

Young Lives, BIG Stories Contest

The *Young Lives, Big Stories* contest is open to all military-connected children preschool through 12th grade. Participants are invited to share their personal story on the theme: **‘What does it mean to you to be a military child or youth?’**

The contest provides an opportunity for military-connected children and youth to express their unique experiences and perspectives. Prizes will be awarded to one overall winner as well as top entries in each category.

Eligibility includes all children and youth of service members--Active Duty, National Guard, Reserve, and Retirees--who are enrolled in Army CYS Programs.

Child and Youth Services (CYS) is encouraged to get youth and parents involved in this contest. In addition, CYS staff should work with garrison marketing offices to ensure dissemination of marketing materials and promotion of this contest. Good luck!

GENERAL ENTRY GUIDELINES

- **Every participant gets to share one story in the Young Lives, BIG Stories contest.**
- Participant entries are as follows:
 - Drawing
 - Ages 3 - 4 years old
 - 5 years old – Grade 1
 - Grades 2 – 3
 - Written Submission
 - Grades 4 - 5
 - Grades 6 – 8
 - Grades 9 – 12
 - Audio/Video Submission
 - Grades 2 – 3
 - Grades 4 - 5
 - Grades 6 – 8
 - Grades 9 – 12

Contest Rules

Theme: All submissions must answer the question: “What does it mean to you to be a military child or youth?”

Original Work: Entries must be original. Please do not submit work copied from the internet, movies, or clip art. **AI-generated materials will not be accepted.**

Winners: One overall contest winner will be selected, along with a first-place winner for each age category.

Content Guidelines: Submissions containing violence, profanity and/or tobacco/alcohol in drawings or written submissions will be automatically disqualified.

Submission: Parents or legal guardians may submit entries on behalf of their child; however, the child must have primary creative control.

Entry Form: An entry form must be included with each submission. Forms may be downloaded at <https://www.armymwr.com/programs-and-services/cys/month-military-child>

GUIDELINES FOR DIFFERENT TYPES OF ENTRIES

Guidelines for Drawings:

- Drawings must reflect the question, “What does it mean to you to be a military child or youth?”
- Word .doc, .pdf, .jpeg, .png files accepted (max of 5MB online/email submissions accepted).
- Title your submission Young Lives, BIG Stories Contest and provide a brief description of your drawing (2-3 sentences).

Guidelines for Written Submissions:

- Written submissions must answer the question: “What does it mean to you to be a military child or youth?”
- Submissions must be at least 50 up to 500 words in length.
- Written submission may be an original essay, poem, song lyric, etc.
- Word .doc, .pdf, .jpeg, .png files accepted (max of 5MB online/email submissions accepted).

Guidelines for Audio/Video Submissions:

- Audio/Video submissions must answer the question: “What does it mean to you to be a military child or youth?”
- Submission **cannot** be **larger** than 18,000 kb.

- Submission **cannot** be **longer** than 3 minutes.
- Submission **may be** an original poem, song, lyrics, or play.
- Submission **must be** QuickTime Movie compatible.

****To ensure safety, entries should not include personal photos or images of the contestant, their family, school they attend or home addresses.**

Contest Entry Guidelines!

- **One Entry Per Participant**
- **How to Submit:**
 1. **Online:** Submit <https://www.armymwr.com/programs-and-services/cys/month-military-child> by clicking the “Enter” button and follow instructions.
 2. **Email: Send entries to** usarmy.ibsa.imcom-hq.mbx.g9-cys-services@army.mil. Use the subject line: Young Lives, Big Stories-[Sponsor’s name] and [Child’s Full Name].
 3. **Mail:** If you cannot submit online or by email, mailed entries will be accepted. All mailed entries must be **postmarked no later than 30 April 2026**.
 4. **Deadlines:** All entries (online, email or mailed) must be submitted or postmarked by **30 April 2026** to:
Department of the Army
IMCOM G9 - Child and Youth Services
CYS Programs Branch (ATTN: Denise Faison)
2405 Gun Shed Road, Building, 2266, 2nd Floor
JBSA, Fort Sam Houston, TX 78234
 5. **Entry Form:** A completed entry form must accompany every submission with parent/sponsor signature. Forms may be downloaded at <https://www.armymwr.com/programs-and-services/cys/month-military-child>.
 6. Entries without completed forms and required signatures will be disqualified.
 7. **Submissions must be original work. AI-generated content will not be accepted.**
 8. **Parent /Guardian Role:** Submissions may be entered on behalf of the

child by a parent or legal custodian. Parents **may** assist with a short description for ages 3 years to 3rd grade, (2-3 sentences) but children must have primary creative control to be entered. All entries must be signed by the parent/sponsor.

9. Creative Control: Entrants must have primary creative control, and all materials must be original.

10. Online/Email: Submissions should be titled “Young Lives, BIG Stories with the sponsor’s and child’s name [first and last name] in the subject line. Online submissions must have entry documents attached. **Shared documents such as Google doc cannot be accepted.**

11. Entries must be submitted or postmarked by 11:59 p.m. CST on 30 April 2026.