

YEAR 22

OCTOBER 16, 2024

ODYSSEY ORACLE

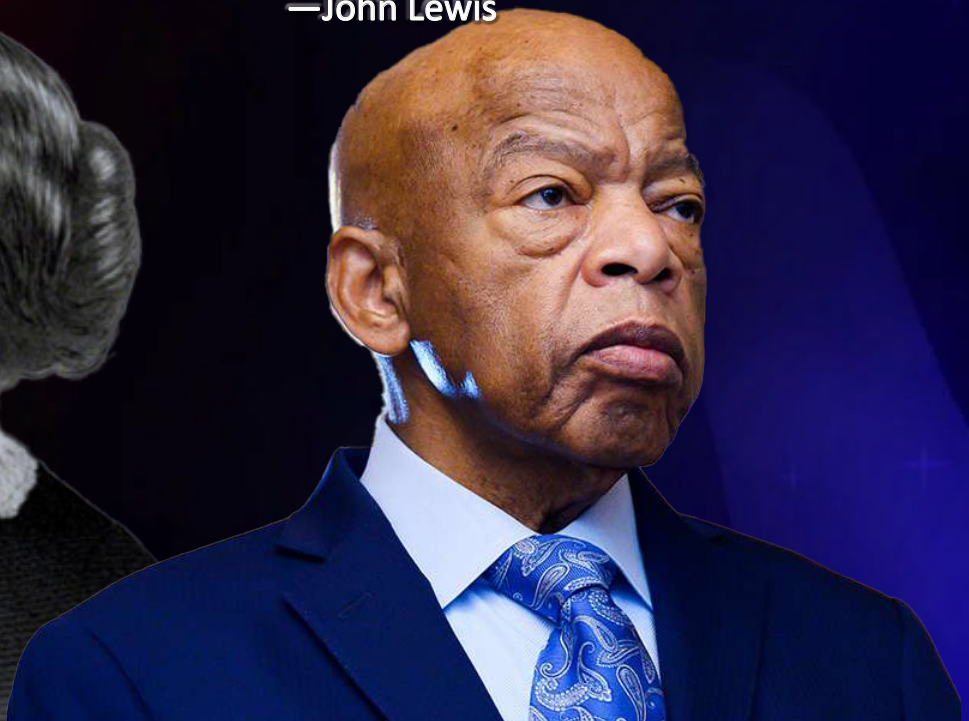
SPECIAL EDITION: A CELEBRATION OF VOTING

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

—Susan B. Anthony

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

—John Lewis



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www.odyssey.wisc.edu

UW ODYSSEY PROJECT: WHY VOTE?

The UW Odyssey Project empowers adults to overcome adversity and achieve dreams through higher education. Each year since 2003, Odyssey has admitted 30 adults into a free, two-semester UW course to earn six credits in the humanities while discovering their voices. Over 600 adults have graduated from the Odyssey Project, and over three-fourths of them have completed more college. Some have moved from homelessness to UW bachelor's and master's degrees, from incarceration to meaningful work in the community. Whole families have broken a cycle of generational poverty.

The Odyssey Project encourages civic engagement and sponsors a "Why Vote?" contest and event every other year. Current students in Odyssey, past students in Onward Odyssey, Odyssey Junior, Odyssey Senior, Odyssey Beyond Wars for veterans, and students released from our Odyssey Beyond Bars program for incarcerated learners were invited to submit short essays, poems, songs, and artwork designed to persuade others to vote. Starting on the next page, you can sample the winners of the 2024 contest. Some will be showcased on October 16th, 5:30-7:30 PM, at the Black Business HUB for Odyssey's nonpartisan "Celebration of Voting" event. The Honorable Judge Everett Mitchell will speak, along with Odyssey students and staff.

We thank our partners for this event: the Cap Times, the League of Women Voters, the Madison Public Library, and the Urban League of Greater Madison. We thank American Family Insurance for their sponsorship, as well as individual sponsors Emily Auerbach & Keith Meyer, Mary Burke, Jean Feraca & Alan Attie, Alison TenBruggencate & Tony D'Alessandro, and Tripp & Nancy Widder.

Visit odyssey.wisc.edu to learn how you can apply for Odyssey, volunteer, donate, and support us.



ESSAYS



First Place Winner: Corey Dean (Odyssey '20)

America, the choice is ours. What kind of future do we want for ourselves and our children? Will we strive to become a nation of prosperity where everyone has a voice, or will we regress into complacency?



Too many good-hearted people become apathetic when the ballot box hangs in the balance, saying things like, "I'm just one person and a single vote doesn't matter" or "I don't vote in order to protest against the system." While these sentiments are understandable, they neglect a critical fact: to abstain from voting is a privilege many cannot afford.

Think of the children who rely on school breakfast and lunch programs for their daily meals, and women whose lives depend on access to adequate healthcare. Consider those of us who depend on social security programs like Medicare and food share, and immigrant families facing the threat of separation. Think of marginalized communities seeking safety and equity, parents unable to pay for childcare, and working-class people struggling to afford the cost of living. For these communities, voting isn't a choice without consequence: it's a lifeline. Thus, when we abstain from voting, we forfeit the opportunity to advocate for a brighter future, and people who are most vulnerable become collateral damage in the name of protest.

America, the choice is ours. Will we be complicit, forgoing our voice and democratic power? Or, will we the people rise up and together cast our vote for a nation of prosperity and a better tomorrow?



Second Place Winner: Edith Hilliard (Odyssey Senior)

In 1969 I was 21 with all the opportunities that came with it. My burning desire and ambition was to vote.

My mind transcends to the Middle Passage with Black bodies lining the Ocean floor. **I VOTE FOR THEM.** The strange fruit that hung on the Southern trees. **I VOTE FOR THEM.** The call to arms on the Pettus Bridge. **I VOTE FOR THEM.** Every single vote is monumental. Every single vote counts to make a far-reaching difference.



Your vote has the ability to capitalize on change. Look at your vote as reshaping our future. Voting gives you a vital asset in undergoing a sea of change. So many times, I have heard the chant, "My one vote won't count." All those "one votes" add up to thousands shouting I DON'T CARE. You have to care. Every single vote is critical to making a change in the process, in your community, your city, your state, and our nation. Look at the ripple effect of throwing a pebble in the water: that's your vote magnified in every wave changing the tide of the political process.



Third Place Tie: Blanca Laine (Odyssey '24)

Why vote? Why let others decide for you on something that will impact your life, your family, your community, and your country? Voting is free. It doesn't demand money, social status, or privilege. All that is required is a pen and the courage to believe in change.



Why vote? My fellow indigenous people: can you imagine how many struggles and abuses our parents and grandparents went through so that now we can have the joy and privilege of exercising our freedom to vote? Can you imagine how much they would have wished, back in that time, to at least once raise their voice and speak out against what was wrong and demand a change?

Now the power is truly ours. Every election is an opportunity to stand up and honor our ancestors' struggles, to stand up for our values and our vision for the future.

Imagine missing an opportunity to vote, then later being disillusioned when the world doesn't align with our expectations. Regret over inaction is one of the most painful kinds of disappointment. But it is preventable. By choosing to vote, we can stop that regret before it ever has the chance to take root.

Why vote? We are Indigenous and they call us a minority, but if we unite and exercise our right to vote, we will be invincible warriors. We can build a better tomorrow because every vote is a sharp pin that will burst the balloon of corruption! The time is now, and the power is in our hands. Go and Vote!



Third Place Tie: Daniel Thomas (Odyssey '25)

We the people need you now! We can all find an excuse not to participate in the electoral season, but it is imperative that we all participate to see change in the country.



Voting can be difficult and often intimidating. It will be difficult to find an unbiased opinion. It will be a challenge not to get wrapped in the sensationalism that comes with the debating parties and their promises of a better tomorrow. But technology has allowed us to have a wealth of knowledge at our fingertips. We have more resources than ever to do research and form our own opinion. Anything we need to know is but a Google search or a five-minute YouTube video away.

This is where you must think for yourself. Even if you don't understand the nuances of politics or the esoteric knowledge needed to run a country, you are still present and involved. It is easy to do nothing while calling yourself anti-this or that. You are not selling out by making your voice heard. You must be the change you want to see!

I have learned so much through experience and by becoming a father. So, my voice is no longer solely dependent on my own wants and needs. Rather, I want to ensure the safety and development of our youth. While I cannot speak for them in a literal sense, I can vote and make it so that they can speak their mind when their time comes.

EXCERPTS FROM HONORABLE MENTION ESSAYS IN THE ODYSSEY “WHY VOTE?” COMPETITION



Ngina Ali (Odyssey '17)

I can remember my grandmother and my uncle telling us stories about marching with the Black Panthers to fight for what was right. Voting is a powerful way to honor the struggles and sacrifices of those who have come before us. It's a chance to shape the future and ensure that everyone's voice is heard. While you might not see justice reform, voting rights, education, equity, immigration, LGBTQ+ rights, reproductive freedom, or racial justice directly on the ballot, all those issues are at stake.



Carmon Caire (Odyssey '19)

Voting is truly very important for African Americans because we were not able to vote or be heard until the 1960s [with the Voting Rights Act]. Being able to vote was epic: it allowed solid changes and choices. We must vote to make the world a better place to live in and survive.



Marisol Gonzalez (Odyssey '17)

Giant sequoia trees are fascinating and resilient, and their wide, interconnected root system allows them to communicate and protect each other. The roots of democracy say that the U.S. government will make “just and equal laws . . . for the general good of the colony.” By not casting your vote, you are turning your back on the roots of your country. Like a sequoia without roots, our country will not stand strong if people don't vote.



Otis Harris Jr. (Odyssey '09)

In a world brimming with opinions and voices, it's easy to feel like your vote is just a drop in the ocean—insignificant, unnoticed, and powerless. But imagine for a moment if every drop in the ocean believed it didn't matter; the ocean would soon run dry. Your vote is not just a number; it is a symbol of your voice, your power, and your right to shape the world around you. Don't let your silence be mistaken for apathy or acceptance. I'm asking you, as a friend, as someone who cares deeply about the world we live in—please, make your voice heard. Vote.





Henry Irisson (Odyssey '21)

You can be the voice for the millions of undocumented workers who have been here for decades paying taxes and contributing to society but unfortunately are not able to vote. People of Color, get out and vote. We have historically faced challenges at the polls. Your vote is important, so let it not be silenced by the modern-day equivalents of the Jim-Crow era.

Women, your reproductive rights matter! A powerful way for the voices of ALL women to be heard is by voting. Please, please vote!



Juan Eugenio Ramirez (Odyssey Beyond Wars '24)

I was born in San Antonio, Texas, and my father was a political radical. My upbringing was plagued with hate mail, hateful anonymous phone calls, vandalism of our home and branch office, bullying issues, verbal and physical assaults, and police brutality. Why vote? VOTE so a child will not have to go through what I went through to have to fight for the rights that we were supposedly born with. VOTE to get the haters out of office and get our true community leaders into highly responsible political offices to make decisions that will benefit us all.



Marilyn Sims (Odyssey '06)

Down through the years there has been lots of bloodshed to earn the right to vote. Thousands of people have died so that we can vote. People fought physically, spiritually, financially, and in courts so that you and I can vote. I hope and pray that we all get a chance to see our first but not last African American female President of the United States of America. If I had a superpower, I would use it to help people come to the realization that voting is the right thing to do.



Alfusainey Manjang (Odyssey '25)

Vote! Don't have voter apathy, for the same wind that seeks to blow out a fire may also cause its spread. Vote for that which you want to see, vote for the society you want to live in, vote to realize that which you envisage. Protesting can have both head-sense and heart-sense, but voting is what common sense is, so vote. Sometimes to see the light, we must first touch the darkness, so I call on you to vote.

**Daija Pigram (Odyssey '25)**

Historically, women and people of color did not have a voice. Not too long ago it was illegal for us to speak up. If we do not act, the progress we have made for women's and minority rights will be lost. Think of the women in your life, mothers, daughters. Our ancestors fought tirelessly for suffrage. Exercising the right to vote honors their struggles and continues the pursuit of equality because we are still far from it. Voting in presidential elections is essential for citizens to exercise their power, protect social justice, strengthen democracy, and shape the future of our children. Make your voice heard and vote!

**Marlene Toledo (Odyssey Beyond Wars '24)**

We are free to choose what religion we like, free to speak, assemble, and vote. We are free to address grievances to the government, and we are in control over our lives. We the people will choose our leaders, and the representatives in Congress and the president of this country will serve us. This election is about the future of America—our freedom to choose healthcare, to choose to attend a college, to choose to have children or pets. Vote! It's very important and very simple: you count!

**Sable Wright (Odyssey '25)**

I think about my grandkids that are in high school, middle school, and elementary school. We are the mouthpieces for our next generation. We must step up and vote for our rights to show the next generation what our ancestors were fighting for all these years. I vote all the time because it makes me feel good and is for all generations to come. Get a great education at UW and run for a Senate seat after college.



POEMS



1st Place Winner: Otis Harris, Jr. (Odyssey '09)

Your Voice, Your Power, Your Vote

In a world where silence reigns,
Where voices go unheard,
Your vote's the flame that breaks the chains,
Your voice within the herd.



They say it doesn't matter,
A single vote can't sway,
But history tells a different tale,
Where one voice paved the way.

Each drop of rain fills oceans vast,
Each spark ignites a flame,
Your vote's the key to a future cast,
In your own name.

Corruption, greed, they fuel your doubt,
But silence feeds them more,
Stand up, speak out, don't sit this out,
Your vote's the lion's roar.

So when the ballots call your name,
Remember what's at stake,
Your voice, your power, they're one and the same,
So vote, for your future's sake.





2nd Place Winner: Tiffany Brenston (Odyssey '25)

Vote

Ever since I could vote, I wanted to boast.
 The feeling that comes to mind is wow almost.
 With rallies here, there, and everywhere.
 Anxiousness of what we the people will choose for our future comes over me.
 We need to vote like there is no time.



It's a must we get to the polls, for this coming election.
 Come one, come all.
 I feel big in this box, not timid or small.
 Ready to vote, not just for me but for all.
 With all these thoughts in my head, I'm looking at the ballot.
 A paper with choices laid out so neat.
 The choices laid out, names in a row,
 Some candidates I heard of, but the others I don't know.
 In my head I already know who to choose.
 Even though there's this one and that one,
 and this one wearing red and the other wearing blue.
 I start to mark the paper, I hope the person I vote for will be true.
 When I vote, I hope the person I vote for will win and rise.
 And take our country to see clear blue skies.
 I'll wear my sticker that shows "I voted!"
 'Cause in the end this world needs a leader and that must be noted.



3rd Place Tie: Giana Mason (Odyssey '24)

Rewrite the Script

Why vote?
 When you are living in a warped reality
 When your drug addiction is running the show
 When you can see the evidence on your hands
 When your bank account is zero



When you missed the last election because of this thing called depression
 So, why vote?
 When you can no longer relate to the evening news
 Because you have become so far detached from the lives that others in society live
 When you are dancing in your own melodrama
 But you don't want to let anyone in
 So, why vote?

Because pain is temporary
 Because I am the strongest woman I have ever met
 Because I am still learning myself, studying my parts in ways I never have before
 Because I am a life recovered
 Because I am a woman scared
 Because my bucket list keeps getting longer

So, why vote?

There is power in using your voice. A voice can change a life forever
Addiction and mental health strife took my voice away for many years
I gave my power away to others
I gave away my vote
I no longer had a say in the direction of my life
My "dreams" only found me when I rested my head
The direction of your life can change at any moment
It's never too late to rewrite the script
Because yesterday, she swore, "I do not care."
And today she insists, "I want to live!"



3rd Place Tie: Marisol Gonzalez (Odyssey '17)

Why Vote?

There are many reasons to vote.
Listen and learn, listen and learn.

There are a lot of mass shootings.
In churches, malls, and schools, do you agree?
There is no safe zone in this country.

If we all vote to stop the law that allows anybody to buy a gun.
I'm sure the streets and public areas will be safe to play, walk, and run.

There are many reasons to vote.
Listen and learn, listen and learn.

There is a girl who was sexually abused.
She is the victim, the abuser is still loose.
She is too young to use contraceptives.
In the state where she lives, abortion is penalized!
What would you tell her as a piece of advice?

If we all vote for women's reproductive freedom,
This girl won't be a girl raising a baby that could be her brother.
Stop this crime and become a voter!

There are many other laws that your vote could help stop
Like immigration harassment, mass incarceration, corruption, abuse of power, fraud, and bankruptcy, just to name some...
Your vote will have a huge impact on all of our lives!
Your vote shows that you care about the country that you live in.
Your power is your vote!

There are many reasons to vote.
Listen and learn, listen and learn!



EXCERPTS FROM HONORABLE MENTION POEMS IN THE ODYSSEY “WHY VOTE?” COMPETITION



Keely Nelson-Gray (Odyssey '23)

The Voter

It's almost here, the time is near.
Get your gear, for we are here.
It's a time of desperation.

One of the only ways to make a change for
something you believe in.
We may have ups and downs and now your
peers are someone to compete with.
Stand your ground, although it may make others frown. . . .
I can't change your mind but if you take your
time you may see that voting is the sequence.
Wrap up your pride, make up your mind, and
register at your earliest convenience.



Marilyn Sims (Odyssey '06)

You Get a Say

You get a say
about laws, policies, and taxes
that affect your life,
and a chance to stop some of strife.

You get a say
being that you are eligible you should make
our politicians accountable.

You get a say
in reproductive rights, Immigration rights,
LGBTQ+ rights, and an opportunity
to put the battle for health insurance to flight

You get a say
and have a chance to make them listen
and get recognition



Char Braxton (Odyssey '06)

Sacrifices

The air was filled with hope and hatred

Bloody Black Sunday, March 7, 1965—Selma, Alabama

Civil Rights activists demanding—end discrimination in voter registration for Black people

Marchers led by John Lewis – peacefully – we will fight for justice

They faced the Edmund Pettus Bridge – named after Edmund Pettus, lawyer, judge, and Grand Dragon leader of the Alabama Ku Klux Klan

Terror, fear, and short gasps of breath intertwined with peace, courage, and loud voices singing “We shall overcome” rang louder than a church bell as the crowd moved forward

The Alabama state troopers attacked men, women, and children with Billy clubs wrapped in barb wire, sprayed them with tear gas—chased, whipped, and beat them—some fatally shot

The 52-mile walk from Selma, Alabama, to the capital, Montgomery, would not be stopped

A pivotal moment in time and history—the fight for equal rights . . .

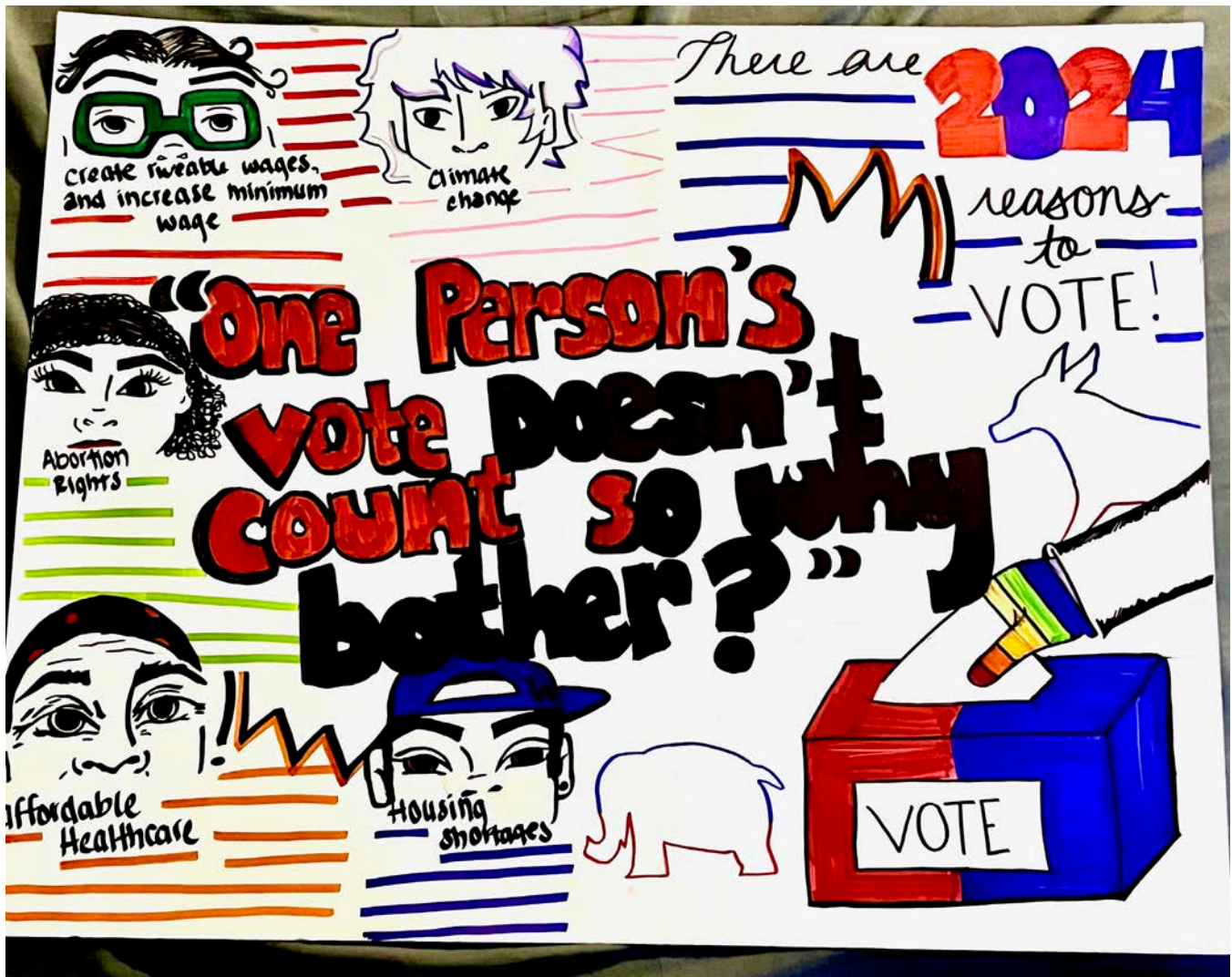
The sacrifices by my grandma and others who protested and marched to remove systemic racism is the reason I stand with dignity and vote.



ART



1st Place Winner
Alexis McClain
Odyssey '25



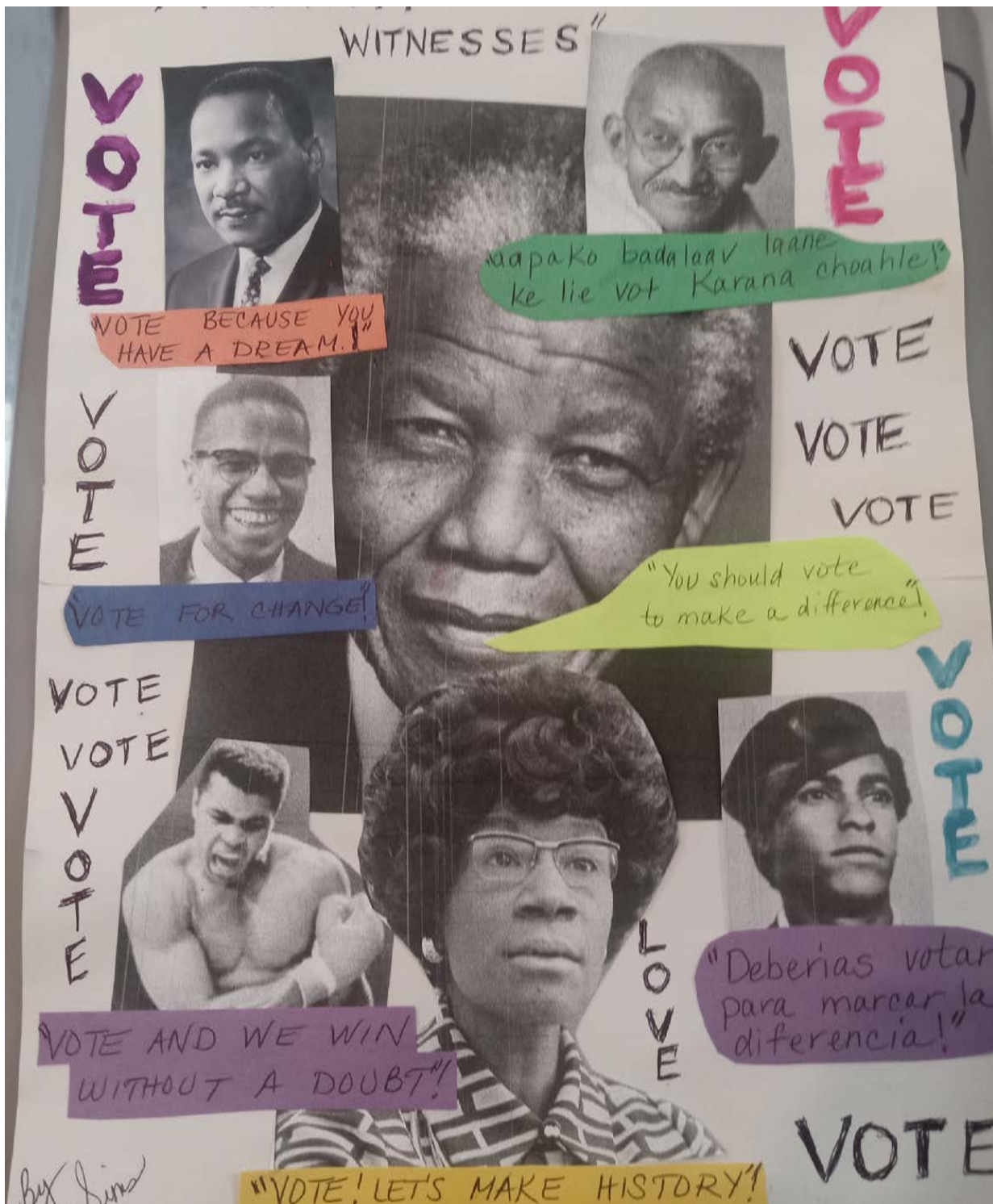


2nd Place Winner
Nicole Hanson
Odyssey Beyond Wars '24





3rd Place Winner
Marilyn Sims
Odyssey '06



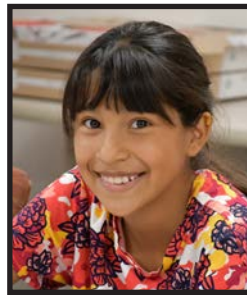
ART FINALISTS



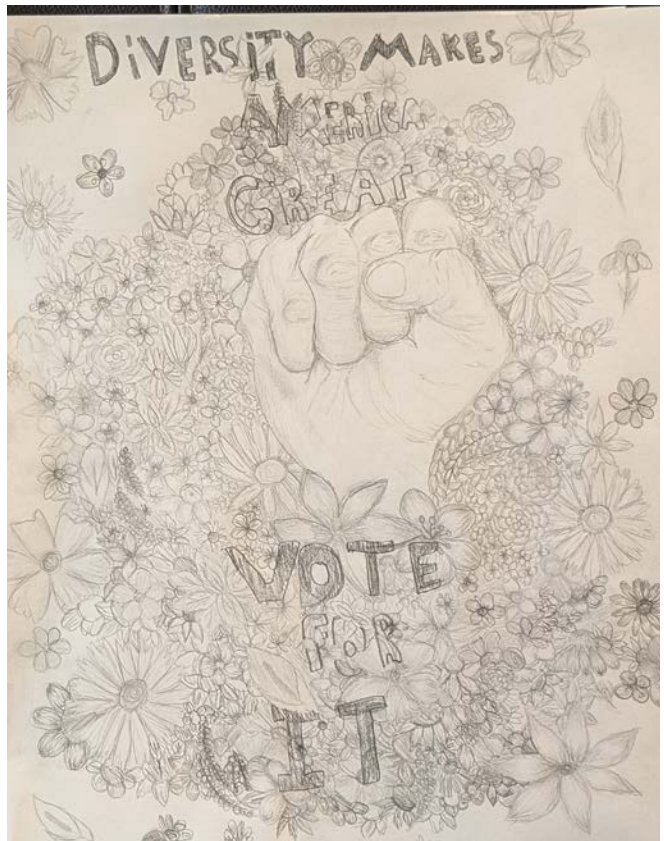
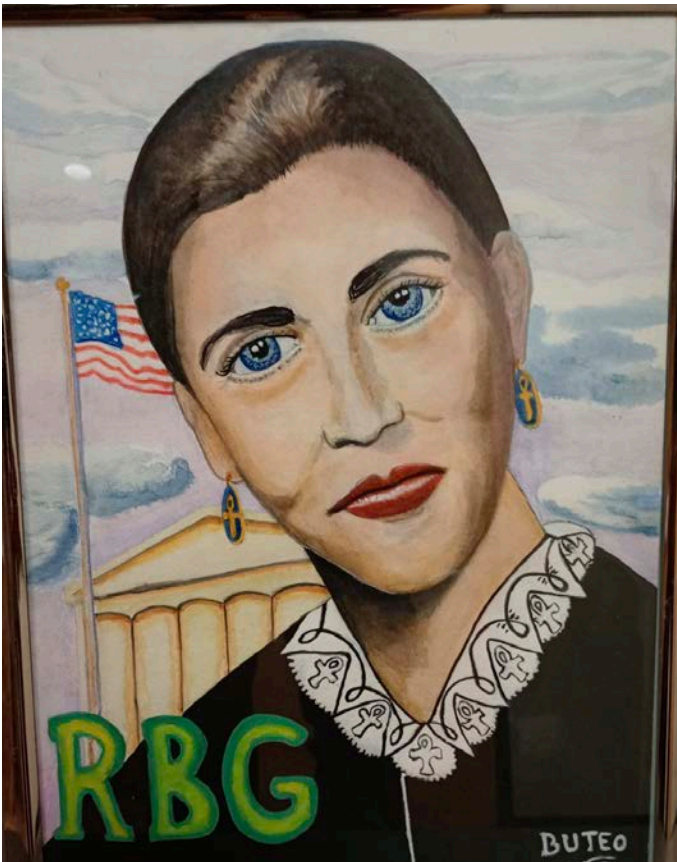
Marisol Gonzalez
Odyssey '17



Josh Rowe
Odyssey Beyond Wars '25



Emily Rojas-Gonzalez
Odyssey Junior



ODYSSEY YOUTH DIVISION



1st Place Tie: Alex Rojas-Gonzalez (Odyssey Junior, age 14)

VOTING IS POWER

The act to vote is the act to speak
so get on your feet to plant a seed
I promote you to vote
because your vote is a lifeboat

Don't let it drown
Or you're like a dog in a dog pound
In a cage made of your thoughts
you age with the thoughts that keep you behind your cage
Leave the cage to be a change
So vote so you can float
Some vote for their pets
because they think they are going to be banquets
Some vote for women's rights
and they're ready to fight
One vote will make a change
because you'll start a chain
You might not get fame
but we will gain
Votes don't go to waste
They are the key to change
End the hate



1st Place Tie: Emily Rojas-Gonzalez (Odyssey Junior, age 12)

VOTE!

Vote for those whose voices can't be heard because they are under the spell of bad influences.

Vote for those who don't want to be heard because they're scared of what might happen if they're free.

Vote for those who are scared that their voices aren't good enough to be heard.

Vote for those who don't realize that it's a superpower and that we can bloom like the most beautiful flower.

Vote for us.

Vote for you.

SONGS



"Make a Difference" by Marilyn Sims (Odyssey '06)

Your vote really makes a difference,
That's why they try so hard to keep you from voting.
It's because your voice makes a change in this world
And your vote is your voice so use it.
Cast your vote, and make a difference, in this world.

"Get the Vote Out" to the tune of Go Down Moses Lyrics by Emily Auerbach & Rene Robinson

When people say 'I have no voice,'
Tell them 'Go and vote!'
Their lives are hard, their wages low,
Tell them 'Go and vote!'

Get the Vote out
All through the USA
Tell ol' legislators
Let our people vote!

When women weren't allowed to vote
Many fought for change
When those of color got turned away
Many died for change



Get the Vote out
All through the USA
Tell ol' legislators
Let our people vote!

Sometimes the choice is hard to make
You don't like either one
That doesn't mean don't vote that day
Your vote is better than none.

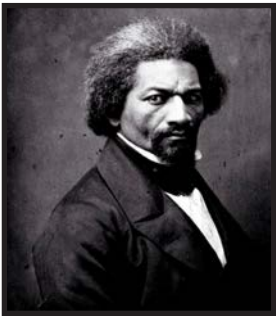


Get your voice out
All through the USA
Show ol' legislators
We are going to vote.

The League of Women Voters' here
Register to Vote
The Madison Public Library's here
Register to Vote

Get Your Voice out
All through the USA
Show ol' legislators
We are going to vote!

FAMOUS PASSAGES ON VOTING



Frederick Douglass, excerpts from 1865 and 1869 speeches

By depriving us of suffrage, you affirm our incapacity to form an intelligent judgment respecting public men and public measures; you declare before the world that we are unfit to exercise the elective franchise, and by this means lead us to undervalue ourselves, to put a low estimate upon ourselves, and to feel that we have no possibilities like other men.

It is said that we are ignorant. But if we know enough to be hung, we know enough to vote. If we know enough to pay taxes to support the government, we know enough to vote.

I hold that women, as well as men, have the right to vote, and my heart and voice go with the movement to extend suffrage to woman; but that question rests upon another basis than which our right rests.

With us, the matter is a question of life and death. It is a matter of existence, at least in fifteen states of the Union. When women, because they are women, are hunted down through the cities of New York and New Orleans; when they are dragged from their houses and hung upon lamp-posts; when their children are torn from their arms, and their brains dashed out upon the pavement; when they are objects of insult and outrage at every turn; when they are in danger of having their homes burnt down over their heads; when their children are not allowed to enter schools; then they will have an urgency to obtain the ballot equal to our own.



Susan B. Anthony, On Women's Right to Vote

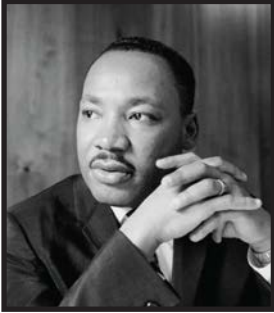
An excerpt from a speech given after her 1872 arrest for illegal voting:

I stand before you tonight under indictment for the alleged crime of having voted at the last presidential election, without having a lawful right to vote. It shall be my work this evening to prove to you that me thus voting, I not only committed no crime, but, instead, simply exercised my citizen's rights, guaranteed to me and all United States citizens by the National Constitution, beyond the power of any state

to deny.

The preamble of the Federal Constitution says: "We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

It was we, the people; not we, the white male citizens; nor yet we, the male citizens; but we, the whole people, who formed the Union. And we formed it, not to give the blessings of liberty, but to secure them; not to the half of ourselves and the half of our posterity, but to the whole people - women as well as men. And it is a downright mockery to talk to women of their enjoyment of the blessings of liberty while they are denied the use of the only means of securing them provided by this democratic-republican government - the ballot.



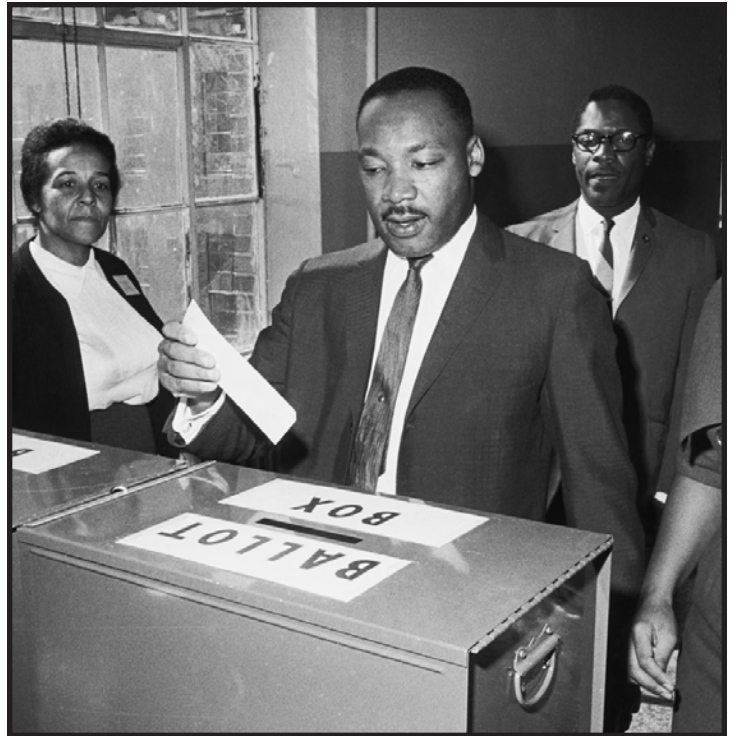
Martin Luther King, Jr., from 1957 speech at the Lincoln Memorial

All types of conniving methods are still being used to prevent us from becoming registered voters. The denial of this sacred right is a tragic betrayal of the highest mandates of our democratic traditions and it is democracy turned upside down.

So long as I do not firmly and irrevocably possess the right to vote, I do not

possess myself. I cannot make up my mind—it is made up for me. I cannot live as a democratic citizen, observing the laws I have helped to enact—I can only submit to the edict of others.

So our most urgent request to the president of the United States and every member of Congress is to give us the right to vote. Give us the ballot and we will no longer plead to the federal government about our basic rights. Give us the ballot and we will bring an end to the dastardly acts of the hooded perpetrators of violence. Give us the ballot and we will quietly and nonviolently, without rancor or bitterness, implement the Supreme Court's decision of May 17, 1954 that reaffirmed the gold old American doctrine of freedom and equality for all people.



John Lewis, comments on courage, action, and voting

If you see something that is not right, not fair, not just, you have a moral obligation to do something about it. You cannot be afraid to speak up and speak out for what you believe. You have to have courage. Raw courage.

I gave a little blood on that bridge in Selma, Alabama, for the right to

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

People keep telling me they are frustrated and ask, 'what can I do?' I say organize, get registered, and vote like you've never voted before. You must not become bitter or hostile; be hopeful and optimistic. This is not a struggle for a day or a week, but the struggle of a lifetime.

