

ODYSSEY ORACLE

VOICES AND VISIONS



Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Song of the Odyssey Class of 2021 | 2 |
| Songs of Ourselves | 3 |
| Becoming Metaphors | 14 |
| Loving Langston Hughes | 23 |
| Encountering Emily Dickinson..... | 32 |
| Poems that Pack a Punch..... | 34 |
| <i>Let's Talk About It</i> Book | 36 |



Emily Auerbach, Co-Director/Founder; Oracle Editor
Kevin Mullen, Co-Director
Emily Azad, Program Manager
Christina DeMars, Coordinator
Beth McMahon, Oracle Designer

emily.auerbach@wisc.edu
kevin.mullen@wisc.edu
emily.azad@wisc.edu
christina.demars@wisc.edu

608-712-6321
608-572-6730
608-590-5862
608-590-5948



SONG OF THE ODYSSEY CLASS OF 2021

We are the Odyssey Class of 2021!

We have worked as a cashier, barman, groundskeeper, cheese cutter, cook, church administrator, electrician, telemarketer, sales manager, baker, waitress, model, actress, busser, cash loan attendant, caregiver, construction worker, fast food server, CNA, stay-at-home wife and mother, babysitter, leasing agent, caterer, pastor, Amazon deliverer, master burrito builder, wedding chef, Uber driver, and special needs teacher, holding jobs at JC Penney's, Dairy Queen, Orange Julius, Papa Murphy's, the City of Madison, US Postal Service, O'Hare Airport, KFC, Sears, Champsports, Walgreens, and Dean Health.

We hail from Mexico, Morocco, Ireland, and America; from Mississippi, Arizona, Pennsylvania, Kansas, and Colorado; from Harvey, Indiana; Chicago, Illinois; Twin Cities, Minnesota; Orlando, Florida; Inglewood, California; Memphis, Tennessee; Kokomo, Indiana; and Green Bay, Milwaukee, and Madison, Wisconsin,

With ancestors coming from Mexico, Canada, South America, France, Germany, Morocco, India, Ireland, Nigeria, Jamaica, Spain, Russia, Sicily, Italy, Switzerland, and the West Indies,

Speaking Spanish, English, ASL, Nahuatl, Mayan, Creole, Hausa, Fula, Irish, French, Ebonics, German, Moroccan, Hindu, Siksikáí'powahsin, Igbo, Cherokee, Apache, Totonac, Berber, Amazigh, Arabic, Italian, Yiddish, and Olde English,

Worshipping as Lutheran, Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist, Mormon, Baptist, Muslim, Hindu, native, Pentecostal, Jehovah's Witness, Smai Twai, Jewish, agnostic, atheist, and pagan.

We call ourselves short, outgoing, strong, proud, busy, calm, ambitious, faithful, adventurous, bold, amiable, inventive, tiny, petite, confident, alive, blunt, stressed, striving, kind, joking, laughing, driven, industrious, eclectic, loving, stocky, funny, tall, protective, patient, laidback, quiet, free-thinking, loud, collected, stubborn, liberal, resilient, maternal, cheerful, and determined.

We are the Odyssey Class of 2021!

SONGS OF OURSELVES

Song of Betsy

I am Betsy.
 I am the daughter of a mestizo
 King and queen who traveled far to provide
 I am a brown-skinned queen learning to embrace her beauty.
 I am short, outgoing, and far from perfect.
 I am Betsy. **(Betsy Alfaro)**



Song of Tawania

I am Tawania.
 A Wisconsinite with roots to other places
 I am a Scorpio
 I am a water sign, passionate and powerful
 I am a mother
 Nurturing, careful, and loving
 I am black
 My melanin is beautiful, not to be afraid of,
 but judged beyond measure
 I am multi-talented
 Easily adaptive, eager to learn
 I am a woman
 A creator of life, a sister, a daughter
 I am religious
 Christianity is in me
 I am Tawania **(Tawania Alston)**

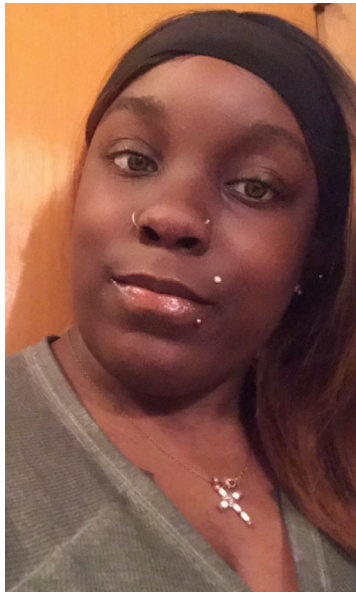
Song of Calvin

Write a Song for Calvin
 No, those are for heroes
 I've done too much wrong to be one of those
 Song for Calvin
 I'm the reason that crack baby's mother got high
 Song for Calvin
 I clearly don't deserve one
 I play an intricate part in this system that makes black men die young
 Song for Calvin
 I'm afraid that's bad taste
 When there are so many good people who deserve one
 Let's not spit in their face
 You asked for a song, but this is all I got
 the sob story of a black dummy
 that became another statistic chasing white money **(Calvin Balentine)**



Song of Sarina

I am Sarina, I am strong and I am proud
 I create children of the sun that I hold in the cloud
 Rooted deep in Wisconsin land
 Yet I always see the waves and sand
 Further we travel and see far and wide
 My family and I all along for the ride
 My skin glowing brown from the moon up above me
 Those rays shine bright, that's my father who is now free
(Sarina Benford)



Song of Anjelica

I am Anjelica
 I am a black queen
 With a lot of melanin
 A teacher
 A mother
 A student
 I am my own boss
 A Christian
 A strong woman
 Who never gives up
 I am a single mother
 But will move mountains
 For my son.
 I am Anjelica.
(Anjelica Brown)



Song of Souad

I am Souad.
 I am Amazigh, Arab, Berber, Moroccan, and African.
 I am Souad.
 Above all I am a woman.
 I am Souad.
 Strong because I stand up not only for myself but for all women around me.
 Optimistic, I am always expecting good things to happen.
 Unbeatable, even when I am alone, by myself, walking through hell, I remain an angel.
 Ambitious, I am working hard to be the best version of myself.
 Dynamic, I know more than I say, I work more than I speak...
 I am Souad.
(Souad Bidar)

Song of Tisha

Tisha was born and raised on the south side of Chicago
 Tisha was such a shy and reserved girl
 Tisha was the youngest of the family
 Tisha's family was huge
 Tisha was very observant, a straight A student, and in her shell
 After many years of observing, Tisha became a butterfly
 Tisha became free to be her, very colorful and outgoing
(Tisha Butler)



Song of Cashae
 I am Cashae
 And just like my name I am very unique
 I am a leader
 A protector
 A black queen
 I am southern
 A brave beauty
 Without a doubt
 Confident and compassionate
 I am original
 But not your ordinary girl
 I am a woman of God
 And that is Cashae. **(Cashae Davis)**



Song of Paris
 I am Paris
 a woman of all talents who's very ambitious
 standing on 10 toes faithful regardless
 taking losses as lessons learned
 learning from all my mistakes
 growing like a flower being watered every day. **(Paris Foster)**

Song of Fernando
 I am Fernando
 A father
 Latino
 Complex but simple
 One with God. **(Fernando Galindo)**



Song of Sarah
 I am Sarah, Sarah SMILES!
 When I smile rooms are lit...hearts are lifted.
 There are many songs written about SMILING,
 my favorite smile song is Sarah Smiles. Lol...
 I am Big and BOLD! With one of my contagious SMILES
 comes Adventure...the definition of adventure is unusual and exciting.
 Yup that is me! I am highly remarkable...interestingly different from others.
 Sarah...SMILE...for a while! **(Sarah Galinski)**

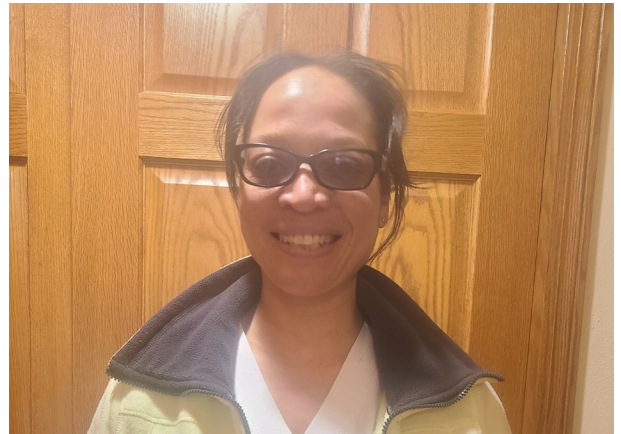


Song of Erika

I am Erika
I am a Mexican yet American princess
who is still trying to figure out her roots
I am a daughter but also a mother
I am strong
I am bold
and I will not give up **(Erika Gonzalez)**

Song of Valeria

I am Valeria
I have Moorish blood in me
With a touch of Mauretania, North Africa, and Europe
I am a CNA of 25 years
My ancestors speak Arabic
I am a Christian
With alertness and discernment. **(Valeria Gordon)**



Song of Bresha

I am Bresha
I am very smart
I have a big heart
I love art
I am an Angel
so I'm important
(Bresha Green)



Song of Melissa

I am Melissa
A daughter of two broken yokes
A mother of miracles
A love that never ends
A divine light to those who can see
A victor who continues to overcome
A teacher of new things
A voice for the soft spoken and strength for the overlooked
(Melissa Herriges)

Song of Kwan

I am Kwan:

I am not my father, I am who my mother raised me to be.

I am Kwan:

I am a kind king who can laugh his way out of any situation.

I am Kwan:

I am a descendant of my Nigerian brothers and sisters,
though I call Madison and Pennsylvania my home.

I am Kwan:

I am a Christian with love in his heart,
in a world that's losing its love
by the day.

I am Kwan:

I am a jack-of-all-trades, my skills and talents know no ends
and there is nothing I can't do when I put my mind to it.

I am Kwan! **(Kwan Hogan)**



Song of Henry

I am Henry

A borderless human

A son of the earth

A clandestine for some,

a fighter and stubborn for others

A nice, diplomatic, noble, and faithful guy
who would die for his ideals

But just do not make me angry,

or else I will fill the front of your house of
'Zarapes' from Saltillo.

(Henry Irisson)



Song of Jessica

I am Jessica

A fighter from the start

But still with a compassionate heart.

I have been through hell but I made it back up again.

I've tasted the sweet things in life only to spit them out,
knowing that they can be bitter too.

I try to stay humble,

knowing that love is what I choose.

I am Jessica

I have been a fighter from the start.

I will fight for you too

Because I have a fighter's heart. **(Jessica Jacobs)**

Song of Brianna

I am Brianna the Soul Queen Crab protecting my soft mushy interior
 I am Brianna genuinely tough through trials and tribulations
 I am Brianna the mother who sings her kids a lullaby when they're sleepy
 or gets them to dance when they're upset
 I am Brianna the one that digs in her purse for change
 when she sees a homeless person no matter how much she has
 I am Brianna the nice sales agent that wants you to keep all of your money
 I am Brianna a Harry Potter fan that never read any of the books
 I am Brianna the spoken word artist who forgot to speak
 I am Brianna who can't make it through Lion King without crying
 I am Brianna who loves country music but hides it
 I am Brianna the conspiracy theorist
 I am Brianna always goofing around cracking jokes
 I am Brianna and clumsy is my middle name it's a trip
 I am Brianna who still runs to put the light on at night
 I am Brianna the Michael Jackson dance queen on the Xbox of course
 I am Brianna who hasn't ridden a plane and is scared to
 I am Brianna the small puzzle piece game you can never figure out
(Brianna Johnson)



Song of Yvonne

I am Yvonne, daughter of a black queen,
 I am a mom of four, I'm loud and funny.
 I am the flower to sun, I'm a busy worker
 and a busy mom.
 I am dark but melanin glows bright.
 I'm not always smart and I'm not always bright.
 I am Light, I am beauty,
 for my roots are strong and they grow with me.
 I am Yvonne with the afro of my history for I am great
 for I am me for I am tall like a tree.
 I am the life that rebirths me for I am
 Yvonne, daughter of my black queen. **(Yvonne Johnson)**



Song of Feather

I am Feather, Feather I am
 I am me, I am you, I am we, and we is me
 I am light
 Bright as the sun, Blazing like a star
 Illuminating yet blinding
 forever burning and infinite
 I am darkness
 I am blackness
 Universal containing all
 Black is the source of everything
 Empty yet not
 I am you, I am me, I am universal, and we are we
 Everything is in the dark
 It's where ego hides
 Hate, envy, and lies thrive
 Where devious thoughts and intentions connive
 There is no separation, it's all fabrication
 Because we are all intertwined
 Endless shades
 From dark to light and many shades of grey
 One cannot survive without the other because we all must blend as one.
 Blend the shades of me right into shades of you
 Blending all the beautiful colors still ends with the same hue
 Blackness is in you as deep as it's in me
 This is the song of Feather
 This is the song of you
 This is the song of me
 This song is universal
 This is the song of we **(Feather Lloyd)**

Song of Meself / Song of Farren

I'm mad as a horde of fading ghosts
Exchanging dreams for last resorts

I'm a crooked signpost dancing on a grave

I'm mad as mad drunks, who, subsisting only on
beans and toast,
Crash endlessly into every new dawn
Still warm in their tattered coats

My people are of Donn, "The Dark One"
We were stacking our stones
Fifteen generations before the great pyramids were
a twinkle in Imhotep's eye
Now for sure our stones weren't as fancy
But they're still standing all the same
And when we die we'll slip off over the sea
Like cobwebs on a breeze
To his house
It's a pub on an island
You go left at Hy-Brazil, the island that vanishes
off the maps in 1865
The beer there is dark as tar
And the lounge is full of shades
Who stay and repeat themselves
And are having far too good a time
To catch the train that comes once a century
And only goes West
Into the Land of Youth.

In our Gaelic you can't say Yes or No
And it's impossible to say you are sad
But our language has gone West now
Back along the rocky road
So we dance with English
Like you might at the crossroads, with the devil
But the words never stop feeling strange in our
mouths

Is there a back door? I might use it.

I am myself
So I am, So I am
And all the people should say:
So he is, so he is

I never give a straight answer to a boring question
I have the hunger of a rat, chewing at the bars
The madness of a dog, chasing speeding cars

The truth won't move windchimes
But it will move me

Don't get up gentlemen, I'm only passing through

I'll say something about America now, will I?
I can understand why a man might risk it all
To rob the Popeye's Chicken at the strip mall
Disappear into the hubbub
Into an endless suburb
The white noise of a dispatch call

Sure Plymouth Rock is just plastic crap
And the Mayflower was sold for scrap
The past is done, the future's a trap
And all of that is just wasted breath

Perhaps I should mention some more of history now
It's to blame for this mess anyhow

My great grandfather invented the submarine
He was too proud and stubborn a man to admit he'd
sunk his boat
This is also the origin of the phrase "Sunk Cost
Fallacy."
But where he really shined was in exceptional
nonsense
I follow his example in all my endeavors

I had brains to burn
So I did, So I did
They were mine to burn
So they were, So they were

Finality is death. Perfection is finality. Nothing is
perfect.
There are lumps in it.

Now, if you don't mind
This is my poem
Get your own **(Farren McDonald)**





Song of Michelle

I am Michelle

I am Mexican but born in the States.

I speak English, but heart cries to learn Spanish.

I am mother of three, but oldest daughter of four.

My home is in Wisconsin, but my heart misses Colorado.

I was born Catholic, but now Pentecostal.

I am Tiny, but Strong. **(Michelle McKoy)**

Song of Stephaney

I am Stephaney

Full Nigerian yet full American

I am the pride of my ancestors

I am the manifestation of their wildest hopes and dreams

I am a daughter, sister, mother, and friend

I am a protector and provider

I am a student, an entrepreneur and future business owner

I am a child of God, unstoppable and fearfully and wonderfully made

(Stephaney Obi)



Song of Asia

I am Asia

A jack of all trades

A mother of two

A god-fearing woman

An old soul

Derived from Nigeria

Filled with ambition and drive

I live in my skin

Lovely as a rose petal

A queen of her throne! **(Asia Pearson)**

Song of Burnett

I am Burnett, but not a Brunette.

I am a special needs teacher,

A previous youth court coordinator

A phenomenal Odyssey student

A blessed Christian

A great speaking ASL guru.

A Milwaukee native

A family so big numbers couldn't justify. **(Burnett Reed)**

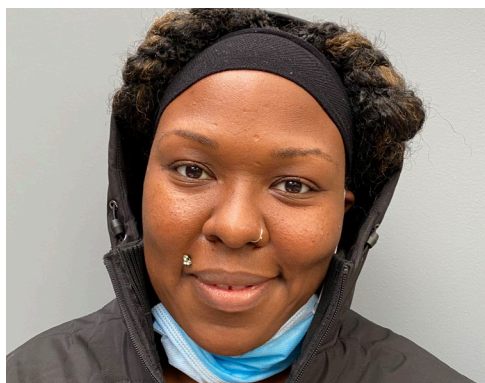




Song of Delisha

I am Delisha
 I am a Mother of four boys
 An African American Queen from Chicago
 A goddess with gravity defying hair
 And sun kissed skin
 I am a born Leader
 A strong woman who feels deeply and loves fiercely
 A natural caregiver at home and also for a living
 I am often misunderstood by people who try to understand me
 I had to stop explaining myself
 I am me
 I am Delisha **(Delisha Smith)**

I am Krystal
 I am strong
 I am independent
 I am capable
 I am beautiful
 I will continue to grow and prosper **(Krystal Smith)**



Song of Thedora

I am Thedora, a soft rock. A fragile glass.
 I am a navigator, an advocate.
 I am shy but excited to start this journey.
 I am a working beauty, a work of art.
 I am emotionally intelligent. Culturally aware.
 I am open to love, friendship, camaraderie.
 I am close to pain, disappointment, lies. **(Thedora Smith)**

Song of Dana

I am Dana.
 I am a voice for unheard helpless individuals when needed.
 I lift a vibe.
 I am a helping hand.
 I am passion, healing myself as well as the others.
 I am a focused compass.
 I am teaching my children my community empathy.
 I am still learning every day.
 I am making a difference.
 I am a pyramid.
 I am threaded with survival.
 I am a volunteer. **(Dana Stokes)**





Song of Faleshuh
 I am Faleshuh
 I am tall and sometimes shy
 I am tough but I still cry
 I am Faleshuh
 A master procrastinator who
 will motivate the masses
 I pinch myself each time an
 opportunity passes
 I am Faleshuh
 I can't see very well and I always
 forget my glasses
 I sometimes start out slow but
 I finish strong
 I am Faleshuh
 In this life I have learned that
 you have to do what's right to
 avoid things going wrong
 I am Faleshuh **(Faleshuh Walker)**

Song of Sunni
 My name is Sunni
 It rhymes with Bunny
 My mom calls me Sunni Bunni
 My son is Brian
 It rhymes with Crying
 He's always crying.
 We call him crying Brian.
 I'm from Chicago
 where we pray to see tomorrow.
 I pray to God & keep faith
 so I know I will survive though.
 My favorite rapper is G Herbo
 but they call him Swervo.
 My husband always say
 "Sunni, you're my Sunshine." **(Sunni Walker)**



Song of Diane
 I am Diane.
 I am the slow jazz horn of the saxophone playing moody blues and
 rhythmic jazz tunes.
 I feel your smile as I express my sounds and enjoy the pleasure of
 your celebrations of our harmony.
 May we always feel the togetherness and joy of our beautiful sounds!
(Diane Walton)



Song of Keyanna

I am Keyanna, smart and strong.

I am a mother,

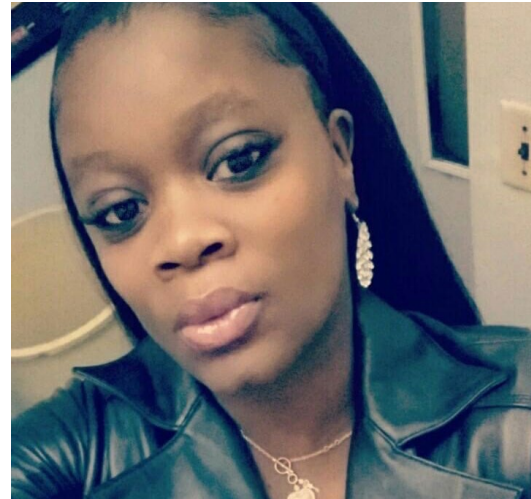
Came from a one parent home.

I'm a learner who sometimes speaks aggressively.

I am a dreamer, who believes in it coming true.

I am determined and dedicated to reaching my goals.

I am Keyanna (**Keyanna Wilson**)



Song of Shiquita

I am Qui.

I'm sweet and unique, and as certain as I can be.

But also very hard for few to see.

I'm here in the moment and that's all I can be,

simply because this is just me. (**Shiquita Woods**)



BECOMING METAPHORS

I am art.
 No two people will see me the same.
 Where some see soothing
 Others see pain
 Where some see dark
 Others see light
 But I am the same work of art
 Regardless of sight.
 Some will not see my canvas
 Because of my frame
 Some will not see the beauty of my drawing
 Because of the color of my paint.
 Some will stand too close to see the full picture
 While others will view me in the wrong lighting or setting
 Regardless of your point of view
 I am me
 Regardless of what you see
 I am me.
 I am art. **(Calvin Balentine)**



I AM AN ELEPHANT!

And in ALL ways...I see BIG, HUGE, in the GREY area of things, because with me it's never just BLACK or WHITE. I AM that in between. Grey areas can be the unknown or the untouched; it is a complicated area...yup, that is ME!

I AM AN ELEPHANT!

When it comes to remembering SPACES, PLACES, and FACES...DULY NOTED!! THAT'S ME! I have been pregnant with a vision of COMMUNITY for over 20 years, but like an ELEPHANT'S pregnancy of 23 months, my vision WILL be born right on time! Upon a grand entrance into this world, my vision WILL hit the ground running! Just like a baby elephant, MY VISION IS HEAVY; 268 pounds to be exact, 3 feet tall...AT BIRTH!!! How many of you can even imagine my baby? LOL . . . IKR.

I AM AN ELEPHANT!
 STOP POACHING US!
 OUR TUSKS ARE OUR TUSKS!
 LOOK BUT DON'T TOUCH! **(Sarah Galinski)**



I am water
 Flowing and free
 Gentle like a stream, strong like the current of the lake
 I am water
 Fierce like a hurricane yet calm like pond ripples on a hot summer's day.
 I am water
 Refreshing, nourishing, rejuvenating
 I give, sustain, and can take away life
 I am water
 I am an infinity of shades, from green, teal, to blues
 I accept all that is me, knowing it can change
 From a miniscule teardrop to the greatest waterfall
 I am water
 From a smooth surfer's wave to a destructive tsunami
 I am Feather
 I am free
 I am flowing
 I am water **(Feather Lloyd)**



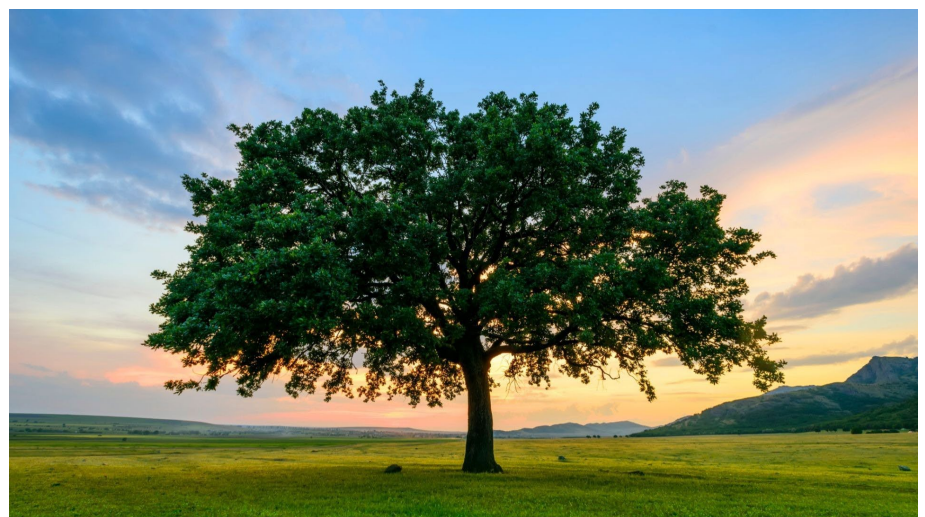
I'm a broken toilet
 Gleaming white and full of crap

 I'm a frustrated hunter
 I cannot shut my trap

 I'm a Nigerian Prince
 Probably a scam

 I'm a lazy old beaver
 I do not give a dam. **(Farren McDonald)**

I am a tree sturdy and strong. I'm
 alive and grown. I sprouted my
 leaves in the spring that fall in
 autumn. The snow covers me in
 the winter but when the sun has
 melted the snow it'll water my
 roots. I will survive. **(Dana Stokes)**



I am Black Velvet

I am a flower. I can grow up to 7 feet tall. There aren't many like me.

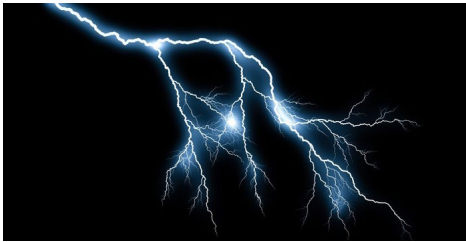
I am rare. I have a stunning deep red that fades outward like a reflection of oneself. When I change my hair from dark to light, my eyes look Chinese, or Asian, as many say.

From my dark center to my splash with a tinge of orange, like the orange fruit I love to eat, I am a sunrise in broad daylight.

I am a flower that used to be a seed like a baby in my mother's womb, waiting for the day my life makes an impact on earth, as my eyes open at the first sight of light.



Who am I? I am not ordinary, for I am a black velvet queen that stands tall to shine when the light hits me from the sun which darkens my melanin in the summer. Let me shine! I am a black flower that runs deep within me. Not just a flower, because I am a Black velvet queen sunflower. I am me. **(Yvonne Johnson)**



I am a bolt of lightning,
Silent but striking. I shine bright as the light of a bolt.
I am fast and furious, moving at my own pace.
I come and go unannounced.
I am a bolt of lightning! **(Asia Pearson)**

I am a rabbit ready to go.

I have so many things going on that it never stops.
my mind racing, feet slowly pacing,
head sometimes aching, getting so old,
feel like my knees breaking. Got to keep working and learning
cause it'll never stop. I am trying to go high in life and reach the mountain top.
Nobody said it would ever be easy, and through times like this
have to make sure to cover our sneezes. **(Burnett Reed)**

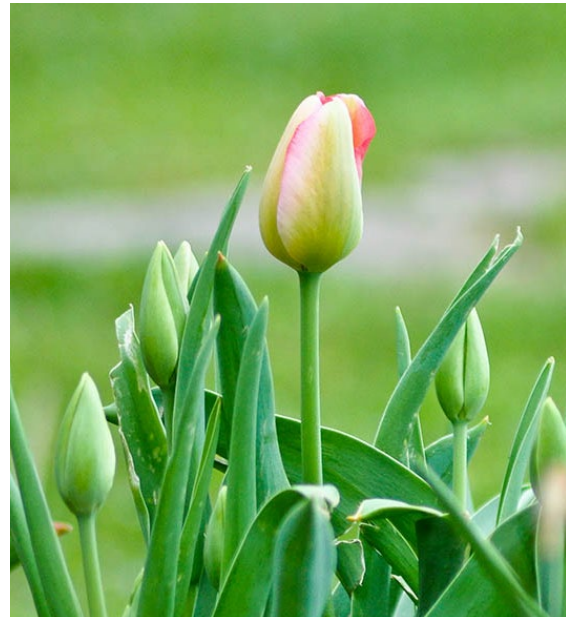


I am a mirror
A direct reflection of you
A reflection of your insecurities, lack of accountability, your truth
I am a mirror
Looking right back at you
A reflection of the pain, the broken promises, the truce
I am a mirror
Candy Man, Candy Man, what you gonna do
Many different choices, but only one you
I am a mirror
To break me is to break you **(Faleshuh Walker)**

I am a seed that is tough yet fragile
 I am a seed that requires the proper environment and nutrition to bloom
 I am a seed that soon will bloom into a beautiful flower. **(Erika Gonzalez)**



I used to be an un-blossomed flower
 but now I am a ray of sunlight to help that flower blossom.
 I used to be an un-blossomed flower
 but now I am a flourishing rose. **(Betsy Alfaro)**



I am a bamboo tree,
 Easily bent but not broken.
 Would you ever think that I am stronger than steel?
 Could you see that I have been through many tropical storms?
 That those storms have made me want to give up and pray to be
 taken away?
 But I somehow still have the strength to get up after...
 I got over the pain of failed life choices and “hurricanes” and
 reminded myself,
 You may bend, but you will NOT break.
 The wind may knock you over and make it hard to get up,
 But remember you’re resilient.
 You ARE a bamboo tree. **(Tawania Alston)**



I am the moon
 I have history, I have secrets
 I am a reflection and I shine
 I am here, I am gone
 Like the moon I am reborn
 I am dark, I am light
 I will disappear but I’m still here
 I have something behind me
 I have something in front of me
 There’s a moon in you
 There’s a moon in me **(Bresha Green)**

I used to be a caterpillar
 But now I'm a beautiful butterfly.
 In my cocoon wrapped tight
 My life was upside down for a while
 But my growing struggle brought strength
 I have opened up,
 I can now spread my wings and soar.
 It was dark as mud, I couldn't see
 I thought I was blind
 Felt like those who have done time.
 I am finally set free.
 I am a butterfly
 And a butterfly is me. **(Cashae Davis)**



I am a light.
 When we find ourselves trapped in the dark,
 we search for an extended hand to pull us up,
 this hand is me.
 When we are lost and cannot find our way,
 the guiding voice from a distance is me.
 When we need someone to hold our hand,
 in turmoil, chaos, change, and troubled times,
 I am the non-judgmental comforter.
 I'm just standing in the gap
 being for others what wasn't here for me. **(Melissa Herriges)**

I am a bottomless pit when it comes to food. I've been told I inhale my food like a vacuum. I am a bottomless pit when it comes to athletics; my energy has no limits, I don't know when to give up, and I've been told I jump like an antelope. I am a bottomless pit when it comes to respect. Not only do I show respect to adults, but I'm a strong believer in treating others the way you want to be treated. **(Kwan Hogan)**

I am natural, old-fashioned, present, I lead,
 I'm strong, sweet, tangy, thick, frothy, delicious,
 peculiarly flavored,
 I can be much sometimes, commonly hot but best Iced
 I used to be Lemons but now I am Lemonade.
(Delisha Smith)



I am a Black Butterfly rare but virtuous.
 Starting off as a caterpillar on an Odyssey of finding my purpose,
 leaving the traces of the old me behind,
 in time manifesting into something beautiful,
 breaking free from a dark Cocoon and rebirthing.
 Not only do you see my darkness in the beaming sunlight,
 now you can see all my colors too.
 I am a Black Butterfly
 Black in color but rare in nature.
 Just like the song "sailing across the water
 tell your sons and daughters what the struggle brings,"
 My life is a struggle but through triumphs I will persevere.
 My goal is to help others hold everything near and dear.
 I am a Black Butterfly rare but almost there. **(Brianna Johnson)**



I am a mountain, and mountains do not
 fall. Although one period of my youth was a dark
 storm, mountains are resilient. They contain
 volcanoes, forests, and rivers. I am resisting. Even
 though the danger itself stands in front of me, I
 stand because I remain a mountain not shaken
 by the wind. I am the glory of a woman. I am a
 mountain. **(Souad Bidar)**



I used to be "shy as a possum."
 Never spoke my mind.
 My head was filled with words of wisdom,
 But my lips remained sealed.
 The birth of my daughter awakened my soul.
 I had so much to say.
 I knew going forward I had to be "loud as a lion."
 And "strong as oak."
 Being a mother is no joke. **(Michelle McKoy)**

I used to be a mouse,
 quiet, scared to go after my dreams,
 needing permission to breathe, timid,
 scared of all the things that can go wrong.

Now I am a lioness,
 roaring my plans, going after everything with no fear,
 protecting my cub and feasting on her enemies,
 promenading proudly as the queen of the jungle.
(Paris Foster)



I used to be a ninja turtle, eating pizza and fighting crime throughout my youth days, but now I am Master Splinter training my young turtles, providing pizza and words of wisdom. **(Sarina Benford)**

I'm a night owl always staying up late
watching TV
doing homework
on Facebook
I'm a night owl
enjoying the quietness and peacefulness
enjoying "me" time
I'm a night owl always staying up late **(Anjelica Brown)**



I'm love that radiates through the cosmos,
In this never-ending cosmos,
my cup of love is not full nor empty,
nor directed at anyone in particular,
but everyone can drink from it if they want to.
I'm a pure and clean canal of light that becomes love,
love for anything that lies within the cosmos.
Alive it is, alive I am, and alive will always be
this never ending-love. **(Henry Irisson)**



Shark is a mom, a mom that's me.

I am mama shark, pink as can be.
I am mama shark, I swim fast at sea.

I am mama shark with sharp teeth.
I have a baby shark that's going to grow big as me.
I am mama shark, people swim away when they see me.
Swim swim, I am mama shark, hungry as can be.

Swim swim, you can't out-swim me.
I have sharp teeth and am ready to eat.

I am mama shark of the sea. **(Yvonne Johnson)**

She used to be a caterpillar. She was just a shy girl from Chicago who was in her shell--always quiet and always to herself. And she enjoyed it. With the shyness came a lot of doubt. She had so many ideas, but she was afraid that she was going to fail. She was afraid of rejection and didn't go for a lot of jobs and competitions. She went for a state job. She didn't get hired, but she found out that you had to know people.

Then one day, it clicked: "move." So she moved to Madison, Wisconsin to stay close to the family, while also finding herself. She made a promise that she was going to be great. With that attitude, she was always great.

After nine years, she is a butterfly. Now, she's a butterfly who is not afraid. She has grown mentally. And she has grown up and that has made her a butterfly. Now she goes after everything. When she came here, she applied for a state job at Unemployment Insurance; she got it, and that gave her a lot of confidence. Before, she gave up on schooling. Chicago wasn't welcoming. But Odyssey made her see new things and made her feel welcomed. **(Tisha Butler)**



I am a sunflower. Just like a sunflower, I need direct sunlight. When the sun comes out, I have good energy and feel as if I am standing tall. When the sun goes down, sunflowers curl or fold as if they're sleeping. At night, I also go into a moment just like the sunflower. I spend some nights reflecting on my life and overthink, making me curl up. By the next morning when the sun comes out, I become reenergized and stand tall just like the flower I am. **(Keyanna Wilson)**



I Am Clouds

I am clouds in the sky at night time.

The different shapes are signs of how I'm feeling

Sometimes you can see through my body to the soft, fluffy, airy clouds of my moods,

And sometimes I allow the beautiful blue or orange sky from the moon at night to express myself.

I move with quiet soft silence through my thoughts, troubles, and happiness.

Sometimes I allow others to see my smile with the crest of the moon. **(Diane Walton)**



I am a bright star.
 I am bright indeed for I am a star.
 I have unique characteristics.
 I symbolize light in darkness—hope
 Beauty beyond measures—perfection
 Positivity—energy
 And everything good—blessings and luck
 I am a star.
 I shine bright in the day and especially at night.
 Even when I appear to be so far, I am still near.
 I am a star—outstanding
 I shine when I’m alone but I have a special glow
 and shine when I’m amongst others.
 I am a star—dependable
 Full of energy
 I am a bright star.
 I am there even when you think I’m not

or when you can’t see me.
 This is because I’m small but mighty
 but I’m there shining no matter what,
 never changing even if other elements do.
 I don’t care, rain, sunshine, storm,
 rainstorm or snowstorm.
 I am a star, made to shine
 and illuminate everything around me
 and that’s what I do! **(Stephaney Obi)**

I am Sunny. My name is actually Sunni, but it fits me well.
 When I’m goin’ through bad times, I try to make light of
 every situation. My mom would say when I was younger, I
 was sweet and my eyes would brighten any room. I shine
 like the sun. Therefore, I was given the best name: SUNNI!
(Sunni Walker)



I am love but sometimes I’m not.
 I feel I am made up of many different pieces
 that eventually spill out love, but sometimes
 those pieces get thrown about. Then I have
 to scurry around and pick them up just to
 put them back together. I am love, and
 when I love it is as solid as a rock.
 But cannot rocks break apart, too, if
 you hammer them enough? Then they
 turn to little pebbles and eventually
 get lost. I am little pieces of love
 just thrown about. **(Jessica Jacobs)**

LOVING LANGSTON HUGHES

God to Hungry Child

Hungry child,
I didn't make this world for you.
You didn't buy any stock in my railroad.
You didn't invest in my corporation.
Where are your shares in standard oil?
I made the world for the rich
And the will-be-rich
And the have-always-been-rich.
Not for you.

I picked "God to Hungry Child." To me when I read this it tells me that if you're hungry in this world you will always be hungry. He talks about how God only made this world for the rich man! If you don't have the means to be rich, you will always be hungry.

I chose this one because I thought that it would be the complete opposite of what it was. I thought that the way he portrayed God wasn't right. God should be trying to enlighten the hungry, should be telling them ways to stay strong in the midst of their struggle. I can take away the fact that this is a world for the rich; that's shown tremendously time and time again. **(Kwan Hogan)**

I think "God to Hungry Child" starts with the voice of God talking to his poor child. It sounds like he speaks to the poor child as if they are undeserving because of their nonparticipation in corporate America. It seems as if he is saying, "Don't you ask for anything."

The images he uses are investments, stock in railroads, and standard oil.

I chose it because it was the first poem that sounded interesting. It made me feel as if the god of this world does speak like that, and society reinforces the idea of the hungry child.
(Thedora Smith)

For this assignment I chose "God to Hungry Child." What I got from the poem is the poor are hungry because they are poor. The world was not meant to help the poor but to keep the rich richer. God is saying he did not make the world for the poor to survive. The poor cannot invest into "my corporation" or put stock in "my railroad." I believe that "my" is the white man. God does not own corporations or railroads, and back then Blacks didn't either.

I chose this poem because in a sense it made me angry. How does Hughes know what God wanted? Why is he comparing God to the White man? No man is equal to GOD! It's not God's fault that people are poor or rich or that people are mistreated by the color of their skin. That's the White man's fault for thinking he is superior to the Black man. Then while reading I asked myself why does God allow this to go on? If he could stop racism and violence and end world hunger, why doesn't he? **(Sunni Walker)**



Dinner Guest: Me

I know I am
 The Negro Problem
 Being wined and dined,
 Answering the usual questions
 That come to white mind
 Which seeks demurely
 To Probe in polite way
 The why and wherewithal
 Of darkness U.S.A.—
 Wondering how things got this way
 In current democratic night,
 Murmuring gently
 Over fraises du bois,
 “I’m so ashamed of being white.”

The lobster is delicious,
 The wine divine,
 And center of attention
 At the damask table, mine.
 To be a Problem on
 Park Avenue at eight
 Is not so bad.
 Solutions to the Problem,
 Of course, wait.

I chose “Dinner Guest: Me” because it became personal to me as I read it. I know the feeling Langston Hughes was describing: to be the token ‘Negro’ or the scapegoat for a generally white crowd. They will not outrightly admit prejudice because white fragility is a real thing.

When I was growing up, my mother worked hard to continue to move us up in status. So, there were and still are many situations I am put in where I am the only chocolate drop in the bunch, or the only Mexican. So, for people who have never experienced a minority, they are curious. They ask careful ignorant questions and simply cannot believe the horror stories that can happen to minorities in this supposedly fair and democratic nation. While they are trying so hard to be accepting, they still feel uncomfortable with the presence of a black person in white society. Solutions to him being the problem can wait as they enjoy the education. He is also enjoying his status regardless of the underlying fact he is not welcome. Basically, it can be worse. **(Feather Lloyd)**

“A Letter to Anne”

Since I left you, Anne,
 I have seen nothing but you.
 Every day
 Has been your face,
 And every night your hand
 And every road
 Your voice calling me.
 And every rock and every flower and tree
 Has been a touch of you.
 Nowhere
 Have I seen anything else but you,
 Anne.

“A Letter to Anne” is the story of lost love. Langston Hughes uses earth’s environment to describe his love. Everything he sees is a reminder of her. He says the days are her face and the nights are her hand. He is saying there is no passing moment that he does not think about her.

I think this poem is beautiful. I love his use of metaphors. He is comparing her features to nature. I can relate to his message. I too have let go of someone I love and was not able to see anything but them after the fact. **(Asia Pearson)**

Love

Love is a wild wonder
 And stars that sing,
 Rocks that burst asunder
 And mountains that take wing.
 John Henry with his hammer
 Makes a little spark.
 That little spark is love
 Dying in the dark.

In the poem “Love” by Langston Hughes, the first thing that stuck out to me was how he describes love as something beautiful to see, hear, or feel. If you try hard enough, you will see love in just about anything.

When he mentions John Henry and his hammer making little sparks of love, this to me means if you want love out of life, it’s going to take work. You are never done using a hammer after the first bang. It takes consistence and patience. Don’t let love fade away: keep hammering and let the sparks fly. **(Kwan Hogan)**

Irish Wake

In the dark they fell a-crying
For the dead who'd gone away,
And you could hear the drowsy wailing
Of those compelled to stay —
But when the sun rose making
All the dooryard bright and clear
The mourners got up smiling,
Happy they were here.

I chose the poem “Irish Wake” because when I opened the book it fell to that page, and I took that as a little bit of a sign.

In the poem Hughes describes an Irish wake, how some mourners stay the night, in the dark, crying around the body, while others leave early. This is called “Keening” in Ireland, from the Irish for crying; it’s a kind of wailing lament, mostly wordless but with elements of song slipping in. The poem itself almost seems like a snatch of lyric to me: “they fell a-crying” has that ‘a’ to soften the consonant in crying and make it flow more musically, which is common in ballad singing.

On first reading, the smiles of the mourners present as callous, but on a second look these are the mourners who have stayed the night wailing, so perhaps they have worked through something in those long dark hours and it’s those who left early who will be haunted.

Irish wakes are often a boisterous affair, which can feel a bit odd for outsiders. When my grandfather died, there was a party that lasted a week. Relatives visiting from England were shocked to find themselves not sitting quietly around a bed but instead dancing till 4 am. It also brings to mind the concept of the “American Wake.” In past days this was a wake held for a family member who was emigrating to America, and who in all likelihood, due to the danger of the journey and the cost, would never return. **(Farren McDonald)**



My People

The night is beautiful,
So the faces of my people.

The stars are beautiful,
So the eyes of my people.

Beautiful, also, is the sun.
Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people.

“My People” is a very short but meaningful poem. I think Langston Hughes means the night is dark, just like the faces of his people. Both are beautiful. The eyes of his people sparkle bright full of hope, just like the stars in the night sky. The souls of his people shine bright like the sun. The sun is strong and a giver of life like his people.

I chose this poem because it talks about the beauty of being Black. The few sentences were powerful. When I read this poem, it lights up my soul. Words can make people feel like they are on top of the world and beautiful inside and out. That is what this poem did for me. I hope one day the world will realize that beauty comes in all colors, especially Black! **(Michelle McKoy)**

Laughs

Dream-singers,
 Story-tellers,
 Dancers,
 Loud laughs in the hands of Fate—
 My People.
 Dish-washers,
 Elevator-boys,
 Ladies' maids,
 Crap-shooters,
 Cooks,
 Waiters,
 Jazzers,
 Nurses of babies,
 Loaders of ships,
 Porters,
 Hairdressers,
 Comedians in vaudeville
 And band-men in circuses—
 Dream-singers all,
 Story-tellers all.
 Dancers—
 God! What dancers!
 Singers—
 God! What singers!
 Singers and dancers,
 Dancers and laughs.
 Laughs?
 Yes, laughs....laughs....laughs—
 Loud-mouthed laughs in the hands of Fate.

The poem "Laughs" [also called "My People"] is describing the variety of jobs that Black people have to make ends meet. Some of the jobs are glamorous such as singers, jazzers, and dancers, and others are the backbone of the community such as nurses of babies and porters. Black people took jobs of low status such as ladies' maids, dishwashers, and waiters. No matter how menial the job, it still required a certain amount of talent, grace, and tact. These jobs may seem to strip people of their humanity, decency and self-respect. Nonetheless, Black people kept their laughter. They were able to hold onto their joy and light despite the hardships and humiliating jobs they

were able to get and the basic lifestyle those jobs could afford. Blacks never lost their laughter or their hope. They laughed, with boldness and pride, in the face of the fate set for them because they knew they would be all right, no matter what.

I chose this poem because of the vivid imagery the words provide. I visualize the singers and dancers and comedians standing in front of an audience using their talents to provide not only entertainment but an escape from the harsh realities of life. I can see the dishwashers, cooks, and waiters in a busy restaurant kitchen working with expert skill to follow or create recipes that keep their hungry customers satisfied and coming back for more. I can imagine the elevator-boys in their uniform helping guests in and out of the elevator. I can imagine loaders of ships and porters soiled and sweaty from a hard day of work. I can see the facial expressions of the story-tellers as they draw in their listeners into a moment in time far, far away.

Reading this poem made me proud of the strength, grace and perseverance of Black people, who can take the lemons of life and make lemonade for all to enjoy. The lemonade of our art, cooking, dancing, singing, and just being us quenches the thirst of a nation attempting to resist the sweetness found in our struggles. I take away from this poem that hope that no matter what happens in life, I should hold fast to my joy, sparkle, and laughter because I will overcome and win in the end. **(Stephaney Obi)**



The Negro Mother

Children, I come back today
 To tell you a story of the long dark way
 That I had to climb, that I had to know
 In order that the race might live and grow.
 Look at my face—dark as the night—
 Yet shining like the sun with love's true light.
 I am the child they stole from the sand
 Three hundred years ago in Africa's land.
 I am the dark girl who crossed the wide sea
 Carrying in my body the seed of the free. . . .
 God put a dream like steel in my soul.
 Now, through my children, I'm reaching the goal.
 Now, through my children, young and free,
 I realize the blessings denied to me. . . .
 All you dark children in the world out there,
 Remember my sweat, my pain, my despair.
 Remember my years, heavy with sorrow—
 And make of those years a torch for tomorrow. . . .

I chose "The Negro Mother." This poem was the story of an enslaved black woman. She talks about being the seed of the coming of the free. She is saying she lives as a slave so that one day the children of the future would not have to be. She says, "Look at my face—dark as the night— / Yet shining like the sun with love's true light." This illustrates that although she was mistreated and her hard work was not acknowledged, she still found light in the darkness.

I chose this poem because it inspired me. In this poem you have a woman who is still thinking to the future even though she is not treated as a human being. She feels like she will walk so that her children can one day run. She may not have freedom, but she lives another day so that one day her children will. As a mother I can relate. I am always putting my children before myself. I may not always have something, but it is because I make sure my children have everything, including the things I don't. **(Asia Pearson)**

**Merry-Go-Round
COLORED CHILD AT CARNIVAL**

Where is the Jim Crow section
 On this merry-go-round,
 Mister, cause I want to ride?
 Down South where I come from
 White and colored
 Can't sit side by side.
 Down South on the train
 There's a Jim Crow car.
 On the bus we're put in the back—
 But there ain't no back
 To a merry-go-round!
 Where's the horse
 For a kid that's black?

I chose the poem "Merry-Go-Round." In this Langston Hughes poem, he describes himself being a young colored kid wanting to ride the merry-go-round. He wants to ride the merry-go-round but is confused as to where he should sit. He wants to know where the Jim Crow section is on the ride and says that in the south white and colored can't sit side by side; then he says that there are train sections and bus sections but there is no back on a merry-go-round.

I think that Langston Hughes chose to write as a young black child to show the innocence in the question being asked, which is, if there is no front or back on a merry-go-round then where does he go? Being so young and having to think about race and segregation when wanting to just enjoy the simplicities of childhood, like a merry-go-round, is so sad and heart breaking. To put yourself in the shoes of a child who just wants to have fun, you are immediately struck with the question of racism--like, "Sure, you can ride this ride. but can you, though, because you are black?" It makes me sad to read this poem, and yet happy to know that segregation doesn't exist in this form anymore. **(Sarina Benford)**

I, Too

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

The reason I chose "I, Too" is because it says how darker skin tones were treated. Even though the treatment wasn't equal to the lighter tones, he didn't let that steal his joy. I believe he was very brave for standing up for what is right.

I've shared a personal experience due to my complexion as well. As a child and even up until today, I can't say that I like it because I don't. I believe everyone should be treated the same regardless of skin tones. This can also affect someone's mental stability. I just wish this was never a thing; then the world could be a better place.

(Shiquita Woods)

I feel he is saying he too is America, regardless of him being a darker brother. He is the same, so don't send him away when non-colored people come over. He wants them to see he is as beautiful as they are. They will see that and be ashamed. He is the same, and they're America.

I chose this poem because I feel racism isn't something that will ever go away, even though we are all the same inside, all Americans, just different colors. Don't let others treat you differently because of your skin tone. I liked this poem because it shows you not to let others tell you what to do.

(Betsy Alfaro)

Comment on War

Let us kill off youth
For the sake of truth.
We who are old know what truth is—
Truth is a bundle of vicious lies
Tied together and sterilized—
A war-maker's bait for unwise youth
To kill off each other
For the sake of
Truth.

This poem by Sir Hughes is absolutely amazing! I love the fact that it's short, direct, sweet, but disturbingly true. I am grateful for his honesty. He was a great walking among us. So many greats I only get to read about. I say thank you to all my ancestors, THANK YOU, for the ultimate sacrifice, giving of your life. This poem spoke of the youth being sacrificed for the sake of the truth. I believe the young in us die DAILY when we do not stand and speak up for the TRUTH. Everyone has his/her own truth. Once you find out "THE TRUTH," will you sacrifice "THE YOUTH"?

My personal take-away from this poem is the fact that "YOUTH" is untarnished, the uncorrupted and unfiltered parts in us all. When I think of youth, I feel free and COURAGEOUS! As mentioned in the poem, being "OLD" is being wise, I agree. Once you have lived life and made memories and have had many experiences, your journey in life is a little too greatly tamed and tainted. In our youth, we take more chances and say yes more often. On the other end of the spectrum, when you are "of age" you have more responsibilities and "WISDOM." At that point when you know better you have no choice but to do better! **(Sarah Galinski)**

Helen Keller

She,
 In the dark,
 Found light
 Brighter than many ever see.
 She,
 Within herself,
 Found loveliness,
 Through the soul's own mastery.
 And now the world receives
 From her dower
 The message of the strength
 Of inner power.

I picked the poem "Helen Keller." The name caught my attention right away, and that is why I selected it. Helen Keller had a sad story in the sense of losing her sight and hearing at a very young age but still managed to find light in the darkness of it all. The poem is spoken in a tone of empowerment from her disadvantages. It was quite beautiful. Langston Hughes was expressing that from her life, she left a gift, a message. There is an inner strength we all have inside of us, to find simple beauty in life. She was the best example of finding that inside of herself. **(Sarina Benford)**

Helen Keller is definitely a being out of the ordinary. Deaf, mute, and blind, she grew up in a dark bubble, silent and isolated, unable to communicate with her loved ones and the outside world. But with her personal willingness, she succeeded in breaking this bubble.

I chose the poem "Helen Keller" because I reconnected with my childhood. I was nine years old when I first read about this great lady in an article (in French) called Helen Keller, the miracle woman. Helen Keller succeeded in breaking through barriers through the strength of her will and hard work. She remains an encouragement now and an incentive to rely to the end on one's own capacities.

Helen Keller teaches us that human beings can do more than they think they can. This great lady



inspires me with her strength and challenges because she had nothing (she was deaf, mute, and blind) yet was able to be a person who influenced, who always influences, and will influence until the end of the world. I have to stop saying I can't because I have everything to achieve my goals. I need a strong will—that's all! **(Souad Bidar)**

My Loves

I love to see the big white moon,
 A-shining in the sky;
 I love to see the little stars,
 When the shadow clouds go by.

I love the rain drops falling
 On my roof-top in the night,
 I love the soft wind's sighing,
 Before the dawn's gray light.

I love the deepness of the blue,
 In my Lord's heaven above,
 But better than all these things I think,
 I love my lady love.

Langston Hughes is telling the audience of his heartfelt desires. He is observing nature and the sounds of the weather. But what he loves out of all of them is his lady. The images are rain, sky, shadow clouds, rooftop, and dawn's light.

I personally get that nature is good but his Lady is the Creator's best gift to the world.
(Thedora Smith)

Daybreak in Alabama

When I get to be a composer
 I'm gonna write me some music about
 Daybreak in Alabama
 And I'm gonna put the purtiest songs in it
 Rising out of the ground like a swamp mist
 And falling out of heaven like soft dew.
 I'm gonna put some tall tall trees in it
 And the scent of pine needles
 And the smell of red clay after rain
 And long red necks
 And poppy colored faces
 And big brown arms
 And the field daisy eyes
 Of black and white black white black people
 And I'm gonna put white hands
 And black hands and brown and yellow hands
 And red clay earth hands in it
 Touching everybody with kind fingers
 And touching each other natural as dew
 In that dawn of music when I
 Get to be a composer
 And write about daybreak
 In Alabama.

When reading “Daybreak in Alabama,” I think Hughes was referring to a break from all the things that were going on in Alabama during those times, such as segregation. When saying “daybreak,” he was speaking of taking the time to be equal and people opening to one another and blending, no matter what color or what race you are. The image he used of being a composer helps show the feelings he has about the things that were going on. It gives off a positive message that shows that everyone is human, and no one should be treated less than that.

I chose the poem “Daybreak of Alabama” not only because I love the poem but also because it sends a valuable

message. It helped me to understand what equal means and how to treat others no matter what’s going on in the world. You could also be positive and creative to get your message across in other ways, like being a positive composer. The feeling that the poem brought me was joy—joy because I myself have felt like this and didn’t know what words to use to explain the feeling. “Daybreak in Alabama” explained the feeling of equality so vividly, relating a happy message for those who struggle with understanding how to come together to make positive changes. **(Keyanna Wilson)**

“To Certain Negro Leaders”

Voices crying in the wilderness
 At so much per word
 From the white folks
 “Be meek and humble,
 All you niggers,
 And do not cry
 Too loud.”

I love this poem. It’s short, simple, and to the point. Voices in the wilderness—Langston Hughes draws the pain subtly. After all, there’s only so much per word. The poem ignores the pain, same as the white man’s words— “don’t cry too loud.”

This is today. After George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and the black community crying out in pain,

the one consistent thing I heard from the white community was “don’t cry too loud.” From certain Negro leaders and followers, “don’t cry too loud.” From the executive branch of our government, “don’t cry too loud.” From the news and media outlets, “don’t cry too loud.”

I love this poem.
(Calvin Balentine)



Sketch of Hughes by Stanley Sallay '07

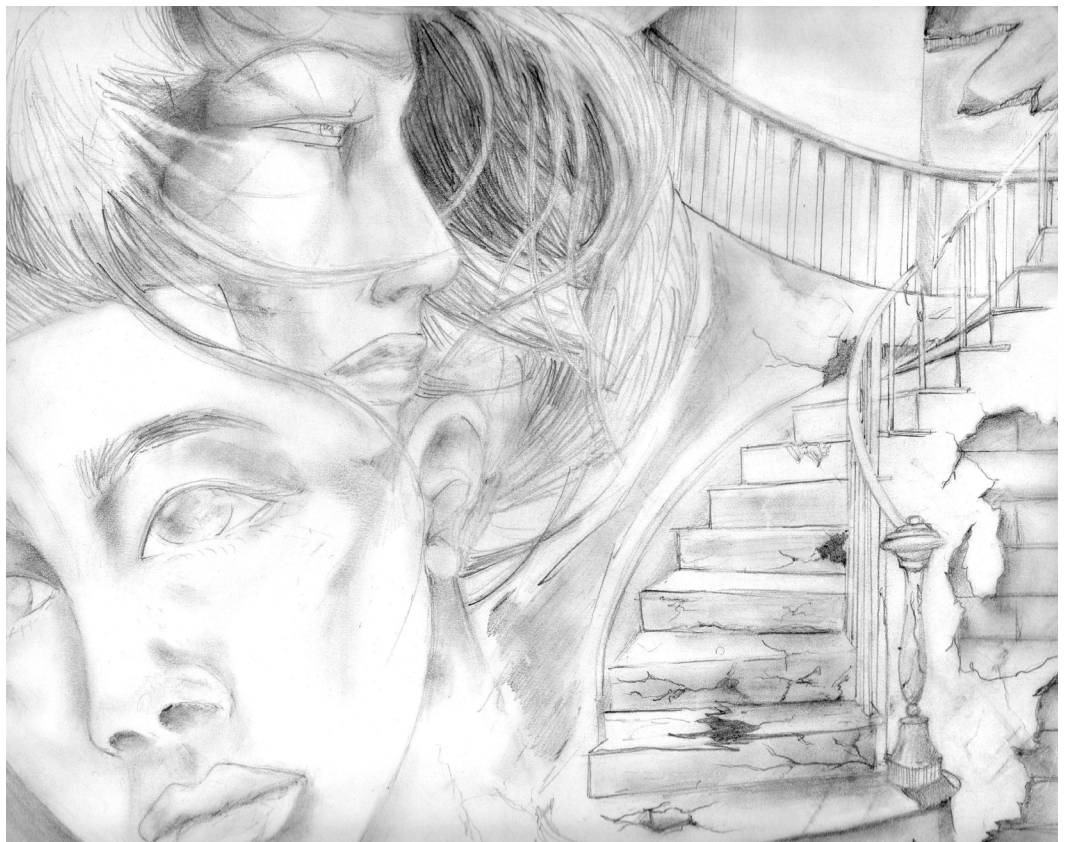
Mother to Son

Well, son, I'll tell you:
 Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
 It's had tacks in it,
 And splinters,
 And boards torn up,
 And places with no carpet on the floor—
 Bare.
 But all the time
 I'se been a-climbin' on,
 And reachin' landin's,
 And turnin' corners,
 And sometimes goin' in the dark
 Where there ain't been no light.
 So boy, don't you turn back.
 Don't you set down on the steps
 'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
 Don't you fall now—
 For I'se still goin', honey,
 I'se still climbin',
 And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

All mothers should read this poem to their sons or daughters. I agree with the words of wisdom the mother is giving her son. In my 45 years of life, none of it has been easy. There are many times I want to just run away or avoid it. I know that will only cause more issues later if you do not face obstacles in life. Whenever I am having a hard time in life, I remind myself dark times do not last forever. I believe everything happens for a reason. When I look back on everything that has happened to me, I realize some things taught me a lesson. Some things made me stronger or more patient. It is our job as parents to prepare our children for life. We must be honest and not lie to them about life. Life is a gift, and we must not take it for granted.
 (Michelle McKoy)

The meaning of this poem to me is life is a challenge. It's going to be hard. Even though the stairs are too high or even broken, just keep climbing. The image is a long stairway, broken, dark, hard, high, and far to go, with splinters of wood. **(Yvonne Johnson)**

The mother in this poem is telling her son that life is not clear or easy. The tacks, splinters, and boards torn up mean life is full of uneasy paths. Life has many obstacles. You never know what to expect. Life is hard and sometimes unjust. There are times life may seem dark, so you must walk in faith. Push through life no matter how scary life gets. Do not run away. She wants her son to be strong. The mother never gave up, and she does not want her son to give up either.



Sketch of Mother to Son by Stanley Sallay '07

ENCOUNTERING EMILY DICKINSON

#288 I'm Nobody! Who are you?
Are you – Nobody – too?
Then there's a pair of us!
Don't tell! they'd advertise – you know!
How dreary – to be – Somebody!
How public – like a Frog –
To tell one's name – the livelong June –
To an admiring Bog!
"I'm Nobody! Who are you?"

I feel she is speaking ironically. Nobody is who you want to be because the people who are somebody are really useless voices—public figures (frogs). They are loud and belching but talking about nothing. She is saying it's better and realer to be nobody. Once you are somebody for everybody, you're worthless to anybody. Don't tell the world that there is more than one nobody because they will advertise us and make us noticed. A somebody is a loud, obnoxious, worthless circle talker; a frog on a bog is what you have to be "somebody" in our society. She is mocking the idea that to be somebody is great, and she sees emptiness and no value in them becoming somebodies.

I analyze it in a way that I also have never wanted to fit in. I also do not see the value in being popular or performing for the sh*t show—never have. I think she is saying to be valued by the invaluable doesn't bring true value. The loud, famous, attention-craving type of person (frogs) are saying nothing. Their words and actions are worthless and for show. There's no value, quality, or originality in those pleasers of the masses. To be like everyone is to not be authentic. I'd rather be nobody, where I do not have to perform, where I am authentic. If there were two, then we may get noticed and lose our authenticity.

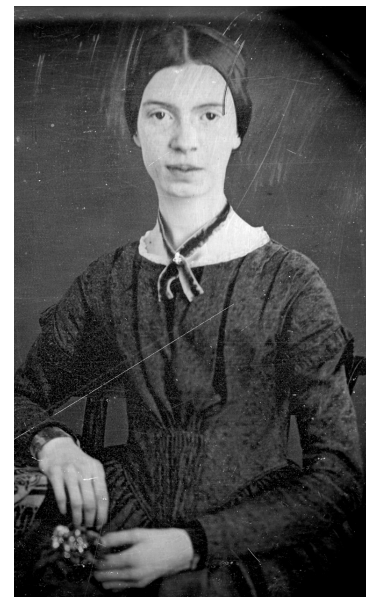
To be a judging boring frog on a bog—who wants that? **(Feather Lloyd)**

#919 If I can stop one Heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain
If I can ease one Life of Aching
Or cool one Pain,
Or help one fainting Robin
Unto his Nest again
I shall not live in Vain.

If I can help one person or if I can touch someone's life in any way, it makes life worth it. Every day, we encounter many people in our daily lives, and we do not know their stories or what they are going through. Sometimes just by a simple "hi" or "are you okay?" we do more than we think. That simple question might make someone feel noticed in a world where they didn't feel noticed before. How we treat someone can make or break their day—just our actions, no matter how big or small they are. (Betsy Alfaro)

In this poem I believe she is stating that her life is not her own. Her life is purpose-filled, and she does not want to live life without touching another soul or making some sort of a positive impact. I love how she refers to not only people but also nature when it comes to her not living in vain but assisting/helping.

My personal relation to this poem is the fact that I live my life meaningfully DAILY! Those are my intentions, anyways. Once I discovered and found great joy in assisting others in their needs, I knew I would not go day to day in vain ever again.
(Sarah Galinski)



#712 Because I could not stop for Death –
He kindly stopped for me –
The Carriage held but just Ourselves –
And Immortality.

We slowly drove – He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility –

We passed the School, where Children
strove
At Recess – in the Ring –
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain –
We passed the Setting Sun –

Or rather – He passed Us –
The Dews drew quivering and Chill –
For only Gossamer, my Gown –
My Tippet – only Tulle –

We paused before a House that seemed
A Swelling of the Ground –
The Roof was scarcely visible –
The Cornice – in the Ground –

Since then – ‘tis Centuries – and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses’ Heads
Were toward Eternity –

In Emily Dickinson’s poem #712, death arrives in the guise of a final formality, kindly stopping for someone too wrapped up in the affairs of their life to notice his inevitable approach. Dickinson steps within his carriage and off they go, in no hurry at all, for it is not only labor and leisure that have been laid to rest but the very concept of time.

Along their journey they pass the schoolyard and a field of grain, and in these images of growth we get a sense of life running backwards to its inception, from adulthood, to childhood, to a freshly budding

stalk of corn. This sequence is reminiscent of Scrooge’s ghostly return to his own childhood winters, and Dickinson leaves it ambiguous if these roadside scenes are from her own life, or the same journey we all will go on. The travelers pass the setting sun, or it passes them, for really they’re on a road to nowhere, into a night that precedes birth and extends forever after death.

Finally, we reach the grave, swollen with the freshly buried and grimly echoing the inverse image of a pregnant belly. The house of life has decayed, the roof collapsed and the walls sunk deep into the earth; their ornamental trims now only delineate a mouth of flowers and a box of bones. The tomb is all that remains.

Death has been on my mind a lot lately. We all know it’s coming, and we fear it, but we do nothing to prepare for it. I personally fear it and would like to face it as honestly as I can. In our culture the process is concealed and taboo. Youth is what we cherish, and what we chase, until inevitably the grim reaper comes calling. Death is for doctors to cure, and religions to formalize. But death, my own death, I imagine will be nothing if not a personal experience.

In Mexico they have the Day of the Dead and in general seem quite comfortable with the iconography of demise. In Ireland we used to have Oiche Samhain, the time when the boundaries between the worlds were thin. But that was eventually commercialized into the very fun but much more meaningless American concept of Halloween.

It seems to me there’s no meaningful reflection of death in our society. It takes place in white rooms, in nursing homes, out of sight and out of mind. It makes me think also of the Coronavirus: billions and billions of people who could not stop for death until he kindly stopped for us. **(Farren McDonald)**

POEMS THAT PACK A PUNCH

After reading a seven-word poem by Langston Hughes (“I wish the rent / was heaven sent”), Odyssey students and staff wrote their own seven-word poems. Here are samples:

I can feel the weather in my bones. **(Delisha Smith)**

When it’s cold outside, it’s cold inside. **(Bresha Green)**

Cold go away, sun make my day. **(Michelle McKoy)**

I won’t let you destroy me again. **(Anjelica Brown)**

I love you to the very end. **(Anjelica Brown)**

Have a goal and keep working on it. **(Souad Bidar)**

What if sleep and death are cousins? **(Calvin Balentine)**

Accept it all and you won’t fall. **(Keyanna Wilson)**

Without the BLOOD, you won’t see above!!!! **(Fernando Galindo)**

Sadness of the day, please go away. **(Diane Walton)**

I am here, holding my people dear. **(Diane Walton)**

How to love: open your heart, breathe. **(Diane Walton)**

I like being lifted like a kite. **(Dana Stokes)**

To receive love, it must be given. **(Asia Pearson)**

Learn to be free to be you. **(Tisha Butler)**

This pregnant me wants her body freed! **(Faleshuh Walker)**

Why am I here? For future purposes!!! **(Sarah Galinski)**

Black/Brown/Caramel/Brown/Dark Chocolate/Vanilla **(Sarah Galinski)**

Pain never fades, be ace of spades. **(Burnett Reed)**

And the landlord man, go get bent. **(Farren McDonald)**

Bury me, I’ll grow all over you. **(Henry Irisson)**

The dragon in me breathes cool flames. **(Sarina Benford)**

Sleep is my peace, need for release. **(Kwan Hogan)**



“What is poetry? It is the human soul entire, squeezed like a lemon or lime, drop by drop, into atomic words.”

I'm alcohol free today, that's the way! **(Valeria Gordon)**

Buried in the dark, light up my grave. **(Melissa Herriges)**

Loud like the wind, my mind wondering. **(Yvonne Johnson)**

Food gets me in the right mood. **(Cashae Davis)**

Nothing beats a failure but a try. **(Stephaney Obi)**

Make life worth it, you deserve it. **(Tawania Alston)**

Baby, we're bonded like baby in bonnet. **(Thedora Smith)**

I am Sunni, I shine so bright. **(Sunni Walker)**

I am meaningless but so very important. **(Brianna Johnson)**

Being speechless is the symptom of cowardice. **(Brianna Johnson)**

She He We Are All Born Free. **(Feather Lloyd)**

Love puppies butterflies churn stomachs crush hearts. **(Brian Benford)**

Leaves look skyward for hope and direction. **(Peter Moreno)**

Justice is a promise to each other. **(Jenny Pressman)**

Buried beneath the snow, I found transformation! **(Char Braxton)**

The music stopped but I'm still singing. **(Bob Auerbach)**



Human rights are not up for debate. **(Christina DeMars)**

I don't like writing seven-word poems. **(Christina DeMars)**

Thoughts unravel as I yearn for travel. **(Em Azad)**

The sun slows all of my woes. **(Em Azad)**

Your metaphors: electric lights on winter nights. **(Kevin Mullen)**

Odyssey voices pack power and leave love. **(Emily Auerbach)**

**ODYSSEY
STUDENTS
READING
LET'S TALK
ABOUT IT**

**Thank you to American
Family Insurance for the
wonderful *Let's Talk About
It* book of Madison State
Street Art!**



I was very happy to receive the book with State Street paintings. When I opened the book, my heart started pounding and I was filled with two emotions. Pain and love. Pain because an awful tragedy happened. A man lost his life, and he didn't deserve to die. What is sad is he is one of many. The second emotion Love. I love how the community came together to demand justice. Each painting is so emotional you either tear up from pain or the beauty of the painting itself. Each artist did an outstanding job. This book represents history. America, we are tired of your hate and injustice towards people of color. It has to STOP! **(Michelle McKoy)**

**LET'S TALK ABOUT IT: THE ART, THE ARTISTS, AND
THE RACIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT ON MADISON'S STATE STREET**

ODYSSEY STUDENTS READING LET'S TALK ABOUT IT



I was downtown quite a few times over the summer just walking on my own and taking all the art in. I wondered would this moment even be remembered, and I'm amazed and honored to get the book. It's a positive reminder of what art can come out of an otherwise awful year. **(Farren McDonald)**



Thank you so much for this amazing book compiling the art from State Street. It is such an awesome way to keep as a reminder of the past year of the community being in it together. After the riots last year and seeing downtown all boarded up, it was a real shock and realization as to how starting from the ground up sometimes is necessary. The artists who donated their time and talent made my heart smile. I cried my first time seeing the beautiful work done down there. Thank you again. **(Sarina Benford)**



ODYSSEY STUDENTS READING LET'S TALK ABOUT IT



I think the book is beautiful. I had the opportunity of meeting some of the artists and watching them do their art. I had the opportunity to create art as well. **(Jessica Jacobs)**

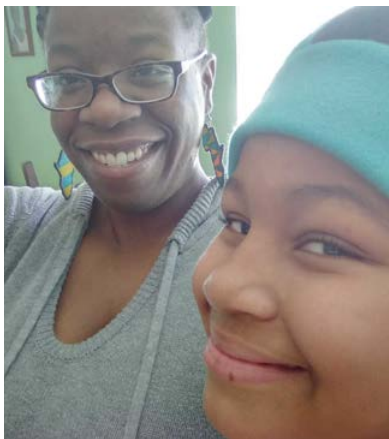


What I like about the art book is that it showed real, good, honest art. You can tell that several people painted from their hearts. **(Valeria Gordon)**



**ODYSSEY
STUDENTS
READING
LET'S TALK
ABOUT IT**

*Love
wins*



This book is HUGE! A much NEEDED topic of HEAVY, graphic, sensitive subjects...Your donation of this book is absolutely MARVELOUS. Thank youuuuuuuuu. And my children and I would love to give a HUMONGOUS air hug and kiss to you and yours. If you can't find a KIND person...become one! Spread LOVE not HATE. LET'S GROW! LET'S WIN! TOGETHER

#GLASSES CREW ME+U
#FOURPIECESPICYTRAVELCREW
(Sarah Galinski)



ODYSSEY STUDENTS READING LET'S TALK ABOUT IT



Art is a powerful tool to illustrate injustice anywhere. It's also a peaceful way of protest when injustice is present everywhere.
(Henry Irisson)



change



**ODYSSEY
STUDENTS
READING
LET'S TALK
ABOUT IT**



ODYSSEY STUDENTS & ALUMNI IN LET'S TALK ABOUT IT



The motivation behind my work consists of a couple of things. Things such as the common public displays of Black bodies being slain, the constant anxiety associated with raising two Black sons, the daily battle a Black boy/man faces, and feeling helpless and wanting to be felt, not heard. I know we've been heard. It's time to be felt. Felt by those who only watch things like this on television where the narrative is heavily controlled. I want them to feel it in their hearts. I want people to close their eyes and imagine waking up each day feeling endangered just for existing.

(Faleshuh Walker, artist, Class of 2021)

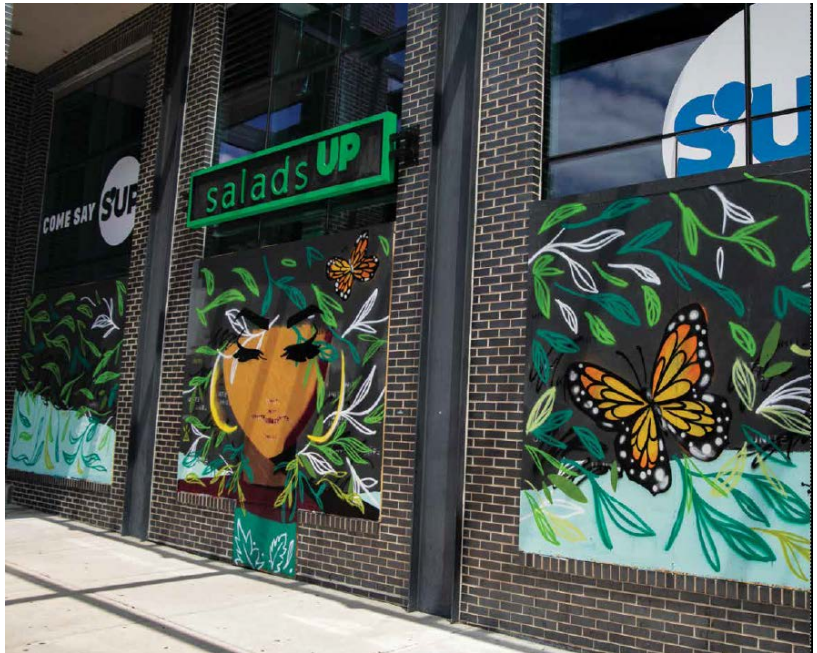
**ODYSSEY
STUDENTS &
ALUMNI IN
LET'S TALK
ABOUT IT**



This piece titled “Our Streets” quotes a chant we sing, while marching in peaceful protest. It was painted cooperatively by myself and other artists. We wanted to bring attention to the police brutality that unnecessarily and unjustly affects, not only people of color, but our society as a whole and demand that systematic change be made immediately.

My sons, who have been quite active in peacefully protesting, have been on the news, in the newspaper and on Facebook facing off with the police and challenging the unjust system. Initially, I thought, “I wish they wouldn’t do that. I fear for their lives.” I told them, “You know I don’t want you to get in trouble, I don’t want you to go to jail and get a record.” They said to me, “Mom, you can’t ask us not to do this! It’s so important to our future. This is a movement, and it’s so important that our voice be heard and that we do something about this right now.” And I was like, “Wow, you know, you’re right.” I am proud of both my sons. They have a challenging and bright future. **(Carrie Morgan, “Our Streets” artist, Odyssey Alum 2013)**

**ODYSSEY
STUDENTS &
ALUMNI IN
LET'S TALK
ABOUT IT**



**Photographer:
Hedi Rudd,
Odyssey Alum
2012**

Thanks to Christina DeMars
for the design of the
Let's Talk About It section