

Patriotism extends beyond waving a flag or attending an Independence Day parade. It is about supporting our country and our fellow citizens in any way we can. It is about making sacrifices for the greater good. American values and ideals are deeply ingrained in all patriots. I strive to embody these principles in every aspect of my life through hard work, compassion, and respect for democracy. Every Saturday, I volunteer at a local food pantry. I also frequently cook meals for a homeless shelter and a community dining hall. I view volunteering as a small way to help ensure that the less fortunate in our community have the necessities for survival. Connections made through volunteering build broader American communities. At the food pantry, I meet a diverse range of people, including elderly, immigrants, and individuals with disabilities, whom I would not typically encounter in my daily school life; I find common ground and form connections with them. While I help bring their groceries to their cars, I talk with them and listen to their struggles and stories. Through my volunteering, I have had the opportunity to meet many veterans. At the community dining hall, I work with a proud Vietnam War veteran who always wears his veteran division hat. As we wash dishes, he shares stories from his time in the military, and I listen, showing my gratitude for his sacrifices. Together, we serve patrons – including several other veterans – who are experiencing food insecurity and have come for a hot meal. I build relationships with these veterans and give back to them through my volunteering. As a leader of our school's Youth in Action program, I organize events with non-profit groups and with local individuals who seek assistance. Youth in Action introduces high school students to our broader community and to community service, whether by helping the elderly shovel snow from their driveways or by gardening for Willing Hands, a program that provides food banks with extra produce from local farms. In addition to volunteering, I express patriotism by treating others with the American values of compassion, integrity, and honesty. Holding a door open for someone, smiling at a stranger, or simply offering a greeting or a compliment may seem insignificant, but these small gestures can build connections and strengthen our communities. Furthermore, I show patriotism by demonstrating the founders' ideals of liberty, democracy, and intellectual engagement. To me, patriotism means engaging in the democratic process. I stay well-informed on current events and politics, forming my own opinions on issues. In the past, I have joined my parents in campaigning and attended advocacy events, exercising my freedom of speech. In this time of political polarization, I try to respect opposing opinions and partake in civil conversation. Listening to and trying to understand contrasting viewpoints helps strengthen the civil democracy that the founders envisioned. As an American, I am fortunate to have opportunities that many others do not have, and I believe valuing and utilizing these advantages reflects patriotism. Because I attend an excellent public high school, I have access to a wide range of extracurricular activities and a diverse selection of optional courses. By studying diligently and developing

valuable skills, I hope to one day give back to this country through a career in medicine. Patriotism is more than loyalty to the flag; it is loyalty to the people and the values the flag represents. Whether by volunteering, learning, or embracing our rich American culture, I strive to embody the ideals that make America strong.