



FREDERICK DOUGLASS FAMILY INITIATIVES

presents

Anna Murray Douglass “Life in Portrait” Contest



Authors of the book, *Picturing Frederick Douglass*, called Douglass the “Most Photographed American of the Nineteenth Century.” Yet, there are only two known images of Anna Murray Douglass, Frederick’s wife and partner during 44 years of marriage.

As a way to honor this great woman during the Centennial of the 19th Amendment, Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives (FDFI) asked Rochester area students to help us imagine how Anna may have looked in portraits during different stages of her life. How does Anna appear in your own creative rendering? Her clothing? Her hair? Her eyes? Her smile? What’s in the background? Black and white or color?

Art experts, historians, journalists and Douglass descendants reviewed all of our entries and selected winners at three levels: elementary, middle, and high school. Here are some of the top entries.

www.fdfi.org

Gwenn | Age 17



Annaliese | Age 16



The wind under everyone's wings and the reason her husband was free
and still sings.

All she did for everyone was delivered on a silver tray, but do we realize
that one of those days, she could've just spread her own wings and flown away?
Her candle burned dimly behind her husband's shadow, but she made him
free and because of her, he was always aglow.

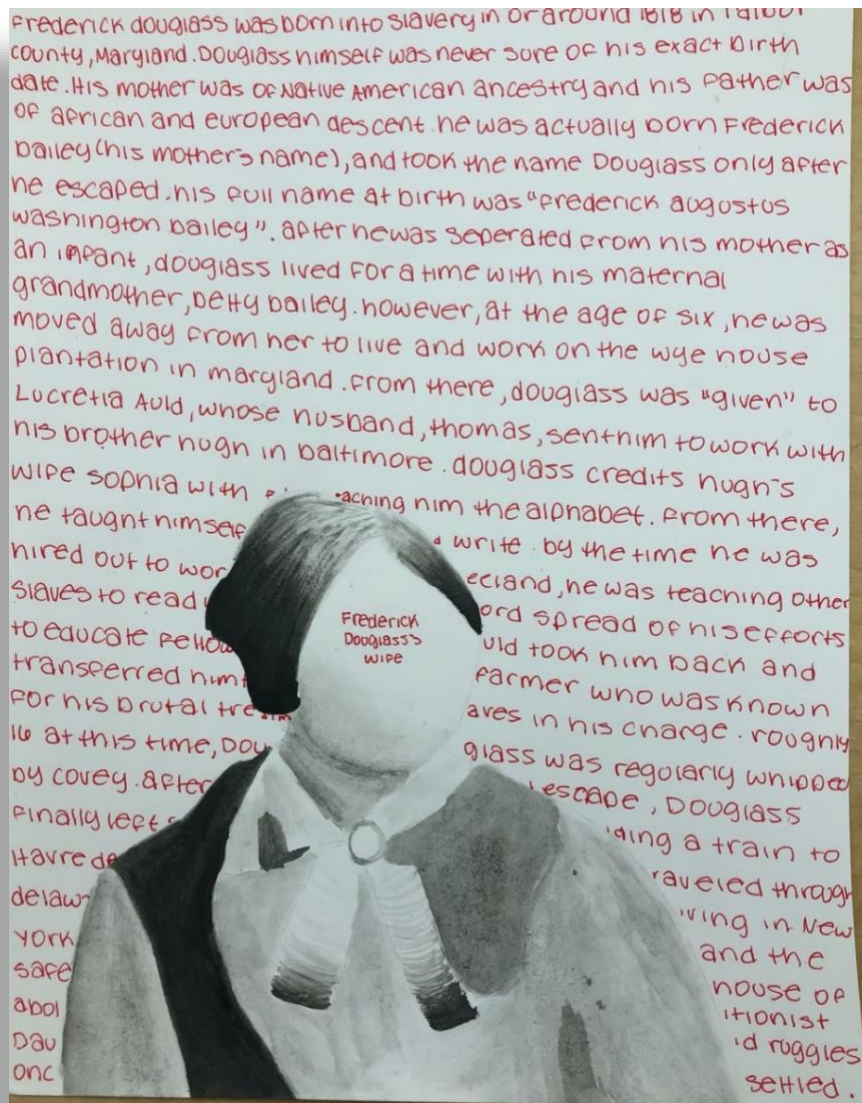
Maybe her light seemed small, but it's actually the most extraordinary of
them all.

While everyone around her shone so brightly, she was the one, that
amidst the storms always remained the glorious sun.

Sunahra | Age 17



Zoe | Age 16



Without Anna Murray Douglass the work of Frederick Douglass would not have been possible. However very few sources mention her name. For all of history she has been demoted to just "Frederick Douglass' Wife" rather than herself as a separate entity from her husband. Anna Murray was not only his wife, but also an incredible mother, laundress, human rights advocate, abolitionist, and so much more. This portrait of Anna Murray Douglass shows what she looked like to the world from the beginning of her marriage to Frederick Douglass, to now. This can also be communicated at the period in which she was seen as nothing but Frederick Douglass' wife, and not the powerful leader she actually was. This portrait illustrates history's failure to give her the credit she deserves.

Tehreem | Age 15

Anna Murray Douglass:
The women who made Frederick Douglass's
work possible.



Danielle | Age 16



I wanted my piece to bring light to the fact that Anna Murray Douglass was so much more than how many people saw her as only "black" (shown by all the yellow words on the outside border.) The small black figures, representing the slaves she helped escape, are crawling around her and reaching for the same "light of recognition" as Anna Murray Douglass.

Rose | Age 15



Yahel | Age 13



Julian | Age 10 – Winner, Elementary School Level



Julian chose to draw Anna Murray Douglass at the age of 15 because he learned that at that age, Ms. Douglass was given the important responsibility of being in service as a young housekeeper, learning to run busy homes and taking care of many people. These were skills that served her well in her life's work as an abolitionist.

Adam | Age 16



Holy | Age 16 – Winner, High School Level



Anna Murray Douglass was a profound woman. Being the wife of the well-known orator Frederick Douglass, she did much work behind the scenes, assuming the role of the family banker, laundress, baker, and general manager of the home. Among Anna Murray Douglass's many achievements is her abolitionist work as an avid anti-slavery advocate. This portrait depicts a scene of Anna Murray Douglass as she brings runaway slaves into her home. Using her home as a station for the Underground Railroad, she housed dozens of runaway slaves along their journey towards freedom. Showing great sacrifice, humbleness, and integrity, Anna Murray Douglass was loved by many, held her household together, and was an inspiring and monumental figure in the cause for abolition.

Lena | Age 16



Allie | Age 16



This portrait is meant to capture Anna Murray Douglass's positive impact in life. The significance of the light surrounding her head is because I see her as a "guiding light" to those around her... helping others in any way possible, and fighting for a brighter future.

Miranda | Age 15



Natasha | Age 16



This portrait is about Anna Murray Douglass and one of the stages of her life around the mid-1800s. This particular scene is Anna Douglass washing the dishes while her husband, Frederick Douglass, is in the background. Anna has a black ribbon around her mouth to show that she is not publicly outspoken, but shows it through her actions. For example, she is holding a red plate to her heart while cleaning to symbolize that she loves her family, and that her duty to advocate and serve for her family is important to her. Although on the outside it looks like she is just simply washing dishes, she secretly was the backbone of society and her husband as a female African American Abolitionist. I made Frederick Douglass in the back the color black because although he was a major influence on abolition, this piece was here to emphasize that Anna Douglass was also equally if not more of an influence on abolition herself, which is why I colored Anna in bright, eye-catching colored clothes. I also used collage in this piece to add different mediums like real red carpeting for the floors, tissue paper which represents the water and soap, cardstock for the fridge and the people, and colored pencils for the Anna Douglass, the dress, and the apron. The background behind Anna is not too busy, and this is because it demonstrates that Frederick Douglass is lost and needs his wife's guidance to make his work possible, which is why he is standing there blankly.

Libby | Age 18



Hannah | Age 17



Natalie | Age 16



My portrait is set sometime in the year 1838 in her life, the year she got married. While this is certainly a wedding portrait with a white dress and veil, multiple other elements represent her and bring it to not be so much about her wedding but the person she was as a whole. The choice of quilt in the background in repeating north stars represents the Underground Railroad along with the North Star paper she ran. The one inverses color star over her head is a representation of her central role in her family and friends lives, and her presence as a “North Star” in all her duties in

centering her family. The white dress certainly is a wedding dress in the portrait; however, the white paired with her purple neck handkerchief are a symbol of women’s rights and suffrage which I thought represented her strength as a powerful woman in her time. Finally, the flowers in her hand are tied to the writing around the outside of the portrait. The language of flowers was incredibly popular in the early 19th century and the flowers she has in her hand each represent an attribute I thought described Anna Murray Douglass in some way. Their meanings written in a border are, Patience in diversity- Chamomile, Constancy- Blue Hyacinth, and Justice- Black eyed Susan. I had so much fun researching and painting this piece and am overjoyed that a woman as fantastic as Mrs. Douglass is being painted by students from grade to grade.

Thomas | Age 16

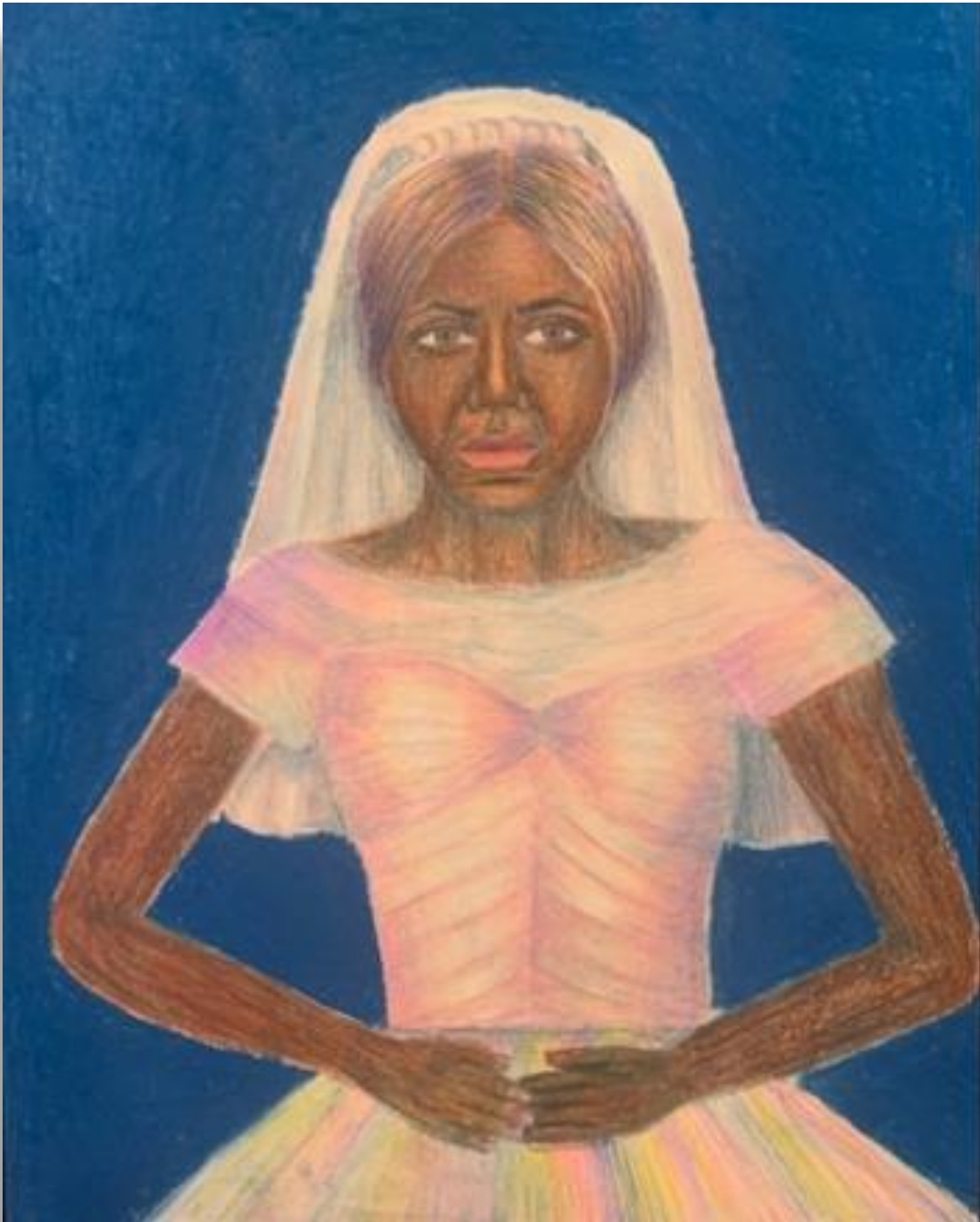


Mina | Age 16



The North Star was used as a symbol of freedom and hope for slaves. Not only was it the name of Frederick Douglass' abolitionist newspaper, but to me Anna Murray Douglass was the "North Star" of her family and the underground railroad. She played a crucial role in history that is too often overlooked, and I wanted to give her the story she deserves with this piece.

Cassandra | Age 17



Ana | Age 13 – Winner, Middle School Level



Makenna | Age 16

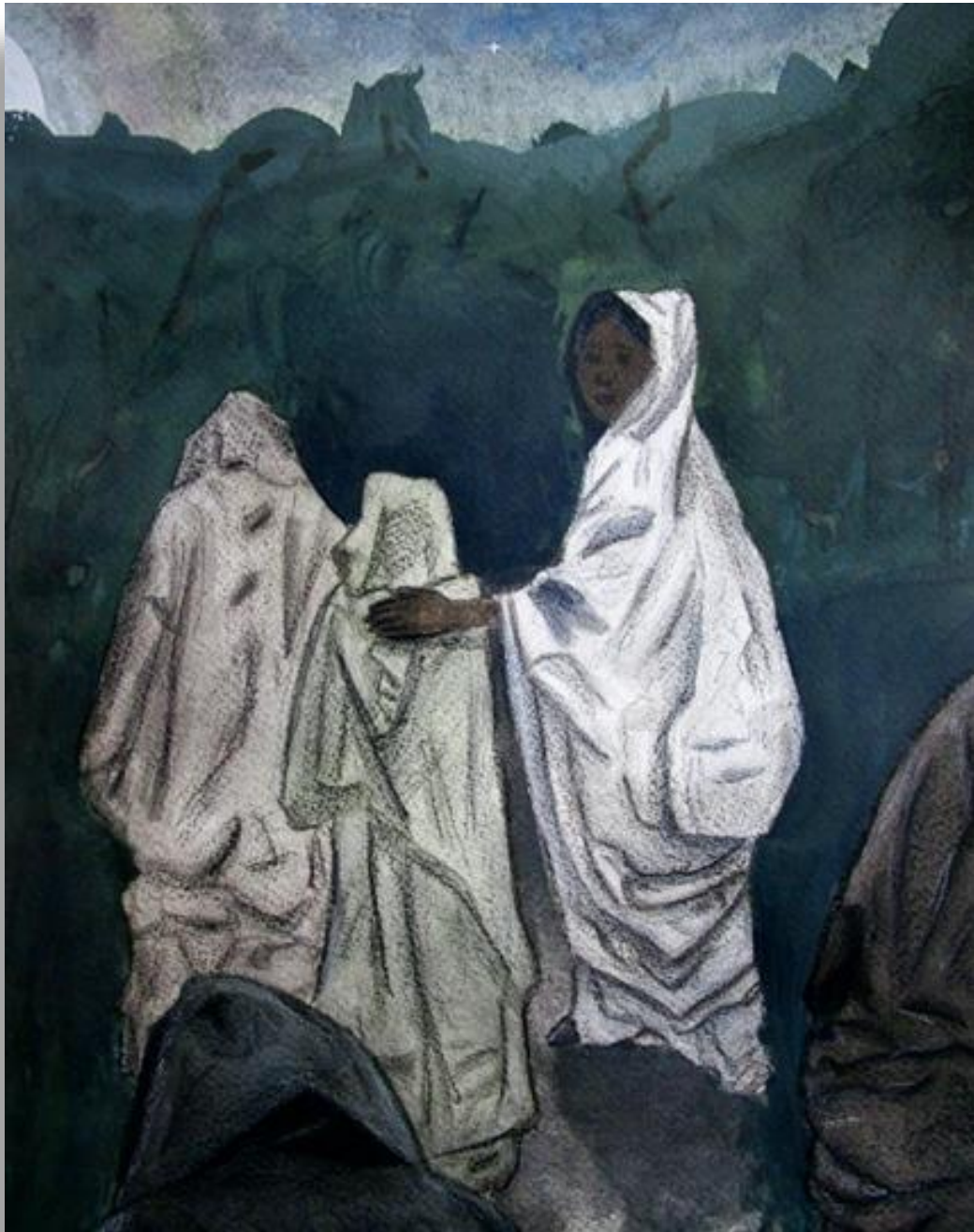


I was inspired to do this portrait of Anna stuffing her feather bed which she later sold to pay for Fredricks escape. For me, the feathers signify freedom, which is why I had them swirling around her as if they were also free.

Rosalect | Age 12

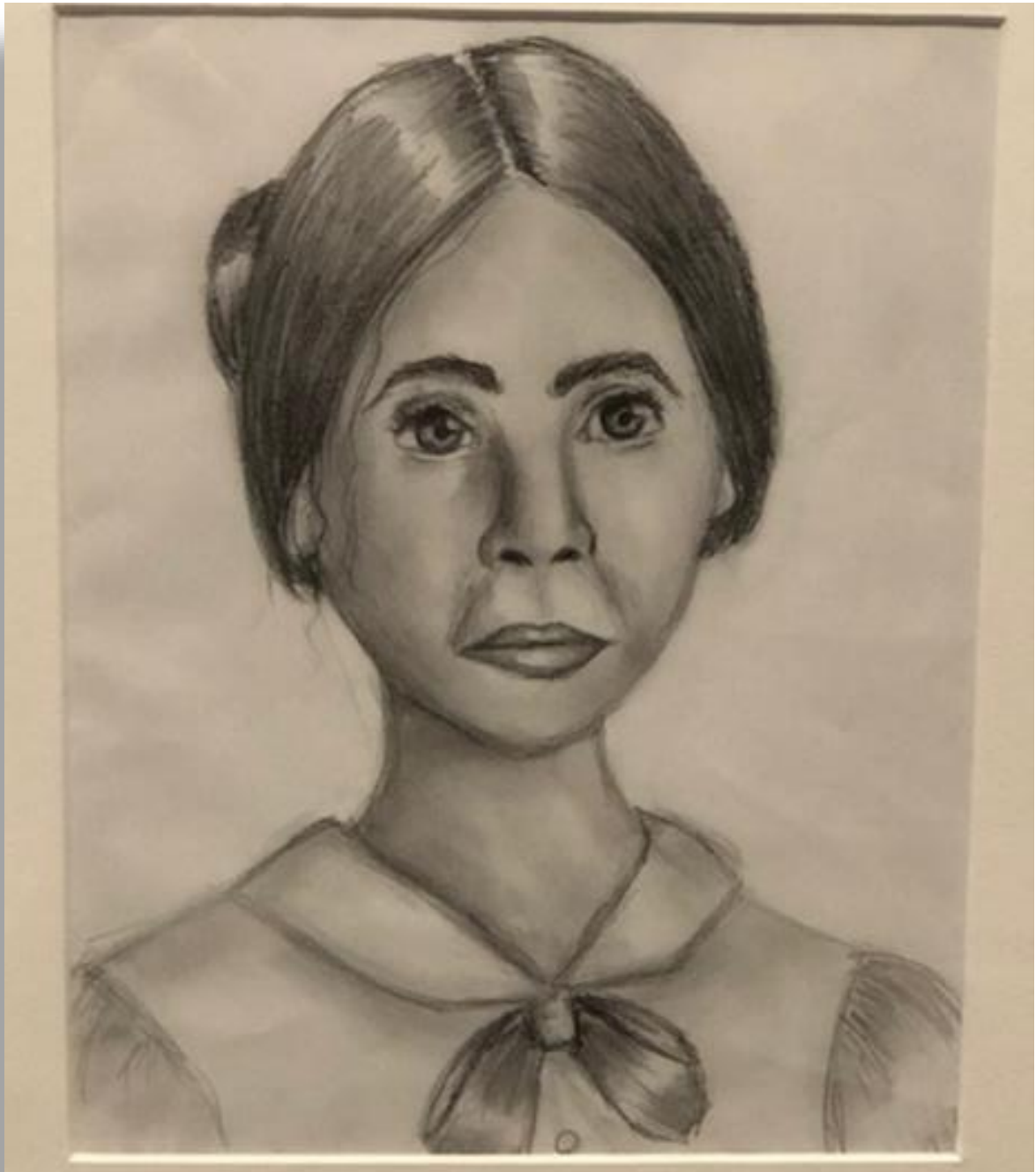


Alyssa | Age 16



This piece refers to the Underground Railroad and how much people really relied on Anna Murray Douglass. Notice she is wearing a white cloak to represent her freedom in a slavery-dependent world, and is guiding others along a dark path that they can only hope will lead them to their freedom.

Mira | Age 12



Amy | Age 17



For my drawing of Anna, I wanted to create a piece that captures both her heroic and ordinary life. In the front, you see Anna doing laundry which seems like a common task for women at the time. But behind her, there is a freedom quilt, which represents her heroic side: helping the runaway slaves. Therefore, although the first thing people think when they look at Anna is that she is just an ordinary woman, it is evident that she has actually done really amazing things. It's just that these things have been hidden and covered by her exterior appearance.

Emily | Age 16

