

YEAR 22, ISSUE 6

NOVEMBER 13, 2024

ODYSSEY



ORACLE

AUTUMN REFLECTIONS



Contents

Searching for Everyday Women Artists 2

Remembering Moments of Courage 14

Finding Plato's Cave Today 23

Showing Off Style 31

Channeling Frederick Douglass 35

Celebrating Our Voting Event 41



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SEARCHING FOR EVERYDAY WOMEN ARTISTS

"It is to our mother—and all our mothers who were not famous—that I went in search of that vibrant, creative spirit that the black woman has inherited. No song or poem will bear my mother's name. Yet so many of the stories that I write are my mother's stories. . . . Because of her creativity with her flowers, even my memories of poverty are seen through a screen of blooms. . . . Guided by my heritage of a love of beauty and a respect for strength—in search of my mother's garden, I found my own."—from Alice Walker, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens"

In class after reading Alice Walker, students were asked to describe a woman they know who demonstrates artistry in unacknowledged ways.

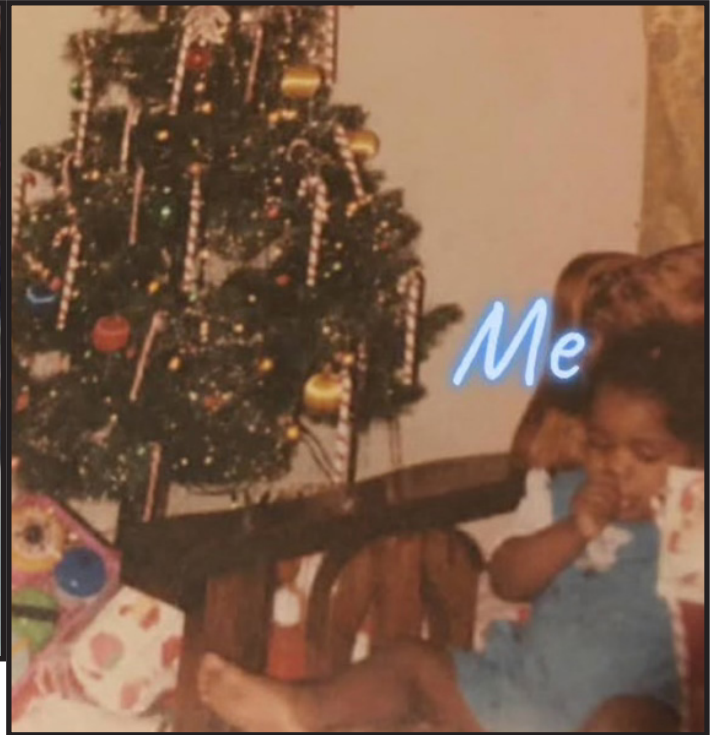
Mrs. Hanson, Maestra Hanson, and now Denise. Denise came into my life as I entered Junior year of West High. She taught me to read in my native language and encouraged me to become a better version of myself, by gifting me with inspirational conversation, financial support, and resources that she has access to through a nonprofit program called Root2Rise focusing on mentoring, tutoring, and engaging youth K-12 in the community through active participation and motivational work. She is the woman that sparked and lit the flame to my future and all those that meet her. **(Angelica Alvarez Valenciano)**



My niece, Akira, does art in nails. She hates doing it, but she does a great job at it. She takes her time, she is focused, and she does not let people talk to her. "Kyky, why are you looking at me?" It's always beautiful in the end. **(Kyiana Baker)**



My mother, Tracy, is always good at telling a story and sewing, amongst building and putting things together. She is an awesome sewer, and made pillows and blankets for our family and friends. She once put together a dishwasher in our home just from reading a book for dummies on how to install it. My mother always made us laugh when she told us her childhood stories on holidays and growing up with her siblings. We always listened and were very intrigued. Overall, my mother is always up to something and being creative. One of the reasons I love Christmas is because of the details she would put into decorating. **(Tiffany Brenston)**



Every couple of days, a man would go fishing and drop fish off at my grandmother's house. Then my grandmother would proceed to wash the fish off, clean out the fish, and make sure she cleaned the fish well. And then she would make a side to it like spaghetti or something else that was good to eat with fish. What's so impressive is how she cleaned the fish and finished the food. It would be so amazing to me—how she used to do it so frequently and how long it took her to clean it. **(Quanna Caffey)**



My sister is very creative and does many things every day, like cooking her famous caramel crunch cheese cake from scratch, literally scratch. She will never tell you everything that's in it. Even when it is a short time and she has low funds and lots of kids to feed, she will make a meal with love and will not forget dessert (she also makes baskets).

(Eleanor Ceasar)



My mom was the primary provider for our family, and her "occupation" was being an in-home daycare provider, although she will tell you she never worked a day in her life because she absolutely loved what she did. This need to provide for the family added with her love of caring for children created what a lot of people might consider an unconventional day-care center. She treated every one of the parents along

I like to think of my mother as magical. Although she has passed on, she left a memorable mark on my heart. When I was growing up, my mom did not always wait for Christmas or my birthday to give me a present. The gift always seemed to be just the thing I wanted, like a skateboard that most of my friends had. For my seventh birthday, she brought me three comic books that began a large volume of comic book collections! She was an amazing, magical person, and she wasn't a genie. She was my mom! **(Tim Comer)**

with their children as part of the family, which led to a lot of overnights, holidays, and irregular hours spent with the children. I always thought it was special how she went about her business to the point it was almost artistic. **(Dillon Dahlk)**

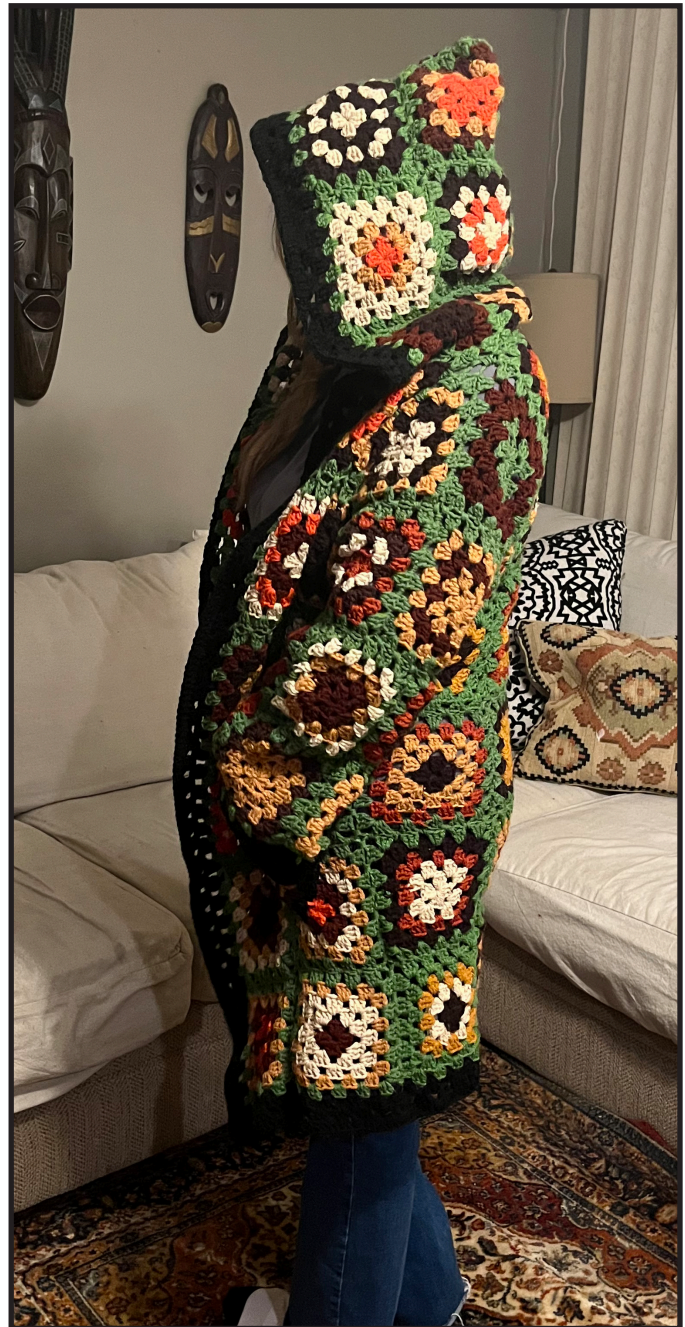


My mother would do my hair in hair styles that appeared to be crowns on my head. One hair style consisted of five parts in my hair; they went in a circle with bows at the top of each ponytail, and the hair would be in two strand twists all the way down to the barrette on the end. The silk bows and barrettes would coordinate in colors to match my clothes and shoes.

The other hair style my mother would do on my hair consisted of two ponytails. She would twist in two strand twists and then criss cross the two ponytails over the top of my head to create a beautiful crown.

These hair styles made me feel beautiful and confident. They both were my favorite hair styles, and anytime she asked how I wanted her to style my hair, I would ask for a crown.

When I became a mother, I would do those same hair styles on my daughters. It made me think of how artistic my mother was and also how I felt when I was a kid wearing those same hair styles.
(Gela Docks)



My stepmom – Rebecca Barber--recently went through a bit of a domestic violence situation, and not long after that, she started crocheting. She would crochet every time she felt anxious. We both have this knack for thrifting. She would find the most beautiful vintage yarn and make a granny square with said vintage yarn again every time she was nervous. I came home one day – “Look what I did!” she said with a big smile on her face. All the granny squares were stitched together into a big comfy sweater – her fears and anxious emotions now keep her warm. **(Brianna Espanol)**

My mother has the most amazing skill--one only an old school black mother could have. Cooking soul food is her super power! I love watching and helping her prep for every meal: chopping vegetables, pulling out spices, and sorting through her obscene amount of pots. Watching her put her soul into her food was magical for me as a child. The aromas of her food would fill the house. I remember walking in the house as a child and instantly exclaiming, "Mom, what are you cooking, because it smells like love in here. **(Adrianne Farrow)**



There is a certain way that my mom prepares her food. She fries the meat of choice, usually chicken. Then she makes the sides, which would probably be rice, corn, and gravy, and then she puts the buns in the oven. She makes the man of the house a plate first, then the children, followed by the rest of the adults in the house. Before a single bite is taken, she will say, "Bow your heads and say grace." **(Jamal Jackson)**



My Nana is a quiet and introverted woman who creates magical meals. The things she whips up in the kitchen taste better than a 5-star restaurant. From gumbo to baked mac n cheese, she takes her time to perfect her craft, and she does it every time. Cooking with love and precision, she puts a smile on the face of every person who takes a bite. By the time she finishes, she's wiping the sweat from her forehead and cleaning up. What she leaves behind is a masterpiece for your taste buds.



Art comes in all forms. My Nana's cooking is one of my favorites. The warm feeling it gives me every time makes me hope that one day I'll be able to throw down the way she does. **(Aaniyah Jefferson)**



This woman that I know is an artist, and she was not aware of it until today. That woman is "me"!!! I have a passion to bedazzle plain things that need life brought to them. I will enhance pictures that I buy from the store and add crushed glass or rhinestones. I will also bling out my daughter's shoes and clothes, setting the statement that anything, even the plain and ugly things, can be made beautiful. I am an artist and I never even knew it. **(Gloria Knight)**



The woman in my life that's a great artist is a great artist in every way. She can sing, dance, and create almost anything I ask for! For my daughter's birthday, she made her tutu as well as did her hair (as she does every year). For my son's half birthday, she created a beautiful balloon arch, and for her own baby shower she threw it, planned it, and decorated it! She is the most creative person I know. Seriously, any time I ask her if she can help me with something that has to do with being creative, she always helps, no doubt! She will set up pictures with a background, and she will cook a Sunday dinner.



Tykia, my kids' favorite auntie, is everything you need. My son's dad calls her "the perfect house wife." She really is like no other; there's nothing she can't do or figure out, and she never lets her talents go to waste. With that being said, she is one of the most creative, thoughtful people I've ever met, and I would highly recommend her to anyone. Ask and you shall receive! **(Crystal Lee)**



It may sound strange, but I find my form of art in working out. It is the way I release my stress, ease my mind, and turn negative thoughts into positive ones. When I leave the gym, I feel like I can conquer the world and nothing can stop me! It is a form of art because of the way it makes my mind see happy colors and the way I see my body changing and transforming. Each day is different. When I work on different parts of my body, I feel different leaving the gym. **(Mariya Lucas)**



My grandmother used to gather all her grandchildren, light a fire, and make all her grandchildren surround the fire. She would tell stories and sing songs for her grandkids. She also used to sew traditional clothes for all her kids and grandchildren. It was a great feeling sitting together with a lovely grandmother singing beautiful songs and telling unforgettable stories. **(Alfusainey Manjang)**

I like to decorate. I like my house to show my personality and a little bit of my family's personalities as well. I like hanging up art my four children created over the years. I like showcasing pictures of my family, in coordinating frames. I make sure my house has "personality." When, for instance, you walk in my small apartment, you see my son's guitars displayed, various pictures of Frida Kahlo in a collage on one wall, candles everywhere, pops of bright colors, and lots of books everywhere, ones read and yet to read. Most importantly, my love of flowers is usually always present, whether store bought or fresh from the farmer's market. I like company to see the personality of our small family. **(Vanessa Martinez)**



My mother is my everything—my biggest headache, teacher, and motivator all in one. She struggled as a single mother of four and never broke. She walked/bussed to work to provide. She made sure holidays felt warm. And lastly, she was young throughout my childhood so we learned things together and she never ultimately gave up. Even with anxiety she graces through life with a smile accompanied by a laugh. **(Alexus McClain)**

There was a time that I was vegetarian. I went to a friend's birthday party. I showed up hungry and worried that there wouldn't be food that I could eat. It was my first time meeting their family. Her Mama welcomed me with open arms. I told her that I did not eat meat, and she reassured me, "There is food for you here." My friend's Mama had recreated traditional Mexican dishes with jackfruit and soy products. When it was time to eat, her Mama dished each person's plate differently. She added more or less of what each person liked. That day I learned what it meant to cook and serve food with love, being intentional with every scoop. **(Mickey Mestiza)**



I would like to recognize my mom for her creativeness with naming us— my siblings and me--all with the letter V. After her it's Victoria, Vanity, Velanie, Vestee, and me, Valvree. Also, I think she's unique for our signature looks—our ponytails; we all have that trait from her. We can't do a lick of hair but can make a nice slick ponytail. **(Valvree Mosley)**



Both my mother and aunt, her twin sister, could be great interior designers/party promoters. This past Halloween they came together to host a party for our family. It's been years since they threw one for their kids that involved sensory games like peeled grapes for eyeballs and spaghetti noodles for guts. It was so fun and I can't believe people did not have this same experience growing up. As grandparents, they created a party for us all to enjoy as a family. **(Daija Pigram)**

My grandmother used to knit and crochet. She made me a scarf, slippers, and a blanket. She used it as an escaping mechanism. That shows her personality. Even in turmoil, she's doing something for somebody. All of my sisters, cousins, and parents have something from her. RIP 5.7.24
(Lailaini Reed)



My childhood friend who is also in Odyssey with me right now, Daija, has always been creative since we were kids. She currently has a passion for knitting hats. She also is a hair dresser and currently in school for becoming a dental hygienist. She is a woman of different hats. I love that she has the courage to jump out there and try new things.
(Tiana Richmond-Lee)



My grandmother baked some of the best desserts I have ever tried. She would make pound cakes with different flavored frostings, different pies including cherry and my favorite – sweet potato pie! They were never dry or falling apart and were always delicious. I remember one Thanksgiving there was an entire fold-up table filled with pies and cakes. By the end of the night everyone had eaten and took home slices and pieces emptying the whole table. **(Ashli Smith)**

Every year around Christmas, my sister Torrie is the complete opposite of myself. I hate it, and she is in love with it. Every year she goes all out. Last year my sister got extremely creative and did Grinch decorations and even got a Grinch green tree. She is so particular with the way she sets up her ornaments and the way she strings the lights around so perfectly. Her décor and set up is out of this world. I definitely believe this is a creative practice that is not often recognized, and I love it. I feel she does this to feel the warmth and love of Christmas and also to make our mother proud. **(Corrie Thomas)**

Cecilia has the art of getting comfy. When it's time to do anything, be it watching a movie, sitting down to do homework, or getting ready to divulge into her arts and crafts, Ceci needs to set herself up for comfort. She has a very meticulous way of setting things up for what I would assume optimal comfort. She needs her Stanley water cup filled with fresh ice. She will search for the perfect stuffy to cuddle when she needs a break. Snacks are a must. If anything, Ceci will get comfy. **(Dan Thomas)**



I would say my grandmother was very creative with cooking. My mom always told me how she never had recipes written out; she just went with the flow, and everything was always so delicious. Everyone still talks about her cooking till this day. I can still taste and crave her caramel cake. The way she set up all the cakes and desserts on holidays was always so beautiful. She woke up cooking every single day. We never woke up in the morning without a meal ready. **(Janessa Weichmann)**



I think of my children's grandmother Norma. Norma has a knack for fixing clothes and making blankets. She often tailors my oldest daughter's clothes for her, and I look at it as a work of art because sometimes if one of the kids has a hole in their clothes, she will find a cool way to cover it up or add a cool patch. She also has made the kids cool blankets for Christmas in the past; the blankets were specifically designed for each child. It brings her joy being able to help her grandchildren. **(Ladella Wilson)**

My mom spent a lot of time working on a special blanket for me. She knitted the blanket putting in different animals and letters; anything that I liked she added to it. She made it very colorful and unique to me. **(Abby Wilson)**



My sister loves to make pillows. She draws her own design to put on her pillows. I have three pillows she made. She puts the Lord's Supper on pillows, the Lord's Prayer.

She uses the most beautiful colors of material and ribbons, sparkles, and bling bling. My sister also makes clothes of her own designs. When she makes her pillows or clothes, it is her own creation.

I love my sister's pillows. She puts a lot of love, time, and passion into her creation. It makes me happy to have her pillows. I am always excited to see her new pillows. **(Sable Wright)**



REMEMBERING MOMENTS OF COURAGE

*courage: the ability to do something that frightens one; strength in the face of pain or grief; having the heart to face danger and hardship; from Latin **cor** “heart”*

I have senselessly been brutal with myself when I contemplate courage. Countless hours and days I wasted beating myself up on not being brave enough or strong enough, so much that I’ve become exhausted by the thought of defining when I should and shouldn’t be. What I do know is that courage is and always has been present in my being; even if it’s not, I must remind myself to be gentle and self-assertive so I can move through my pain or fears.

A memory I hold clear as day is an incident in high school. I was anything but extroverted or social, so this act of courage felt like a foreign entity came over me. It was junior year, eighth-period bible study with my English teacher, Mrs. Swanson. Sitting left to exit the door, I was looking out the small, stained windows and tracing the fluffy textured clouds cruising by to say hello. I could feel the frigid winter from outside, facing University Street; a tall white chimney puffed out waves of clear white smoke.

Daydreaming is an understatement if I was to describe my state of consciousness in Mrs. Swanson’s class. I would not say I was oblivious to what was being taught or disinterested in the class, but to be frank I cannot recall a single word she said. I enjoyed Mrs. Swanson: petite yet big in character, with sunlight-kissed hair and a freckled face with a touch of blue aqua eyeliner and a pinch of rose-colored blush. She was a soft-spoken woman and was a kind teacher to me whenever we interacted.

Eighth-period bible study at West High School was everything but diverse. Two thousand one hundred and forty-seven students attended West in 2010, me being one of the three people of color in Mrs. Swanson’s bible study class. Fourth floor at West High might not have made a dent in the memory of the teen zombies that filled the halls with their

pushing, ranting, and hunger for acceptance, but to me this hall marked the entrance to a core memory. On a day like any other, I entered the class with no ambition to learn, only the desire to get home and take a pointless nap. Blah, blah, blah... hands up and hands down, “tell me what Joseph meant by blah.”

I have no idea what led to my moment of courage but it struck me like a thief in the night. “They are here illegally and should go back to where they came from, they are criminals,” spoken with faith and a confident tone. My heart and soul punched me back to my motherland and I could hear my mom scream, “Que chingagda madre dijo ese hijo de su perra madre” (basically what the f**k did you just hear). My everyday daydreaming was cruelly interrupted by a nameless, clueless, nothingness zombie male. An absence of self and confounding emotions and words took control of my entire being. My heart was racing, like a mother waiting for her children at the Mexican/US border, praying for their safety, my face bloody red like the streets of LA during the Zoot suit riots, and my lips preparing to rip open like indigenous Chichimeca women of my homeland giving birth to a new life. Like James Hetfield singing “Master of Puppets,” my courage, my voice, shot sharp arrows of words at twenty thousand Hz. “What did you just say?”



You have no idea what you are talking about. My mother is no criminal.” I had frozen the classroom with wild blue flames. I lifted all 5 foot 3 inches of my sun-kissed body like the moon pyramid in Teotihuacan in Mexico.

Any word I said after was lost in a classroom filled with souls vaccinated with dementia of the heart. I clearly remember the millions of immigrant voices lifting my voice and smacking this one high school boy’s colonizing ancestors. The last minutes, last voices, last memory I have of that hour were robbed from me and detained like the billions of immigrants throughout history waiting to find their moment of courage. **(Angelica Alvarez Valenciano)**

Every day for the past couple of months I feel I’ve been brave. I’ve recently had to be brave with my fears of not having enough money to make ends meet.

I wake up and still push through because I have my children, who are near, who I will never want to let know I failed. Bravery for me is living a life of what I as a black woman face every day. People being rude and unkindly, it takes a lot out of me not to lose it. I have courage and had enough courage to ask Odyssey for help so I wouldn’t be put up out of my home. **(Tiffany Brenston)**



I feel that the moment of courage started when I was just a little girl. I always was the one who my friends would look to be the one who stands up and says what others are afraid to. Fast forwarding to me now being a single mother on top of taking care of my mom. That gives me the courage to wake up and be at work clocked in every morning at 3:30 am. **(Eleanor Ceaser)**

I can think of no moment more relevant than when I decided to embark back on the journey of education. I was in Oakhill Correctional when I saw a flyer advertising free college credits from UW-Madison [through Odyssey Beyond Bars]. Being a lifelong Badger fan as well as getting back into school being in the back of my mind, I thought to myself this is my opportunity. I can still remember like yesterday sitting in the library with the course application feeling nervous as hell and not knowing what to write. I hadn’t been in school for so long; what if my time had just passed? Also, a little side note, prison is not the most conducive environment for making self-progress.

Oh well, I took the leap and just leaned on my honesty when answering the application questions. I’m happy to say it worked out. I can honestly say that deciding to get back into education is one of the best decisions I’ve ever made. My family and friends would also agree it’s one of the best things I’ve done for myself. **(Dillon Dahlk)**





That day, I got the call from my father to move to Wisconsin. It had been at least a year or two of him begging me to come down to live with him and his then fiancée. It wasn't until that call that I looked around at my life and had no choice but to say yes. I was living with my husband on a military base with no friends, family, or job. It was just me, him, and some pets. I'm thankful to say he never laid a hand on me, but he laid hands on the only things I loved in that house. Maybe two days before this call our dog Ghost was barking. Instead of telling him to stop, he decided to throw the dog into our closet door. Our closet had a sliding door, and the force knocked the door off the track. This wasn't the first or last time he abused our dog. He smashed things, screamed, and threatened. All those moments washed up in my mind when I felt that "yes" roll out of my mouth while talking to my father.

I convinced Kyle that it would be temporary so I could save and come back – but over a year later I'm single! Moving here has had its struggles but c'est la vie! Ghost was taken to a shelter not long after I left. It still pains me that I couldn't give him a better life; it's unfortunate, but every woman has a version of this story. I hope his next family gives him a life he deserves, and I hope I don't have to use this courage for a moment like this again. **(Brianna Espanol)**



I remember going into my first therapy session after my overdose. I didn't know about rehab, recovery, or anything to do with AODA treatment. My therapist told me I should go to St. Mary's for a three-day stay, and everyone in my family told me to go. But my friends and boyfriend told me I could get healthy by myself. The hardest thing I have ever done is deciding to leave my beautiful child and home to go get help.

After two days of back and forth in my head, I decided to check myself in and get the help I needed. It was the hardest decision I have made. I had to muster up every piece of courage I had to walk through those doors at the hospital. But God knows I'm so glad I did. **(Adrienne Farrow)**

It took great courage to join the Odyssey program. I felt like I was too old and was ashamed to start school again and become as smart as I could be. I felt I let life get past me because of some mishaps. Believe it or not, after I applied for the program, I was hoping that I didn't get picked. I had to hold my head up and chest out to put my best foot forward and take on this new responsibility. **(Jamal Jackson)**



The moment of my courage was a courage I never thought I had. I was living in Chicago with two children and family who got excited seeing me fail and be at my lowest. Things that brought about this excitement were seeing me homeless, jobless, and with multiple children by multiple men.

I had to move back with my mother after losing my job and not being able to keep up with rent and bills. I borrowed a friend's laptop to explore jobs and apply to get back on my feet to get back into my own place. My mother would take the laptop cord and tell me that I cannot use the laptop in her house and that I need to go apply for jobs elsewhere. I would go to the library to apply for jobs, and once I got an interview, she refused watching my children so I could go on interviews. I would also have to sit in the cold with my children because I was not able to get a key.

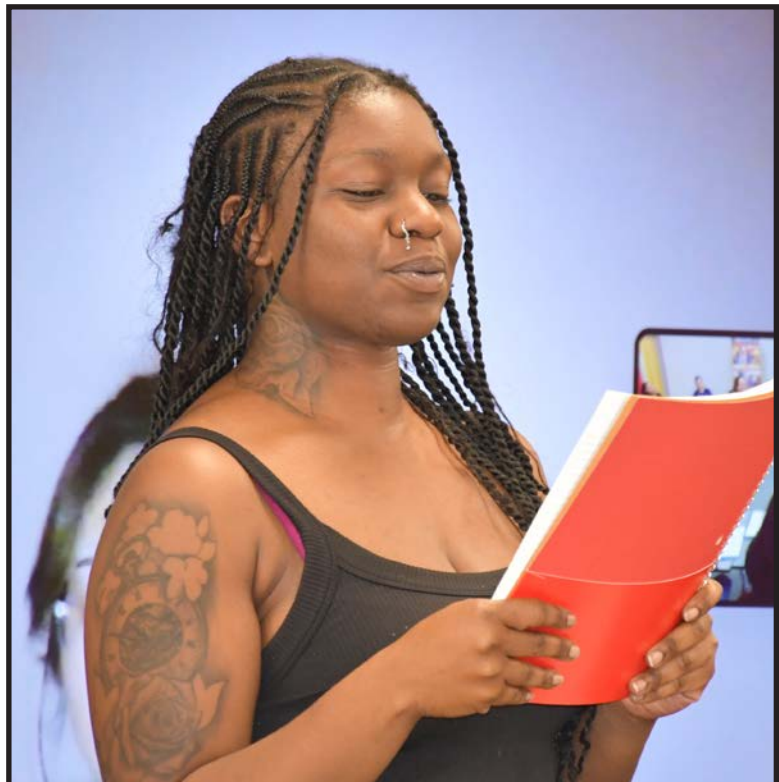
I saw that this was not the life that I wanted for my children. I did not want to disrespect my mother in the process of my feelings. So, I bought my children and me one-way tickets on the Greyhound bus line to Madison, Wisconsin, with no idea of what I was going to do. I did my research on shelters and the job centers to apply for assistance and decided that this was the best choice to get me and my kids out of a toxic environment.

The courage that it took me to step out to move somewhere where I knew no one was unbelievable. I took my children away from a family that would have ultimately torn them down and had them in the state that I am currently still trying to heal from. However, I also improved myself in this process. **(Gloria Knight)**



I always loved the saying "live by courage, walk by faith." Every day I have the courage to get up and make a difference in my life and my kids' life even though lately days have been so difficult. Some nights not knowing where I would be, courage has led me to where we are today! I never give up, as badly as I

want to, and I always strive to do my best because I know my end result will be rewarding. I've learned fight or flight and how to make sure no matter what we have a plan for always finding the next resource. On the bright side of everything, I know better is coming and that takes courage to know at one of the hardest times of my life. **(Crystal Lee)**



Most people still have their mother around, not all, but most. I feel like a leap of courage I take is continuing to be a mom. Without my mom, those moments I feel sad can't be long. The courage I have to be positive when my life has always been filled with negativity is not easy. I have to look at life in a different point of view rather than my own because my own isn't a pretty picture. Turning negative situations into positive ones is courage. Being open minded to new things when your life has been so closed off is courage. Fighting every day good or bad to make sure you don't put your kids through what you've been through is a whole lot of courage. **(Mariya Lucas)**



At a time my life, I was limited financially from pursuing a basic education in Africa, and this went on to have negative psychological impacts on me. My thoughts were no longer genuine, and were usually crowded with negativity and delinquent acts. These negative thoughts were informed by my belief that education is only reserved for the sons and daughters of the privileged. Courageously, I realized that I'm better than my thoughts that seek only to limit me and subjugate me to prejudiced acts, I picked myself up and worked at construction sites to pay for my studies at a

tourism and hospitality institute. I was awarded a diploma in Waitering. This was evolutionary for me, and it went on to build the undying resilience and confidence in me. **(Alfusainey Manjang)**

I was pacing around the Red Clover Tattoo Shop, waiting for Nipinet to finish setting up their station, when I suddenly traveled to a memory I recalled from middle school. I had traveled back to one of the few times growing up when my Papa opened up to share what life was like in Mexico. He was talking about tattoos, specifically how people with tattoos were discriminated against when it came

to employment, what our family believed, and the implications that it would cause with authorities.

My tattoos are stories that reveal fractions of who I have been, what I have been through, and the lessons I have learned. I returned to my body in the shop and heard Nipinet's voice ask, "Are you ready?" It had been over a year since I had scheduled that tattoo appointment. "Yes." That day, Nipinet tattooed a jaguar on my neck and outlined a collaborative tattoo I had started on my chest. The tattoo is a tribute piece to my ancestors. I wanted to honor my



ancestors who fought 500 years of resistance against colonialism. My contribution to our collective liberation today comes from the power of using my voice to speak on injustices that I can articulate through my capacity to speak two colonizer languages. I told Nipinet that I wanted a reminder that I could look at every day and remember that the least I could do was speak up.



Two and a half hours of a 7-round liner tattoo needle piercing through my neck and chest later, I would walk out of the Red Clover Tattoo shop a different person. No one would ever look at me the same way as before. Growing up in the United States, I assimilated for survival. I became like a chameleon. My appearance would change to adjust to my environment. Today, no matter what I wear, where I go, or who I meet, I will never be able to hide who I am, what I have been, and the lessons I have overcome. Somedays, seeing myself is as uncomfortable for me as it is for others. My character has the opportunity to transcend the implications of society. Looking in the mirror is a constant reminder as to why. I am an openly 2-Spirit queer person who advocates and studies indigenizing and practices decolonizing. It takes courage for me to exist every day. **(Mickey Mestiza)**

A courageous time in my life was when I got my CDL. I feel like that was a hard task I completed in my life, as well. And I say that because I did not know what was in store for me when taking that class, but I did know I wanted to make a better living for my kids. I did know that I was tired of struggling, so I got into the class.

The first week was class work, and the rest of the three weeks were done in the yard. The class week was great. I passed all the written parts on the first try. It was the three weeks in the yard that almost broke me. It was the month of November and it was cold and rainy. It's only one person in the truck

at a time, so when it is not your turn, you are standing there outside. I did not come from a background of construction or the country or any experience with CDL, so things were foreign to me. I looked around and I was the only female and black female and there was one black man. Everybody else was white. That alone was a little discouraging.

Also, when practicing I looked at others being able to get the 18-wheeler backed into the space without hitting the cones; that was discouraging and I found out they all came from construction or lived out in the country. I knew nothing about driving stick or the pattern of the gears. But I did not let that stop me.

I had an instructor ask me why I was there. I also know that a lot of men feel that type of work is not fun for women. That question he asked sent me home crying and even asking myself why I was there. I wanted to quit, and I already felt like I had a reason to. I had to have a talk with myself about why. So, I used that instructor and his crazy talk for motivation. I instilled those words in my head so that I can show him' I started to feel like I had a point to prove. He didn't want me to make it.

Test day came. The first part is going over the truck and then driving past the first part – easy peasy. It was when I got to the backing up part that I called the tester to the truck to quit. Luckily, he did not come. I gave it one more try. I cannot tell you how I got it in but I did on the first try. From that day, I knew anything I put my mind to I can and will do it! **(Valvree Mosley)**



A moment of courage for me was when I had my second daughter and I decided to apply for the CNA program when I was two months postpartum. I was very afraid because I didn't think I was ready to put my baby into daycare and jump straight back into work. I struggled with the decision if I would do the program or not if accepted. But I knew now with me having another child that I needed a better job for myself and I needed to start my career.



I jumped out on a leap of faith and accepted the six-week accelerated CNA program. I made the decision not to put her into daycare till after the program. It was very hard for me to be up at 6 AM knowing sometimes that my baby was up or didn't want to go to sleep, but I made it through. I finished the class, passed my state exam, and got a good job. I am not currently still working as a CNA and will start my pre req classes for nursing in January 2025. **(Tiana Richmond-Lee)**

It was the year of 2018 and I just felt as if I was going to pop!! One more month, one more month: I kept telling myself this every day for the last month of my pregnancy. Za'Maia, my youngest, really put me through it. I was fainting, falling over, always light-headed, and almost always in the hospital.

One morning at work I fainted while filling a drink, so I was sent to the hospital in an ambulance. At the hospital they decided to run some tests since I seemed to visit them about the same thing quite often. While running all these tests, from x-rays to EKGs, cat scans and MRIs, they noticed something on my x-rays didn't seem right. The doctors didn't want to give me false information and wanted to go into further testing. It felt like I was stuck in the hospital for days waiting for my results.

Eventually my doctor came in bearing bad news about my scans, I had a hole in my heart the size

of a quarter. They said unfortunately because of the size of the hole I only had one option and that was open heart surgery. If my hole was smaller, we could have used the balloon method to plug it, but that wasn't the case in my situation.

"What if I leave it? What if I just ignore it? I have felt fine my entire life. I can run, jump, swim, climb a mountain if I have to."

"Unfortunately, with how big your hole is you would possibly have anywhere from ten to fifteen years before your heart ruptures and fails; it could just get worse."

At this point I couldn't keep it together; I was crying so hard as if I felt my heart rupturing with every word coming from his mouth. I rescheduled my open-heart surgery three times, and my surgeon finally said I cannot miss another. I could make the process harder if I were to wait years for my procedure, so in I went on August 28th of 2019.

Now it's time I have to put my big girl panties on. I have to think about my kids, my life, my partner. My mind is racing. I can't stop crying and I'm so scared. I took that leap and got it done. This took a lot of courage and a lot of guts for me to go through: something so traumatic with lots and lots of complications afterwards that I'm sure I will get to share. Until then, I give myself the biggest hug and the biggest pat on my back because I did it. **(Corrie Thomas)**



During the 2017 YCS held in Austin, TX, I would be competing in Yu-Gi-Oh, my favorite card game, for the last time that year. This would also be my last time competing at home before moving to Wisconsin. Knowing the event would be stacked with the strongest build at the time, known as 'Sword Soul OTK' ('OTK' meaning 'one turn kill'), I knew I had my work cut out for me. I decided to run my favorite deck of all time. Traptix was a deck that had its time to shine a few years back, but it's a deck that I am comfortable with and proficient at piloting. I spent weeks updating combos and inventing new tech to counter 'today's meta-game.'

The day had been going well. My score going into the 5th round was 4-1-0. And according to the tournament rules, one more loss and I would be out. I checked the white board for my next opponent, and I saw that it was famous Yugituber Jonuchi Wheeler. After seeing that his latest "Sword Soul deck tutorial" video racked up over 20k views and 180k likes, I knew I was done for. Slowly walking to my seat, contemplating any and if possible last-minute changes I can make in order to win, I was stumped. I didn't know what to do. I decided not to make any changes. I figured if I played safe and remembered my routes, I would be ok.

Boy, was I wrong. I got absolutely demolished. To be fair, he played a deck designed to kill in one turn. After picking up my cards and extending my hand to declare "GGs," Wheeler looked at me chuckling and said, "It takes some courage to run Traptix in this format." Yeah, whatever, dude.

(Dan Thomas)



A time of courage I can remember is when I was in labor with my last son this June and his heart rate kept dropping. For hours, they tried switching my position and giving me medication; they tried so many things. I just remember being so scared and crying thinking I was going to lose my son.

They told me they needed to get him out fast and the only option was a C-section. I really didn't want to and I never had to get a C-section before. I didn't want to, but his heart rate kept dropping. I finally just said "do it," so they rushed me to the OR, but by the time we got there I was 10 cm so they let me push.

I was so scared. It took a lot for me to agree on doing the C-section. I was thankful I didn't end up needing to. **(Janessa Weichmann)**

I feel that I was displaying courage when I left my last relationship. I was locked away in my room because I had Covid. I was texting my best friend about me not being in love with my partner anymore, and I sent her a quote that talked about forgiving someone over and over again when they do wrong to you and how you lose love for them.

While I thought I sent the message to her, I actually sent it to my boyfriend/child's father. When he responded, I remember being in shock and sitting there with my mouth open, flabbergasted, and my heart was racing a thousand beats per minute.

It took a lot of courage for me to respond to him when he texted me back saying, “What’s that supposed to mean?” I told him to come upstairs so we can talk. I had to be honest when it was hard because I still cared about his feelings. I feel like it also took a lot of courage to leave considering we had been together for 10 years and had three children together.



Being brave in that moment has brought me to where I am now. I am married and happy and my children are happy, I have a job I love, and I took the needed steps to get back into school. All of this was extremely hard for me to imagine during that time in my past. **(Ladella Wilson)**

One time I vividly remember being courageous was when my family told me my grandmother, whom I was very attached to, passed away. It was really hard on me, and I remember, after they told me, just feeling depressed, overwhelmed by grief. I just cried, saying “no,” like denying it would make it any less true. After that, I just shut my door and shut everyone out, put my hoodie on, and just laid there watching a movie, feeling numb.



After a while, everyone kept checking on me, making sure I was alright. My papa came to my room and told me he was going to a Super Bowl party, and I said, “Could I go?” before I even thought about it. I think that took some bravery because I didn’t want to leave my room before that, didn’t want to talk. I just wanted to be alone. And then, I just decided to leave the house. I think that was my most courageous moment. **(Abby Wilson)**

The moment of courage in my life was when I found out about my illness that

had me bound in my cave as a slave. When I had my heart attack, I drove myself to the hospital to save my own life. That’s where my courage came in. I didn’t want to die because I had too much to live for. So God gave me strength and courage to get myself to the hospital.

I had a double bypass. I say this to say to you that you never know when your courage is going to kick in. When I had a stress test done, that’s when I realized I was in a full-blown heart attack. A couple months before that, I had surgery on my neck because all my arteries were closed. They had to do emergency surgery on my neck to save my life. They cut me from the back of my ear to the middle of my neck; there was no blood flow to the right side of my brain and a blood clot. They had to run the blood through my face. This is my moment of courage. **(Sable Wright)**



FINDING PLATO'S CAVE TODAY

After reading Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" from The Republic, students found examples from their own life of times they have been trapped in caves that kept—or are still keeping—them from seeing the light or truth.

I feel like I have been in many different caves in my 24 years of life already, maybe still stuck in one. Unfortunately, the deepest part of my cave is dark, pitch-black, and empty. It is very hard for me to break the chains and come out of them. It is extremely hard for me to accept that I can be loved by someone or even love someone.

I grew up in a household where showing your emotions and telling your feelings was a weakness and/or you were giving attitude back. Depression, anxiety, and sadness weren't real; it was "you just asking for attention." In a way, yes, I was begging for your attention to tell me you loved me, to tell me you were proud of me, to tell me I am enough!

I came to the realization in my junior year of high school. My only way of showing or expressing myself is blowing up, which isn't healthy and can be toxic to my partner. I bottle everything up until I explode. I am aware of what I do and I know it is not okay, but that's the only way I know how to address it. Exploding is what I was taught. Since I am aware of what I do and I don't know how to change it, I think it is a defense mechanism for me so I can't commit to someone.

Another dark part of my cave is commitment. I had a single mother who grew up in foster care, who never had a quality mother or father figure in her life. My father was never to be seen, but I know alcohol was in his cave. My parents never got married and I never saw them together – I only pick toxic partners or push away the ones that could be good for me. I go for what I think I deserve, and I'm not sure if that's the best for me. I know I can commit to a job because I have bills to pay. I don't know how to break down my own wall that I built with cement, laying brick by brick when something in me broke when I was a child.

When I look at my life today, it's still hard for me to express any kind of emotion – I feel trapped in my own mind. I go to therapy and I feel aware of everything I do and why/how I do it. I need to see the opening on how I can be a better person in relationships. I try so hard and I just repeat the cycle. I've always wondered by people have children when they know they aren't going to take care of them properly. **(Kyiana Baker)**

My allegory would be my life as it is now. I've been in an upward/downward spiral. Most of my time is spent thinking about blocks and blocks. The blocks reference the things that are happening in my life.

Just this year, I've experienced so many falling blocks. A year ago, all of my blocks were reaching new heights, my career, my health, and my goals. Then all of a sudden, blocks slowly started tumbling down. No one can see what's happening to me. I realize I have to rebuild my blocks day by day and by night in order to have a more secure foundation. Losses and gains are all I have seen lately, but no one can see my issues, so being strong is my only option. Through it all, I will be back on top with all my blocks at the top and secure. **(Tiffany Brenston)**



Having a big family that always has a lot going on, I know now that there are families that plan their kids, don't move around and switch schools; some kids grow up in the same school. So, I was used to moving around a lot. Not having great financial management, I know now there are people that manage every cent and dollar they spend; they know how to spend money wisely. Education is another cave for me between public and private schools. What are the differences between public and private schools? The learning. **(Quanna Caffey)**

I would say that we all live in an allegorical cave sometimes, some days more than others. One that I feel we all can relate to is being in a relationship. Sometimes we portray on the internet like we are in very happy, healthy relationships, but behind closed doors and off the internet, it is a very different story. It's reality and sometimes reality is very different from the illusion that we portray on social media and to our friends. So, on the outside looking in, we think they are a power couple. We beat ourselves up wanting to be in a social media, happy relationship. When in reality your single peaceful life is what they are praying for. **(Eleanor Ceaser)**

So if I were to rewind my life about two years ago, it wouldn't be a stretch to say I was at my "rock bottom," and the couple years leading up to that point definitely felt like being in a cave. We were in the middle of the Covid pandemic, I had family members getting sick, and I didn't have a steady income because of a back injury. I felt like the walls were closing in on me and didn't know how to handle it. I used alcohol to try and cope with everything going on, which ultimately led to me getting a bunch of OWIs and a prison sentence. **(Dillon Dahlk)**

I believe everyone's initial "cave" is that child's jaded perception of life – it's the matter of when that veil finally lifts that sets you up with the promise and determination to stay free and to do what you can to protect yourself, or you learn the hard truth of the world and give up.

Though my father was in jail, my mother cared more for men than she did for a child – years of again unfortunate events along with which I was set up once I got to high school. I didn't care. I was a hermit and would stay home with bouts of depression that I didn't have much help with, which caused me to be a slight insomniac. I told my mother I couldn't sleep, and she said, "Here, take this," to which I proceeded to ask, "What is it?" She said, "Don't worry about it." I held the lone pill in my hand and, thanks to Google, I typed in the letters and numbers on the pill – it was Xanax. From that day on for the rest of high school, I was addicted to sleep. All I had to say was, "Mom, I can't sleep" and a pill I'd get. They would change the pills so I wasn't getting Xanax every time, but it would be some form of prescription not prescribed to me.

I realized it had gotten to be an issue when my mother had nothing to give me one day and I drank a bunch of Nyquil and smoked marijuana till I passed out. Because of the depression and obsession with sleep, my junior year of high school I missed nearly 40 days of school – not counting the classes/periods I skipped.



I eventually slowed down my senior year of high school. It wasn't until sometime in my senior year when my stepdad overdosed. That's when I woke up. He wasn't necessarily the "breadwinner," but my mother couldn't afford our apartment. We became homeless and lived in her friend's storage area for a bit – It was me, my mother, our dog, cat, and three guinea pigs. That's what really got me out of the cave: looking at my mother and thinking of my future was scary. The thought of becoming her terrified me.

We eventually did find an apartment and, soon after, I got a job at an animal hospital, which changed my life in ways I probably will never comprehend. I can confidently say I am never going back or leading a life of self-induced misery. There was a point in time when I was convinced that I wouldn't live past 18, but here I sit at 10:55 pm at age 22, fighting like hell for success and rolling a boulder over that cave entrance. **(Brianna Espanol)**

I can relate to the allegory of the cave in many different ways. The main one is that when I was in my drug addiction, I definitely kept myself in darkness. From how I engaged with society, to how

when I got home, I would keep the shades closed and I kept my home very dark, I always seemed to have a dark mindset. When I was in my addiction, I couldn't see any light. I never could see the bright side of things. The glass was always half empty at that time. I would make bad choices and definitely surround myself with the wrong people.

One day I was having a bad week. I decided to try a drug that I never thought would have the effect it did. I overdosed and was unresponsive for 15 minutes. From that moment forward, I decided my life was worth living. I got out of my cave and started to run towards the light. I looked into a full lifestyle change. So briefly, the main goal was sorting out my mental health, which was the key to my sobriety success. Now, here I am almost three years later. Thank God I got a second chance to gain more knowledge, and that is my allegory. **(Adrianne Farrow)**

Sitting in a jail cell had me feeling like the time stood still, and there was no way out. Sometimes, I thought I saw things that weren't there, shadows in the distance when the light was out, or unfamiliar sounds. **(Jamal Jackson)**



A fitting story for an "allegory of the cave" in regards to my life is being in a state of restlessness due to being away from everyone I love. It's a painful thing to endure, but I availed the time to ponder and assess my state, to fight for what I really want, and constantly remind myself of the facts of what is needed to be done to regain or get back to my previous state. I've gained perspectives on which gaps need to be filled. **(Alfusainey Manjang)**

When I was a teenager, I got in trouble often, with the law and at home. I believed that as a person I was unworthy of anything good – that my destiny was not to achieve anything of real value. I struggled in school because of various reasons; physical health and my home life made it hard for me to learn or want to learn anything. I’ve always believed I wasn’t a smart person, not understanding that with the right tutoring with someone patient and non-judgmental, I could learn things. I just needed things explained differently.

When I attended technical college. I was determined to try, yet always became frustrated and gave up because I was always scared to ask for help and way too embarrassed to admit I couldn’t understand something. I’ve always feared the judgment of others. As I’ve gotten older, I’ve pushed myself to face uncomfortable situations, sometimes failing, others succeeding. The idea of at least trying or never knowing what could have happened is what motivates me. I’m constantly uncomfortable facing my truths, but I continue to try. Giving up is not an option anymore. **(Vanessa Martinez)**

Yes, I have been in a cave. My cave story is about police brutality against blacks. Growing up in a black household as kids, we are taught that the police are good people, that they are to serve and

protect us from home to school to the community. They are nice and friendly at community events being at the schools, but it’s not until you start to get older or grown that you start to understand and get your own perception that it may just not be the case for us. We see a lot of disturbing things that make the news, but a lot of things don’t. Thank God for social media for now shining a light on a lot of things that police and the news cover up.

It’s not until you are older and have understanding or have your own encounter with them that you see that’s not what protecting is like. Like now, anytime I see the police when I am driving, I automatically get anxious. My heart starts to beat out of my chest, and I can have everything to be legal to drive. I can be obeying all traffic signs and signals. I can know that they are not even coming for me and still feel like they are.

Here’s an example that we all saw on national TV: a woman who needed mental health called 911 and was shot in the head. Instead of serving and protecting, they murdered her in cold blood. If they could have gotten away with it, they would have because she’s an African American black woman. **(Valvree Mosley)**

Reading the passage, I thought of its relation to slavery. My own experiences with being in a cave or stuck in my own comfort zone are from poverty—not understanding tax brackets, trying to become self-employed and still following tax laws with debt from owing the state, sticking to a 9-5, living paycheck to paycheck and working later to provide for my family instead of working for myself and my passion. Learning financial literacy would make more money and ultimately a better living situation that doesn’t involve me working long hours doing a job I dread going to every day. I would have the freedom to make my own schedule to focus on living life and things that actually matter. **(Daija Pigram)**



I would say the cave that I'm stuck in would have been adding myself to the young black single mom club lol. Having a baby at such a young age and only being the primary parent is the generation we are stuck in, unfortunately. Everyone around you is judgmental, and nobody is really supportive. I have seen this from my peers that I personally know or from social media. This is a big disaster that is going on in the world right now. I don't feel like having a baby is the end of the world, and I feel like my kids were the best thing that happened to me, but the poverty we live in isn't that good for African Americans, really any race.



It's hard raising your kids here in Wisconsin. In order to survive here and to get any state assistance, you have to make a little bit of nothing. I cannot work at McDonald's, pay my rent, pay my childcare bills, pay my car note, and take care of my kids' daily life. Low-income families are honestly all around every state, but I've seen a high population here in Madison, WI because this is where I've been my whole life, and it gets worse and worse as the years go by. If you don't have a degree or some type of higher education, you will not get a good-paying job. Being scheduled for 80 hours a pay period and then picking up overtime is the only way you can really survive here.

Sometimes I feel like a bad mom because I'm always at work and I'm not spending so much time with my kids. I'm working hard to get where I want to be and hopefully make a difference for young black single moms. **(Tiana Richmond-Lee)**

Yes, I have been stuck in a cave which I believe started as a child. My parents were drug users, which often left us stuck in a way that we shouldn't have been. Although my father was in the Air Force and had a great-paying job, we were still dealing with the effects of drug use and poverty. Being in Chicago, we would often have to deal with theft,

violence, and instability. I believe the use of drugs and how it alters your mindset and ability to think is what kept my parents in the "cave." They were comfortable and not willing to seek the truth, just like the prisoners.

My parents are also like the prisoners who escaped the cave and began to see the world for what it really is. After acknowledging that they didn't want to live a drug addict lifestyle, they began to change drastically. We moved out of Chicago to get away from what my parents were "used to." When we moved to Madison, my parents described it as a fresh restart. My mother continued to struggle with alcoholism as my dad progressed. He reminds me of the dilemma the prisoner faced whether he should go back in and enlighten the others and not go back in the cave to possibly face a threat.

As an adult, I have often found myself in a cave mindset. Being young and wanting to party often put me at a disadvantage. It isn't solely the partying but not knowing when to cut it off. In my younger 20s, this would affect my work, which affected me being able to pay bills and struggle to provide for my children. Over the last year, I have strengthened my relationship with God, which I am extremely grateful for. I have learned to be more disciplined and responsible. I strongly believe the saying "to whom much is given, much will be required." Every day I am trying to make a change and strive for greatness! **(Ashli Smith)**

It was the year of 2009, the worst year to come. I lost my mother three days before Christmas in '09. I hate Christmas now! My mother battled drug addiction six months before she passed away. She graduated from a drug program. My mom was looking better than ever. She looked alive again, healthy, wanting to do better for not only us but herself. Shortly after she graduated, her boyfriend (who she promised to stay away from) was released from jail, and my mom fell back into the same old habits, not caring too much to keep up around the house. My older sister and I tended to make meals, at least what we knew to make. I hoped and prayed every night that they would break up. I didn't want them together anymore. I wanted him to forget about us. I wish we were a pile of dirt that he walked through and brushed off and never looked back.

On December 22, 2009, I found my mom lying in bed as cold as a deep freezer, as purple as the biggest bruise you have ever seen. All I could do was scream. I abhorred her boyfriend and wanted nothing but him to be dead too. My mom passed away, and I felt I couldn't make it anymore. "Do I want to make it?" I asked myself in that moment. No, I fell into the same habits my mom did, wondering if she did these things to help with my grandpa's passing. Maybe this is how she felt better. Maybe this was the only way for her to forget. So, here I was messing up, doing everything that I was not supposed to be doing, messing up in school, running away, fighting, stealing – you name it, I was doing it. I could not find a way to get myself back on track, and I didn't care.

I was soon sent away to a treatment facility where I then began acting up more, stealing vehicles to try and make it back home, fighting people for things I didn't have, wanting to be a bully, and not wanting better. I just wanted my mom. Now sent away and lonely, I felt even more trapped—no family or friends near, a curfew, chores, planned meals. I couldn't take it anymore. Stuck in a room, I started self-harming; no way to get high, so maybe I will focus on the pain and gashes in my legs and arms



more than the loss of my mom – nope, nothing. I am still thinking of my mom and now just in pain. I just wanted to see my mom, hear her voice, see her smile, feel her warm hugs, one more meal, one more morning of her yelling at us to get ready for school, but no.

Now I am trapped in reality, trapped in knowing that my mom is never coming back, trapped in never getting one more dance, one more hug, trapped in not treating her better, trapped in Christmas never being the same, trapped in never being able to hear "I love you, CoCo" one more time because I would tell you a billion times over, "I love you more, Mom!" **(Corrie Thomas)**

Socrates's allegory of the cave is a dialogue between Socrates and his pupil Glaucon. Socrates presents Glaucon with a story in which there is a group of prisoners trapped in a unique cave system. Their hands and feet are shackled to the ground, and they wear a collar that prevents them from turning their heads to see behind them. Within the cave there is a fire burning that illuminates the walls of the cave. The fire would also cast shadows on the walls of the things that passed by the cave's opening. Due to the cave's acoustics, noises would often be distorted as they would echo throughout the cave. The story takes a turning point when one of the prisoners has been released from their bindings and given the ability to leave the cave. Upon leaving and discovering the world for what it really is and experiencing things that are initially foreign to them, they then question returning to the cave. Socrates explains

that the story is relative to one's journey toward enlightenment. From this very profound story, I would like to interpret what I would consider to be three main points of the story and how they are related to the journey I'm on.

First, I need to acknowledge "The Cave." It is the amalgamation of generational abuse and self-doubt. I can liken the fire to the trauma they had to endure in their life, as it would cast a shadow formed from their negligence and narcissism. We never really understood why or where the shadows came from, but we quickly learned that piety was required to keep the shadows at bay. In a way, accepting these conditions would be considered that which kept me tethered to the ground. Much like L'Homme au Masque de Fer, I wore an iron helmet fashioned from their words and actions that often embedded the corruption that I am not enough. That I would never amount to anything, and that this was my fault.

What I would consider to be the second phase or the turning point in the story is when one of the prisoners has been released from their chains and departs the cave. I feel the people I have grown to love as friends and family will portray the role of our beloved locksmith: the ones who really push me and anchor my fears with positive reinforcement. I had been offered the opportunity to move up to Wisconsin from Texas to start life over, to rebuild myself, and live life on my own terms. It's very clear that this is not an easy task, and the work that I put in will directly reflect in its outcome. So, with a chest full of determination, I set out for the maw of the cave. As I began to exit the cave, I learned that I was indeed very capable. I was able to fill my lungs with potential that had been within me my entire life. The sun that now casts shadows behind me guides me to my next point of discovery. As it rains, I've learned the importance of building barriers to shield me from the harsh elements. Now the fruits of education provide more nourishment than the ground mill I ate during my incarceration.



In my eyes the most important yet perplexing part of the allegory is when Socrates speaks of the prisoners theoretically returning to the cave and the internal dialogue they have with themselves. For the sake of brevity, Socrates states, the prisoner would question if returning to the cave with all their newfound knowledge would be worth it. Not sure if the others would accept these truths to be fact, they then decide that this is something that the others must discover on their own accord. In my eyes, returning to the cave is important. I would like to quote Bob Marley and say, "In this great future, you can't forget your past." I can never forget the way I felt when I was at my lowest. I will always remember the weight of my manacles every time I raise my arms in triumph. I will cherish the feeling of my eyes adjusting to a light brighter than the pyre set before me. The retention of these memories will propel me along my path. I feel returning to the cave in a literal sense can be just as important. While you may not have the ability to convince the rest of the prisoners, you may possess what it takes to inspire just one.

In closing, one's path isn't defined or set in stone. With help and guidance from those who want to help you, along with the desire to see the past and that laid before you and the drive to seek knowledge of self, you will begin to forge your own path toward enlightenment. You must ultimately choose to leave the cave. This is my interpretation of Socrates's allegory of the cave and how it has helped me thus far in recognizing the strides I've taken in my own personal growth and development.
(Daniel Thomas)

Being depressed after having a child is one of the hardest things I've had to overcome. After my relationship wasn't going well, having a baby made me feel more down than ever. Caring for a baby alone for the most part is a lot of work. I had to pick myself up and keep myself busy. I focused on bettering myself and doing positive things to keep my mind focused on healing.

I look back all the time on growing up and how much I've matured. I feel like mastering being responsible was hard. I look back at the things I used to care about that I don't care about today or the things I didn't think about that now I care so much about: bills being on time, being on time for work and school, maintaining a schedule and bedtime for my kids. Getting older really does make a difference in your way of thinking.

(Janessa Weichmann)

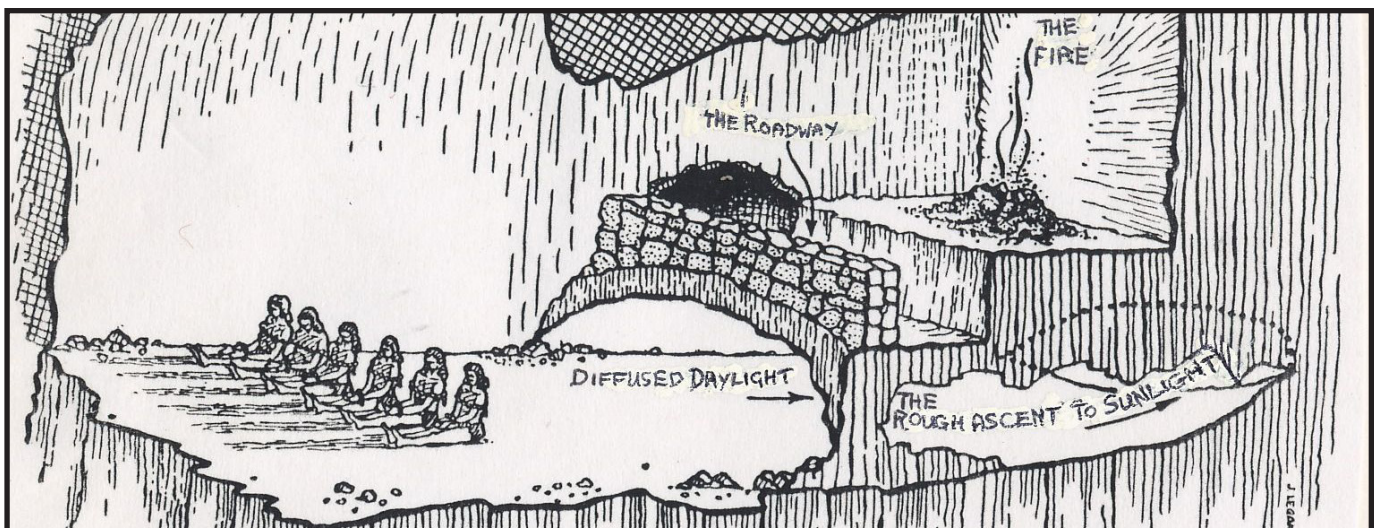
I feel like I've never truly been "trapped in a cave," but there was a time in middle school when we were all told that clowns were coming to the school. I didn't know why they were going to come to the school, but we all believed it. This is back when dressing up as clowns and scaring people was a trend. Looking back, I realize I was pretty naïve in middle school, just believing what I was told. It wasn't until the pandemic that I really began to form my own beliefs. That was when I "broke free from my chains" and started to understand how reality works – and how messed up it can be but also how wonderful it can be.

(Abby Wilson)

The situation that most makes me think of being in a cave was my previous relationship prior to being married. I was in a relationship for 10 years, and I came to a point where I realized that I wasn't in love anymore. I waited for change and hoped for change and it never came. I fully acknowledged the situation and came to terms with everything. Once I went through the steps of acknowledging the truth, I was faced with the decision about staying in this relationship that I knew wouldn't end how I imagined. I also felt scared to move on because it was hard to imagine my life after the fact. I also wondered if leaving was the right choice for my children. With that question at hand, I stuck around longer than I should have. That situation that I was in made me think of being in a cave and scared of possible changes.

(Ladella Wilson)

My dark cave came about when I began to use drugs. It was very dark in my cave. My cave kept me depressed and deprived of a normal life. I couldn't see a silver lining at the end of the tunnel. My master (the shadows) kept me locked in the shadows of my mind or crack, the master of me. Everywhere I turned there were the shadows, until I made the decision to turn around. At that moment, my head shifted to the right where there was light. I stood up and walked to the light and put myself in rehab. That's my freedom. If I go back in the cave I will die. **(Sable Wright)**



SHOWING OFF STYLE

To get ready for writing prose in the style of Frederick Douglass, students experimented with various stylistic devices designed to make language persuasive and memorable.

ALLITERATION:

Being a part of Odyssey makes me want to jump for joy. (Ashli Smith)

The Badgers blew a bold lead this past weekend. (Dillon Dahlk)

Dig deep down to discover what you need to move forward. (Brianna Espanol)

My son is happy, healthy, and handsome! (Mariya Lucas)

Lousy Louis lies to Lizbeth. (Kyianna Baker)

Aziyria already ate all her apples. (Corrie Thomas)



ALLUSION:

Both Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Frederick Douglass demanded the right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” (the allusion here is to the Declaration of Independence)

[Some argue that] God cursed Ham, and therefore American slavery is right. (Frederick Douglass alluding to the Bible)



ANALOGY:

Looking in a field of clovers for a four-leaf clover is like searching for a needle in a haystack. (Corrie Thomas)

Heartburn sneaks up on me like a thief in the night. (Dan Thomas)

Coming to tutoring on Monday nights makes me feel like I’m sitting on the king’s throne. (Val Mosely)

The clothes slave wore were worse than a homeless person’s clothes. (Ladella Wilson)

ASSONANCE:

My brother wants sweet treats for movie nights. (Brianna Espanol)

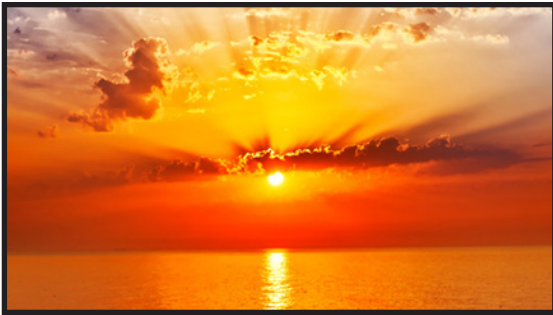
My cat sat on the mat looking fat and flat. (Gloria Knight)

Za’Mala loves to eat sweet treats. (Corrie Thomas)

CHIASMUS:

All my children are his; he is the father of all my children. (Gela Docks)

Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced. (James Baldwin)

**EXCLAMATION:**

I hate waking up too early in the morning! (Adrianne Farrow)

Damn, we lost two games in a row!!! (Dillon Dahlk)

Today is going to be the best day ever! (Jamal Jackson)

I can do anything I put my mind to! (Ashli Smith)

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE:

I'm as hungry as a lion. (simile; Alexis McClain)

Old Blue Boy almost didn't start, but he did start the second time I turned the ignition. (personification; Tiffany Brenston)

I am as tall as the trees when I believe. (simile; Jamal Jackson)

My hands were as cold as icicles. (simile; Adrianne Farrow)

His heart was a shattered glass, broken into a million pieces by his wife's betrayal. (metaphor; Gloria Knight)

**IRONY:**

What a joy it is to do homework! (Tiffany Brenston)

I just love being short—especially when it means climbing onto the counter every time I want something from the top shelf. (Abby Wilson)

Former President Trump is clearly a smart, open-minded, caring, and fair individual. (Vanessa Martinez)

Sandra is a workaholic who comes to work every day on time but does nothing. (Val Mosely)

You're such a good person, especially when you're angry, harsh spoken, and evil-eyed. (Sable Wright)

"You shouldn't always be so angry!" she screamed. (Kyiana Baker)

**ONOMATOPOEIA:**

The ball swished through the net. (Crystal Lee)

The chiropractor produces a loud “crack” from my back. (Dillon Dahlk)

There is nothing like that “ching” from lacing the perfect shot. (Dan Thomas)

The shrieks of slaves being whipped haunt me. (Mickey Mestiza)

When I eat chips, you can hear every crunch when I’m chewing. (Ladella Wilson)

OXYMORON:

A clumsy acrobat, the ladybug fumbles gracefully through the garden. (Abby Wilson)

I can’t imagine a more glorious defeat than Donald Trump losing the presidency and tenderly losing his mind in prison. (Angelica Alvarez)

At a certain point in the winter the cold air burns. (Brianna Espanol)

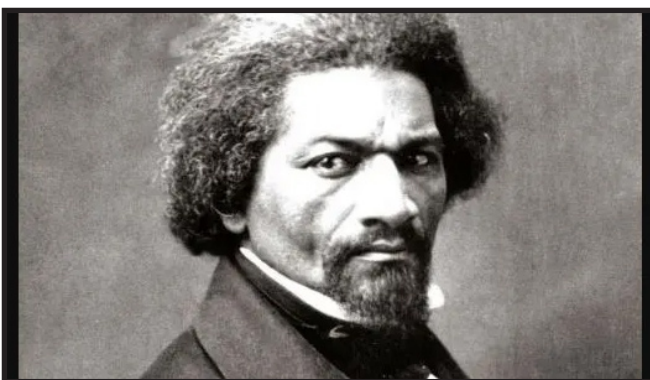
Being a Badgers fan lately has been bittersweet. (Dillon Dahlk)

My friend is a smart dummy, meaning intelligent book smart but lost as far as common sense goes. (Jamal Jackson)

Whenever I am startled, the deafening silence of investigating tenses me up. (Daija Pigram)

He’s a demonic saint. (Alfusainey Manjang)

For Douglass, learning how to read and write was a cursed blessing. (Eleanor Ceaser)

**PARALLELISM:**

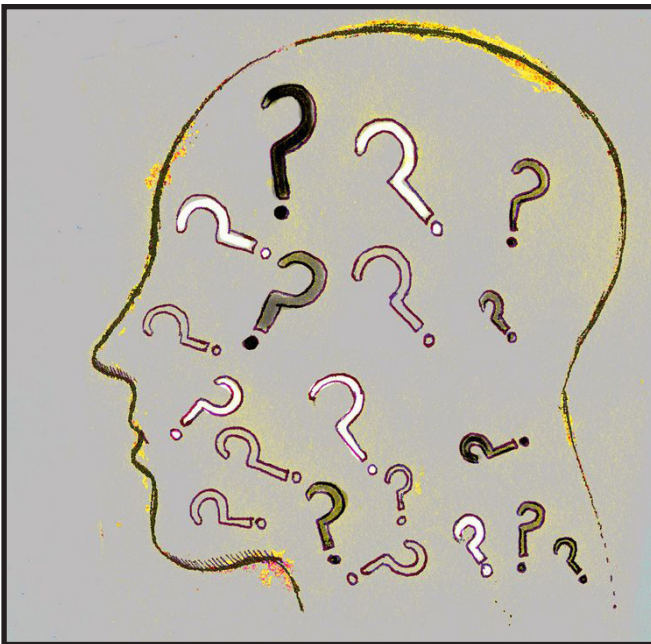
Let us preach peace and let us end war. (Alfusainey Manjang)

You may rejoice; I must mourn. (Frederick Douglass)

REPETITION:

Wake up with kids, go to sleep with kids, every day revolving around kids: my kids are my whole life.
(Janessa Weichmann)

When I'm home, I'm always cooking, I'm always getting children dressed and ready for school, I'm always cleaning, I'm always busy with something to do. (Tiffany Brenston)

**RHETORICAL QUESTION:**

So you just think I'm stupid, right? (Mariya Lucas)

Have I not sacrificed enough? Do you not have a roof over your head and clothes on your back?
(Vanessa Martinez)

Are you kidding me? (Janessa Weichmann)

What gives you the right to assume she's wrong?
(Sable Wright)

SUPERLATIVE:

She was the most talented hair braider of the salon, effortlessly braiding with flawless results.
(Gloria Knight)

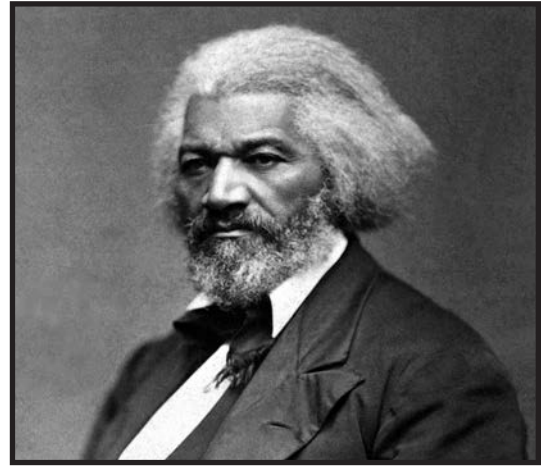
Mr. Gore was the proudest, most ambitious and persevering slaveowner and was the most artful, cruel, and obdurate. (Tiana Richmond-Lee)

My crew gets the work done the fastest (Lailaini Reed)



CHANNELING FREDERICK DOUGLASS

After reading Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Odyssey students were given an editorial from the Southern Quarterly Review of 1852 claiming that slavery was God's plan, that slaves basked in the sun and were happy, and that only whites could understand the conception of liberty. Students responded using the fiery voice and oratorical style of Frederick Douglass, including alliteration, rhetorical questions, exclamations, irony, and other techniques. Here are brief excerpts from longer letters they wrote in the voice of Douglass.



Dear Editor,



Repugnant, narcissistic, and corrupt is your faith, soul, and spirit. Am I not made of flesh and bone? Do I not bleed and leak my red soul in the womb of this divine earth? Does my skin not feel cold, warmth, and pleasure as God created? This

“Christian slavery” and sunbeam that America has blossomed and basked in is not inherited. The slave is stolen, beaten, raped, and made to feel inferior by your interpretation of what makes a Christian. So I say this on behalf of the Negroes that have perished in your nation’s ships and savage plantations: may your Christian slavery be slaughtered. May the cow skin that ripped my people’s back be felt in your Christian master’s bedside when the frigid touch of merciless death comes to visit his disgraced, faithless, soulless soul.

Remember, reminisce, and remind yourself in the days God Almighty allows you to live, that you are also but a man made of flesh, vulnerable to the sands of time. May your God have mercy on your soul and the souls that shake hands with you. May your God forgive your wicked words and wicked heart. I am your fellow-man, not your slave.

(Angelica Alvarez Valenciano)



You say that “slavery is a life of enjoyment that God has destined” for me, which is completely wrong. As a former slave who has liberated himself, I had to guess my age from the time I was born. I never got to see my mother; she had to sneak

away at night to even be in the same room as me when I was a child. I loved my mother very much but I could not even be at her burial when she died. I have absolutely no recollection of my mother in the daylight. Every slave I knew was familiar with separation from mother and child after a year old. How would you feel if you got taken from your mother as an infant to go work at a Master’s house – even one known as the “nigger breaker”? Not one slave owner had empathy for us, yet we are just as human as you are.

Liberty was not given to those that looked like me. After many brutal beatings, getting moved and mistreated, I was finally going to be free in 1838. As I was planning my escape, I thought about all the friends I would be leaving behind. Months went by as I worked and planned. I was scared, scared of failure. As I sit here and write this as a man to the ignorant editor who wrote about me, it feels good to be free and educated. **(Kyianna Baker)**



As I get my pen to address you, I am in great dismay, not just as a fellow citizen but as a moral conscience that refuses to be silenced. Your article is an outrage to what I as a black man have endured in my life. These writings have

reeked of hatred, perpetuating vile stereotypes and divisions among our people. The words in your article have brought nothing but harm and suffering upon those who have done no wrong.

I have known the lash of oppression and worn the chains of bondage, witnessing my people being whipped and hung from trees. They held on for bare life, bruised and starved, barely clothed!! With that being said, I know firsthand the destructive power of prejudice. Yet, I also know the transformative power of truth, justice, and compassion. I implore you to reconsider your stance, to recognize the common humanity that binds us all, regardless of complexion. **(Tiffany Brenston)**



I write to let you know that you have incorrect information about slaves. Slaves were not provided with the right knowledge and did not even know their own birthday. Slaves want knowledge but don't have the tools to know. Slaves do not

have an option but to be slaves. **(Quanna Caffey)**



Happy? Yes, we were very happy to be ripped away from our innocence and from our only family we knew, not ever having a bond with our parents, no birthday parties, no new clothes—how about no clothes at all? I remember the chains being

so tight on our naked bodies. What about hearing screeching screams through bloody hits to our bodies with whips and seeing dead bodies in front of our faces? **(Eleanor Ceaser)**



There is no proof in God's holy bible where the Black man was destined to be a slave: what outlandish nonsense! The Black man – in his homeland land, Africa – was born a free man. "Give me liberty, or give me death!" Did he, or did he not, become disturbed

after having been taken from his homeland? Slavery is a horrendous thing, to put any man or woman to task, to taste the bitter-sweetness of Mother Earth, to endure the most sufferings mankind has ever known.

God made all men equal and gave them the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. What does the Declaration of Independence mean if it does not mean all men? **(Timothy Comer)**



I dare say this negro dreams of liberty. I imagine you and many like you had their cradle rocked by the pale hand of your mother, whereas I lost my mother for the selfish means of your benefit, the benefit of your land, the benefit of your family, the benefit of your society –

the society which fears the success of a person such as I. The astounding perseverance this life has given me to push past the bounds of the notion that we are less than has brought me strength; however, one does not forget that first strike of hunger especially when you are nothing more than a child doing as told, punished for merely being a different shade in God's rainbow. If you dare not disturb us in the enjoyment of this grand life you speak of, why disturb us at all? I dare say this negro dreams of life beyond anguish. **(Brianna Espanol)**





I would first like to start by saying, what gives you the right to interpret how we, as African Americans, think and feel? Secondly, slavery was created by man, not ordained by God. Slavery does not bring us enjoyment. It is abuse, very traumatic, and should not ever be suffered by any human being.

You speak of slavery as if it is a pleasurable life or party! As a people do you not think we want education, freedom, and an unbroken connection with our loved ones? Would you like to be whipped or treated worse than cattle? Even calves are allowed to stay with their mothers. In contrast, our children are ripped from their mothers' arms!

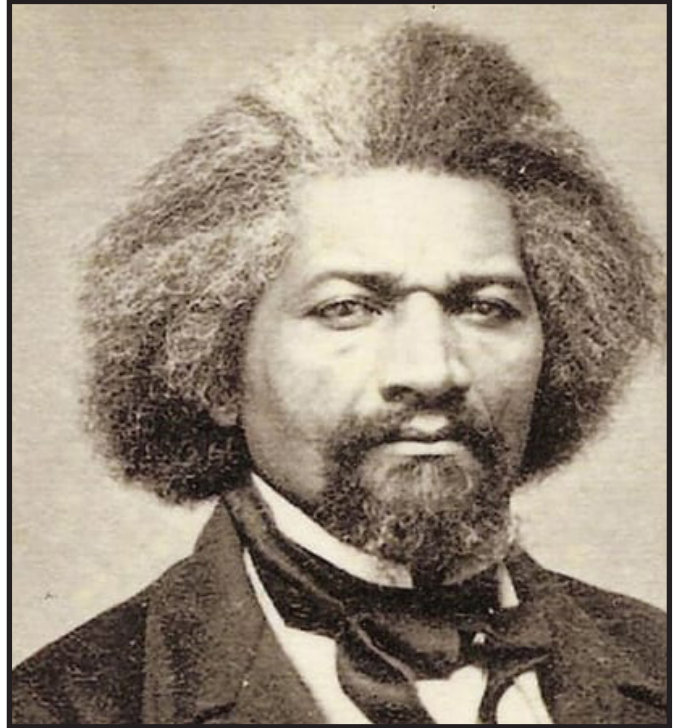
Treating slavery as a reward in a game we never chose to play is a disgusting assumption. If you truly feel this way, I invite you to join my brethren in the field where you believe they find joy! **(Adrienne Farrow)**



I disagree with your laws and the beliefs you have for black men and women. We are beaten for no reason. We are taken away from our children and families no matter the age. We have no control over our lives. As a condition of this, our health is poor. We have nothing to dream about, no inspiration. The only thing we have to look forward to is the NorthStar to freedom. It is not humane. We want equal rights as well as our education, our families, and our freedom and independence. **(Jamal Jackson)**



You claim that God has destined slavery, but what about all the killings and beatings that slaves have to endure: would God truly accept that and want that for his people? I remember as a child listening to my people sing their heart out and cry to God for deliverance from slavery.



One last argument you chose to make is that slaves were happy. Does being beaten and whipped until you are covered in blood for another's personal pleasure sound like happiness? What about being hanged in front of the entire town for "disobeying" your master's rules? Tell me, does that really seem like happiness? **(Mariya Lucas)**



Your pro-slavery remarks are inhumane and inconsistent in all sense to the laws of nature itself. Your evil remarks are without remorse and sympathy, explicitly stating that liberty is not the dream of the negro; that it is cruel to grant the negro the privilege of enjoying a life of freedom; that it is not desired by the negro to see an end to his predicament of slavery—that it is the destiny of the negro to endure slavery and the atrocities therein.

With the strongest terms, I ask together with many like me that you withdraw your remarks, apologize unconditionally, and never publish such ever again. **(Alfusainey Manjang)**



Have you the empathy to truly understand the mental and physical torture these human beings have been through as slaves? Have you the deep scars and gashes on your skin, a reminder of the suffering and drudgery of your day-to-day life?

Have you felt the deep, painful pangs of hunger? Has God himself spoken and informed you of the joys of a life forced upon you, of the people forcibly taken from their native homeland and all that is familiar? Of the sheer, joyous, feelings of your loved ones torn from you and sold off like cattle?

Perhaps you have stood at the ocean's edge, hearing the sorrowful cries of slaves, drowned, a haunting melody from their watery graves. I find your abhorrent, severely misguided beliefs concerning the inhumane treatment of other human beings because of religious ideals to be an ironic distortion of the Bible. Lastly, I ask, if these depraved actions were to befall yourself and your family, would you feel inclined to "bask in the sunshine" and feel such joy within the circumstances? **(Vanessa Martinez)**



If you consider yourself a man of Christ, do you possess the virtue of humility to learn from a black man like myself? Perhaps we can learn from each

other and ask whether Liberty is something to be achieved or analyze if it is something imposed.

Can you become free as a white man if your role is only ever that of an oppressive authority? Christian slavery, in its need to chain, condemn, and whip fellow persons of the planet, can be observed as a manifestation of the mental constraints that

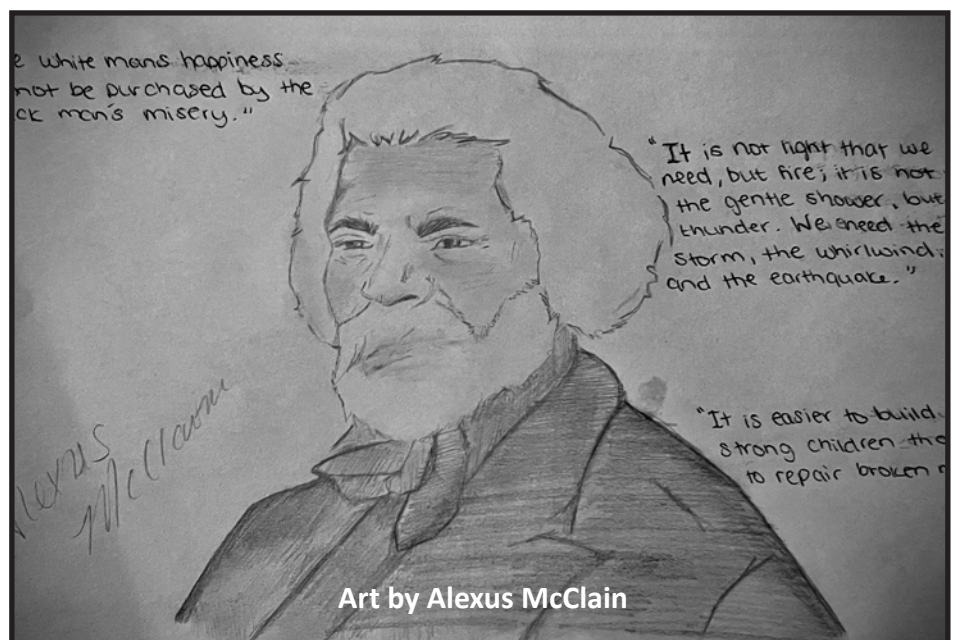
the oppressor experiences within himself. In the constant pursuit of Liberty, could he ever achieve freedom?

I speak for myself when I say that perhaps you make a point that, as a black man, I do not wish to grasp Liberty if it means becoming an oppressor. Given the atrocities I have witnessed in my life that have been inflicted upon living persons by white men, I agree that it would be cruel and disturbing to ask that I find enjoyment in the violent subjugation of another living person. **(Mickey Mestiza)**



Would slaves dream of liberty if it was not denied from them to begin with? We black people and slaves can indeed understand that mistreatment and abuse is not right. I am here to tell you that in the winter we are freezing cold, with one piece of

clothing and never enough to eat. The torture and abuse that I witnessed at the hands of the white man included a slave shot dead right in front of me trying to escape to freedom. Or let us talk about the gashes in my feet from walking around barefoot, gashes so deep the pen I am writing with can fit into them. What do you know about being a slave if all you experience is power and control and cruelly torturing black people? **(Valvree Mosley)**



Art by Alexis McClain



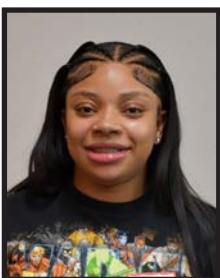
Are the black folk you stole away from their homeland, descended from royalty, not able to comprehend freedom? You withheld education from us for years only for your benefit to keep the black man down generation after generation.

To mention God and the wrongdoings of rape, murder, and kidnapping in the same breath is the lie you tell yourself to sleep at night. To be ripped away from your mother's arms, to be sold away from family, whipped daily for the enjoyment of "master," to be deprived from food and clothing is anything but happy. **(Daija Pigram)**



Growing up, freedom was all I could imagine. I wished for education. I wished for more money. I wished for happiness. There is no enjoyment in an enslaved life. Imagine working 16 hours every day for bread and chump change. Of course, we have to find things to enjoy just to survive, but there is no basking and no flowers and sunshine.

It is indeed cruel to rub into somebody's face what they are already desperate for. Thinking people are born to be slaves is incredibly destructive to society. There is no way slavery was part of Christianity. **(Lailaini Reed)**



I was a very determined man and nothing would get in the way of me educating myself and freeing myself from ignorance. I was able to teach myself how to read and write under the white man's thumb.

It is very ridiculous to state that enslaved people do not understand the value of being free. At great personal risk I escaped slavery all on my own. If you ever had to live the life as a slave I am 100% sure you wouldn't say that it was a desirable life. I have witnessed women and children beaten and

children torn away from their parents. I still have yet to stomach the smell of flesh after a beating. As I was running for my freedom, I knew I never wanted to experience that again. Being enslaved is not basking in the sunshine; rather it is a dark horror.

(Tiana Richmond-Lee)



Slaves cannot grasp the concept of freedom? I find this argument futile and senseless. A man that has never been through something so vicious should not be able to speak something so violent. Slaves would sing about freedom, yell about freedom, and

face violence over it. As I say in my book, learning and reading about slavery started "to torment and sting my soul to unutterable anguish." Being a slave is far from enjoyment; it is fiendish barbarity.

Destined for slavery, you say? My life story proves you wrong. Everyone always assumed, assumed I was happy, assumed this was all we knew, and assumed I would be a slave forever, yet my escape points to the contrary. **(Corrie Thomas)**



I can agree that "the negro, left to himself, does not dream of liberty." When I was enslaved, "liberty" would often remain the furthest from a dream. Exhaustion from the cane and whip often leaves the slave with no time to rest, let alone dream.

Malnutrition encompasses the mind and body of the slave, as lofty ideas of liberation will not provide him with sustenance. Liberty is not a concept readily available to the slave, nor is the ability to dream.

As the slave basks in the good Lord's light, they will never understand what it is that awaits them outside the confines of plantation life. The same light that blinds the negro from the blessing of their master when attempting to flee. A light that reveals the detriments of the intelligent negro. A light that justifies the evangelical master as he disciplines with not only a rod but the word of God as well. A light that confuses cruelty as duty. **(Dan Thomas)**



I who spent my life a slave never before found enjoyment in the unimaginable things I and others endured. I have never in my existence basked in the sun and found myself happy or enjoying the life given to me.

Children remaining naked when their yearly clothes failed them is not considered happiness to me. Whipped backs of women whose children scream and cry while forced to watch is not considered happiness. The only people who are free are the ones outside of this heinous place they have trapped us in. **(Janessa Weichmann)**



We were stolen from our homeland by greedy, evil white men, and because of this, being enslaved is now the tragic reality for the negros. Please, do you understand that there is nothing enjoyable about one not even having the privilege of knowing their age or bearing a child

without that child being ripped away from you as if you did not create the life of the baby, love the baby, or weep with your baby? Could you imagine having to wear dirty, dusty, damaged clothes all your life?

Please advise what type of life would you claim to have when every day you wake up at the crack of dawn to work, every day you face the possibility of being brutally beaten, and every day you yearn for love, more food, and FREEDOM? **(Ladella Wilson)**



To call enslavement a “joy” is disheartening. I was taken from my mother as a child, and she died in bondage – a life she never chose and could never escape. And yet, you insist that God has destined the Black man to be enslaved. When my former

master passed, they forced me to return and be “valued” alongside the property he left behind. Standing beside the animals, we were all ranked as

if we were no more than livestock. To be treated as nothing but an asset – reduced to a single number, a worth no different from cattle – is a degradation no person deserves, nor could ever be “happy” about.

You say that slavery is Christian, but how does slavery fit into a religion that was built upon compassion, love, and equality? In your eyes the black man is nowhere near being your equal, but in the eyes of God “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Does not Christ preach that we should love thy neighbor, and to have mercy on the oppressed, and to be kind to all? **(Abby Wilson)**



I have read your letter. I would like disagree with some of points about slavery. You stated that slavery is good and that slaves are basking in the sunshine of their lives and are happy. My questions to you:

How can a slave be happy when they live in chains? How can a slave be happy without freedom? How can a slave be happy when they have no choice in life but only to do what they are told to do?

How can enslaved people be happy when they are denied education?

How can a slave be happy being physically abused and starved with no knowledge to read or write?

How can a slave be happy when they are snatched from their mother and family and sold on a block to strangers without having a choice?

For any slave to bask in the sunshine and be happy as you say, they must be set free and given an education and equal opportunity; they must be free in mind, body, and spirit. **(Sable Wright)**

Sincerely,
Frederick Douglass

CELEBRATING OUR VOTING EVENT

On October 16, 2024, Odyssey held a “Why Vote?” event in partnership with the League of Women Voters, the Urban League, the Madison Public Library, and the Cap Times, with sponsorship from American Family Insurance and Individual donors. The Honorable Judge Everett Mitchell made rousing opening remarks, Jean Feraca shared an eye-opening League of Women Voters handout on elections where one vote made a difference, and students from Odyssey, Onward Odyssey, Odyssey Senior, Odyssey Junior, and Odyssey Beyond Wars shared their winning essays, poetry, songs, and artwork with the audience. With the help of the Madison Public Library, League of Women Voters, and City Clerk’s Office, a dozen students registered to vote. Food was catered by C&J Soul Food. Odyssey has sponsored a biennial nonpartisan voting event for two decades in order to encourage civic engagement.

On October 16th, I presented an essay I had written encouraging others to vote. I actually had never registered to vote myself. With that being said, writing the essay felt like I was convincing myself to vote. Registering felt like I had been able to do just that. Listening to others and the feedback I got really inspired me. I felt I was making the right choice. **(Dan Thomas)**



This was an amazing experience. I loved Judge Mitchell’s speech. He is such an amazing speaker; his words were very inspirational. I thought it was very cool that we could register to vote at this event because that’s honestly half the battle. Everyone who was there was very friendly. It was so nice that people got to perform or show their works of art. **(Adrianne Farrow)**

I called Emily on the day of the event because I felt an overwhelming mix of anxiety and anger. As a DACA recipient, I have faced a complexity of layers of oppression within the United States Government system. After twenty-three years of living in this country, I am still unpacking. I have been learning how to navigate my emotions by focusing on the things within my control. How do I soothe the colonial wounds? While I was at the event, I found that in our community, people were willing to hear me and cared about my experiences enough to amplify my voice. I found that the root of my anger was that I had not been using my voice while people were willing to listen the whole time. **(Mickey Mestiza)**

I think it was a really good event; it felt open. I loved that there were people there to help register and even answer any questions we had about voting. The food was really good, and everyone that wrote poems, made art, or sang was great. I'm not sure if it would've been appropriate, but maybe next time provide information on each candidate for those that are political and need help with educating themselves about each person running. **(Kyiana Baker)**



I enjoyed everything about this night. I feel very strongly about voting. Knowing our history and being a Black woman with children, it matters to me more than ever. I loved Judge Everett's speech. I go to his church, and whenever I go to church, he is such a good man and speaker. I think he's genuine and cares about people. **(Janessa Weichmann)**

I feel it was a highly motivational evening on the importance of voting. I agree that everyone's vote matters and is important. I believe that when Trump won the first time, it was because a significant amount of people didn't vote, for various reasons, and they overlooked the most important reason why they should.

In the end, I believe our country was an embarrassment for allowing an ill-equipped and undeserving person to win that election, causing many severe consequences. That is when people actually thought it was okay to be outright prejudiced. It was like our country went backwards and people were unafraid to be openly prejudiced. **(Vanessa Martinez)**



I think the event was amazing, and I hope that encouraged many people to go and vote. I enjoyed the music, and I liked the speech that the judge had. The food was also really good.

(Abby Wilson)

I felt moved at the event. Hearing Judge Everett state where he came from and seeing how far he came was really inspiring, and hearing him tie it back to the importance of voting brought a smile to my face. I also loved hearing people from different backgrounds speak about the importance of voting. It was really moving, and everyone has their own reasons. Also, the music was great, with so much soul poured into the songs! **(Ladella Wilson)**

It was great—the music, the speeches, and the speakers. They hit on a lot of pointers. They gave me a lot to think about and go encourage other people to go out and vote. Let them know their vote counts as well. The food was great as always. Everybody's vote matters, even if we think it doesn't. Still, it's your right to vote. **(Sable Wright)**

The voting event that we had was a very nice ceremony. My favorite part was the songs. I really



felt the songs and the words that they were doing. I loved how they put the words into the songs [about voting]. I love music, so I connected with that in a great way. **(Eleanor Ceaser)**

Though I definitely believe in the concept of voting, I along with many think that voting is a very gray situation. There could be someone that would fit the job perfectly; however, if they are lesser known, can't afford a large campaign, but have the hearts of the people in mind, they unfortunately won't win. Especially when it comes to voting for president: the last election was basically picking the lesser of two evils. **(Brianna Espanol)**



Before this, the last time I voted was in the 5th grade, and of course I voted for Obama, the first Black man I knew of to be president at the time I was educated on anything else. I am now 24 years old and voting; now it's so real and different. I had the opportunity to canvass and ask people to make sure they vote and to hear people's outlook on who they are voting for. I am not the kind of person to judge someone on their opinion even if I don't agree because everyone is entitled to their opinion, especially when it comes to the election. The debate gets dangerous.

People really get upset and so I learned to listen, observe, and do my part to vote for who I feel is right. I did not realize how much every vote matters. This election has showed me how much things really are based on social media with no facts behind it. A lot of Trump supporters think they will get a check, and a lot of Kamala supporters want her in office because she is the first black woman. (That would have been my mindset in the 5th grade.) I find that sad but also understandable because it's so overwhelming.

I hate to get into politics but I do have my opinion. I know my vote was valid and based on facts that I've heard and read about. I am slowly learning

how to not believe everything social media throws at us, but unfortunately social media is all a lot of us have. **(Crystal Lee)**

I feel like voting is very important and shouldn't be optional. The world is such a big mess right now, and everybody's vote matters. I think that registering and stuff like that should be done prior to elections. It may make the process run more smoothly and get more people to vote. I truly never kept up with the election craziness growing up; I just voted for whoever my mom told me to lol. Now that I am older and have kids, I have been keeping up with everything and listening to speeches, etc. **(Tiana Richmond-Lee)**

As I was listening to the speakers and feeling their emotions and passionate pieces, I found myself thinking about the FOOD! I wish I could say that the speakers are what caught my attention. I don't know if it was the collard greens, corn bread, or the mac and cheese, but the FOOD! The food was my highlight of the night; to be fair, soul food is on my top three cuisines, and I am a sucker for a creamy cheesy mac and cheese. It had been years since I tasted collard greens, and they did not disappoint. I felt like the food made the event even more special and memorable. **(Angelica Valenciano Alvarez)**

