



17TH ANNUAL

Pueblo Home of Heroes Association Essay Contest



 PUEBLO CITY-COUNTY
Library District

Sponsored by the Pueblo Home of Heroes Association
and Pueblo City-County Library District

Pueblo Home of Heroes Association

The mission of the Pueblo Home of Heroes Association is to preserve and expand the memorial dedicated to Medal of Honor recipients; to advance the history of the Medal of Honor; honor the legacy of those who have received the Award nationwide; to promote democratic ideals; and encourage among the people of the United States, and especially its youth, citizenship, character, integrity, and selflessness as epitomized by the Medal of Honor.

The Pueblo Medal of Honor Association began in 1997 when Robert H. Rawlings, owner and publisher of The Pueblo Chieftain, began a project to create a Memorial as a lasting testament featuring bronze statues honoring Pueblo's four Medal of Honor recipients: William J. Crawford – Army WWII, Carl L. Sitter – Marines Korea, Raymond G. “Jerry” Murphy – Marines Korea, and Drew D. Dix – Army Vietnam. Additionally, the names of all the over 3,500 recipients of the Medal of Honor would be listed on granite plaques.

This Association successfully bid for, and brought to Pueblo, the Congressional Medal of Honor Society for their national convention in September of 2000. It was held at the time of the unveiling of the Medal of Honor Memorial. Ninety-seven out of 147 Medal of Honor recipients living at the time were in attendance, which allowed thousands of Puebloans, and Coloradoans, to be able to meet and visit with America's greatest military heroes.

In 2009, the Pueblo Home of Heroes Association created this essay contest to draw the attention of Pueblo students to the true heroism represented by the recipients of the Medal of Honor. The Association raises money for JROTC scholarships, upkeep of the

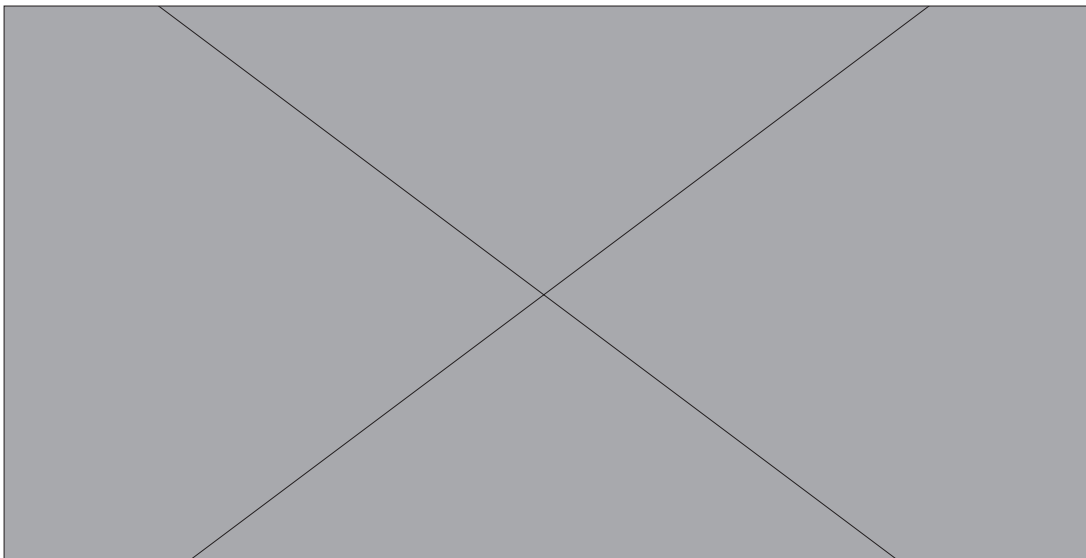
Medal of Honor memorial, as well as a Medal of Honor interactive display inside the Convention Center. The Association also assisted with the data base for the Veteran's Bridge at the Riverwalk.

In 2017, this group again brought the Congressional Medal of Honor Society national convention to Pueblo where 40 of the 79 living recipients were in attendance.

The Pueblo Home of Heroes Association funded the renovation of the window display inside the Convention Center in June of 2022, and created an interactive display with a 12'X 7' screen for visitors to view information about Pueblo's Medal of Honor Recipients, how the Pueblo sculptures were created, information about the Medal of Honor, information on those listed on the Veteran's Bridge at HARP, and attractions around Pueblo including over 30 military monuments and memorials in the area. This display is free and open to the public any time the Convention Center is open.

Currently the Pueblo Home of Heroes Association is hosting a podcast featuring Pueblo area veterans and their stories. These podcasts are available on Spodify and www.pueblohomeofheroes.org (select the icon entitled Pueblo Veterans and their Stories).

In 2024 a new virtual feature was added to the Walk of Valor around the Riverwalk to enable walkers to utilize their cellphones using QR codes to gain information about the various stops which highlight Pueblo Veterans, our heroes (military and civilian) who are the reason Pueblo is called Home of Heroes.



This display is free and open to the public during regular hours at the Pueblo Convention Center.



Pueblo Home of Heroes Association Essay Contest 2025

P R O M P T - S T U D E N T S

“When you recite the Pledge of Allegiance what does it mean to you and why?”

Pueblo Home of Heroes Association, in cooperation with Pueblo City-County Library District, is pleased to announce the winners of the 16th annual essay contest.

The following guidelines were required:

All entries must be typed.
300 – 500 words for grades 4 and 5
400 – 700 words for grades 6-8
500 – 1,000 words for grades 9-12

Pueblo Home of Heroes Association judges were Kevin Cover, Gary and Karen Micheli, Margo Hatton, Don and Mary Gray, Dave Rush, and Ray LeMasters. There were 300 entries this year.

Pueblo Home of Heroes Association and Pueblo City-County Library District wish to thank teachers and parents for encouraging their students and children to participate in this essay contest.

A special thanks to the Pueblo City-County Library District for their assistance each year with this essay contest.



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Winners

Elementary School (grades 4-5)

1st Place – Junie Hall, age 9

South Mesa Elementary, Mr. Bowen

2nd Place – Haley Swope, age 10

South Mesa Elementary, Mr. Bowen

3rd Place – Yaraneei Sanchez, age 9

South Mesa Elementary, Mrs. Hanratty/Mrs. Brown

Honorable Mention –Domenic Elenes, age 11

South Mesa Elementary, Mrs. Hanratty/Mrs. Brown

Honorable Mention – Bailey Whiting, age 11

Prairie Winds Elementary, Mr. Powell

Honorable Mention – Karina Ramirez, age 10

Prairie Winds Elementary, Mr. Powell

High School (grades 9-12)

1st Place – Carina Milne, age 18

Rye High School, Mr. Estes

2nd Place – Joseph Upshaw, age 16

Pueblo West High School, LTC Emond

3rd Place – Ion Reynoso, age 14

Pueblo South High School, MSG Dilcher

Honorable Mention –Ryan Szakal, age 18

Pueblo West High School, LTC Emond

Honorable Mention – Erick Chavez, age 17

Pueblo West High School, LTC Emond

Honorable Mention – Brooke Newitt, age 15

Rye High School, Mr. Estes

Middle School (grades 6-8)

1st Place – Leah Stotts, age 13

Vineland Middle School, Ms. Chavez

2nd Place – Jerzey Rhodes, age 14

Vineland Middle School, Ms. Chavez

3rd Place – Kinley Kirby, age 13

Vineland Middle School, Ms. Chavez

Honorable Mention – Rosie Miner, age 14

Vineland Middle School, Ms. Chavez

Honorable Mention – Jarrett Dionisio, age 13

Vineland Middle School, Ms. Chavez

Honorable Mention – Yalaina Dickerson, age 14

Vineland Middle School, Ms. Chavez

Junie Hall

1st Place, Elementary School

South Mesa Elementary, age 9, Mr. Bowen

The pledge of allegiance means something different to everyone. Every day we say "I Pledge Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands one Nation under God, indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all. Every morning since preschool, we would say it, but I did not really know why or what it meant until I started writing this essay, and my mom helped me research. First, I had to find out where it came from. The Pledge of Allegiance was written by Francis Bellamy in 1892. He wanted it to be used by people in any country. In 1923, the words the flag of the United States of America were added. Bellamy also wanted all who were saying the pledge to do a military salute and extend our hand toward the flag, but it was changed to putting your hand over your heart.

After I found out who wrote the pledge, we decided to break up the pledge in different parts to understand it better. The first part was I Pledge Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America. pledge means a serious promise. Allegiance means staying loyal. So, we are making a serious promise to stay loyal to the United States of America.

The next part we broke up was and to the republic for which it stands. I wasn't sure what republic meant so we looked it up and it is a form of government and people choose our leaders like when our parents vote

for the president. For which it states is talking about our country the United States. So, I think this means that the republic will always stand up for the United States.

One nation under God was next. A nation is a large group of people like everyone who lives in the United States. Under God means that God is here to take care of us. So I think this means that the large group of people believes God who is greater than us all is looking over us.

Last was Indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. When we looked up what Indivisible means it said can't be broken up. Liberty is a kind of freedom. Justice means to be fair. So, I think this is saying our nation can't be broken up and our nation is free and fair.

So, after my mom helped me understand what the pledge means I understand it better. When we say the Pledge, it means we are making a serious promise. We are being loyal. We are a republic. We are a nation. God is looking over us. We cannot be broken up. We have freedom. We are fair. People fight to come to America to be free. We are like a strong team that cannot be broken up. I respect the pledge more and I'm thankful to live in this country.



Haley Swope

2nd Place, Elementary School

South Mesa Elementary, age 10, Mr. Bowen

In the morning when we stand up to say the Pledge of Allegiance, the music stops, we put our hand over our heart, and we start to say the Pledge. I always wondered what the Pledge meant, until I did a lot of research. I now know that I say the Pledge to show loyalty and appreciation to the sacrifices that were made for me, and my country.

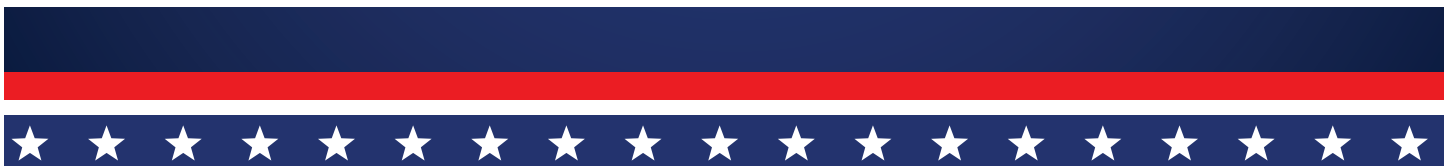
The loyalty we show today is for those who fought in every battle and war for our freedom and our peace. We show loyalty to those who lost a life or those who are fighting for our country's freedom still. Loyalty means, a strong feeling of support or allegiance.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, appreciation means, "recognition and enjoyment of the good qualities of someone or something". I show appreciation to the flag for my freedoms and for the army and all the branches of the military. The appreciation we all show today is to the brave, proud,

courageous, and the loyal for saving mine and everybody else's life.

Look at everybody else in the room, without the sacrifices that were made we wouldn't be standing in this country or in this class. Sacrifice means, to give up something valuable. We should thank all of the brave who have given us our freedoms and the rights we have today like the right of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion. So be grateful for what we have and thank those for the protection we have today.

In conclusion, I now understand what the Pledge means to me and my country. I say the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag because of the loyalty and appreciation I have for the sacrifices that were made for me and our country. Every day I'm grateful for the freedoms I have. We're free to be ourselves, so go be free and do what your heart tells you to!



Yaraneei Sanchez

3rd Place, Elementary School

South Mesa Elementary, age 9, Mrs. Hanratty/ Mrs. Brown

The Pledge of Allegiance means that I was blessed to be born in this awesome country filled with the greatest protection on earth! Whenever I recite the pledge it makes me feel protected and joyful. I might not show it, but I am very proud to be born here. Donald Trump said, "It is time to remember that old wisdom our soldiers will never forget: that whether we are black or brown or white, we all bleed the same red blood of patriots, we all enjoy the same glorious freedoms, and we all salute the same great American Flag."

My family told me they moved here to live a better life for them and for their kids. My mom told me that she moved here so we can have justice. If they didn't move here and chose to stay in Mexico, I wouldn't have had as many opportunities that I have today. My mom and grandma said, "Us moving here, changed our lives forever. Our ancestors were not able to move so we had to for better lives."

Our flag represents hope, and respect, the people who found our country had hope to find a better life.

The 50 stars on the flag represent the 50 states. The 13 stripes represent the 13 colonies we have. In the pledge it says, "With liberty and justice for all." which shows me there's still some justice and loyalty left.

The pledge means so much to me I can go on and on about how proud I am to live here. So many people sacrificed their lives for us just for our countries to be a thing and have living beings on our land. We have hope and so much justice. We have stores and buildings built for us to work and have opportunities. I didn't even know what the pledge really meant until I studied and wrote about the flag and the pledge. I've learned much more about it.

Overall, our country and flag brought much hope and pride. Once people saw our flag waving in the air while trying to start a better life here, they probably felt freedom and pride knowing they will have more opportunities. Especially people trying to move here for a better life for them and their families.



Domenic Elenes

Honorable Mention, Elementary School

South Mesa Elementary, age 11, Mrs. Hanratty/ Mrs. Brown

The Pledge of Allegiance means to me that I am blessed to be born in the United States of America. I vow to be loyal to my nation and never turn my back on my country. Have you seen how kids from other countries live? They live horribly. We are also blessed to be able to go to school every day.

I feel blessed to live in the United States of America because I have the rights and freedom to do whatever I want to do in life. These rights and privileges give me a chance of achieving my dreams. This allows me to do what I love the most and that is playing baseball.

Also I feel blessed because in class we have been watching videos of how kids in other countries live. They live horribly. They had terrible houses, they didn't have shoes, and to use the bathroom they had to dig a hole every month because the other hole would fill up. Some of them don't get to go to school every day, and they don't always have a hot shower and meal. Most of them don't have a choice of what they want to do in life.

I also feel thankful to be in this country. I feel grateful because my parents tried so hard to get into the United States of America. You might ask how my parents got into this nation. First of all, the reason that we came was because my grandpa was working

here. My grandparents and my parents came here when they first got their green card. According to Google, "a green card is a Permanent Resident Card that allows you to live and work in the United States of America". Their journey from Mexico began with a long drive. They had to switch off the driver because they would get tired of driving. Once they got here my grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles all lived in a one, single, very crowded house. They shared all the bills. When my parents saved up enough money they bought a camper to live in. So, that's the beginning of the story of how my parents came to the United States of America.

In conclusion, when I stand up for the pledge it reminds me of how blessed I am to be born in this amazing nation. When I stand up for the pledge it reminds me of the freedom I have in the United States of America. I feel thankful because I have the choice of what I want to do in life. I get to live the life I want in the United States of America. I'm thankful to wake up every day and get to live in the U.S.A and have the rights to do what I want in this country. So when I stand up for the pledge it reminds me how fortunate I am to live in this nation. I am blessed.



Bailey Whiting

Honorable Mention, Elementary School

Prairie Winds Elementary, age 11, Mr. Powell

As I recite the pledge, I think of it meaning patriotism, rights, and those who are serving or have served. There are a variety of things I think it means, but these are the things I feel it means most. When it comes to “one nation under God,” I think of these things: we are one nation, and these are the things we have. I also think of similar things when I say “I pledge allegiance.” I know I’m making a promise, and I know the soldiers did too, which makes me think of these things as well.

First of all, I feel patriotism, which I feel is a trait in the pledge. When I say “of the United States of America,” I think of our country and how we are unbreakable. When we say the Pledge of Allegiance, I think of this as an unbreakable saying that we will always be part of the United States. I also think of it as honoring our flag and respecting it. Patriotism comes to me as red, white, and blue, which makes me think of the fifty states. I know that I love our country and pledge allegiance.

In addition, it makes me think of rights and how we are free. I think of this when I say “with liberty and justice for all,” which means we have rights. This means to me that I can be my own person, and I can do what

I want. Rights also give me free education to help me learn more and improve my knowledge. Also, it means that I can travel when and where I want, which is awesome. This means I can choose what my career will be. This also means it’s okay if I make mistakes; it’s just part of life.

Finally, this makes me feel respect for people who are doing or have done service. When I hear the words “to the flag,” I think of those who risked their lives to raise our flag. I appreciate it greatly. I also want to recognize those who are protecting our country now, risking their own lives to save ours. I also think of the veterans-those who have served but survived to live their own lives. When the Fourth of July comes, I know I can thank all the soldiers, dead or alive.

All in all, this is what the Pledge of Allegiance means to me. These are the things that I think of most when saying the pledge. I know that when thinking of America, I think of the Pledge. When I look out our classroom window, I see Pikes Peak, and it rejoices my heart. I know that I’m lucky to know about the Pledge. I know that I feel this way for a reason.



Karina Ramirez

Honorable Mention, Elementary School

Prairie Winds Elementary, age 10, Mr. Powell

“I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America” -you have probably heard that thousands and billions of times. Have you ever sat down and thought about what it means to you and thought for a few minutes? Well, here is what it means to me.

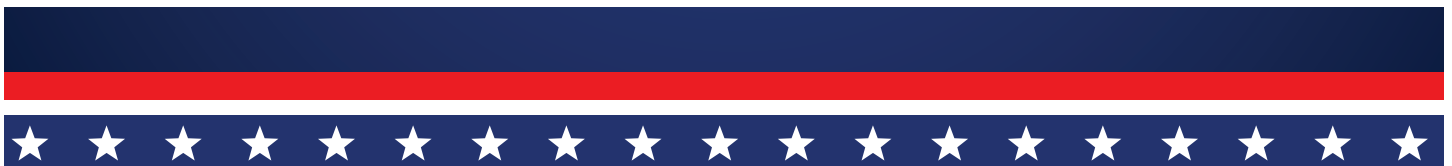
One example: You have stood there facing the flag with your hand on your chest, looking through the window at the mountains where “America the Beautiful” was inspired and written. Just standing there looking at the flag is a really good feeling. I will respect the pledge, and “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all” is a promise to stay safe.

Another example of what the Pledge of Allegiance means to me is that it’s a promise to stay safe in the United States of America and to be ready for anything

or everything that comes my way. Also, stopping there and pausing whatever I’m doing can get kinda annoying, but just looking through the window and seeing the mountains is nice.

The last example is that I’m proud to be a citizen of the USA and to say the pledge in the morning without having to worry about being a slave or being judged. I am very happy to be a citizen of the USA. I’m happy to be here and alive today. I’m grateful today because of the changes made throughout the years in the United States of America.

In effect, this was fun to write about and to type. I’m thankful to be here today and to be a citizen of the United States of America and to stand there facing the flag saying the pledge.



Leah Stotts

1st Place, Middle School

Vineland Middle School, age 13, Mrs. Chavez

There are three reasons why I feel proud while reciting the pledge.

Growing up with my grandpa and uncle in the military is one reason I am proud to say the pledge. They have given up so much for our country and the pledge shows the respect that they have for this country. This symbol is important to them because of all the soldiers that have come before them. I personally want to join the military and it shows what I am going to dedicate my life to. It shows that I must have an alliance with this country because one day I might have to fight for it.

The second reason I am proud to say the pledge of Allegiance is because it is a symbol of our freedom from England. Before we were our own country we had to fight for it and fight for what we wanted it to be. The pledge shows how each state came to be part of our great nation.

The stripes show the original colonies and the stars show how many states. We have come a long way as a country and the pledge to the flag shows everyone who fought for it and died that we appreciate all that they have done. Without the flag and pledge we would've

never understood what the soldiers and families went through.

The last reason is about our flag and the lines, "one nation under God" and "with liberty and justice for all" and why they mean so much to me. As a Christian I believe that following God's words and wants is important. This country was founded on a belief of God and even though there are many beliefs and faiths in the world God is still existing in the pledge. That line shows me that there is an importance in respecting others and what they believe in. The line, "with liberty and justice for all" shows me that everyone has liberty to live their lives and to follow their dreams and do what they want with freedom. We got this way because our country was built by religious and faithful men. They believed that God should be in our lives.

In conclusion, I am proud to stand up and say the Pledge of allegiance because it's truly like a promise that we are making to our great nation to make sure that we are keeping true to what the founders wanted it to be, and that was great. I am proud to say the Pledge of Allegiance and will continue to say it proudly.



Jerzey Rhodes

2nd Place, Middle School

Vineland Middle School, age 14, Mrs. Chavez

“From this day forward, the millions of our school children will daily proclaim in every city and town, village and rural schoolhouse, the dedication to our Nation and our people to the Almighty”. This is a quote from Dwight. D Eisenhower. The Pledge of Allegiance can symbolize many things and can essentially describe America. When I recite the Pledge of Allegiance, to me it means that I am honoring America, setting a good example, and am willing to defend and represent my country because it is the right thing to do and it has been a part of me.

To begin, when I recite the Pledge of Allegiance, it means that I am honoring America. Both of my parents served for our county and I know honoring America and reciting the pledge is the right thing to do. Since it would be quite impossible to visit every veteran and on-duty military personnel and thank them, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance is a way to show your gratitude towards them. Not only are you honoring the people who have done right for America, but you are also showing your appreciation for your rights as a United States citizen. When the Pledge of Allegiance says “...with liberty and justice for all”, it is saying how we have the freedom to rejoice in the fair rules under the law. The Constitution provides this for us and we should be very grateful to have such freedoms. Unless you despise such freedoms, there truly is no reason to be disrespectful and not recite the pledge. Honoring the Pledge of Allegiance is important, but when I say it, I also know I am setting a good example.

In addition, when I recite the Pledge of Allegiance, it means that I am setting a good example. Although most people aren't paying attention when I am reciting the pledge, I hope I am showing those who are, how to be respectful. For example, if we were to get a new student that didn't understand English or did not follow our same customs, maybe they would realize what others were doing and follow. Now, setting a

good example for newcomers isn't the only way to be a leader. Kids can be difficult or think they are funny and decide to not stand, not put their hand on their heart, or talk when it is time to recite the pledge. As someone in my school's student council, I already have a leadership role to play with responsibilities. Showing others the importance of appreciating our country is only one of them. It is good that most people do tend to recite the Pledge of Allegiance, but it still makes me feel good when I know I am doing the right thing. With wanting to set a good example, showing that I am willing to defend and represent my country is what I think of when I recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

Furthermore, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance indicates how I am willing to represent my country. I feel this way because why would I recite the same thing everyday to show my gratitude towards my country, and people who defend it, and not be willing to fight for it as well? As an American citizen, the pledge and America has always been a part of me. Before school, games, or a meeting of importance, the pledge is said. This comes to show how people honor and respect it. Some people's passion is to serve our country, others are not. This goes with verbally defending our country as well. Joining the military is not my first choice, but not my last either. Being a United States citizen means it can feel like devoting yourself to America and its people when reciting the pledge.

All in all, when I recite the Pledge of Allegiance, it means that I am honoring America, setting a good example, and am willing to represent and defend my country because it is the right thing to do and it has always been a part of me. Reciting the pledge is not something that should be taken lightly. It plays an important role everyday.



Kinley Kirby

3rd Place, Middle School

Vineland Middle School, age 13, Mrs. Chavez

“One nation under God indivisible with liberty and justice for all.” What does the Pledge of Allegiance mean to me and why? The Pledge of Allegiance, an American anthem known from coast to coast. All the way from Maine to Hawaii. A symbol of Justice, Liberty, Unity, and above all freedom. As Patricia Schroeder said “In our pledge every day, we pledge one Nation under God with liberty and justice for all. A saying that ensures that all American citizens can and will live free and prosper until the end of time. What does the Pledge of Allegiance mean to me though?

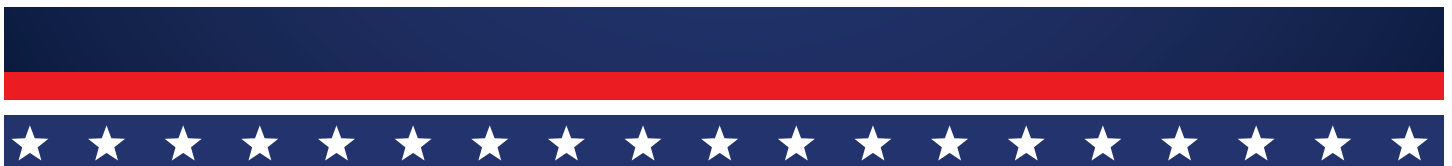
The pledge of Allegiance, is a safety net for me and may other millions of American citizens. Ensuring we can live with absolute freedom. Due to the fact that all of the soldiers that put their lives on the line, to make sure that from now until the end of time we can live independently and free. Being able to have our own voices, opinions, styles, and lives. The factual definition of freedom is “the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint.” We as American citizens have this right and it is extraordinary to have this right. With the help of the Pledge of Allegiance knowing that many men put their lives on line and possibly died to give us the right. Millions of Americans daily from Pre-K all the way to twelfth grade. That’s fourteen years we dedicate one minute to the fallen soldiers of our country. I wouldn’t have it anyother way though. The wonderful God given 31 words. So, I pledge of Allegiance to the flag for freedom and religion. Along with My Country the breathtaking United States of America.

Next, it resembles respect and loyalty. Loyalty to our country and community. Loyalty means the absolute

world to me. Especially when it comes to my country and my community. The Pledge of Allegiance is my home stead and safety net guaranteeing my freedom as a Us citizen. Respect, I could not and will not live in a different country. Due to the fact that I have so much love and respect for my country. I have had a lifelong dream of joining the Navy. My uncle is the commander of the Key west naval base. He has been based in 2 different counties and all across the United States. He has been my inspiration for the longest time to push myself and travel the world, while I still can. The only downfall of him being away is that he is always away from his hometown and family. ALthough if that means I get to fight for my country I would be ok with it.

The Pledge of Allegiance makes me feel safe and that I have people there for me. Defending me along with having my back. Even if they don’t know who I am. It’s an honor to have unknown people fight for me and my freedom. I feel so safe because men and women came out of business with their families to defend me. Along with the future american that will come after me. I am so thankful I can go to school and have a future because of the soldiers that fought for me and my future.

In conclusion, I am oh so thankful for the Pledge of Allegiance. Being created in 1892. I am overjoyed that in the cold war of 1954, they added “Under God” into the Pledge of Allegiance. Thank you for all of your service and sacrifices you have made for us.



Rosie Miner

Honorable Mention, Middle School

Vineland Middle School, age 14, Mrs. Chavez

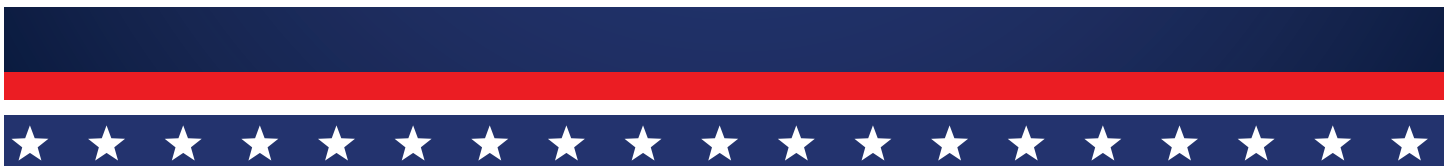
When I recite the pledge of allegiance, what does it mean to me and why? When reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, it reminds me of how proud I am to be an American. I feel lucky to be born in a country like the United States of America, where I am free.

First of all, when I recite the Pledge of Allegiance, it reminds me of all brave men and women who have fought, and are still fighting for our freedom till this day. It honors the men and women who have died for freedom. The Pledge of Allegiance also reminds me that we are all united as one. It takes all fifty states to be the wonderful country that we are. It reminds me that we are stronger when we work together. We are amazing regardless of if we are different or not.

Second of all, when reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, it reminds me that we are all equal. Everyone is welcome to be in our country no matter what their race, religion, or gender they are. You will be seen as equal in the United States of America. It reminds me that everyone deserves justice and liberty. That is what our flag stands for, all of our fifty states working together as one united country.

Now, third of all, to me, the Pledge of Allegiance is a good way to show our loyalty and respect for our country and soldiers who have fallen. The men and women who have fought and are currently fighting for our country deserve the respect for all of their hard work they have done and are doing to protect us and our country. Many of them are the reason we have a lot of the rights that we have now, they are the reason that women and people of color have more rights than they did so many years ago. Some people who fought for womens rights were Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady, and Sojourner Truth. And, some people who fought for people of color rights were Martin Luther King Jr, Rosa Parks, and Frederick Douglass.

In conclusion, when I recite the Pledge of Allegiance, it reminds me of how proud I am to be a citizen in the United States of America. I feel blessed to be born in a country such as America, where everyone is free to be here regardless of their gender, race, or religion. The Pledge of Allegiance is a promise of loyalty to the United States, a reminder that we are one nation that is unable to be divided and that we all have freedom despite our differences.



Jarrett Dionisio

Honorable Mention, Middle School

Vineland Middle School, age 13, Mrs. Chavez

When I recite the Pledge of Allegiance what does it mean to me and why? It means that I am grateful for my country. It means that because of the freedom we have in the U.S.A. I am able to do the things I want to do. Everyday when I recite the Pledge of Allegiance I think of the people who risked their lives for our country. These brave men and women are one of the reasons our country is such a great place to be from.

The Pledge of Allegiance means a lot to me. It means that I am a free citizen of the U.S.A. When I first learned the Pledge of Allegiance I did not know what it was at the time. But now that I am older I know what it is. It is a pledge we say daily to help us remember the sacrifices made for our country and to remind us how lucky and blessed we are. I am thankful for Jesus for giving the people who fought for our country the strength and courage to keep fighting. Without them our country might not be what it is today.

When I look at the flag I think about all of the people who died in battle for our freedom.

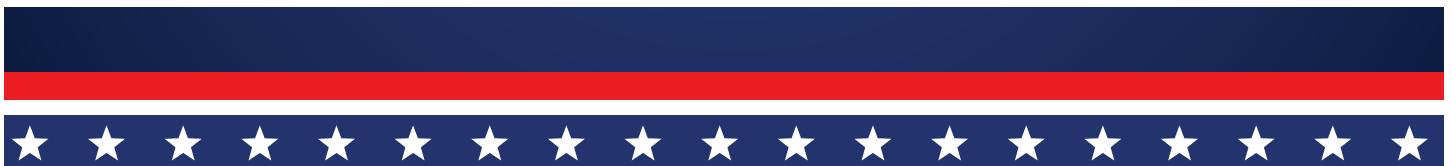
The flag represents the 13 original colonies and the 50 states. This shows the progress our country has

made. It also tells a story about the freedom as citizens we have gained over the years. The flag is a symbol of our country and represents a team. All citizens of the U.S.A are on the same team.

To me the Pledge of Allegiance also means we vote. In our country, we vote for the people who make the laws. This is called a Republic. This is mentioned when it says "And to the Republic for which it stands." Not all countries have the right and freedom to vote. This is one of the things that makes our country great.

When the Pledge of Allegiance says "Indivisible with liberty and justice for all" I think it means justice for everyone. As a country we are stronger together. Everyone should be treated equally. Everyone has the right to vote which gives them voice in our country's decisions. This also helps us to be united as one.

In conclusion, saying the Pledge of Allegiance is something I feel honored to do. To me this symbolizes the great country I am proud to be from. This country stands together as one and will fight to keep our freedom. The Pledge of Allegiance is an important part of the history of our country.



Yalaina Dickerson

Honorable Mention, Middle School

Vineland Middle School, age 14, Mrs. Chavez

When I recite the Pledge of Allegiance, it means that we are honoring the people who served, remembering our rights as citizens, and remembering past turmoil that has threatened to divide us. For different people, the Pledge of Allegiance could mean something completely different, and I believe that their opinions are just as important as my own.

There are many people who have served our country for the better of others. Every time someone recites the pledge, it is important to remember and honor the many people who have fallen for the better of others. These courageous people have fought for this amazing country despite everything that has happened and many have perished or gotten injured during the process. These amazing people have fought for what they believe in, and yet many brave souls are still dedicated enough to fight for the same reasons to this very day.

The Pledge of Allegiance is also meant to remind us of our rights as US citizens. Although many people may have forgotten about these important rights. Our founding fathers fought to make all this possible. Along with the many amendments that have been made, they have worked hard for a great country. Wouldn't they have wanted our rights to be protected?

I believe the pledge is meant to help remind us of this. Our citizen rights are incredibly important, and all the amendments are meant to keep the Constitution modern and up to date for modern society.

There have been many wars in the past that have threatened to divide the United States despite being stronger together. For example, the civil war has divided the nation, forcing brother to fight against brother because of differences beyond their control. I believe that part of the pledge reflects this, saying, "...one nation, under god, indivisible ..." possibly a reference to the Civil War, saying that we cannot be divided.

In conclusion, when I recite the pledge of allegiance, it means that we are honoring the people who served, remembering our rights as citizens, and remembering past turmoil that has threatened to divide us. Every time the pledge is recited by children in schools all around the United States, we are reminded of these things and why they are so important to remember and protect. I believe that it is highly important to remember this the next time you hear the Pledge of Allegiance or our national anthem.



Carina Milne

1st Place, High School

Rye High School, age 18, Mr. Estes

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under god, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." I have been starting my mornings with that mantra since the beginning of my schooling career. When I first started saying it, I never understood the importance, although now coming into adulthood I have realized the depth and meaning the pledge carries throughout the current nation, and back when it was founded.

One of the reasons I didn't take the pledge of allegiance seriously when I was young was because I didn't understand what it meant. We start off the pledge with pledging allegiance. Allegiance is defined as loyalty or commitment as a singular person to an object, group, or cause" We are swearing undying loyalty to the American flag and as it says, to the republic for which it stands. The stripes the number of stars, the colors, all of it has meaning and we are committing our honesty for the history behind it. The next few lines say we are one nation under god, and indivisible. We remind ourselves each morning that no matter the internal conflict, we are one nation, protected by god, and we cannot and will not be split by any force. That's the line that cements it all together, that we are one entity that is stronger than anything that is trying to divide us. Of course, the Pledge of Allegiance ends with one of its most iconic lines, with liberty and justice for all. America has promised us all that justice will be served for all deserving, and that we will all live our lives with liberty. All lines inside of the pledge are so moving, and the more that I recited it and the older I got, my passion only grew.

In 2020, I was a seventh grader about ready to go into my eighth grade year. With COVID locking all of us up in our houses and on the internet all day, the political climate that was thrust onto everyone was very radical. This was the first time in my life I had ever kept up with politics.

With people demanding justice for George Floyd, burning buildings of innocent businesses down and even to go as far as storming the United States Capitol. This time

for everyone in America was like stepping on egg shells, can't move without someone saying you're in the wrong. I watched our nation go up in flames, and I wondered, where did it all go wrong? I thought this was a nation of my brothers and sisters, not of felons and criminals fueled by the media. Although I didn't recite the pledge every day because we weren't in school, when we finally returned from lockdown I realized how much it meant to me, and how much it should mean to others, especially in times like 2020 when tomorrow wasn't promised.

The pledge is a part of American culture that cannot be rewritten. People may try, but we have been saying those same words in that same cadence since the 1800's. Especially, it has been written so well and it is still so popular today for that reason. If the pledge wasn't important, we wouldn't still be saying it every single day in schools all around America. In more recent years my school has been unreliable with committing to the pledge every morning; though this year as a senior, they maybe have missed one or two days throughout the whole year. I truly believe that the people behind the pledge each morning have our best interests in mind. They continue the tradition of American excellence unrelentingly.

The Pledge of Allegiance is a keystone part of our nation. I have no choice but to care about the unity and strength of America in these trying times. If I were to be the only one in an entire crowd to stand and recite the pledge, then so be it. I have promised my allegiance to our nation, and nothing can ever break that promise, nor wear it down. My patriotism will not be defined by social norms or the uncertainty of the future of our nation. I will continue to uphold our decorated legacy for years to come. Though I will not say it every morning anymore, the teachings will live with me forever.



Joseph Upshaw

2nd Place, High School

Pueblo West High School, age 16, LTC Edmond

Many of us recite The Pledge of Allegiance every day without much thought. We stand, face the flag, and say, “I pledge allegiance to the flag... and for all.” For some, it’s just a part of the school routine, but for me, it’s much more than that. When I say the Pledge, I think about what it means and how it connects to the values I hold dear as an American citizen.

To begin with, when I say, “I pledge allegiance to the flag,” I’m not just promising to honor a piece of cloth. I’m pledging to the ideas and values that the flag represents: freedom, democracy, and justice. The flag is a symbol of everything the United States stands for, and each stripe and star has its own meaning, representing the journey of this country from its founding to where we are today. As I recite the Pledge, I’m reminded of the sacrifices and struggles that came before me and how much work has gone into building the country we have now. It’s a way of acknowledging the past and honoring those who fought for the freedoms I enjoy today.

The line “and to the Republic for which it stands” is also one that makes me reflect. The United States was founded as a republic, where power is in the hands of the people, and representatives are chosen to make decisions on our behalf. In a time when political division often feels more extreme, this line reminds me that, no matter what our differences might be, we’re still part of the same country and share the same ultimate goal: to make the United States a better place for everyone. Whether we agree or disagree on specific issues, we’re all working together to build a future, and that’s what “Republic” represents to me.

The word “indivisible” is another part of the Pledge that stands out. It’s a powerful word, meaning “unable to be divided.” This is a reminder that, despite our differences, we are all part of one nation. The U.S. has always been a diverse country, with people from different races, religions, and backgrounds. It can be easy to get caught up in the idea that our differences make us too divided, but “indivisible” reminds me that these differences don’t tear us apart—they make

us stronger. Our shared commitment to the ideals of liberty and justice should keep us united, no matter how divided we may feel at times.

The phrase “with liberty and justice for all” is, in my opinion, the most meaningful part of the Pledge. It’s a call to remember the freedoms that should be available to every person, regardless of who they are or where they come from. Liberty is what allows us to think freely, speak our minds, and pursue our dreams. Justice is what ensures that everyone is treated equally and fairly. But here’s the thing: I don’t see this as a promise that liberty and justice will always be perfect. Rather, I see it as a reminder that these are the ideals we should always strive for, even if we haven’t always lived up to them in the past. It’s a responsibility to work toward a better future for all, where everyone’s rights are respected.

When I say “with liberty and justice for all,” I also think about the work that still needs to be done. The United States isn’t a perfect country, and there have been plenty of times in history when it’s failed to live up to these ideals. Slavery, segregation, and inequality are just a few examples of how the country has fallen short. But that’s also where the Pledge becomes even more important—it’s a reminder that these words aren’t just a history lesson. They are a call to action. The Pledge calls on us to keep fighting for a society where liberty and justice are truly for all, not just some.

In a way, reciting the Pledge is a moment of self-reflection. It makes me think about what it means to be an American. It’s not just about being born in this country or living here—it’s about being part of something larger. It’s about taking responsibility for making this country live up to its ideals whether that means voting, standing up for what’s right, or being active in my community. The Pledge reminds me that we all have a role to play in creating a country that reflects the values of liberty and justice for everyone.

Every morning in school, we stand up, place our hands over our hearts, and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.



Ion Reynoso

3rd Place, High School

Pueblo South High School , age 14, MSG Dilcher

For many of us, it has become a routine, something we do without thinking much about it. However, as I have grown older, I have started to reflect on what the Pledge of Allegiance truly means to me.

It is more than just a few lines of words; it represents our values, our unity, and our commitment to our country. The Pledge of Allegiance was originally written in 1892 by Francis Bellamy, and it has undergone several changes since then. The version we recite today states, "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." Each phrase in this pledge carries significant meaning, and I believe it is important to understand them.

When I say, "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America," I am acknowledging the symbol of our nation. The flag represents our history, our struggles, and our achievements as a country. It is a reminder of the sacrifices made by countless individuals who fought for our freedom and rights. The flag is not just a piece of cloth; it embodies the spirit of America and the values we hold dear. It reminds me that I am part of something bigger than myself, a community of people who share a common goal of striving for a better future.

The next part of the pledge, "and to the Republic for which it stands," emphasizes the importance of our government. The United States is a republic, which means that we have a system of government in which representatives are elected to make decisions on our behalf. This is a privilege that many people around the world do not have. By pledging allegiance to the Republic, I am committing to support the democratic principles that allow us to have a voice in our government. It is a reminder that my participation in the political process is essential for maintaining our freedoms.

The phrase "one Nation under God" is particularly significant to me. It reflects the idea that our country is united, regardless of our differences. We come from

various backgrounds, cultures, and beliefs, but we are all Americans. This unity is crucial, especially in a world that often seems divided.

By recognizing that we are "under God," we acknowledge a higher power that guides us and holds us accountable for our actions. It serves as a reminder to treat one another with respect and kindness, regardless of our differences. The word "indivisible" is powerful. It means that we cannot be separated or divided. In a time when our country faces many challenges, it is essential to remember that we are stronger together.

The Pledge of Allegiance encourages us to stand united, even when we disagree. It reminds me that we must work together to overcome obstacles and create a better society for everyone. Finally, the pledge concludes with "with liberty and justice for all." This phrase encapsulates the core values of our nation.

Liberty means the freedom to express ourselves, practice our beliefs, and pursue our dreams. Justice ensures that everyone is treated fairly and equitably under the law. As a student, I believe it is vital to uphold these values in our daily lives. We must advocate for those who may not have a voice and strive to create a world where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

In conclusion, the Pledge of Allegiance is more than just a daily ritual; it is a reflection of our values and our commitment to our country. As I recite the pledge each morning, I am reminded of the importance of unity, democracy, and the principles that make America great. It inspires me to be an active participant in my community and to stand up for what is right. The Pledge of Allegiance serves as a reminder that we are all in this together, and it is our responsibility to uphold the ideals of liberty and justice for all. As I continue my journey through high school and beyond, I will carry these values with me, striving to make a positive impact in the world around me.



Ryan Szakal

Honorable Mention, High School

Pueblo West High School, age 18, LTC Emond

The Pledge of Allegiance is more than just a daily thing that all schools do, it carries a deeper meaning about unity, patriotism, and the principles that define the United States. When I say the pledge when the speaker comes on I see it as a reminder of the values this country stands for freedom and justice. However, the pledge also serves as a record of what America has been through.

The phrase, “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America” is personal to me. The allegiance means loyalty, and while patriotism can mean different things to different people, this part of the pledge expresses a sense of belonging. For me, it means appreciating the sacrifices made by the soldiers to give us these rights and everyday citizens who have worked to what it is today. It doesn’t mean blind loyalty but recognition of the what flag represents.

The next line, “and to the Republic for which it stands,” reminds me that the United States is a republic, a government by the people and for the people. The right to have a voice in decisions that shape the nation. This line is important because it acknowledges that while America has faced challenges it was built on principles that allow for growth and change.

“One nation, under God, indivisible” is a phrase that highlights unity. While the country is diverse in beliefs and backgrounds this part of the pledge suggests that despite differences, Americans are connected by a shared identity. The word “indivisible”

is particularly significant because it reflects the strength of the nation in the face of division. History has shown moments of deep conflict, from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement, yet the country has continued to move forward. This line serves as a reminder even in times of disagreement.

Finally, the pledge ends with “with liberty and justice for all.” These words carry the most weight for me because they express the ideals that America strives toward. Liberty represents the freedoms that all Americans cherish even with freedom of speech and religion. Justice on the other hand is a promise that fairness should exist for everyone, regardless of race, gender, or background. However, this phrase also challenges the nation to ensure that these rights truly apply to all people, not just in theory but in practice.

When I say the Pledge of Allegiance, I realize that America is not perfect. The country has struggled many times and even today, there are issues that need to be addressed. However, the pledge is a reminder of the nation’s greatness. It makes me think about what I can do to contribute to a better future whether that means going to the army, standing up for what is right, or simply treating others with respect and kindness.

In the end, the Pledge of Allegiance is not just a collection of words that we just recited out of habit. It is a reflection of American values, a tribute to those who have fought for freedom, and a call to each person to uphold the principles of liberty and justice.



Erick Chavez

Honorable Mention, High School

Pueblo West High School, age 17, LTC Emond

The Pledge of Allegiance is more than a routine recitation; it is a profound affirmation of loyalty and commitment to the principles that define the United States. For me, this pledge encapsulates a personal and collective dedication to the nation's ideals of unity, liberty, and justice.

Authored in August 1892 by Francis Bellamy, a Baptist minister and Christian socialist, the original pledge was introduced to instill a sense of patriotism among American youth. First published in *The Youth's Companion* on September 8, 1892, it read: "I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all" ("The Pledge of Allegiance"). Bellamy intended to create a concise and impactful expression of national loyalty that citizens of any country could recite.

Over time, the pledge underwent modifications to reflect the nation's evolving identity. In 1923, the wording was changed to: "I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States," to clarify that the allegiance was to the American flag. The following year, "of America" was added, resulting in: "I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America." In 1954, during the Cold War era, President Dwight D. Eisenhower encouraged Congress to add the words "under God," leading to the current version: "I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all" ("The Pledge of Allegiance"). This addition was influenced by the desire to differentiate the United States from atheistic nations and to emphasize the role of faith in American society.

Reciting the Pledge of Allegiance serves as a unifying act, transcending individual differences to foster a collective national identity. The phrase

"one Nation under God, indivisible" emphasizes the importance of unity and shared purpose. This unity is not merely geographical but ideological, representing a commitment to the common values that bind the nation together. As noted by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the pledge's thirty-one words "affirm the values and freedom that the American flag represents" ("The Pledge of Allegiance").

The pledge also underscores the nation's dedication to "liberty and justice for all." This commitment is a reminder of the ongoing responsibility to ensure that freedom and fairness are accessible to every citizen. It calls for active participation in the democratic process, vigilance against injustice, and a continuous effort to uphold the rights enshrined in the Constitution. As highlighted by the National Constitution Center, the pledge "stood for the vision of... one nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all" ("The History of Legal Challenges to the Pledge of Allegiance").

For me, the Pledge of Allegiance is a personal vow to contribute positively to society. It inspires a sense of duty to engage in civic activities, support community initiatives, and advocate for policies that promote equality and justice. This pledge is not a passive declaration but an active commitment to embody the principles it espouses. As expressed by students reflecting on the pledge, it "represents the freedom and ideals that America is built on" ("Students Reflect on Meaning of the Pledge of Allegiance").

Moreover, the inclusion of "under God" reflects the historical influence of faith in the nation's development. While acknowledging this heritage, it also invites reflection on the American populace's diverse beliefs. This phrase serves as a reminder of the moral and ethical foundations that guide the nation's pursuit of liberty and justice. As discussed in *Smithsonian Magazine*, the addition of "under God"



in 1954 was influenced by the desire to emphasize the role of faith in American society (“How the Pledge of Allegiance Went From PR Gimmick to Patriotic Vow”).

In essence, the Pledge of Allegiance is a multifaceted expression of patriotism. It encapsulates a commitment to national unity, a dedication to the principles of liberty and justice, and a personal resolve to contribute to the nation’s progress. Reciting the pledge is a reaffirmation of these values and a reminder of the collective responsibility to uphold them.

American populace’s diverse beliefs. This phrase serves as a reminder of the moral and ethical foundations that guide the nation’s pursuit of liberty and justice. As discussed in Smithsonian Magazine, the addition of “under God” in 1954 was influenced by the desire to emphasize the role of faith in American society (“How the Pledge of Allegiance Went From PR Gimmick to Patriotic Vow”).

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Brooke Newitt

Honorable Mention, High School

Rye High School, age 15, Mr. Estes

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America". We've been reciting these words almost every day since we were about 5 years old. But what does it mean? We all know the words, but do we understand the message? Have we ever taken the time to sit down and really comprehend the important message that the Pledge of Allegiance holds?

The first version of the pledge was written in 1885 by George Balch. His version opened with "We give our heads and our hearts to God and our country". His wording choice here is quite interesting: 'we give our heads and our hearts', or in interpretation, our mind and soul, all that man itself is. We willingly give ourselves to God and America. What an incredible statement. Hundreds of thousands of Americans have given their lives for this country, because it truly means something to them. So, what does it mean to us now?

We live in a world where so much is divided because of ideas, beliefs, or political views. We are becoming less and less united each day because we can't seem to figure out how to accept the fact that others may have a differing opinion from our own. It can be discouraging. Everyday in school, I stand to recite the Pledge Of Allegiance, while the rest of my class remains silent. It's not 'till the last phrase of the pledge that I am reminded that we still are "indivisible". I find comfort in thinking that we have shown in history, that even when we don't see eye to eye, or sit at the same table as one another, we are all American in

our very core.

Richard Red Skeleton once said while speaking about the Pledge of Allegiance, that we are "individual communities that have united into 48 great states. 48 individual communities with pride and dignity and purpose, all divided with imaginary boundaries, yet united to a common purpose: and that's love for country." Now, we are 50 states. The 50 United States of America. Yet his point still stands, if anything even more so now. We are a diverse nation and people.

We have communities, city, state, region, ethnicity, religious, educational, economical, social, and so many other kinds of differences that may categorize or seem to divide us. Yet what still remains is that we are American. The blood that runs through our veins is not just red, but white and blue as well. We are different. but that's what makes us stronger.

I think of these things every day as I recite the Pledge of Allegiance. That is what it symbolizes to me. That we are a single people, united under a flag that was instilled in the ground by the literal blood, sweat, and tears of our fellow citizens. A flag that is a symbol of who I am. And I pledge allegiance to it, and to the Republic for which it stands. We have always been and always will be, one nation under God, truly indivisible, with the rights of life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, and justice for all.



