

# 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.

<sup>A</sup> 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 Bunten  
*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

## **Patriotism Through Literacy**

### **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 Nasuğraq 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

## **Patriotism Through Literacy 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

## **Patriotism Through Literacy 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:**

<sup>A</sup> \**Lost in Action: A WWII Soldier's... Capture on Bataan...* by Dick Bilyeu

<sup>A</sup> \**Combat Crew* by John Comer

<sup>A</sup> \**Code Talker Stories* by Laura Tohe

<sup>A</sup> \**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

<sup>A</sup> *The Radium Girls* (also available in a *Young Readers Edition*) by Kate Moore

<sup>A</sup> *9/11 Ordinary People: Extraordinary Heroes* by Will G. Merrill, Jr.

<sup>A</sup> *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America from 1890...* by David Treuer