



# ACKNOWLEDGE & REFRAME TOGETHER

## Civic Memory and Representation in Santa Monica

The Acknowledge + Reframe Together (Reframe) Initiative of Santa Monica Cultural Affairs produces public art and civic memory projects that center community voices with the aim of creating a more just and equitable Santa Monica. In particular, Reframe focuses on centering the voices and experiences of communities of color who have been historically excluded from discourse about representation in civic spaces. Belmar History + Art (2019–2021) was a demonstration project that inspired this initiative.

As part of this initiative, we are hosting community dialogues to dig deeper into the mural in historic City Hall. The mural, entitled "**History of Santa Monica and the Bay District**," was completed between 1939–1941 by Stanton MacDonald-Wright, and conveys attitudes and emphases that no longer reflect the full complexity of our histories and community. While honoring the contributions of all Santa Monicans past and present, we are undertaking a process to consider the artworks and create new interpretive and art responses to reflect the values of Santa Monicans today.



Help amend and celebrate Santa Monica history by taking part in Reframe! Scan this QR code OR visit [santamonica.gov/programs/acknowledge-and-reframe-together](https://santamonica.gov/programs/acknowledge-and-reframe-together) to learn more and take the Survey.



#### PHOTOS

1. *Our Pico Neighborhood*  
East Los Streetscapers, 2004 (Virginia Avenue Park)
2. *Saint Monica*  
Eugene Monrahan, 1934 (Palisades Park)
3. *Livin' Together*  
Abbie Jane Baron, 2007 (Euclid Park)
4. Belmar History + Art Community Tea with April Banks,  
February 2020. Photo by Leroy Hamilton.

# YOU BELONG HERE

## Words and images from Santa Monica Students

Local youth share their ties to Santa Monica and their reflections on history, civic representation, place and belonging.

Acknowledge + Reframe Together's examination of the City Hall Mural is a timely project undertaken by the City of Santa Monica and its Cultural Affairs Division. Timely, because in a nationwide movement over the past few years, we are questioning the histories and futures represented by monuments, public art and civic memory projects of the past.

As a public artist/muralist and as someone who grew up in Santa Monica, it was an honor to get to work with 75 local elementary, middle, and high school students and spend time with them discussing and analyzing the Stanton MacDonald Wright mural, *History of Santa Monica and the Bay District* in the lobby of Santa Monica City Hall. We also viewed and talked about the works in the *Lives that Bind* exhibit in City Hall East. Then the students explored their ideas of how to make their city a more welcoming and representative place with their own artwork describing Santa Monica.

It was a pleasure to work with so many young people (and the staff members who accompanied them) who clearly understood the issues and concerns at hand and were eager to join a discussion, even when it was difficult. The students were astute in their observations and analyses. They were willing to discuss the inequities that they found, whether based on notions of race or gender or otherwise. An elementary student was asking deep questions about racism while making her drawing, earnestly asking when did it start that white people began to hate black people? One high school student stated how great it is that the City of Santa Monica was interested in hearing the ideas and voices of the youth.

Most had never been inside City Hall, and so were especially engaged when we toured the site. The students took time with their drawings and focused on doing a comprehensive job, knowing that the City leaders would be looking at their artwork and ideas.

This is an important moment in time to learn about our histories, consider how people are represented, erased, or misrepresented, and question perspectives that may not reflect who we are now. I'm happy to know that young people are thinking about this too!

- Glenna Avila, summer 2022

**Glenna Avila** is an artist and educator dedicated to the intersection of art, community, and youth. She grew up in Santa Monica, receiving her BA in Art from UCLA and her MA in Art from the University of New Mexico. She worked as an Art Center Director in a number of Los Angeles communities for the City of Los Angeles, and as Director of the California Institute of the Arts Community Arts Partnership program for 28 years. She has painted over 75 public murals, the majority of which are collaborations with youth and communities, and her work has been exhibited in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Laguna Art Museum, the Los Angeles County Natural History Museum, Self Help Graphics, Plaza de la Raza, and many other venues. Her best-known mural is *L.A. Freeway Kids*, painted on the 101 Freeway in downtown LA, commissioned by the LA Olympic Organizing Committee in 1984.

### The prompts:

© What do you know about who or what was here before you?

© Who, what or where is the heart of Santa Monica to you? What happens there? Who is there? What does it look like?

© What is it about your Santa Monica that makes you feel welcome?

© What histories, and what people, do you see celebrated now in our parks, streets, and buildings? What other histories, or other people would you like to see?

© Take a look at the names of parks and plazas, the murals and sculptures of important histories and people in them, and how public spaces around you are used and who uses them. If you were in charge, how would you improve Santa Monica's public spaces?



Youth participants viewing the lobby mural at Historic City Hall, the exhibit in City Hall East, and working on their artwork in response to the prompts.



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Grace draws a response to the prompt: "What is the heart of Santa Monica to you?" The Santa Monica Pier was a recurring theme with the students as a recognizable symbol of the city.

ARTIST: Grace B.  
AGE: Elementary School

Rocco's cityscape groups a Dodgers flag with the U.S. flag and a Black Lives Matter sign.



ARTIST: Rocco N.  
AGE: 8

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Eli spent a good amount of time designing this image including the sun, palm tree, dollar sign and the ocean to represent Santa Monica.

ARTIST: Eli W.  
AGE: 16

This student at John Adams Middle School felt that school is a big part of their experience of Santa Monica.



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Adi depicted two important holidays in their drawing to represent Santa Monica: Earth Day and Dia de los Muertos!

ARTIST: Adi R.  
AGE: Elementary School

Melinda notes that the original inhabitants of Santa Monica are still here.



ARTIST: Melinda  
AGE: Middle School

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ARTIST: Mario O.  
AGE: 10

Mario was very thoughtful about what he wanted to draw and depicted faces of people from different races in front of an ocean wave and a beautiful sunset. An important message of people from different backgrounds working and living together to make Santa Monica the best place it can be.

Ashton drew a Native American woman in the natural environment of Santa Monica with hills, a waterfall and fish. This artist wanted to call attention to the first inhabitants of this land.



ARTIST: Ashton  
AGE: 8

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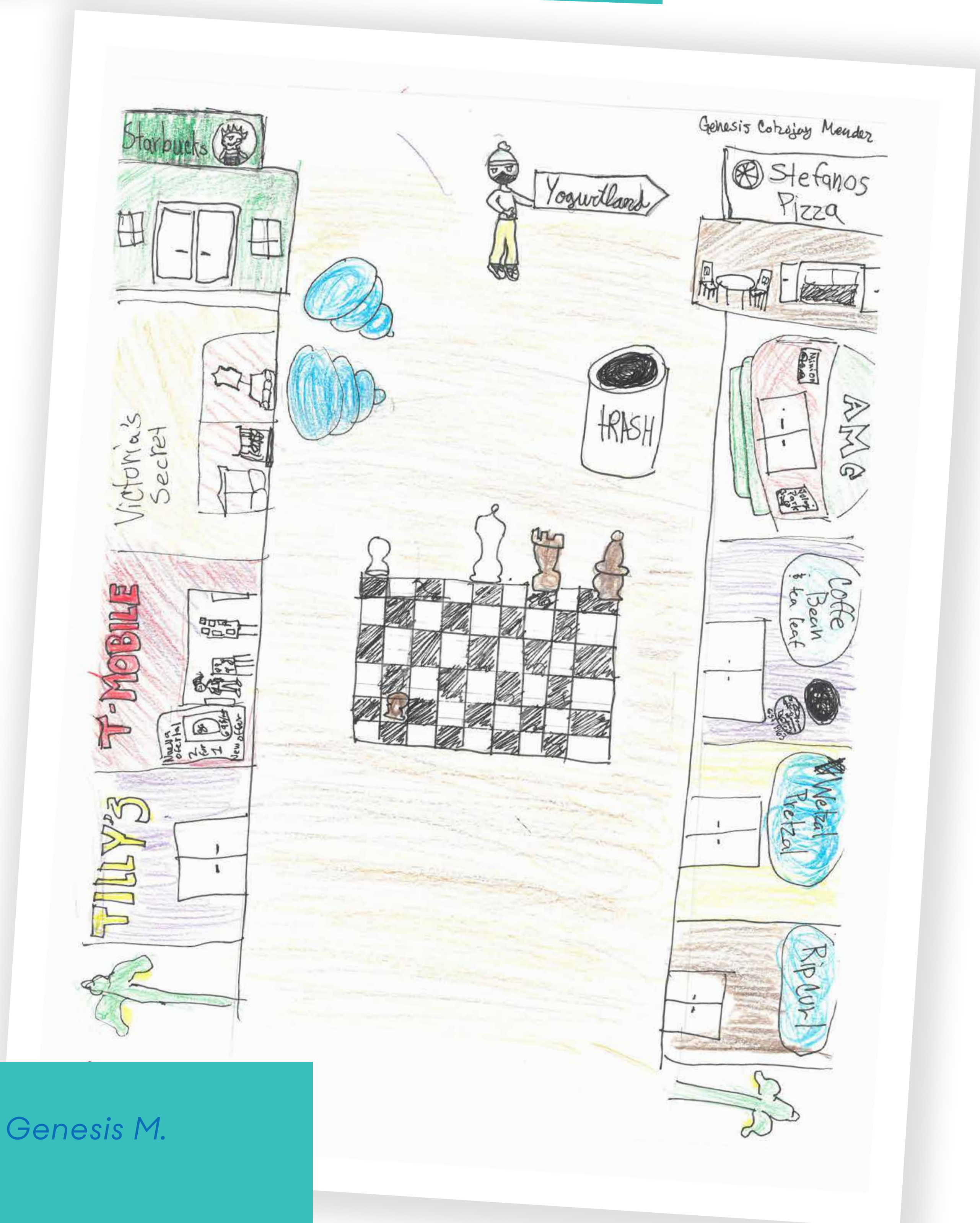
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Justin's Santa Monica Beach teems with fish, rocks, surfers, volleyball players, an ice cream vendor, bikes on the bike path, the beach houses – and the artist points out it's not to scale! A detailed look at a well-known symbol of Santa Monica.

Genesis drew an aerial view of the Third Street Promenade as an important part of her city.



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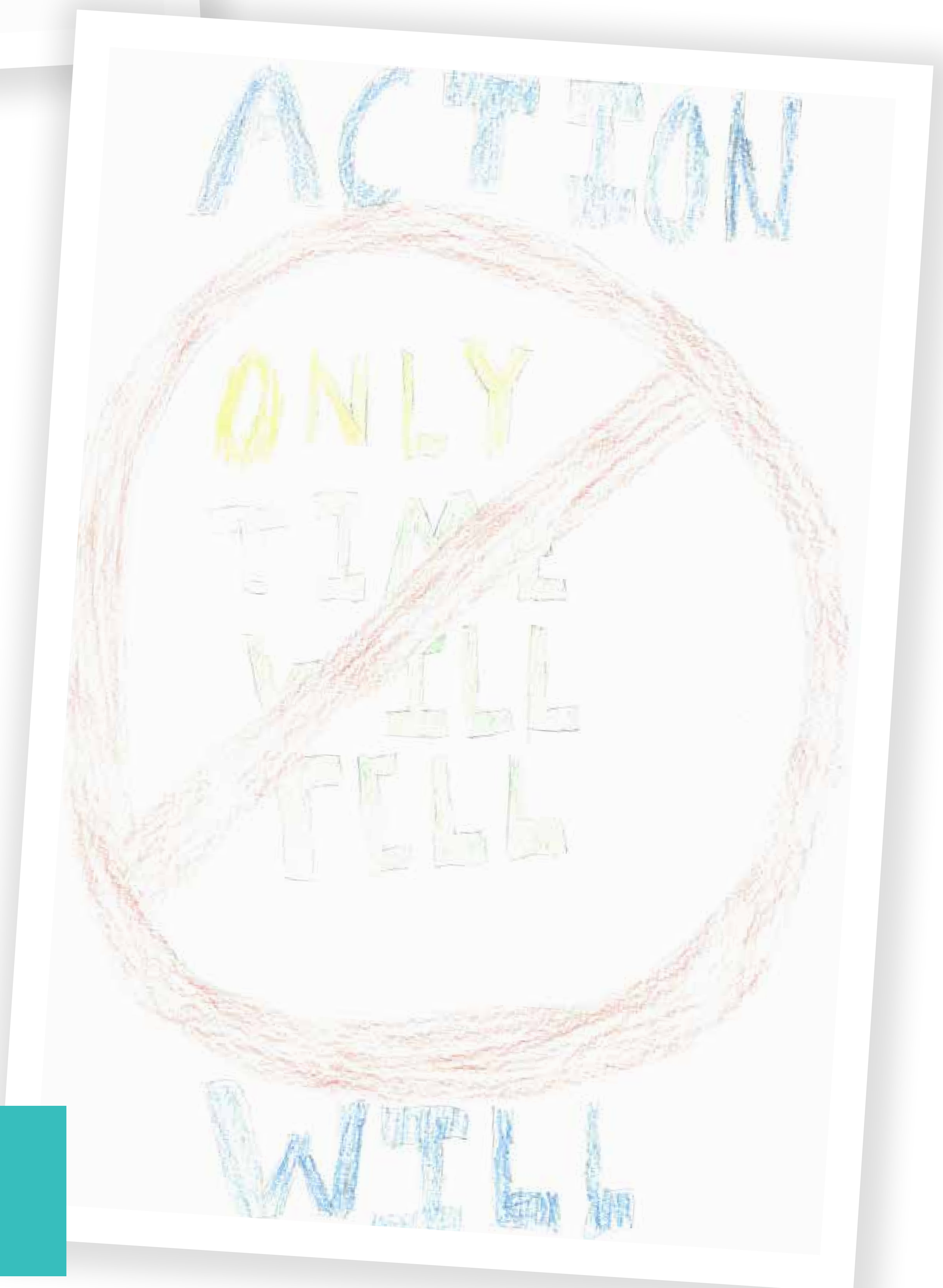
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Annia has depicted someone who is singing or speaking on the beach, perhaps at a wedding, with a large audience including a shark!

ARTIST: Annia  
AGE: 6

Asher drew a sign urging action over waiting, an important message to our politicians and leaders.



ARTIST: Asher V.  
AGE: 13



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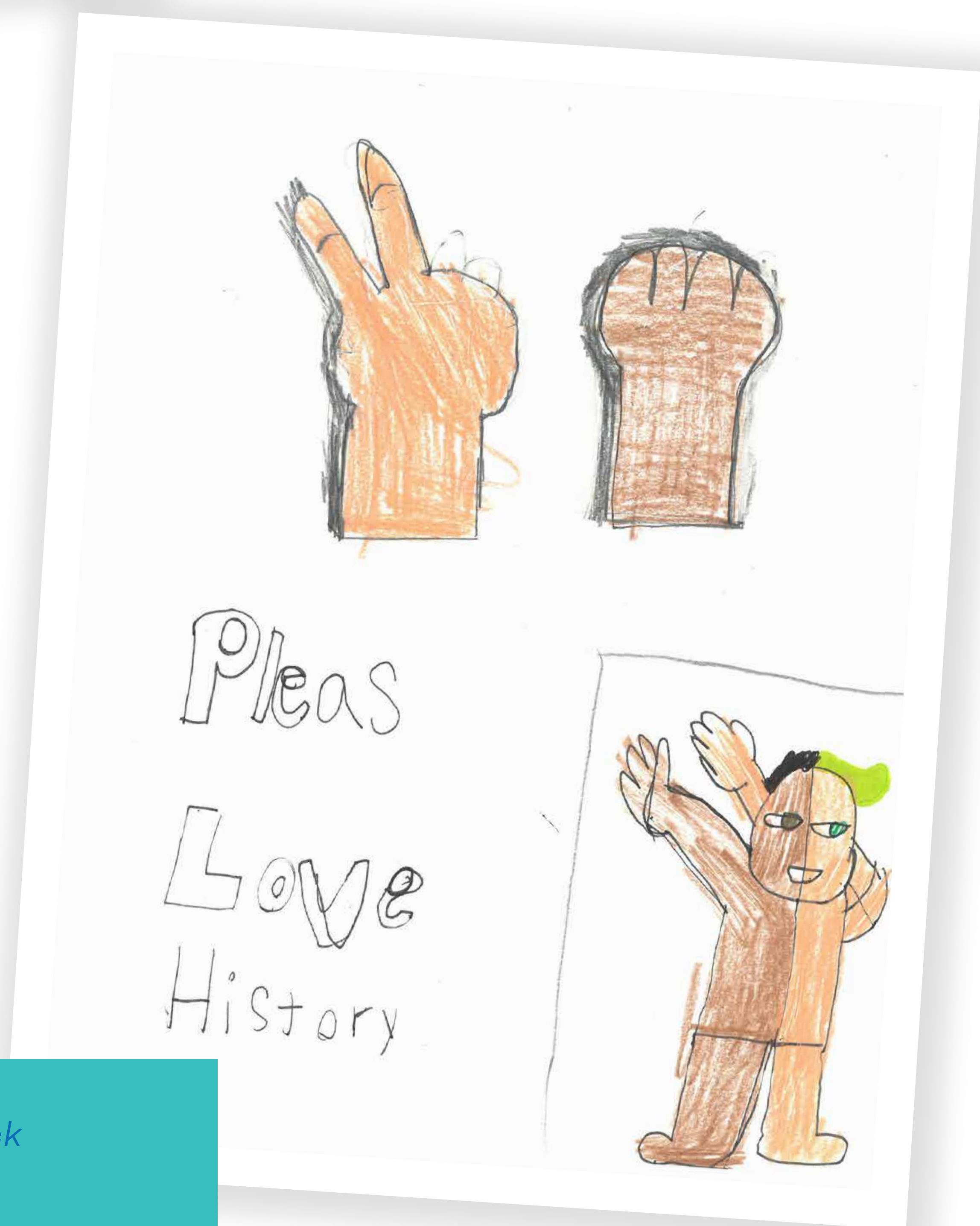
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Sabrina has drawn two women of color holding signs that say, "Equal rights for women and everyone" and "Rights for Women," recognizing the need to keep women's issues represented.

Deverick has drawn a picture of someone who is two skin tones. The hands show a peace sign and the Black power fist. This artist makes a statement about the need to learn from history in the fight against racism.

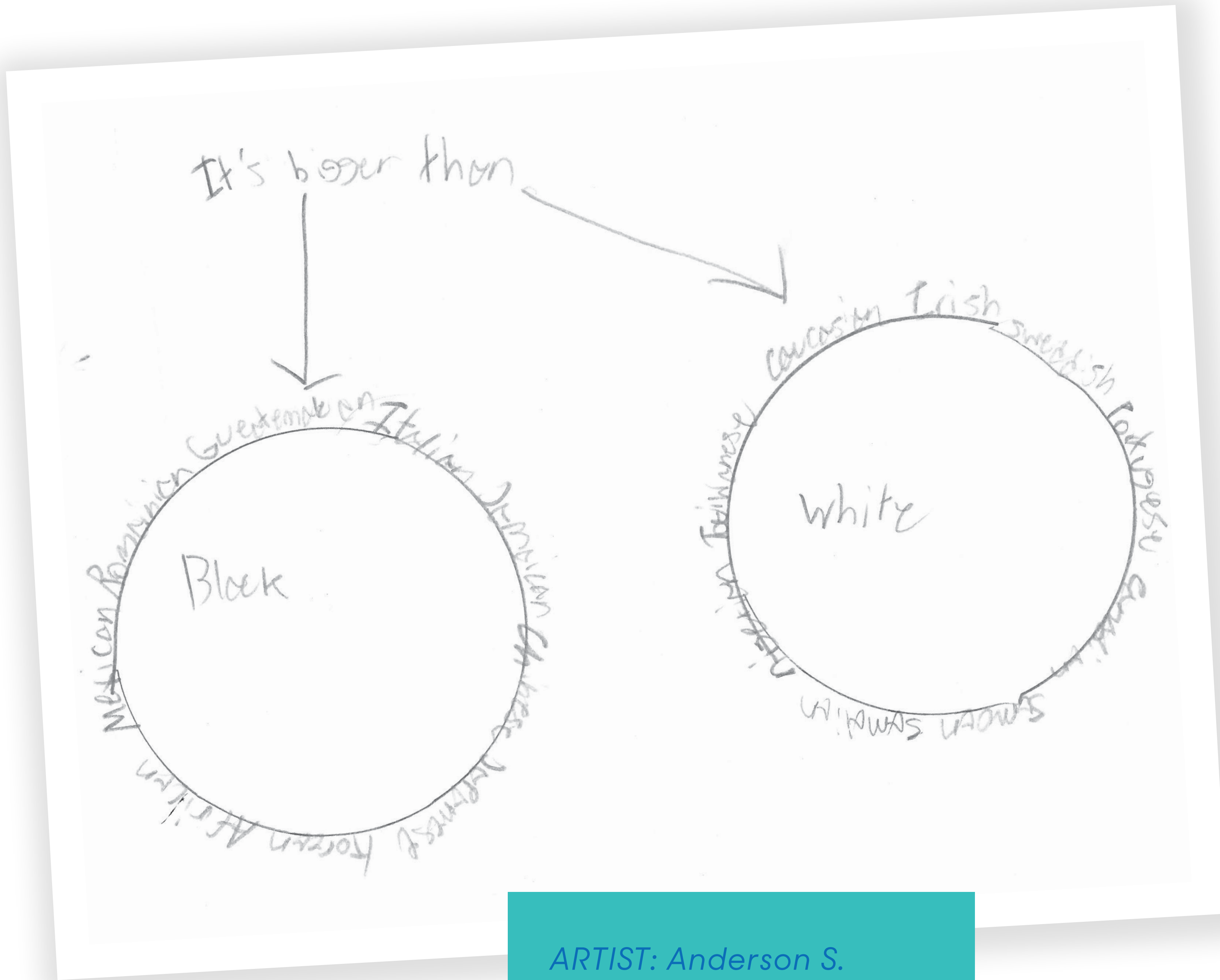


ARTIST: Deverick  
AGE: 9

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ARTIST: Anderson S.  
AGE: 13

Anderson suggests the conversation is more nuanced than black and white.

Sarah drew a timeline of the pandemic including racial reckonings, fires, ocean pollution, mobility and plenty of snacks.



ARTIST: Sarah  
AGE: 11

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A student suggests  
livening up the front of  
City Hall with a pool!

Another envisions  
City Hall with music  
(and a rocket ship?)

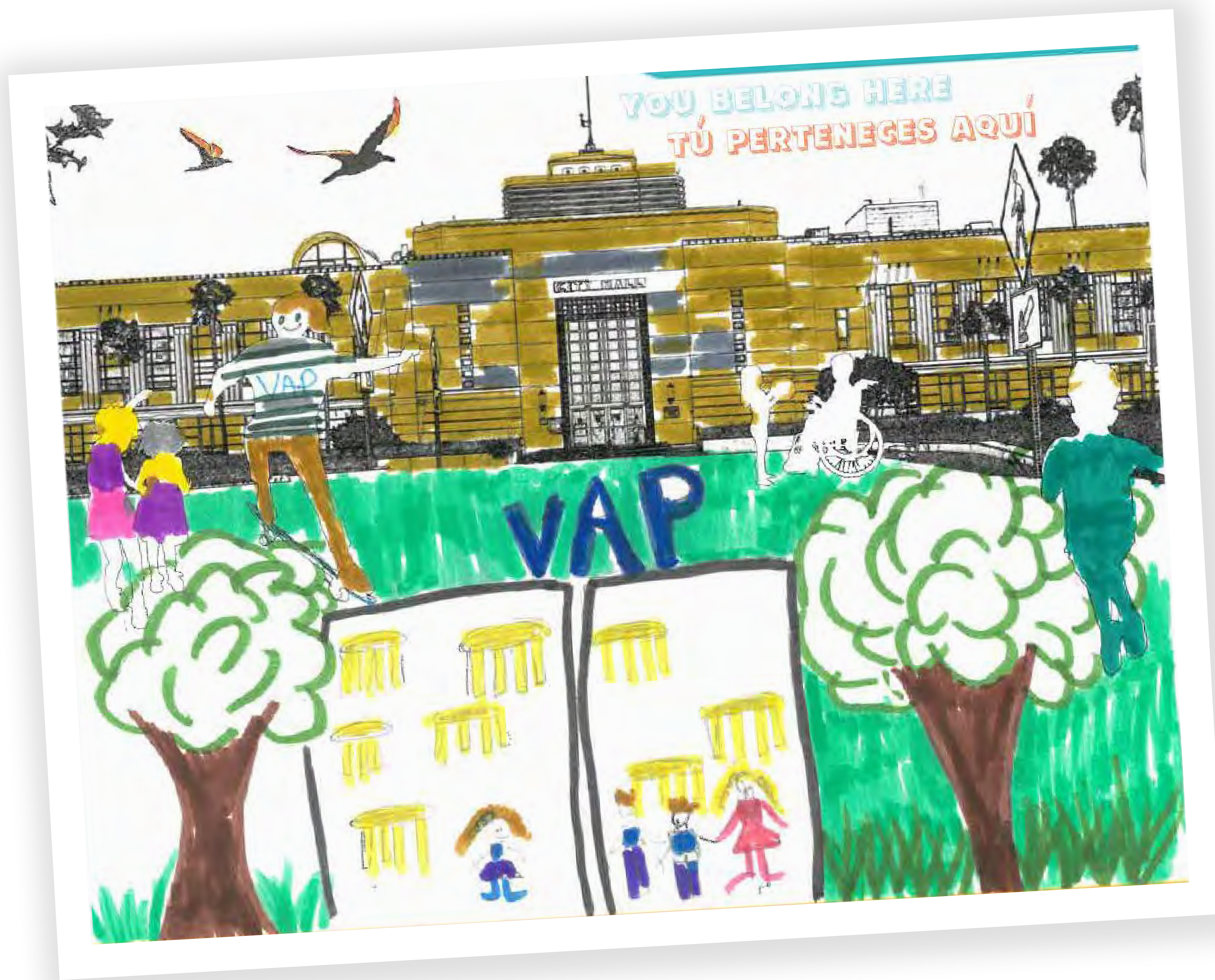


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A student suggests holding their classes and camps at City Hall.

Another envisions City Hall with a skate ramp in front-

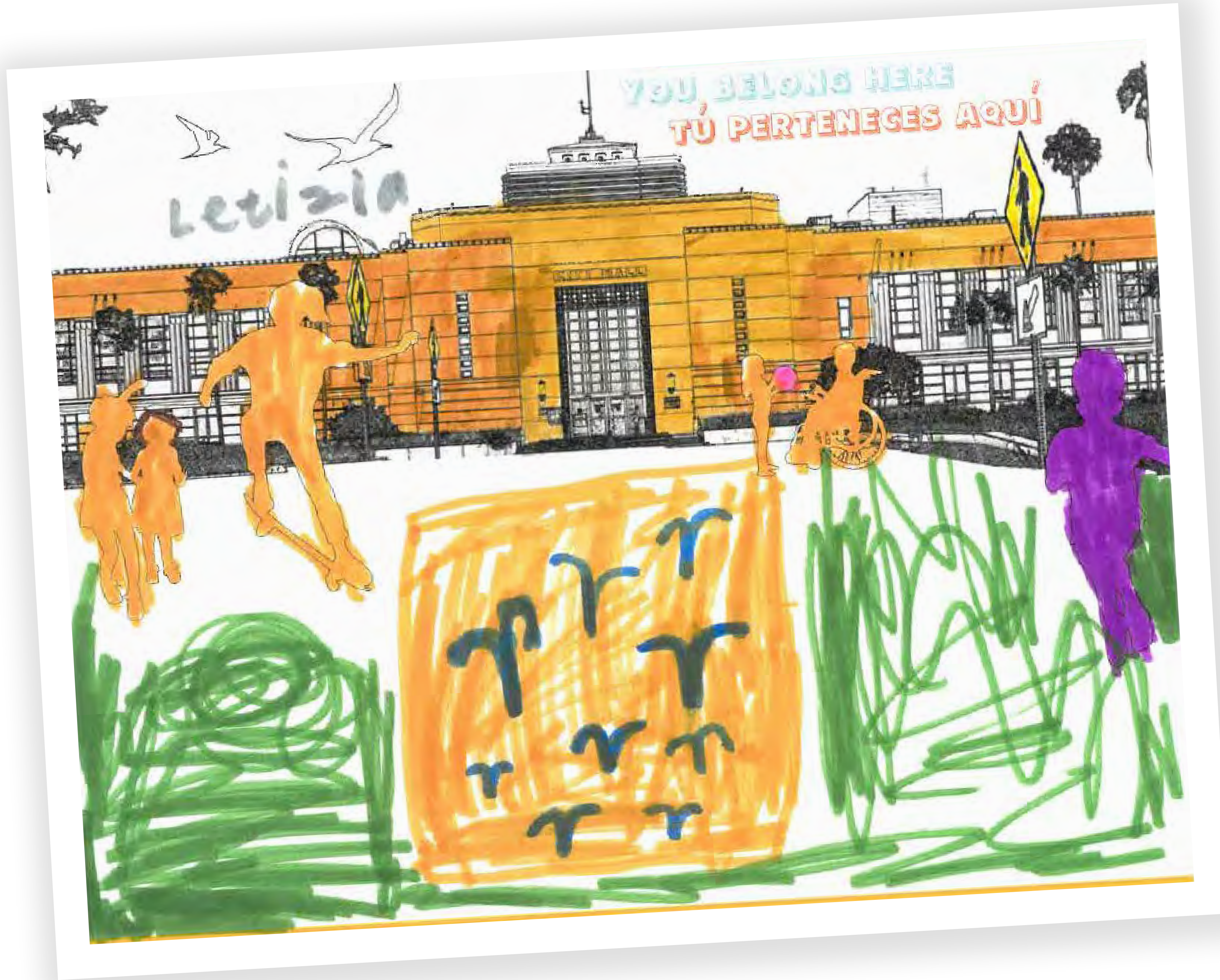


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A student suggests growing corn at City Hall.



Another envisions housing here.