqueline Woodson
Clara and the Bookwagon by Nancy Smiler Levinson
Dust for Dinner by Ann Turner
Baseball Saved Us by Ken Mochizuki
Golly Sisters Go West by Betsy Byars
The Josefina Story Quilt by Eleanor Goerr
The Doll Shop Downstairs by Yona Zeldis McDonough
New Shoes by Susan Lynn Meyer, illustrated by Eric Valasquez

Americana and/or Educational:

**Rolling Thunder* by Kate Messner, illustrated by Greg Ruth
**The Veterans Day Visitor* by Peter Catalanotto, illustrated by Pamela Schembri
Keepunumuk: Weeachumun's Thanksgiving Story by Alexis Bunten, et al.
The Survivor Tree... by Cheryl Somers Aubin, illustrated by Sheila Harrington
Some of Us: A Story of Citizenship & the United States by Rajani LaRocca
If I Were President by Catherine Stier
The Flag We Love by Pam Munoz Ryan
We the Kids by David Catrow
The Scrambled States of America by Laurie Keller

Creative Non-Fiction, Biography, & Memoir:

**They Called Her Molly Pitcher* by Anne Rockwell
**Nubs: True Story of a Mutt, a Marine & a Miracle* by Maj. Brian Dennis, et al.
**A Life of Service: The Story of... Tammy Duckworth* by Christina Soontornvat
**A Day for Remembering...* by Leah Henderson, illustrated by Floyd Cooper
**The Spy Who Played Baseball* by Carrie Jones
Revolutionary Mary by Karen Blumenthal and Jen McCartney
Finding Providence: The Story of Roger Williams by Avi
First Flight: The Story of Tom Tate & the Wright Brothers by George Shea
Diana's White House Garden by Elisa Carbone
Emma's Poem by Linda Glaser
The Story of Ruby Bridges by Robert Coles
Martin's Big Words by Doreen Rappaport
Balloons Over Broadway: The True Story of... Macy's Parade by Melissa Sweet
Harriet's Ruffled Feathers by Joy McCullough
I Could Do That: How Esther Morris Gets Women the Vote by Linda White

Patriotism Through Literacy

Recommended Reads

Grades 3-4

Historical Fiction:

**Brave Like My Brother* by Marc Tyler Nobleman
**The Hero Two Doors Down, Based on the True Story...* by Sharon Robinson
**Postcards from Pismo* by Michael Scotto, illustrated by Dion Williams
I Survived series (Gettysburg, Pearl Harbor, D-Day, 9/11, etc.) by Lauren Tarshis
Step Up to the Plate, Maria Singh by Uma Krishnaswami
Home is With Our Family by Joyce Hansen, illustrated by Kadir Nelson
Capital Mysteries series by Ron Roy
Tricking the Tallyman by Jacqueline Davies
The Year of the Boar & Jackie Robinson by Bette Bao Lord
American Girl series (incl. books about *Molly, *Claudie, *Kit) by various
Worth by Alexandria LaFaye
If You Were a Kid During... series (American Revolution, etc.) by Will Mara
Magic Treehouse series (incl. *Big Day for Baseball*, etc.) Mary Pope Osborne

Americana and/or Educational:

**The Wall* by Eve Bunting, illustrated by Ronald Himler
**America's White Table* by Margot Theis Raven
**Half a Man* by Michael Morpurgo
We Are America: A Tribute from the Heart by Walter Dean Myers
Ellie May on Presidents' Day by Hillary Homzie
Shh! We're Writing the Constitution by Jean Fritz

Non-Fiction, Biography, & Memoir:

**The Poppy Lady: Moina Belle Michael and... Veterans* by Barbara E. Walsh
**A Splash of Red: The Life & Art of Horace Pippin* by Jen Bryant/Melissa Sweet
**Forgotten Founders...* by Mifflin Lowe, illustrated by William Luong
**Twenty-One Steps: Guarding... Tomb of the Unknown Soldier* by Jeff Gottesfeld
**Contenders: Two Native Baseball Players, One World Series* by Traci Sorell
**Being Teddy Roosevelt: A Boy, a President and a Plan* by Claudia Mills
**Nisei Soldiers: Elite Fighters of WWII* by Debbie Michiko Florence
Weird but True Facts about... (U.S. Military/U.S. Presidents) by Arnold Ringstad
I Have a Dream by Martin Luther King, Jr., illustrated by Kadir Nelson
A is for Abigail: An Almanac of Amazing American Women by Lynne Cheney
She Persisted series (Maya Lin, Maria Tallchief, Sally Ride, etc.) by various
Who Was/What Was... series, (Sitting Bull, D-Day, Gettysburg, etc.) by various
What Do We Know About... series (*Lost Colony of Roanoke*, etc.) by various
Little Legends/Little Leaders/Little Dreamers by Vashti Harrison
Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story... Underground Railroad by Ellen Levine
Amazing Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders Who Inspire... by Maia Shibutani
Magic Treehouse Fact Checkers (Revolution, WWII, etc.) Mary Pope Osborne

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Recommended Reads

Grades 5-6

Historical Fiction:

**Eyes on the Sky* by J. Kasper Kramer
**Keeping Score* by Linda Sue Park
**Prairie Lotus* by Linda Sue Park
**Cracker: The Best Dog in Vietnam* by Cynthia Kadohata
**The True History of Lyndie B. Hawkins* by Gail Shepherd
**The Unsung Hero of Birdsong, USA* by Brenda Woods
**One Crazy Summer* trilogy by Rita Williams Garcia
**Planet Earth is Blue* by Nicole Panteleakos
On the Horizon by Lois Lowry, illustrated by Kenard Pak
We Dream of Space by Erin Entrada Kelly
Stella by Starlight by Sharon M. Draper
Eagle Drums by Nasugraq Rainey Hopson
Show Me a Sign by Ann-Clare LeZotte
Red, White & Whole by Rajani LaRocca
This is Just a Test by Madelyn Rosenberg and Wendy Wan-Long Shang
Eleven by Tom Rogers
Esperanza Rising by Pam Muñoz Ryan
My Life as an Ice Cream Sandwich by Ibi Zoboi
Nine, Ten, a September 11th Story by Nora Raleigh Baskin
Bud, Not Buddy by Christopher Paul Curtis
The Watsons Go to Birmingham by Christopher Paul Curtis
Unsinkable Cayenne by Jessica Vitalis

Creative Non-Fiction, Biography, & Memoir:

**Chester Nez: A Navajo Codetalker's Story* by Joseph Bruchac
**Off to War and *Children of War* by Deborah Ellis
**Skyward: The Story of Female Pilots in WWII* by Sally Deng
**Leadership Journey: How 4 Kids Became President* by Doris Kearns Goodwin
**Fallout: Spies, Superbombs & Ultimate Cold War Showdown* by Steve Sheinkin
Ida B. Wells: Let the Truth Be Told by Walter Dean Myers
Out of Hiding: A Holocaust Survivor's Journey to America by Ruth Gruener
How We Got to the Moon... Humanity's Greatest Adventure by John Rocco
History Smashers series (Revolution, Pearl Harbor, etc.) by Kate Messner
Big Ideas That Changed the World series by Don Brown
It's Up to You, Abe Lincoln by Leila and Tom Hirschfeld
What Was the Continental Congress? by Candice Ransom
Maya Lin by Jeanne Walker Harvey, illustrated by Dow Phumiruk
The Great Fire by Jim Murphy
We'll Never Forget You, Roberto Clemente by Trudie Engel
Ellis Island (A True Book) by Elaine Landau

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Recommended Reads

Grades 7-8

Historical Fiction:

**Woods Runner* by Gary Paulsen
**Scar: A Revolutionary War Tale* by J. Albert Mann
**Like a River: A Civil War Novel* by Kathy Cannon Wiechman
**Homefront* by Doris Gwaltney
**Grenade* and **Heroes* by Alan Gratz
**Two Roads* by Joseph Bruchac
Seeds of America series by Laurie Halse Anderson
Fever 1793 by Laurie Halse Anderson
All the Stars Denied by Guadalupe Garcia McCall
The Magical Imperfect by Chris Baron
Kira-Kira by Cynthia Kadohata
Ophie's Ghosts by Justina Ireland
Lucky Broken Girl by Ruth Behar
Out of the Dust by Karen Hesse
The Day of the Pelican by Katherine Paterson

Creative Non-Fiction, Biography, & Memoir:

**Star Sailor* by Charles F. Bolden, Jr. & Tonya Bolden
**Warrior Dog (Young Readers Edition)* by Joe Layden, Will Chesney
**Gone to the Woods: Surviving a Lost Childhood* by Gary Paulsen
**Fly Girls: Forgotten Women... Pilots of WWII* by P. O'Connell Pearson
**The Notorious Benedict Arnold, A True Story...* by Steve Sheinkin
**Facing the Mountain... (Young Readers Adaptation)* by Daniel James Brown
**On the Horizon: Memories of WWII* by Lois Lowry, illustrated by Kenard Pak
**Braver Than I Thought: Real People, Real Courage...* by Luke Reynolds
Bad Boy: A Memoir by Walter Dean Myers
At Last She Stood... Joey Guerrero... Fought for Freedom by Erin Entrada Kelly
Astronauts: Women on... Final Frontier by Jim Ottaviani, illustrator Maris Wicks
Bomb: The Race to Build –& Steal– Most Dangerous Weapon by Steve Sheinkin
Amelia Lost: The Life & Disappearance of Amelia Earhart by Candace Fleming
The Great Influenza: The... Deadliest Pandemic in History by John M. Barry
Chasing Lincoln's Killer by James L. Swanson
Lifting As We Climb: Black Women's Battle for the Ballot Box by Evette Dionne
Enchanted Air: Two Cultures, Two Wings by Margarita Engel
Hidden Figures: The American Dream... by Margot Lee Shetterly
Witches: Absolutely True Tale of Disaster in Salem by Rosalyn Schanzer
Ambushed! The Assassination Plot Against President Garfield by Gail Jarrow
Jane Addams: Most Dangerous Woman in America by Marlene Targ Brill
Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson
Susie King Taylor: Nurse, Teacher & Freedom... by Erica Armstrong Dunbar

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Recommended Reads

Grades 9-12

Historical Fiction:

- **Fallen Angels* by Walter Dean Myers
- **The Things a Brother Knows* by Dana Reinhardt
- **Soldier's Heart: Being the Story of the Enlistment and...* by Gary Paulsen
- **Flygirl* by Sherri L. Smith
- **I Pledge Allegiance* (Vietnam Series Book 1) by Chris Lynch
- **Alex & Eliza* by Melissa de la Cruz
- **Time Enough for Drums* by Ann Rinaldi
- **Two Girls of Gettysburg* by Lisa Klein
- Butterfly Yellow* by Thanhha Lai
- The Downstairs Girl* by Stacey Lee
- We Are Not Free* by Traci Chee
- Sheine Lande* by Darcie Little Badger
- Last Night at the Telegraph Club* by Malindo Lo
- A Very Large Expanse of Sea* by Tehera Mafi
- The Hired Girl* by Laura Amy Schlitz
- Hattie Big Sky* by Kirby Larson
- The Davenports* by Krystal Marquis
- The Memory of Things* by Gae Polisner

Creative Non-Fiction, Biography, & Memoir:

- ^A **Lost in Action: A WWII Soldier's... Capture on Bataan...* by Dick Bilyeu
- ^A **Combat Crew* by John Comer
- ^A **Code Talker Stories* by Laura Tohe
- ^A **Alexander Hamilton* by Ron Chernow
- **Unbroken (YA Adaptation): An Olympian's Journey...* by Laura Hillenbrand
- **Pure Grit: How American WWII Nurses Survived...* by Mary Cronk Farrell
- **Infinite Hope: A Black Artist's Journey from WWII to Peace* by Ashley Bryan
- **American Boys: True Story of the Lost 74 of the Vietnam War* by Louise Esola
- Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom...* by Lynda Blackmon Lowery
- Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice* by Phillip Hoose
- Loving Vs. Virginia* by Patricia Hruby Powell
- 1968: Today's Authors Explore a Year of... Change* by Marc Aronson, et al.
- Sally Ride: America's First Woman in Space* by Lynn Sherr
- Black Birds in the Sky* by Brandy Colbert
- They Call Us Enemy* by George Takei
- March* graphic novel series by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin & Nate Powell
- Apple (Skin to the Core)* by Eric Gansworth
- ^A *The Radium Girls* (also available in a *Young Readers Edition*) by Kate Moore
- ^A *9/11 Ordinary People: Extraordinary Heroes* by Will G. Merrill, Jr.
- ^A *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America from 1890...* by David Treuer