

2025

**STEP UP !
Frederick Student
Songwriting Contest**

There are so many people in our country who have performed incredible acts of courage and kindness through tragedy. You are welcome and encouraged to submit your own courageous song subjects for approval under [STEP 1 – APPLICATION](#) on this website. Below, we have provided a few examples of those who meet the 2025 Song Subject Criteria.

THIS YEAR’S SONG SUBJECT CRITERIA:

A COURAGEOUS PERSON OR GROUP WHO, THROUGH GREAT SUFFERING, TRAGEDY OR PERSONAL RISK, PERFORMED ACTIONS RESULTING IN SIGNIFICANT POSITIVE CHANGE IN OUR COUNTRY AT ANY TIME.

**Once you find someone who inspires you,
learn about and honor them by writing a powerful song!**

And we can help. Please attend as many free songwriting workshops as you can Saturday mornings January: 4, 11, 18 and 25 at Y Arts, 10:00 AM-1:00 PM, lunch included. For more info and to RSVP: Songwriting@ChordsofCourage.org

**HERE ARE A FEW ALREADY APPROVED SONG SUBJECTS
FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION:**

Jane Addams and Hull-House

While much of her childhood was happy, it was marred by memories of the Civil War, a preoccupation with the injustices of the world, and the death of her older sister, Martha, from typhoid. In addition, she suffered from the effects of spinal tuberculosis. In 1889, Jane rented a run-down mansion on a derelict strip of Halsted Street in Chicago’s 19th Ward. The neighborhood was home to thousands of recently arrived immigrants—Italians, Greeks, Russian Jews, Bohemians, and Irish. Her plan was to use the mansion to improve the lives of the urban poor. Named Hull-House after its original owner, Charles Hull, it would become known as America’s first settlement house. At its peak, Hull-House served 10,000 people per week!

Frederick Douglass

Famed abolitionist Frederick Douglass was driven by a deep sense of mission. After escaping from slavery in 1838, he used his experience in bondage to become a leader in the antislavery movement and a champion of black freedom. His dazzling oratory and powerful writing impressed many people and helped to show the intellectual capacities of those held in slavery.

Cesar Chavez

Hardened by his early experience as a migrant worker, Chavez founded the National Farm Workers Association in 1962. His union joined with the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee in its first strike against grape growers in California, and the two organizations later merged to become the United Farm Workers. For 30 years, stressing nonviolent methods, Chavez tenaciously devoted himself to the problems of some of the poorest workers in America. The movement he inspired succeeded in raising salaries and improving working conditions for farm workers in California, Texas, Arizona, and Florida.

Mary Edwards Walker

American feminist, prohibitionist, alleged spy, prisoner of war, surgeon and the only woman ever to receive the Medal of Honor!

She volunteered with the Union Army at the outbreak of the American Civil War and served as a surgeon at a temporary hospital in Washington, DC, even though at the time women and sectarian physicians were considered unfit for the Union Army Examining Board. She was captured by Confederate forces after crossing enemy lines to treat wounded civilians and arrested as a spy. She was sent as a prisoner of war to Richmond, Virginia until released in a prisoner exchange. After the war, she was approved for the highest United States Armed Forces decoration for bravery, the Medal of Honor, for her efforts during the Civil War. She is the only woman to receive the medal and one of only eight civilians to receive it. Her name was deleted from the Army Medal of Honor Roll in 1917; however, it was restored in 1977.

Claudette Colvin

On March 2, 1955, a full nine months before Rosa Parks' famous arrest, Claudette Colvin was dragged from a Montgomery bus by two police officers, arrested and taken to an adult jail to be booked. She was only 15 years old and was the first person to be arrested for defying bus segregation in Montgomery.

Her arrest and story has long since been forgotten, but it provided the spark for the Black community in Montgomery that ultimately led to Parks' actions, the bus boycott, and the Supreme Court ruling to end segregation on buses.

John Scopes

In 1925, high school teacher John Scopes risked his career and reputation when he taught the theory of evolution in his classroom, an illegal act in Tennessee. His trial, famously portrayed in "Inherit the Wind," challenged prevailing creationist beliefs. Convicted, his case sparked important discussions about the separation of church and state and what is taught in American classrooms. Scopes faced the outcome of imprisonment to bring a major discovery of science to the world.

John Lewis

While participating in civil rights demonstrations, including the historic Selma to Montgomery march in 1965, Congressman John Lewis experienced numerous physical assaults and arrests. His bravery and advocacy for racial equality helped shape the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which had a profound impact on dismantling racial segregation and discrimination. Throughout his life, he remained dedicated to fighting for justice and equality, inspiring future generations to follow his path of peaceful resistance and activism.

Marsha P. Johnson

She played a pivotal role in the early LGBTQ+ rights movement. As a Black transgender woman, she was a prominent figure at the historic Stonewall Inn riots in 1969, a catalyst for the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement. Johnson faced stigma, homelessness, and personal danger while demanding the right to live authentically for herself and her peers. She co-founded the Gay Liberation Front and the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), organizations dedicated to supporting marginalized transgender and LGBTQ+ individuals. Her unwavering activism and visibility challenged societal norms and stereotypes about gender and sexual orientation.

Alan Turing

Turing faced the possibility of severe legal consequences and imprisonment as a brilliant mathematician and computer scientist who played a pivotal role in breaking the Enigma code during World War II. In isolating conditions, his unorthodox work with early computers and code-breaking was highly risky and secretive. But when the code was cracked, it contributed to ending the war. In his personal life, he faced discrimination and persecution including “chemical castration” due to his homosexuality. Pardoned after his tragic death, the “Alan Turing law” protected future men from enduring the same criminalization.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Ruth Bader Ginsburg’s courageous journey was marked by her tireless advocacy for gender equality and women’s rights, facing enormous resistance and discrimination. At times, the only woman serving as a Supreme Court Justice, she played a pivotal role in shaping legal precedents that advanced equality, demonstrating a steadfast commitment to justice until the last days of her life at age 87.

Ruby Bridges and Mrs. Barbara Henry

Ruby Bridges, at age six, was one of the first African-American students to attend an all-white school in the racially segregated South during the 1960s. She faced daily threats, harassment, and discrimination from angry segregationists, yet she continued to walk through the doors of William Frantz Elementary School with unwavering determination. Only one teacher was willing to instruct her. Mrs. Barbara Henry experienced immense hostility and threats from segregationists. Despite the dangers and societal backlash, she remained committed to her principles and believed every child deserved an equal education. Mrs. Henry not only helped Ruby integrate William Frantz Elementary School but also played a pivotal role in the larger civil rights movement, demonstrating exceptional bravery and unwavering dedication to equality and justice. Ruby said of her teacher, “I had never seen a white teacher before, but Mrs. Henry was the nicest teacher I ever had. She tried very hard to keep my mind off what was going on outside.”

Rachel Carson

An environmental crusader in the early 1960s, marine biologist and author, Rachel Carson was working to overcome immense personal and professional challenges. On top of writing what would ultimately become *Silent Spring*, her watershed book exposing the dangers of synthetic pesticides and their impact on the environment, Carson was fighting a battle on a whole other front: cancer.

Despite being plagued by a series of health complications that took great physical and emotional tolls, Carson remained staunchly committed to her mission, “to bring the wonders of the natural world to the public and to spotlight the responsibility we each have to protect the earth that sustains all life.”

Susette La Flesche Tibbles

The daughter of Omaha chief Joseph La Flesche wanted to be a teacher. She studied in New Jersey and was published in the *New York Tribune* before coming home in 1875 to apply to teach on the Omaha reservation in Nebraska. The local Indian agent refused her application because she was not white. Thus began La Flesche’s long career of advocacy. She secured the teacher job and, a few years later, the *Omaha World-Herald* hired La Flesche to translate Ponca accounts of their violent, forced deportation. Working closely with journalist Thomas Tibbles—whom she would later marry—La Flesche advocated on behalf of Ponca chief Standing Bear in his legal battle for the right to return home to bury his son. Her translation of his moving courtroom speeches led to the landmark 1879 U.S. Supreme Court case *Standing Bear v. Crook*, which established Native Americans’ right to recognition as persons under the law. “I am the only Indian speaking to the public through the press for the Indians,” she wrote from Pine Ridge as she covered the immediate aftermath of the 1890 Wounded Knee massacre.

Judy and Dennis Shepard

On October 6, 1998, Judy and Dennis’ son, Matthew, a 21 year-old student at the University of Wyoming, was beaten and murdered near Laramie, Wyoming by two men because he was gay. Matthew Shepard’s murder became a catalyst for a national effort to pass federal hate crime legislation and led Judy and Dennis to dedicate their lives to preventing another parent from experiencing what they had. In 2009, after a decade of work, Judy and Dennis watched as President Obama signed into law the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Federal Hate Crimes Prevention Act.

Wei Chen

Wei was one of dozens of Asian students who were attacked during a day-long series of assaults by fellow students at South Philadelphia High School in 2010. Using civil disobedience and coalition building, Wei changed the climate of fear and violence at South Philly and forced the school system and the city to examine the way it looked at Asian immigrants.

