

YEAR 20

OCTOBER 12, 2022

ODYSSEY



ORACLE

SPECIAL EDITION: A CELEBRATION OF VOTING

*"Women must have their opinions
counted at the ballot box."*

—Susan B. Anthony

*"The vote is precious. It is almost sacred.
It's the most powerful non-violent tool
we have in a democratic society, and
we've got to use it!"*

—John Lewis



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

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

www.odyssey.wisc.edu



UW ODYSSEY PROJECT: WHY VOTE?

The Odyssey Project encourages civic engagement and sponsors a “Why Vote?” contest every other year. Starting on the next page, you’ll sample the winners of our essay, poetry, and art contest for 2022.

Two years ago during a presidential election when we were at the height of the pandemic, current and past students were invited to submit short essays, poems, songs, and artwork designed to persuade others to vote. Youth in the Odyssey Junior program could also apply. Because that year’s winners never got a chance to celebrate in person, we are including excerpts from the 2020 contest in the second half of this Oracle.

That year, we held an online-only “Celebration of Voting” event on October 3, 2020 via Zoom. Speakers included Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes, Judge Everett Mitchell, Dr. Ruben Anthony, Jr., and Rep. Shelia Stubbs, and the event also featured famous passages on voting read by American Players Theatre actors Gavin Lawrence and Sarah Day and Odyssey’s theatre professor Baron Kelly.

Today, on October 12, 2022, we offer a hybrid event with an in-person ceremony at Memorial Union’s Great Hall as well as an online option for audience members. We are thrilled to make “Amplifying Student Voices and Celebrating Voting” part of our 20th anniversary year. Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway has pronounced today “Odyssey Day” in recognition of our 20 years of changing lives and celebrating voting.

We thank American Family Insurance for sponsoring our 20th anniversary and Summit Credit Union and Madison Gas & Electric for sponsoring this event. Our partners are the League of Women Voters, the Madison Public Library, the Cap Times, and the Urban League of Greater Madison. We thank UW’s Division of Continuing Studies and College of Letters & Sciences for their long-time support of the UW Odyssey Project, and we thank thousands of organizations, foundations, and individuals who have helped our project grow in multiple ways. Visit odyssey.wisc.edu to learn how you can apply for Odyssey, volunteer, donate, and support us.



ESSAYS



Henry Irisson
Odyssey '21

Voting is a Secret Power You Didn't Know You Had!

November 8, 2022 may be one of the most important elections in the history of the U.S.A.



These are not the times to remain silent. To truly make a positive impact in your life, the lives of the people you love the most, the education and health care you want them to have, the society you want to feel proud of being part of, you must break this silence. Think of how powerful this is, the power to be able to have your voice to be heard, the power to choose who you want to be represented and governed by; this powerful tool that is in your hands and was gifted to you by the struggles of our ancestors. For women, for instance, it took a 100-year struggle (1920, 19th amendment), and the African American community could not truly exercise its right to vote until the 1960s. Think of their suffering, how long it took for them to achieve this, the battles they fought to gain the right to vote; think of how many of them died and did not even get the chance to exercise their right to vote.

The best way to fight a corrupt system is to be vigilant and participate in your society's future. The power is in your hands, so do not take it for granted. Get out and vote, via mail or at the polls: mask up and vote!



Andrea White
Odyssey '23

Voting Is Your Right!

As a Black woman, my grandmother wasn't able to vote until the 1965 Voting Rights Act made voting a reality for Black women.



It's very important to vote, starting with your local leaders, to make sure that we are putting people in positions who care about our wellbeing, safety, and, most importantly, our rights as Americans. Voting can get funding for your region, state, or neighborhood to use for schools, healthcare, and programs for youth, veterans, and disabled people. Vote and elect people who have your best interest in mind. When you vote, you are taking an active role in deciding issues regarding health care, immigration, equal opportunity, the environment and wildlife, voting rights, jobs, education, social security, neighborhood safety, and taxes.



VOTE! It's your right! People have died for the opportunity to vote. Don't take it for granted!



Ngina Ali
Odyssey '17

Fight Back and Vote!

Each voting cycle, I feel my vote, our vote as a nation, is more critical than the last.

Why vote? In 2022 it is about survival. This election is not only about policies, like healthcare or budget issues. It is about fighting and maintaining a political system where Americans have civil liberties, where a woman's reproductive rights are hers to choose and where we can protest our grievances in public! As a Black woman whose family fought for the 1965 Voting Rights Act, whose family took to the streets of Chicago to demand civil rights for Black and minority voters, whose family sacrificed its comfort to be respected in America, I am not willing to return to a time of social and racial injustice. I am not willing to give one inch of that freedom we have all fought for. I ask you to vote for democracy, to go forward and not backward. Vote to live in an America where we can marry who we want, pray for who we want; where Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid are still available; where public schools teach history, civics, and math. Vote to stop the same politicians who pushed Jim Crow laws in the 20th century!

How do we fight back? VOTE, GET OUT THE VOTE and RUN FOR OFFICE!



Tandalaya Taylor
Odyssey '18

Make a Difference and Vote!

Voting is the one time you can make a difference. Imagine if you were the one vote that broke the tie. Imagine if your vote were to determine if we would eat or starve. Imagine if your vote were to get Flint Michigan clean water.



You use your time to google search any and everything. Why not do a search to determine what vote would be best for you? How much time do you have to search for the best decision that can affect your life? You have the power to focus on what matters most to you. You have a right to change the outcome.

Without a vote, you lose the right to complain. You sacrifice everything you love because you chose not to have influence. As time goes on, people will look to you to be effective. You are the difference.



POETRY



Dominique Smith
Odyssey '23
"Count on Your Vote"

Morals and dreams tainted
By the expectations the media painted.
For years MANipulated to compete,
Making us easier to conquer and defeat.



Minimizing our potential
When they know our vote is essential.
Knowledge is power and there's power in numbers.
Just take a lesson from those who endured before and for us.
Marching to be heard to marches heard around the world,
Making equality possible for every boy and every girl.
Given a place in the race for the future that we face,
Holding politicians to a moral pace.
With the vote that we grace
To determine the representing face
Of the governed land
On which we stand.
Regardless of the party you decided to attend,
Democratic, Republican, or the Independent crew,
Just make the life of the party's vote come from you.





Brianna Johnson
Odyssey '20
"Time to Stand Up"

Why vote? because I'm tired of losing my mind.
 These people in places of power don't understand my kind.
 Tired of feeling misunderstood,
 I just want to get out this predicament,
 Get out the hood,

Hood meaning an unsettling life!
 To be poked and pulled cuz I'm not white,
 To be turned away and looked down upon,
 Losing opportunities that I know I've won.
 The struggles and triumphs of trying to get ahead
 But who has the power?
 To stand on it and not be misled.
 They say I can vote, that is my choice.
 The people before me didn't have a voice.
 It's time for change!
 It's time to stand up!
 I want to have access and knowledge,
 I wanna just get up.
 Equality is for everyone not just me,
 I'm Black in America, you see.
 You never know who could be the one.
 Why vote? Because I don't have anyone.



Faleshuh Walker
Odyssey '20
"Use It or Lose It"

Why have a voice if you aren't going to use it?
 Why have a choice if you aren't going to choose it?
 This life can be whatever you make it,
 You have a say so...a chance to make a difference,
 Why not take it?

Imagine having the opportunity to be heard
 And you choose not to say a word...
 Imagine not having that opportunity at all,
 Yeah, I know . . . it's absurd
 If I can leave you with anything,
 I'll leave you with this,
 All of the shots that you don't take,
 I promise you'll miss!
 Picture this ...
 A community of people all coming together in unity
 To exercise the opportunity to navigate our odyssey politically...
 Moral of the story is GO VOTE!



ART

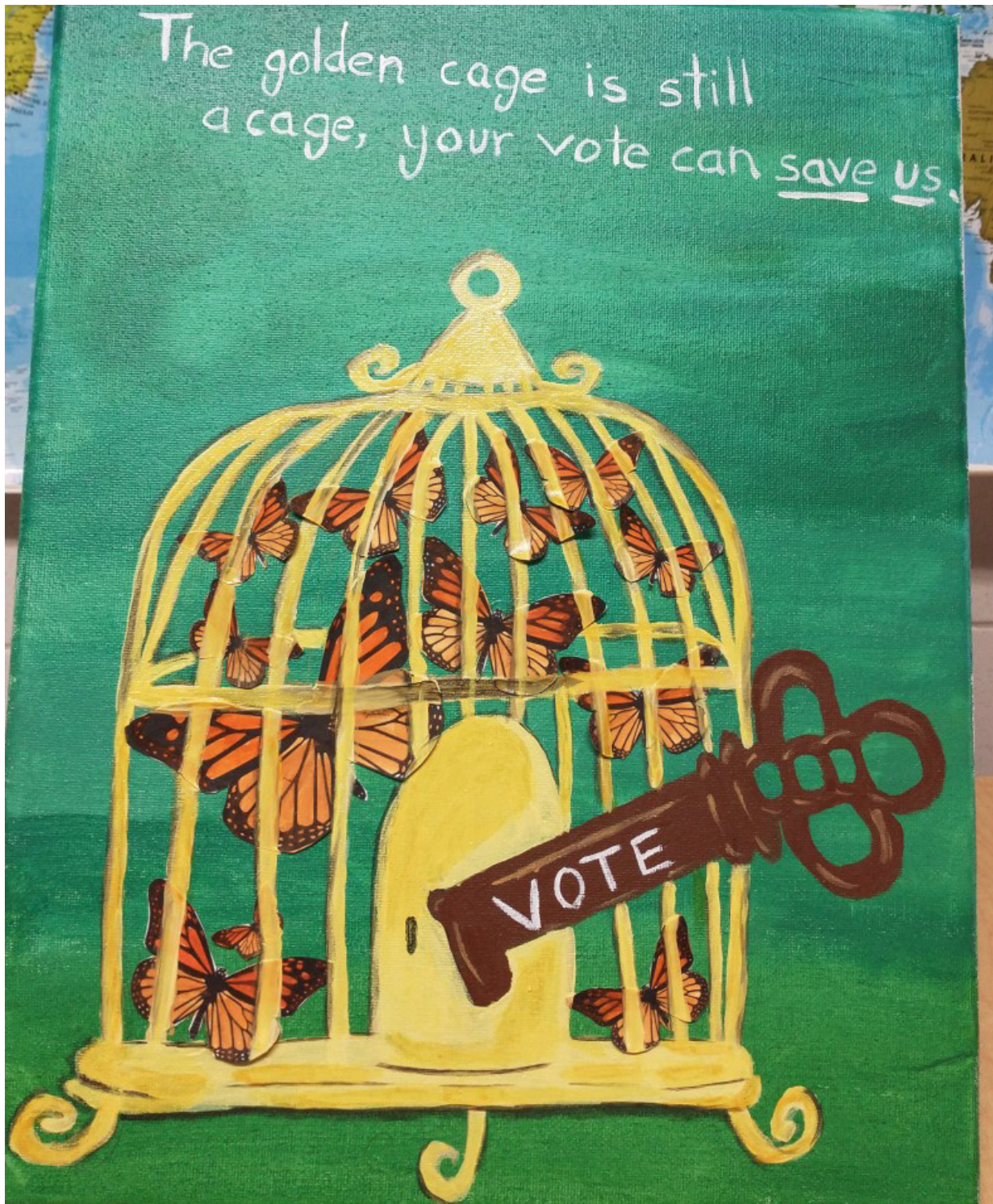


Faleshuh Walker
Odyssey '21





Marisol Gonzalez
Odyssey '17





Kaitlin Birdsall
Odyssey '23



2020 WINNERS

ESSAYS



Hedi Rudd
Odyssey '12
First Place

Why Vote? Every election is important to me, but this year's Presidential election is not only important to me but also to the future of our country. In less than two months, my vote will tell America that I love you, I need you and I trust you. That may seem silly, but the reality is there is a lot at stake. How I vote can change the future of our country or send us back to a time when America was not so great.

The current divide slashing its way through our country has to be faced, and our vote is our best tool to stop it. With one vote, I can say that Black Lives Matter, that Climate Change is real, that together and safer at home we can beat COVID-19 and most importantly that we reject dictatorships in favor of a flourishing democracy.

My vote will tell my children and grandchildren that I stood against corruption and racism and that I don't ignore the past but learn from it. My vote will tell my friends that I care about their access to healthcare and immigration reform. It will tell my neighbors that I believe in their right to protest, their right to housing and their right to hold leaders accountable. It will tell the world that humanity and our planet are sacred.

Most importantly, it will say that my vote counts and so do each and every one of us.



Ngina Ali
Odyssey '17
Second Place

WHY VOTE? We can no longer ask, "Why Vote?" We must ask, "What will be left of America in four years if we don't vote?"

America is at cross-roads for the soul of the country. Do we want to live in a democracy or under an authoritarian regime? Do we want to live or die during a global health pandemic? Do we want work towards an economic system equal for all or suffer a global economic depression?

Every single US voter is liable for the results of the 2020 US Presidential election. Every citizen who can vote has the responsibility on their shoulders for the future of America. Now is not the time to abandon democracy but a time to fight for solutions. How? By voting! Vote for a leader who can steer the country out of the current economic, political and public health crisis we are in.

Democracy may not survive another four years with chaos and division spread by the current person in the White House. No one should feel passive or apathetic about the November 2020 election. Democracy is not perfect but is worth fighting for. Many fought for democracy and to vote because these rights are linked and not guaranteed. We see extensive voter suppression to stop people from voting, especially in minority neighborhoods.

Americans haven't always had the right to vote, and if they don't use it, they lose it! Now is not the time to ask, "Why Vote?" It is time to say, "YOU MUST VOTE!"



Marisol Gonzalez
Odyssey '17
Third Place

Why vote? I grew up always complaining about "why me?" Why do I have to help my mother with household chores? Why do I have to take care of my siblings? Why do I have to work at such a young age? Why me? Furthermore, why is my family poor?

Because I was complaining so much and asking God "why?" all the time, someone told me, "why not?" If I was born with all of my body parts, with a healthy body and a brain, with the ability to do that and much more... then why not me? It's not okay to complain about all the things that go wrong in our country and not do anything about it. It's not okay to keep quiet and not make your voice heard when you have the ability to speak. It's not okay to give up without trying. It's not okay to let others choose for you when you can choose for yourself. It's not okay that the wealth of the world belongs to the one percent. The one percent keeps growing richer, and we keep staying poor. It's not okay to not take responsibility and to not vote!

It's not okay to only dream of the perfect country when you can make that dream come true. By doing that, you are building the country that you want to be part of. As Gandhi said, "You can be the change that you want to see in this world." Use your right to vote!!



POEMS



Char Braxton
Odyssey '06

The Right to Vote!
First Place

The chants of hatred vibrated in my ear
One Step Closer to Vote
The negative roars of "Black trash –you have no rights here!"
One Step Closer to Vote
My flesh was trembling with fear
One Step Closer to Vote
I felt spit hit my face and I wiped it away with tears
One Step Closer to Vote
The courage of Black women suffragists who fought for the 19th Amendment guaranteeing American women the right to vote
One Step Closer to Vote
Name, incorrect address, and the history of using literacy tests to deny the rights of Blacks to vote
My hands are trembling as I fill out my voting ballot
I am surrounded by piercing eyes of disbelief
The marches, the picketing, the entire movement
The pain, hatred, and lynching of blacks who went before me
Racism and Injustices bottled up in Black History
I walk out with pride and joy
I am black, I am a woman, I just voted!

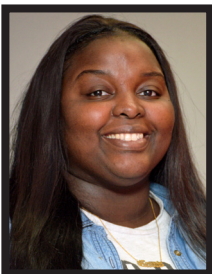




Marisol Gonzalez
Odyssey '17

Your Right to Vote is Powerful
Second Place

I am the child of the undocumented immigrant in a cage, in extremely inhumane conditions.
 I am a black man incarcerated because in this country being a person of color is a crime.
 I am the dead body in a mass shooting, my only mistake was attending a school that day.
 I am the underpaid worker that builds your home, takes care of your children, harvests your food,
 cleans your house, fixes your car, takes care of your elderly, the essential worker necessary but
 not wanted.
 I am the black man shot dead in police hands the same way our ancestors died in the hands of the
 white men.
 I am the brown immigrant harassed by ICE in a country made by immigrants.
 You are my voice, the key of my cage, the freedom I dream of in jail...
 You are the one with a powerful tool called the right to vote.
 You are the one who can make history.
 Use your right to vote. Your vote is powerful.



Kayasia Blake
Odyssey '19

Who I Vote For
Third Place

My ancestors envisioned my life before they knew I'd exist,
 The sorrow in their song and hope in their hearts carried a lifetime's worth of dreams for me.
 They knew that one day their pain would become freedom.
 My voice carries through the world for the millions before me,
 Cut down, lost, and forgotten.
 We still sing the same tune,
 Only now more people will LISTEN.
 My vote is my power,
 There is no such thing as a small contribution when it comes to my future.
 It's impossible to live only for me.
 My vote is not only mine.
 I am proud to lift the voices
 Of those who sacrificed their own for me.

ODYSSEY JUNIOR DIVISION



Truth Clacks
(parent: Ta'tiana Clacks, Odyssey '18)

First Place

My baby brother didn't get the light of day,
Mortality took his life away.
George Floyd didn't get to fight,
Police brutality took his life.
Breonna Taylor didn't get to stay,
But anyway, as Huey P. would say,
I have the people behind me.
The people are my strength.
Why are we looking for the right way
To make our money, when as MLK would say,
Don't let your dream fade away.
Just like basketball, when it comes off the rim
You have to grab the ball and dunk it right back in.
I have to do this right for my family.
I have to be the man that my mom told me that I can be.
We came from kings and queens, no rags and lows,
But now these days everyone talks about Gucci bags and clothes.
But it ain't going with you. Go vote to live your life
and be strong as Jacob Blake, who gave us hope
to never give up even when your hands are up.





Samuel Ewing
(parent: Sarah Galinski, Odyssey '21)

Why Vote?
Second Place

VOTING is important because I want to have a say so in the speed limit in my neighborhood. Do people speed in your neighborhood? Well, on my block there are no speed bumps, nor are there speed limit signs. My cat, Isabelle, got hit by a car.

I'm only 14 years old, but in three years I will be 18, and I WILL VOTE! This is one of many reasons you should vote. Children's safety as well as their pets' safety is very important. What may seem like a very SMALL personal issue to you may be a HUGE, very important issue to others.

So VOTE. I hope my SMALL personal issue opens your mind and heart to VOTE, and not just for the president of the United States but for aldermen and judges and senators—the people who are set in place and high seats by OUR VOTES (your VOICE).



Jayda Woods
(Parent: Shiquita Woods, Odyssey '21)

We shall vote.
Third Place

We shall **V**ouch for change among us,
in doing so we become united.

We shall **O**btain a voice to choose a welcome leader,
in doing so we speak on behalf of our communities

We shall **T**ake advantage of this given right
to try to fight for our country,
in doing so we'll see the outcome of justice

We shall **E**levate ourselves into making sure
everyone is equal and treated fairly.

We shall vote.

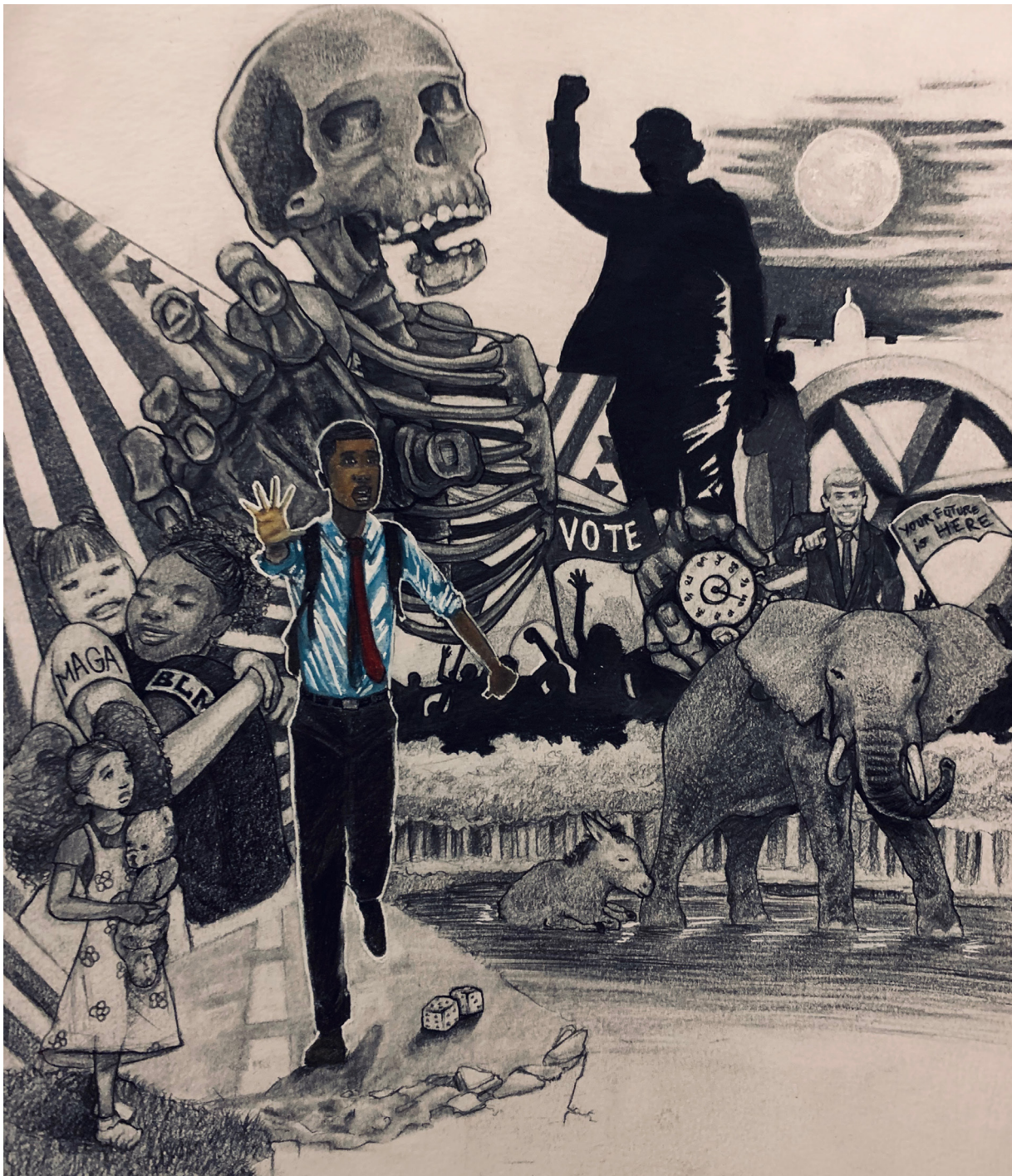


ART



Stanley Sallay
Odyssey '07

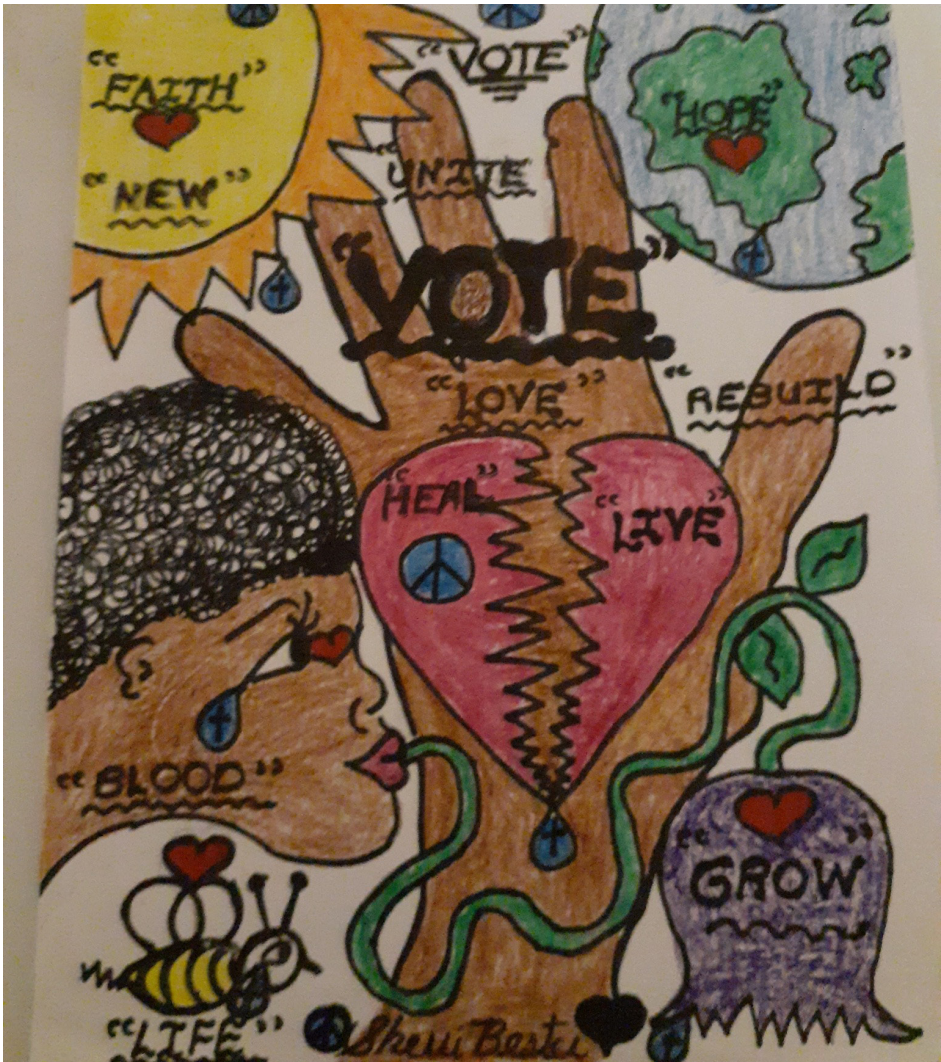
First Place





Faleshuh Walker
Odyssey '21

Second Place



Sherri Bester
Odyssey '08

Third Place

MAYORAL PROCLAMATION

Whereas, the UW Odyssey Project is celebrating its 20th year in South Madison of empowering adults to overcome adversity and achieve dreams through higher education; and

Whereas, Odyssey has helped over 600 adults recognize their innate potential and unwrap their gifts, including those moving from homelessness to bachelor's and master's degrees, from incarceration to meaningful work in the community; and

Whereas, Odyssey graduates now take courses through Onward Odyssey, earn certificates and degrees, hold political office, direct plays, start foundations, publish books, launch businesses, and teach and counsel others; and

Whereas, Odyssey Junior offers an intensive arts-based literacy program for children and grandchildren of Odyssey students encouraging them to be college bound; and

Whereas, Odyssey Beyond Bars has brought life-changing UW credit-bearing courses and enrichment into Wisconsin prisons; and

Whereas, Odyssey has begun planning programs for other often unseen communities, including an Odyssey Beyond Wars initiative for veterans and an Odyssey Senior program for elders; and

Whereas, Odyssey has sponsored a Why Vote contest every other year for two decades to encourage its students, over 90% of whom are from communities of color too often disenfranchised, to use their voices and register to vote; and

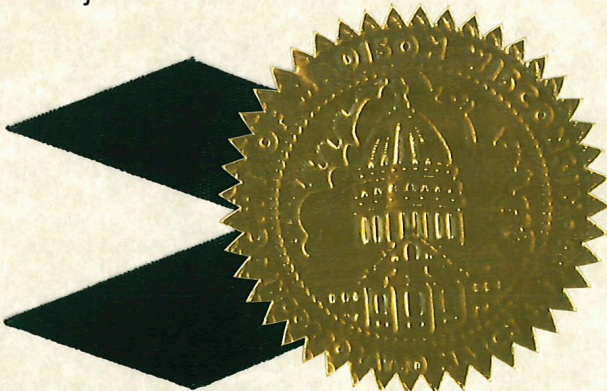
Whereas, Odyssey has grown remarkably in the last 20 years due to the resiliency of its students, the dedication of its staff, and the support of thousands of individual donors, organizations, businesses, and partners; and

Whereas, Odyssey has begun building endowments to carry it forward into the next 20 years and beyond, helping to break cycles of generational poverty through access to higher education.

Now, therefore, be it resolved that I, Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway, on behalf of the residents of Madison, Wisconsin, do hereby proclaim **October 12, 2022** as

Odyssey Day

in recognition of the 20th anniversary of the transformational, award-winning UW Odyssey Project.



Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway

Signed and sealed this 29th day of August, 2022 at City Hall