



MCFOK NEWSLETTER

— *SPECIAL EDITION* —

REVIEW OF OUR PUBLIC SCHOOL PROGRAMS

2024 – 2025
School Year

Now that the school year has ended, we want to take a moment to review the programs at the Masonic Charity Foundation of Oklahoma for public schools.

THESE PROGRAMS ARE:

- HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR ESSAY CONTEST
- STUDENT OF TODAY -AND- TEACHER OF TODAY
- WINTER HOLIDAY CARD VISUAL ARTS CONTEST



High School Senior Essay Contest

Our Senior Essay Contest was established in 1966 to provide graduating students an opportunity to engage in meaningful discussion on current events. This contest is open to any high school senior student enrolled in an Oklahoma Public School.

Local 1st through 5th place winners receive a certificate. State winners 1st through 15th place receive a certificate and a cash prize, and the funds are for the winners to spend as they wish! The school of the 1st place state winner also receives a cash prize!

Each year, a new topic is selected to challenge the seniors to think about the impacts of culture on our everyday lives. By engaging them in this writing exercise, we hope that students will demonstrate proficiency in expressing observations, thoughts, and conclusions logically and professionally.

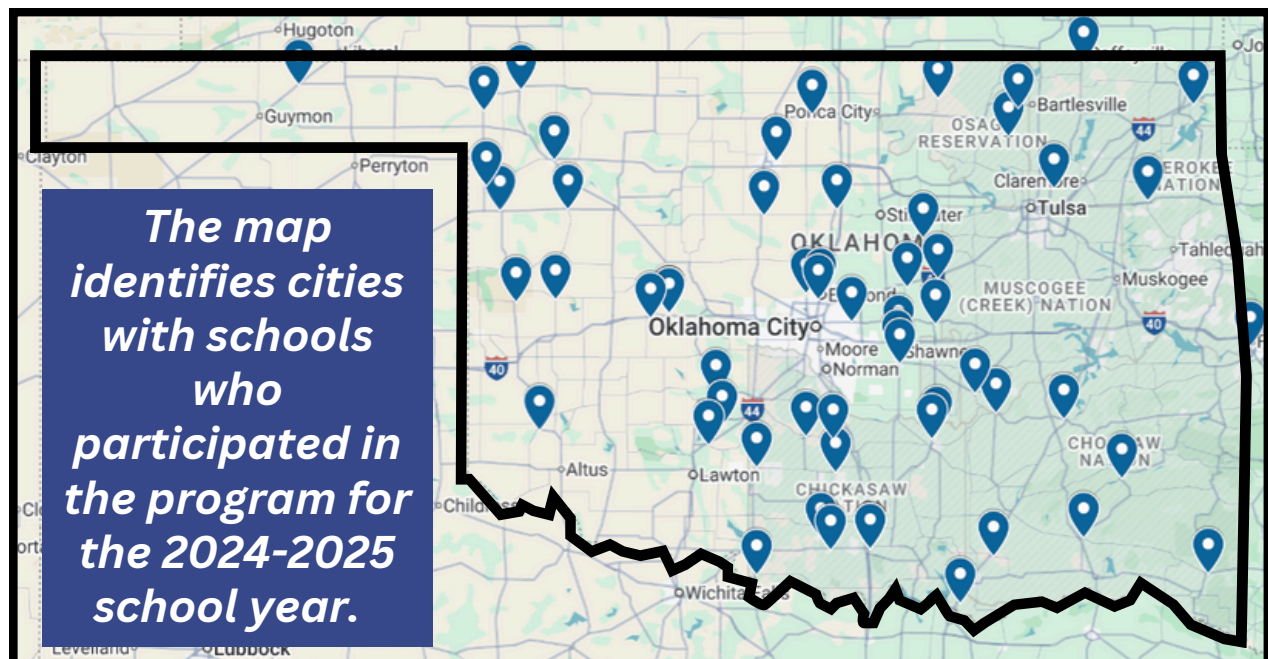
The 2024-2025 topic:

Presidential elections often include language filled with vitriol. When, if ever, does the quest to win an election at any cost outweigh the damage and disunity created by attack ad campaigns?

High School Senior Essay Contest

Program Participation

- **NUMBER OF SCHOOLS:** 87
- **ESSAYS RECEIVED:** 534
- **LOCAL CERTIFICATES AWARDED:** 177



CASH PRIZES AWARDED TO STATEWIDE WINNERS

1st	\$ 2,000	6th	\$ 650	11th	\$ 400
2nd	\$ 1,500	7th	\$ 600	12th	\$ 350
3rd	\$ 1,000	8th	\$ 550	13th	\$ 300
4th	\$ 750	9th	\$ 500	14th	\$ 250
5th	\$ 700	10th	\$ 450	15th	\$ 200

High School Senior Essay Contest

Statewide Winners

1st Place	Pond-Creek Hunter High School
2nd Place	North Rock Creek High School
3rd Place	Woodward High School
4th Place	Hennessey High School
5th Place	Colbert High School
6th Place	Owasso High School
7th Place	Bartlesville High School
8th Place	Laverne High School
9th Place	Shawnee High School
10th Place	Cushing High School
11th Place	Locust Grove High School
12th Place	Bethel High School
13th Place	Cheyenne High School
14th Place	Owasso High School
15th Place	Shattuck High School

The table above lists the high schools of the Essay Contest's Statewide Winners. Students' names are not being shared for safety reasons.

High School Senior Essay Contest

1st Place Statewide Essay

WINNING WITHOUT NEGATIVITY: IS IT POSSIBLE?

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Winning Without Negativity: Is It Possible?

Why do political candidates find it necessary to wage war upon other candidates to try to win an election? This question has been pondered for over two hundred years, and no one can seem to find the answer. What once started out as simple satirical cartoons in the newspaper, has now become vicious television and social media advertisements that “throw shade” on a candidate’s past, present, and future actions. Whether the actions are true or not, this type of negative campaigning could very possibly be the end of a person’s political hopes and dreams. Is it necessary? No. Will it ever change? I doubt it. The reality of negative campaign advertising is that it often creates disunity among voters, damages the credibility of the candidates, and promotes future negativity.

Firstly, negative campaign advertising can create disunity among voters. According to Kupferberg (2023), “One of the most significant risks of negative campaigning is turning voters against the politician who uses it and lowering general voter turnout.” Campaign strategists know which topics are the most controversial and plan their advertisements around those topics. They also depend on the fact that human emotions drive the vote much more often than what’s best for our country. Negative campaigning can anger voters to the point where they choose not to vote at all during an election. This could happen because either the voters are weary of the constant barrage of slander and vitriol toward each other, or they turn away from their allegiance of the candidate they originally followed because they believed the information being promoted in the attack ad campaigns.

Secondly, negative campaign advertising often damages the credibility of the candidates. According to Lau and Rovner (2009), “Candidates who attack their opponent might be perceived as mean-spirited or nasty...” Some political candidates have been a victim of the “backlash effect.” This happens when candidates choose to use negative advertising in an attempt to taint the reputation of the opposing candidate, but instead taints his own reputation by the slander of the advertisement. This effect does not usually come to light during the actual election, but shows in hindsight after he or she loses the

High School Senior Essay Contest

1st Place Statewide Essay

WINNING WITHOUT NEGATIVITY: IS IT POSSIBLE?

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election. The damage to the candidate's reputation was enough to cause him or her to lose and possibly create a situation where future political aspirations will not be realized. Another way negative campaigns damage the credibility of candidates is the distrust that voters feel toward a candidate that cannot stand on his or her own accomplishments, policy ideas, and personal merits (Lau & Rovner, p. 2). Most often, candidates who are predicted to win by a landslide are less likely to consent to negative campaign ads and depend on their personal merit to win the election. Therefore, the utilization of negative campaigning poses the problem of damaging the reputation and credibility of a candidate that has a campaign platform that will help bring about change but will not win because of his or choices about how that campaign was managed during the election.

Lastly, the dominance of negative campaigning and its ability to possibly sway the outcome of an election could promote future negativity in election campaigns. According to Dowling & Krupnikov (2016), "Since the 1960s there has been an increase in the amount of negative advertising in American campaigns. Although only 10% of advertisements aired in the 1960 campaign were negative, in the 2012 campaign only 14.3% of aired ads were positive." If negative campaigning creates the wanted effect of winning an election, why would future candidates choose not to use it? This is the concern of many who believe that negative campaigning is detrimental to the democratic process. Our country was built upon the foundation of government leaders being chosen by the people. It was also built upon the foundation of the people depending upon their trust for whom they vote into office. This trust fails when the candidates are more intent on winning the election than keeping the foundations secure. Negative campaigning is based on deceit and trickery instead of transparency and belief in a candidate that is for the people instead of himself or herself.

There are always two sides to every story, and many researchers tell a different story of the positive effects of negative campaign ads. While this may be what the research shows, it does not mean that it is right or good. Some may argue that no matter how offensive candidates are to each other, it still comes down to the choice of the voters. While this is true, many voters in this country, young and old,

High School Senior Essay Contest

1st Place Statewide Essay

WINNING WITHOUT NEGATIVITY: IS IT POSSIBLE?

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find themselves easily swayed by putting their trust in who they perceive a candidate to be. If this perception is not accurate, their vote was all for nothing. I want my vote to count for someone who feels convicted to put the people of this country first. I want my vote to be for someone who stands up for his or her convictions instead of trampling on the convictions of his opponent. This may seem unrealistic, but if a person cannot put his or her trust in the leaders of this nation, then our nation will fall to ruin. The future may look bleak right now, but it is possible to take a stand and win without negativity.

References

- Dowling, C. M., & Krupnikov, Y. (2016, November 22). The effects of negative advertising. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics.
<https://oxfordre.com/politics/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-978010228637-e-51>
- Kupferberg, J. (2023, April 14). Negative campaigning. What is negative campaigning and is it worth the risk? <https://www.hubdialer.com/glossary/what-is-negative-campaigning/>
- Lau, R. R., & Rovner, I. B. (2009). Negative campaigning - department of political science. Negative Campaigning. https://fas-polisci.rutgers.edu/lau/articles/lau-rovner_negativecampaigning.pdf

Student of Today & Teacher of Today

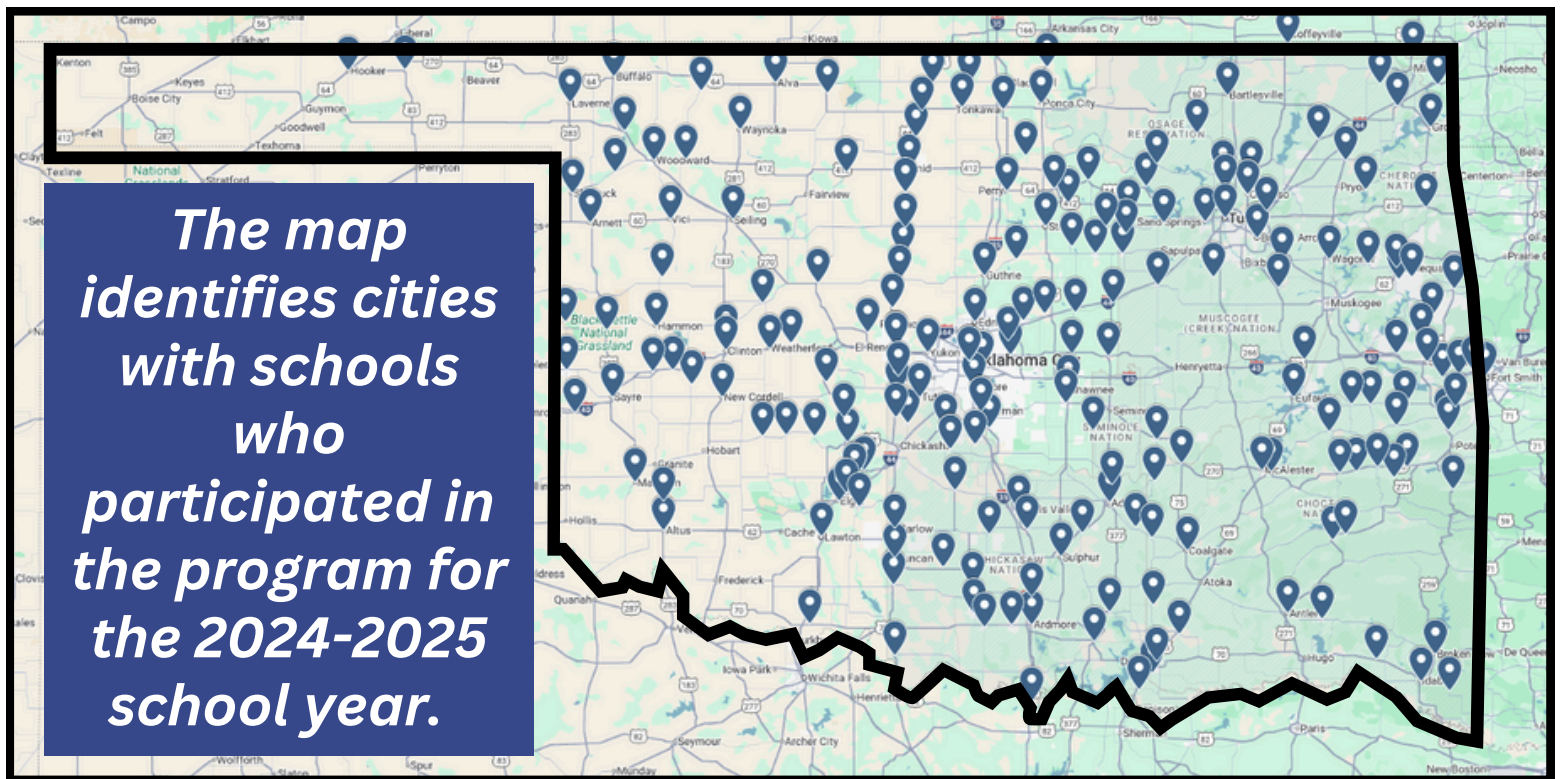
The Student and Teacher of Today award has been around for sixty years. The idea first came to bear in 1959 through the Education Committee, led by Brother Ferman Phillips, and it was designed to be a program of support for public schools in conjunction with American Education Week.

An excerpt from a letter penned by then Grand Master, Ray K. Babb: *“Our purpose is to get ourselves, our friends, and our neighbors into the schools so that our citizens may see and understand for themselves. This is more than a Masonic project. It is an American program in which masons are asked to participate. Who better than Freemasons to take the lead? Masons built this country with their toil and with their blood.”*

A letter then went out to all Masons explaining each step to this process and the why. In 1960, it came to be determined that one boy and one girl, who exemplified citizenship, leadership, and scholarship, would be recognized as the winners. One teacher would also be chosen who demonstrated a commitment to the principles of loyalty, dedication, and helpfulness. “If Masonry is to continue to exercise an influence for a greater tomorrow,” said Brother Phillips, “free institutions such as public schools, must be understood, must be improved, must be protected, and supported.” In 1962, it was adopted that local lodges would take over the distribution and award ceremonies for their area schools.

Student of Today & Teacher of Today *Program Participation*

- **NUMBER OF SCHOOLS:** 600
- **STUDENT CERTIFICATES AWARDED:** 1883
- **TEACHER CERTIFICATES AWARDED:** 615



Wynnewood Lodge #40 presenting certificates



Winter Holiday Card Visual Arts Contest

The Winter Holiday Card Visual Arts Contest was created in 2024, in collaboration with the Oklahoma Alliance for Arts Education (OAAE), to support more students and public schools in Oklahoma. This contest recognizes talented students from Pre-K to 12th grade while providing support to Art Teachers and Art Programs across the state!

Students are invited to create a winter/holiday design, and the winning design from each group will be turned into holiday cards for the Masonic Charity Foundation of Oklahoma. The winning students receive prizes, and the 1st place winner's school's Art Program/Teacher also receives a cash prize.

This program is similar to the High School Senior Essay Contest, which provides cash prizes to students and the school of the first-place winner. The visual arts contest allows us to acknowledge students with different skills and provide financial support, specifically to arts in education in the state.

The contest is open to all public schools in Oklahoma. Students from Pre-K to 12th grade may participate. The students are divided into five categories:

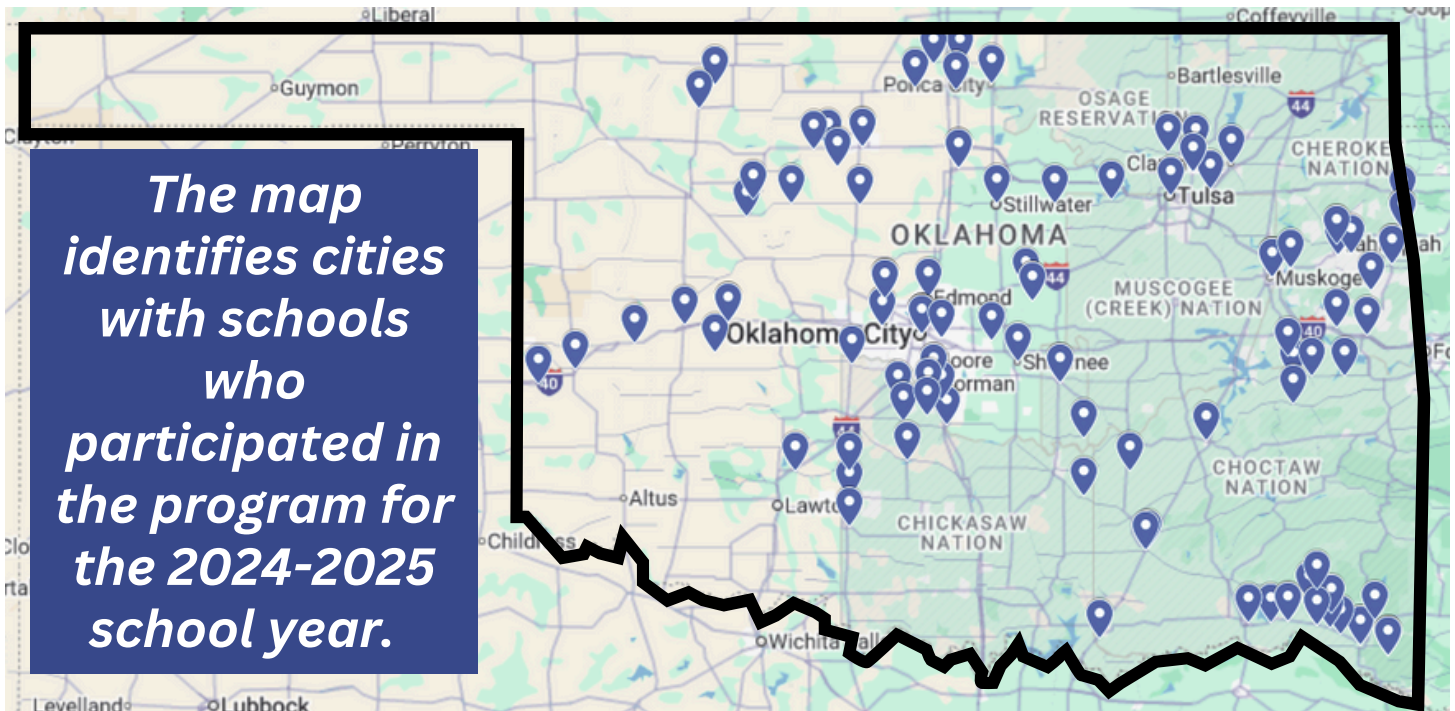
1. High School Seniors (12th)
2. High School (9th – 11th)
3. Middle School (6th-8th)
4. Elementary II (3rd – 5th)
5. Elementary I (Pre-K – 2nd)

The 2024 - 2025 school year was the first year for the Winter Holiday Card Visual Arts Contest.



Winter Holiday Card Visual Arts Contest

Program Participation



- **NUMBER OF SCHOOLS:** 114
- **TOTAL DESIGNS RECEIVED:** 568
 - 1. High School Seniors (12th) ~ 88 submissions
 - 2. High School (9th - 11th) ~ 214 submissions
 - 3. Middle School (6th - 8th) ~ 178 submissions
 - 4. Elementary II (3rd - 5th) ~ 34 submission
 - 5. Elementary I (Pre-K - 2nd) ~ 54 submissions

1st place in each category will have their design printed as a Holiday Card for the 2025 Holiday Season!



Winter Holiday Card Visual Arts Contest

Prize Breakdown

FOR HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

Winning students received a certificate and the following cash prizes:

1st Place: \$2000 2nd Place: \$1500 3rd Place: \$1000 4th Place: \$750

1st place winner's Art Teacher also received \$2000!

FOR 9TH - 11TH GRADE STUDENTS

Winning students received a certificate and the following cash prizes:

1st Place: \$750 2nd Place: \$650 3rd Place: \$575 4th Place: \$500

1st place winner's Art Teacher also received \$750!

FOR 6TH - 8TH GRADE STUDENTS

Winning students received a certificate and the following cash prizes:

1st Place: \$100 Food Gift Card

2nd Place: \$75 Food Gift Card

3rd Place: \$50 Food Gift Card

4th Place: \$25 Food Gift Card

1st place winner's Art Teacher also received \$500!

FOR 3RD - 5TH GRADE STUDENTS

Winning students received a certificate and the following cash prizes:

1st Place: \$40 Food Gift Card

2nd Place: \$35 Food Gift Card

3rd Place: \$30 Food Gift Card

4th Place: \$25 Food Gift Card

*1st place winner's Art Program also
received \$500!*

*1st place winner's class also
received a food party!*

FOR PRE-K - 2ND GRADE STUDENTS

Winning students received a certificate and the following cash prizes:

1st Place: \$40 Food Gift Card

2nd Place: \$35 Food Gift Card

3rd Place: \$30 Food Gift Card

4th Place: \$25 Food Gift Card

*1st place winner's Art Program also
received \$500!*

*1st place winner's class also
received a food party!*

Winter Holiday Card Visual Arts Contest

Winning Designs: High School Seniors

1



Madileen - Owasso High School

2



Zoe - Clinton High School

3



Clarice - Norman High School

4



Jayelle - Owasso High School

Winter Holiday Card Visual Arts Contest

Winning Designs: 9th - 11th Grade

1



Cali - Norman North High School

2



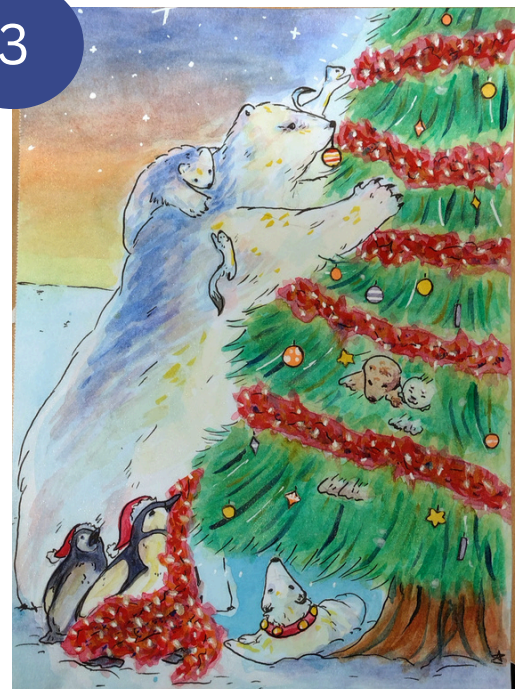
Carissa - Skiatook High School

3



Polly - Bethel High School

3



Renata - Owasso High School

Winter Holiday Card Visual Arts Contest

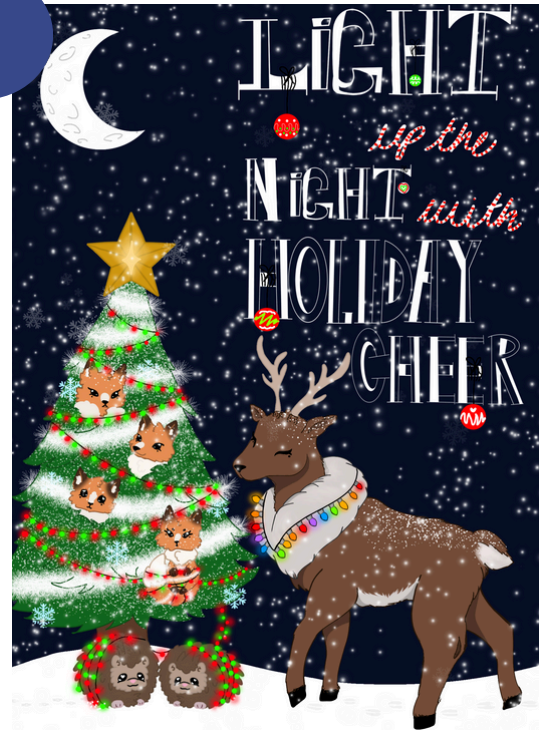
Winning Designs: 6th – 8th Grade

1



Scarlet – Middle School of Piedmont

2



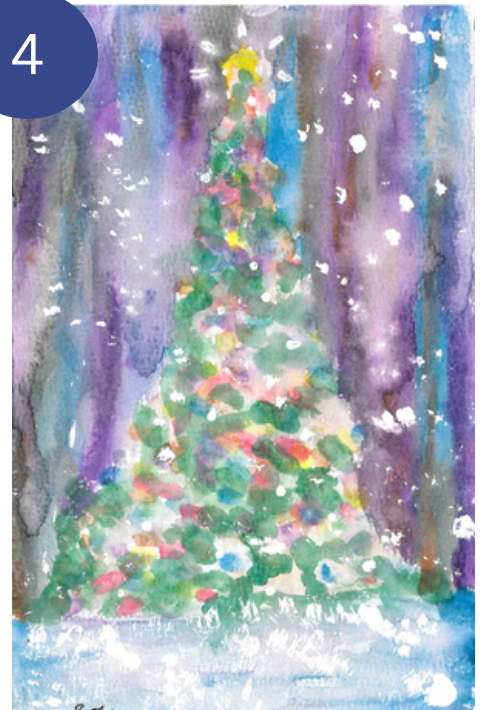
Katelyn – Sayre Public Schools

3



Cate – Valliant Middle School

4



Ryan – Justus-Tiawah School

Winter Holiday Card Visual Arts Contest

Winning Designs: 3rd - 5th Grade

1



Leighla - Atoka

2



Raelynn - Meeker Elementary

3



Kyra - Dibble Elementary

4



Oscar - Dibble Elementary

Winter Holiday Card Visual Arts Contest

Winning Designs: Pre-K - 2nd Grade

1



Emily - Mark Twain Elementary

2



Sofia - Mark Twain Elementary

3



Carolina - Mark Twain Elementary

4



Chole - Whitefield

THANK YOU

To all the school administrators, students, teachers, and lodges who participated in these programs – thank you!

Please visit our website for more information on these programs, including start dates and participation requirements.

Senior Essay Contest:

<https://mcfok.org/programs/for-public-schools/>

Student of Today & Teacher of Today:

<https://mcfok.org/programs/for-public-schools/student-teacher-of-today.html>

Winter Holiday Card Visual Arts Contest:

<https://mcfok.org/programs/for-public-schools/visual-arts-contest.html>

Questions? Contact Us!



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