Civil Rights Movement Inspires Award-winning Middle School Artist
By Mimi McMann, Associate Director of Communications

A middle school artist at Graland Country Day School has won a top honor in the 2018 National Scholastic Art Competition.

Eighth-grader Naomi Wellso’s sculpture, titled “Why the Caged Bird Sings,” was inspired by a class trip to the Deep South where she visited historic sites, museums and memorials that brought issues of the Civil Rights movement into sharp focus. On returning to Denver, she and her classmates were encouraged to create art pieces depicting an aspect of the movement that was especially meaningful to them.

“I kept thinking about the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing,” she said, referring to the heinous event in 1963 that killed four young girls and maimed another. Her sculpture includes five birdcages and shards of “glass” to represent the victims and the explosion. She carefully selected colors, like white to represent innocence, bringing added meaning to her art.

“This project is important to me because I want to make sure we don’t forget these little girls and the other events of the Civil Rights movement,” she said. She was moved to acknowledge that there are still racial issues in our country today and to empower people to action in creating a better society.

Her art teacher, Cathy Naughton added, “It is a huge honor to win a national medal in the Scholastic Art program and this recognition reflects Naomi’s thoughtful interpretation of her experiences in the South.”

In winning the Silver Medal, Naomi was judged against middle school and high school entries, and she was one of only four middle schoolers from Colorado to earn a medal. To qualify, she first won a Gold Key in the Colorado Scholastic Art Awards. Gold Key winners in the program are advanced to the national competition and judged against other top art from across the country.