



2017 Essay and Creative Arts Competition Topic: *Voting*

► **MUSIC**

Peter Rothberg

*Western Pines Middle School
(Grade 8)*

Teacher: Steve Gordon

*Excerpts from Peter's essay
about his songwriting process:*

One reason I chose to do a song is because people pay more attention to songs than they do to essays. People listen better if the words are sung. People will also remember something longer if they hear it in a song. If you sing a song, people are going to be like, wow, this is pretty good, and listen to what you are saying.

Voting Is Important

Go out and vote
So we can stay afloat
Voting is cool
So don't be a fool
Go get in your car
Don't drive to a bar
Go to a polling place
Make sure to show your face
Cause we're a democracy
Not an aristocracy
Everybody has a shot
Even if you don't have a lot
You can achieve much more
Than you ever thought before
Voting is a right
So stand up and fight
If you think something's unfair
Go out and show you care

Voting is important
Yes yes it is
Voting is important
Yes yes it is
Voting is important
Yes yes it is



► **3-DIMENSIONAL ART**
Aliyah Lumia

*Western Pines Middle School
(Grade 8)*

Teacher: Steve Gordon

*Excerpts from Aliyah's essay
about her artistic process:*

Being a child in this day and age, when I think about voting I think about the debates. This also makes me think, what if you didn't have a voice.

To explain this best I could, I decided to base my metal sculpture on *The Trumpet and the Swan*. In this book, a trumpet is mute. Children have to open their voice to make a difference. The swan learns to write and play the trumpet to make up for that.

In today's world, we must do something about our future and vote.



► **ESSAY**

Harrison Schram

*Oxbridge
Academy
(Grade 9)*

*Teacher:
Amy Jurskis*

The Importance of Voting

Voting is something that every qualified American citizen should take part in. It is a core component of every democracy. Voting gives people the power to choose their leaders, and express their views on how government should operate. It is something in which I look forward to participating.

Voting is the most important component of a democracy. Democracy comes from the Greek words *demos* and *kratos*. They translate to people and power, respectively. Thus, democracy literally means people power. The way people express this power is through voting. Voting gives everyone a voice. Failing to exercise this right is tantamount to giving up your aforementioned voice. The most recent election was one of the most divisive in history. Both sides of the political spectrum had very strong opinions. Despite this, just over half of the people who were eligible to vote did. Those who failed to do so gave up their say in how our government is run.

Voting allows people to choose their leaders; in non-democracies where open elections are absent, people cannot do so. Examples include places such as Cuba and North Korea. These totalitarian societies have allowed single families to seize power, and hang on to it. If the inhabitants of these countries had the power to choose their officials, despotic leaders would be thrown out of office. Those leaders would not have the ability to rule their people harshly for more than half a century as they have in these two countries. Voting prevents something like this from happening, as when given a choice, the majority of people will not choose a tyrant.

I cannot wait until I can vote. I will be turning 18 in 2019. You can be sure that when election day 2020 rolls around, I will be making my voice heard by casting my vote. In the meantime, I will keep myself informed about the political issues. I followed the 2016 election from start to finish. I watched various news broadcasts, read many different articles, and had conversations with both Republicans and Democrats about the various issues affecting our country. It felt empowering to be well informed about what was happening. I was able to achieve this by looking at both sides. Instead of just watching one news channel, I watched many. Instead of just talking to people who shared my beliefs, I spoke to people who didn't. It gave me a broader view of everything that was going on, and helped me become better informed. I plan to do this for elections in the future, so that when I cast my vote, I know that it will be well informed.

In America, we believe that our rights are inherent and are not granted by the government. In fact, the government's power derives from the people. Voting is the means by which people express their inherent rights on how our government should operate. Voting ensures that the people of this country will always have that power.



► **Special Recognition**

Photography

Shelby Bakkedah

*Western Pines Middle School
(Grade 8)*

*Teacher:
Steve Gordon*

Excerpts from Shelby's essay about her work:

Pictured is my three siblings and I holding hands. Although right now we are all under the age of 18, we will have equal voting privileges when we turn 18. Even though we are males and females, we will all have an equal right to vote. Even though we are of different races, we will all have an equal vote. This is because of the beautiful country we live in believes in equality. We may be different but we are equal. And with that equality we create unity. And that unity is what gives us our elected officials. Nobody's vote is of greater or lesser value. And everybody joins together and becomes united so we can select our government. I hope in the future my siblings and I will show our equality and unity, and all go vote together.



Palm Beach Fellowship of Christians & Jews

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The Fellowship's Annual Essay & Creative Arts Competition is open to all Palm Beach County public and private middle and high school students. The topic is announced in the fall. Winning students receive cash prizes and are recognized on the Fellowship web site, Facebook page, and at an awards ceremony in the spring, where supervising teachers are also honored.
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Why Vote

Perhaps one of the most important freedoms of any country is the ability for its citizens to choose their leaders through elections. Voting is a constitutional and democratic right that all citizens should embrace. Elections allow voters to voice their opinions and to effect change. Voting also helps lawmakers know what is important to voters. In a civilized society, its citizens accept the results of elections and move towards common goals in an effort to make our country better.

The right to vote is something that should never be taken for granted. My father was born in Cuba and if my grandparents had not fled the Castro regime, they would have lived their lives trapped within a dictatorship. Everything about their lives would have been controlled by a government that never had to answer to its people. For my grandfather, it was his loss of a voice that was his driving force to move his family to seek freedom.

Voting is an important mode of communication between elected officials and their constituents. Elections provide the path whereby citizens who do not agree with an elected official are able to vote for someone who represents their beliefs and values. As times change, politicians can transition into the people that voters want to lead them into the future. Even in my school, our Student Council officers are elected based on what they promise and how other students expect them to lead.

Everyone should vote in every election from the time they register to vote. Politicians from the Republican and Democratic parties and the adults who vote for them debate every issue right up until Election Day. American citizens understand the privilege and the responsibility of their voting rights and this affects how they respond to the results of elections. What other country in the world could go through this past election season and then return to a normal life? Maybe that is the gift of every citizen having a voice. Sometimes a voter's candidate wins and sometimes they lose but the belief that we are grounded in the same goodness gives us faith to all move together in the same direction.

Regardless of our backgrounds, we are bound by similar beliefs and desires for families to grow, opportunities to go to school and places for our parents to work so they are able to provide for us. Fortunately, we are taught from an early age about the privilege of the right to vote and learn about those societies where the right to vote does not exist and the bad things that happen. Maybe that is the reason that adults make sure they vote so that their voice is heard but accept the results when their candidate does not win because they know that eventually their message will be heard by a candidate in the future. God bless the USA!

► ESSAY

First Place -
Middle School

**Maggie
Acosta**

Rosarian
Academy
(Grade 7)

Teacher:
Chrissie
Ferguson

► ESSAY

Second Place -
Middle School

Jack Vo

Western Pines
Middle School
(Grade 8)

Teacher:
Steve Gordon

Voting

Many citizens in our nation choose not to vote for a variety of reasons. Voting is one of our many natural rights as citizens. At the age of 18, you can make a big difference in our nation. It is a vital system that helps our society change the ways the government thinks or behaves. Many citizens acknowledge the fact that voting is one of our most basic rights and has an enormous effect on us as citizens, but still choose not to participate. It is our duty as citizens to make sure we have an influence on our nation by voting.

In our democracy, voting is one of the many rights given to us. It helps us get our thoughts and ideas out about certain topics and make sure they get heard. Voting can not only get controversial topics like abortion and same-sex marriage more attention, but makes your voice and opinions be heard when you are unable to do so other ways. When you vote, you tell representatives how and why you feel about what you feel, and lets you speak what's on your mind to candidates who most often have the most influence on people.

Another reason we should vote is to honor those who fought for this right. Significant figures like Susan B. Anthony and president Lyndon Johnson both helped end barriers that prevented certain citizens from voting. When we take part in voting for any representatives, it is our way of thanking and repaying them for the difficulties and challenges that they went through for us to vote. Voting is a privilege that we share, that most people in the world don't have. We should cherish this right and not take it for granted.

In this year's election, nearly half of Americans did not vote. When you take into consideration how big our country is, it seems distressing that that many citizens did not vote and instead were statistics. Not only is this upsetting for the people who have strong opinions about a candidate or their beliefs, but for the citizens who did not vote. When you are uneducated, it is best to get informed quickly to know if a candidate shares the same thoughts and ideas as you. Not only could this help you decide who to vote for, but it also could connect you to people who share the same interests and principles as you.

In conclusion, voting not only changes the way our government performs, but also the way we live. More and more citizens are choosing not to vote, which is a mistake. Many individuals want to have their voice heard and voting is that way to get it out. It is one of our basic rights but still one of the most important, given and fought for in the past so that we as citizens can take part in the election and change our nation.

► ESSAY

Third Place -
Middle School

**Lizzie
Barnum**

St. Ann's
Catholic
School
(Grade 7)

Teacher:
Mary Cooney

The Right to Vote

Your vote is your voice. It is a right we have fought for and should honor, a right that cannot be taken away from us. The ability to vote inspires change and is representative of the United States of America. Without citizens' votes, democracy, the basis of our country, is incapable of properly functioning. With less than 60% of eligible voters voting (approximately 58% in the most recent election) can we truly say the winners of the elections were chosen by the people?

Our country has fought for the right for all people to vote, regardless of race, sex, or religion. Voting began in 1776, when only white men who owned land could vote. Women endured oppression for decades, only finally being able to vote in 1920. Indigenous people couldn't vote until 1947. People of color couldn't vote freely, without constant fear of discriminatory restrictions, until 1965. Countless brave men and women have made sacrifices for the right to vote, for their future, for our present. So many were maimed or killed, and we waste their efforts, their lives, due to the belief that a single vote couldn't possibly matter. But it does.

"Take it from me, every vote counts." Al Gore lost the United States Presidential Election of 2000 to George Bush by 537 votes in the deciding state, Florida. That year in Florida, only 57.5% of eligible voters voted in the general election. There were over four million people that didn't vote in Florida alone, and if only 537 of them had voted for Al Gore, they would have changed the course of history. Our votes decide our future. Our votes decide our country's future. Our votes matter.

Without the ability to vote, our country would fall apart. We were built on democracy. We were built on the people. Voting is something many take for granted, a freedom that we were born with because of the sacrifices made by those before us. These sacrifices can never be forgotten, and should be honored. We can do this by voting. With our voices, we can inspire change and truly make a difference in America. Your vote is your voice, let it be heard.



► 2-DIMENSIONAL ART

First Place

Flora Beleznay

Pine Crest School
(Grade 8)

Teacher: Barbara Milanese

Excerpts from Flora's essay about her artistic process:

For my painting, I incorporated what I think of when the topic of voting comes to mind. The ballot box is filling up with ballots that all have a different interesting fact about why voting is important for our country. In the background, there is a reversed American flag, which represents that our country would be going in the wrong direction if voting was not part of it. On the bottom of the painting there are hands raising up to show that anyone could be a part of the election, no matter what ethnicity, gender, etc. I created my artwork as more of a surreal piece. I chose to mix some of my colors by combining different colors. I did this to make the color lighter or darker to add depth to the painting. I think that adding depth made the painting pop out at the viewer.



► **2-DIMENSIONAL ART**

Second Place

Anna Stengal and Mariana Beaujardin

St. Ann's Catholic School

(Grade 8)

Teacher: Mary Cooney

Excerpts from Anna's essay about her artistic process:

Our drawing depicts how far as a country we have come. One side shows the past and how only white people were allowed to vote. The other side shows the present with all different races voting. The 15th amendment, ratified in 1870, banned any state from denying a male citizen the right to vote based upon their "race, color or previous condition of servitude." Yet, this didn't stop prejudice acts that prohibited people of color from exercising their right to vote. However, after the brutal incident in Selma, President Lyndon Johnson called for a voting rights legislation and passed the bill with a 77-19 vote in May of 1965.

I believe that we should not only see voting as a privilege, but also as an obligation.

Excerpts from Mariana's essay about her artistic process:

Our drawing has two sides; the present where everyone can vote, and the past when people of color didn't have common rights. African-Americans weren't allowed to vote, sit in the front of the bus, drink from the same water fountains, sue the same bathrooms, or attend the same schools as white people. People of color had no say in who would govern America, even though it's their country too.

The other side of our drawing that shows the present depicts how we are all unique and blended together as a country. It shows people who are proud Americans being grateful that they can live in this nation. It represents how all different races and religions can come together. A lot of people dedicated their lives to making America a free country. Because of their bravery we can choose our president. We are lucky to have these rights.

► **ESSAY**

Voting

Honorable

Mention -

Middle School

Jacob Perez

Western Pines

Middle School

School

(Grade 7)

Teacher:

Steve Gordon

The right to vote is a privilege given to us in our country of the United States of America. As a grandson of immigrants of Cuba I see firsthand how important it is to have the privilege to vote and be a part of making decisions for your family, community and country. In Cuba you are not part of making those decisions. In the United States we the citizens have the responsibility to vote and assist in progressing our country. One of those great responsibilities is voting. There are many reasons to vote when it comes to election time. Some of those reasons are because it's our right and we need to exercise our right to vote in this free country. Second, voting helps make decisions in our community and country. Another reason you should vote is because every vote counts and your vote can make a difference and can begin a movement of change. Therefore you should vote on Election Day.

To begin with, voting is a right we have as Americans and we need to use that right properly and efficiently. As Lyndon B. Johnson said, "the vote is the most powerful instrument." This shows that we the people have a very strong tool in our hands and we have to use it properly. Citizens have to use it in the right way. As citizens we have to vote and go in on Election Day well informed and educated on the issues and the candidates running. You do not want to go vote without knowing what you are voting for. That can have big consequences if everyone did that. That is why it is important you read about information ahead of time that will be presented on ballots. If you are too young to vote you can help your parents or elders understand the issues being presented through discussion.

Another reason we should vote is because it helps make decisions in our community and country. Your vote can contribute to making decisions about improvements in your community and country, such as updating roads, keeping communities safe and improving the welfare of our citizens. By voting you are taking part in these major decisions.

Finally, you should vote because every vote counts. Many people get discouraged when they think that their vote won't count. Many people will complain that they didn't like a new law or public official, but they did not vote to help progress change. So you can encourage others to vote and remind them of the importance and privilege we have of voting. Your vote can be the decision maker if there were a tie. Thus you should always vote.

In conclusion, voting is a privilege we have to take seriously. We have to help and encourage others during voting time and remember that every vote counts. By voting you can bring change to your community and country. So on next Election Day go out and vote!

St. Ann's Catholic School students Anna Stengal, Mariana Beaujardin, and Elizabeth Barnum proudly show off their winning entries.



► **2-DIMENSIONAL ART**

Third Place

Elizabeth Tischuk

Western Pines Middle School

(Grade 8)

Teacher: Steve Gordon

Excerpts from Elizabeth's essay about her artistic process:

My work was created with the medium of colored pencils and ink pens to define dark values. I drew four distinct characters to ensure diversity. I included one college student, a Muslim woman, a man of African-American descent, and a handicapped Asian man. My goal was to inform people that there can only be the change you want if you vote by adding dialogue to the characters holding their ballots saying what they want to see change in the U.S. Some of us may be too young, but to exercise our obligation to vote is our responsibility that we should make an effort to stay closely in the loop of what's going on in politics to advance the process. With a friend you could have discussions about your political views or overall politics. Everyone should vote to make the change they desire to see in this country.



Middle school Essay winner Maggie Acosta of Rosarian Academy is congratulated by her teacher, Chrissie Ferguson.