



VOICES

The Newsletter of the Touchstones® Discussion Project



CELEBRATE 250 YEARS OF AMERICAN IDEALS AND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP BY SECURING YOUR TICKETS TODAY FOR AN EXCLUSIVE EVENING WITH THE TOUCHSTONES® DISCUSSION PROJECT.

As the United States marks its semi-quincentennial, this special event honors the democratic practices, vision, and principles that shape our nation and are hallmarks of all Touchstones discussion programs. Join us for an inspiring evening featuring remarkable guest speakers, including Elisabeth Long, the Sheridan Dean of University Libraries, Archives, and Museums at Johns Hopkins University; Ambassador Lucy Tamlyn, who retired in 2024 from a decades-long career in foreign service; and our event host, Capt. George Dolan, USN (Ret.). Our honored speakers will share insights about American democracy and the unique role and opportunities they see for America on the global stage at 250 years plus.

The event spotlight also shines on the 2026 Geoffrey J. Comber Teacher of the Year, Dr. Gregory Hodges, for his remarkable work in advancing Touchstones in Canada and across the world with his in-person and online teaching and volunteering.

Highlighting the transformational power of inclusive dialogue, we also proudly honor the dedicated volunteer corps that facilitates the weekly Touchstones discussion program at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women (MCI-W) as our Volunteers of the Year.

Event Schedule

3:00 PM – 4:30 PM | Touchstones Discussions: Engage in a close-knit exploration of American ideals. This session is strictly limited to 45 attendees (up to 3 groups of 15) and features collaborative conversation followed by a short reception, snacks, and beverages.

5:00 PM – 8:00 PM | Fundraising Dinner: Enjoy an elegant dinner, be inspired by our distinguished guest speakers, and participate in an exciting art raffle!

(Ticketing info on page 2)

Through inclusive discussion-based programming, Touchstones develops highly effective speakers, listeners, critical thinkers, and collaborative leaders.



TICKETING INFO

(Continued from page 1)

Ticket & Registration Information

Your attendance directly supports the Touchstones mission to bring critical thinking and community discussion programs to diverse and under-served populations.

Individual Tickets: \$150 per person (\$75 is tax-deductible)

Table for Eight: \$1,000 (\$400 is tax-deductible)

Spaces for the discussion session are highly limited, so early registration is strongly recommended

To reserve your seat, visit www.touchstones.org/event, email Jenny Walton at jenny@touchstones.org, or call Touchstones directly at (410) 604-3309.

Join us and be part of a legacy that strengthens community with democratic engagement!



Guests are invited to engage in Touchstones discussions on ideals and principles of American democratic practice with a vision toward the future. This pre-dinner activity is optional.

DEFINITELY NOT BUSINESS AS USUAL

Updates From the Field

Each fall, we bring you news about what is happening in K-12 classrooms—how Touchpebbles and Touchstones are helping students learn vital interpersonal skills and fostering their development as future leaders who explain reasoned judgments, ideas, and opinions. While this essential growth is once again in full swing this year, there are some new programs that are definitely not business as usual.

After learning about Touchstones programs at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), educators at Ball State University in Indiana launched two new Touchstones programs to further support new students this fall. Stephanie Harshman, the Director of Student Success in the College of Fine Arts, is running two sections of the school's signature first-year experience seminar in which Touchstones is a core component. In their first few weeks at the university, students are already considering what it

means to engage in balanced discussions where no individual or group dominates classroom dialogue. As they investigate questions of power and voice, they are considering what each person must do to ensure every member of class is recognized, respected, and heard.

At the same time, Garrett Turr's team of graduate students and 20 peer mentors are focused on student success in the Living-Learning Community Programs. These programs recognize the significant growth and development that occurs *outside* formal classroom settings. Their initiatives ensure student experiences in class and out are integrated and constructively reinforcing. Through Touchstones, the peer mentor cohort is learning first-hand what it means to practice being a more skilled member of a discussion. As they become more intentional in their discussions, this group of graduate students and peer mentors is digging into specific behaviors, habits,

attitudes, and interactions that contribute to student success. Turr has invited Harshman to bring her own evolving Touchstones discussion leadership experience from her College of Fine Arts seminars to the Learning Community program pilot. This exciting partnership is highly collaborative by design.

Realizing a similar opportunity to further strengthen their own Touchstones programming, the College of Education at UNLV has also trained their peer mentors in Touchstones this fall. The mentors, who are embedded in Touchstones courses, will use their extra training to foster greater connection among students during and after class.

We can't wait to bring more news from the field—and hopefully from instructors and students themselves—as the academic year progresses!



FROM PART TO WHOLE

Touchstones Roving Reporter

Since 2019, Touchstones has had the pleasure—and responsibility—of sharing works from a collection of 180+ paintings left to the organization by painter, poet, musician, and teacher Dr. Elliott Zuckerman. Elliott chose Touchstones to receive his paintings because the organization's mission—to teach all people, regardless of circumstance or background, how to engage in inclusive and collaborative discussions—deeply appealed to him. He wanted his paintings to help Touchstones thrive.

The funds from each sale support Touchstones' community programs, allowing us to offer those programs completely free of charge to hundreds of educators and participants every single year, including:

- Incarcerated individuals finding hope and connection through volunteer-led programs.
- Neighbors coming together to break down barriers and build stronger, safer communities.
- Global participants uniting around the world during Touchstones Week to practice dialogue and collaboration.
- Seekers connecting every other Saturday through our Online Community Discussion Program.

This means that every painting sold from the collection has the power to directly transform lives.

This year our special exhibition—the fifth major show highlighting the collection—was the largest yet. With 46 vibrant and exploratory portraits, landscapes, and still lifes, it delves deeply into Elliott's work with color and form. When curating the show, Susan Mayberry of Maypop Studios (www.maypopstudios.com) wrote,

"Each piece selected for this show has a balance of color and rhythm while looking toward abstraction. I see doorways, windows, and column structures. And there is a similar liveliness and musical component to works by Paul Klee, with Elliott's paintings capturing his own sense of light and color. In this self-portrait, an otherwise floating subject is anchored by color bands and blocks, with facial shading of bright pink and orange echoing in a window-like shape in the background."

One can't help but be curious about the relationships between these parts and the whole.

To kick-off the show, a group of 14 participated in a discussion on two works in the show: "New Series #1" (our fall raffle item—tickets are available on the Touchstones website) and "Self-portrait #13." The group considered what it means to "read" a painting and how exploring abstract art in a group helps one see and understand the work in new ways.

Here's what a few guests shared during their exhibition experience:

"It's surprising how realistic Elliott's works are, even though they are abstract. A fundamental sense of humanity emanates from each one, and I love the sense of humor that comes through in so many of these portraits."

"When I look at Elliott's paintings, I see such complexity—different phases of who he was and what he was up to with his viewers."

"New Series #1 reminds me of Santorini!"

To bring the show to audiences wherever they are, "From Part to Whole" is now available on the Touchstones website: <https://touchstones.org/art/>. Scroll down to the exhibits section.

If you're interested in learning how to acquire one of Elliott's works, please email our executive director, Stefanie Takacs, at st@touchstones.org. Each work sold comes with its very own Touchstones lesson plan to help you build connection and collaboration with others through art and discussion!



Susan Mayberry hangs self-portraits by Elliott Zuckerman in preparation for the show on Sept. 24.



23 self-portraits by Elliott Zuckerman.
Icon to Othello #1 (shown middle row, far right)

ADVANCING THE COMMON GOOD

By: Jenny Walton

Every meaningful discussion begins with someone who cares enough to make it possible. At Touchstones, we know that thoughtful discourse can change individuals, strengthen communities, and help us better understand one another. Your support for Touchstones can take many forms—all of which helps in different ways to ensure our vital work serves more and more people every year.

Making an annual donation or a monthly gift provides essential and on-going funding for Touchstones teacher trainings and programs that engage thousands of new students. Every gift—regardless of size—makes a difference. Monthly gifts ensure steady funding throughout the year, while annual or biannual gifts make it possible for us to plan for longer-term goals.

You can also ensure future support for Touchstones with a planned gift. Our planned giving program makes it easy to include Touchstones in your estate plans and leave a legacy. Your generosity today when thinking about tomorrow can inspire others and help sustain Touchstones for generations to come. Visit <https://touchstones.org/about/for-funders/> to learn more.

Another deeply meaningful way to engage with Touchstones is through volunteer work or joining one of our committees. Share your time and talents by supporting programs, outreach, or events and communications. Touchstones volunteers help with mailings, lead online community discussions every other Saturday, and facilitate weekly discussions at a women's prison. They also help with events, future planning, and outreach. We can help you to organize and host a gathering, lead a discussion, or start a Touchstones group in your area. Invite family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues to experience the power of building community through discussion to advance the common good!

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For a copy of our financial statements, contact us at 143 Log Canoe Circle, Stevensville, MD 21666.
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