

# The Adopt-a-School Program For Camps

Adopted in 2005



"...so that children could learn about the flag  
and the sacrifices that made it what it was today."

1889 National Encampment  
Grand Army of the Republic

## **About the Adopt-a-School Program and why:**

Our children spend an average of 30 hours each week in the classroom at elementary, secondary and high schools. Teachers struggle with the ever growing number of students they must help educate in an ever growing number of subjects. The face of America is becoming more and more diverse and the title history class has been changed to social studies until today where it's called social science.

Recent studies have shown that the historical knowledge of young Americans is less than most educators and citizens would desire. Students' knowledge of history has suffered because of untrained teachers, reduced course requirements, and textbook treatments that are bland and voiceless and directed more toward trivial coverage of details than to the fullness needed to bring vitality and credibility to events of the past (Sewall 1987; Cheney 1987).

For young elementary students, an important purpose of education in history is to make the past seem real instead of remaining an untouchable abstraction held only in adult memories or hollow textbook passages. **History instruction will help children recognize their own relationship to history**, realizing that their actions and lives are a potential part of yet-to-be-written histories.

**Special experiences pump life into children's history learning.** Such experiences go beyond the "staples" of the classroom instruction and include field trips to museums and historical sites, simulations, craft and model-building experiences, individualized and in-depth National History Day projects, and oral history projects. When students are properly prepared for such experiences, the depth of understanding they build more than justifies the extra effort they entail.

**History improves judgment.** This is perhaps the most often-cited practical reason for studying history, and it was foremost in the mind of Thomas Jefferson when he wrote that schooling in America's new democracy should be "chiefly historical." He said, "...the people...are the ultimate guardians of their own liberty...by apprising them of the past will enable them to judge of the future. It will avail them of the experience of other times and other nations; it will qualify them as judges of the actions and designs of men."

**Knowledge of the past is required for understanding present realities.** When people share some common knowledge of history, they can discuss their understandings with one another.

Students familiar with history know their unique place in the stream of time; they have a sense of the trajectory of human development, where it may veer off course and how it might be kept on track. A democracy needs citizens with such judgment and wisdom; the past is the only place to find it.

As Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, we are the legal heirs to the Grand Army of the Republic. Our goal and purpose is to perpetuate the memory of the GAR; what they did in the Civil War and to preserve the Union, and to continue the work they started following the War. Teaching others about our flag, our government, patriotism and citizenship were important to them and should be important to us all. Learning about the other cultures and histories that live among us today is important, but the basic history of the United States cannot take second place to that of others.

Too often, history is perceived as dull; a special program, a presentation by a “living historian,” fun contests, and interesting discussions can make history come to life and a memorable experience.

The following offers suggestions on how we can help both the teacher and the student in better understanding American history; please remember that Camp/Department participation is voluntary. Good luck!

### **Here are a few ideas for how your Camp can adopt a school:**

#### **An Essay contest -**

A Camp could offer to sponsor an essay contest where the theme could be “What freedom means to me” or “What the flag means to me” or something similar.

The contest could be between several schools within a district with the winning school receiving a new U.S. flag; for fairness, if the contest is between schools in a district, it should be elementary vs. elementary, secondary vs. secondary, and high school vs. high school. The contest could also be between grades in just one school with the author of the winning essay being allowed to raise the new flag with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> place winners assisting.

How to implement –

- A. Within the Camp, determine what school(s) you wish to adopt.
- B. Draft a brochure or handout that you can leave with the school principals or teachers that includes information on the SUVCW, our goals and purpose, and the offer to sponsor an essay contest.
- C. Make an appointment to meet with the school and present your idea.
- D. Should the school wish to participate, discuss the details with the teachers including the theme or subject, how the essays will be judged, and what determines the winner. The essays may be judged on simply content and/or grammar, punctuation,

penmanship (if handwritten) – all items to clarify before hand with grade level skill in mind.

E. After the details are complete and a kick-off date chosen, send out a media release inviting local media sources to attend. By doing so, even if only the school newsletter editor attends, it will be an opportunity to get the word out about who we are. If an entire school is going to compete vs. another a school, try to arrange for a school assembly that introduces the contest to all the students at one time.

F. After the contest deadline, meet with the school to review essays and determine a winner.

G. Schedule a day with the school to present them with the new flag and once again, invite the local media sources.

H. Encourage maximum attendance from your Camp (including any Sisters of the Allied Orders who may be active in your area). Hopefully, the school will allow a formal flag raising ceremony where additional tips on flag etiquette can be shared. Remember, while we want others to know who we are, it is important to stress how important the school's and students involvement is in this project – we want to help them grow.

I. It is important to take photos and to write a follow-up report, not only for the Camp's records, but the Department and National levels as well. To many times, our Encampments lack sharing the successes you experience throughout the year.

J. Present the school and winning author with a framed color certificate of appreciation.

### **Special flag programs -**

Offer to teach a program on flag etiquette by sponsoring a “Red, White and True Blue” Day where your Camp instructs the students on raising and lowering the flag, how to fold it, and other important facts. (This would be a great opportunity to pass out our Flag Facts flyer.)

This project is less involved but one that is just as worthy of undertaking as the essay contest. In many elementary schools, the students are given the responsibility of raising and lowering the flag which would reduce the size of your audience and create a closer relationship. This type of project can not only be used to increase knowledge of our flag and patriotism, but offers opportunity to be used as a kick-off to other projects such as Civil War memorial restoration fundraising.

## **Special presentations and/or living history programs -**

If you have living historians, reenactors, and/or speakers within your Camp, you could offer to make a presentation(s) on the Civil War when the students have reached that part of their studies (usually in May).

These programs should be given with the age of the students in mind; something one-hour or less will hold the students attention quite well. Be sure to allow the students to ask questions as that will also help you better understand what they are thinking about.

## **“Together...we CAN do it!” and Civil War Memorial Restoration**

This project is a winner! Schools are often looking for projects in which their students can get involved; they are called *service-learning projects*. We, as Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War are working (or should be) to locate, assess and/or preserve and restore the Civil War memorials in our communities. After we locate them, we often find them in need of restoration and/or preservation; both of which take money.

The “Together...we can do it!” project offers 1) a short history lesson on the Civil War to the students, 2) an opportunity for the students to learn the character values of giving and sharing, 3) a Camp to collect funds towards a restoration/preservation project, and 4) the students can not only study history, but they can help save it.

The project works as follows:

A. A Camp must have a restoration fundraising project established and underway and preferably some printed literature supporting that (flier, brochure, newspaper article, and etc.

B. Approach a school with the project and how the students can help; agree upon a day for making the presentation.

C. On the scheduled day, give a 1-hour presentation on the Civil War (this could be on the soldier, women, or both – it is up to what is available to you). At the close of this presentation, share with the students a brief history of the GAR and the SUVCW and the particular memorial you are raising \$ for; having pictures really helps tell the story, not only of what you are restoring but why. Be sure to let them know the cost and that individually we cannot afford it, but “Together...we CAN do it!”

D. Encourage the students to bring in a can of food over the next week with a dollar bill of ANY denomination (some cans have been returned with as much as a \$100 bill attached). Explain to them that you will give the cans of food to a local food bank thereby helping others less fortunate and the \$ will go to assist with the fundraising.

Be sure to thank them and let them know they will receive an invitation when the time for rededication comes.

E. A week later, return to the school and pick up your cans and \$. Be sure to record this contribution accurately in your restoration bookkeeping.

**Come up with your own ideas!**

The ideas above are simply suggestion as to what can be done. If your Camp has other ideas, please share with the National Patriotic Instructor.