

# ODYSSEY ORACLE

## INTRODUCING THE CLASS OF 2016



*"Education is power"*  
~Jayvonna Flemming

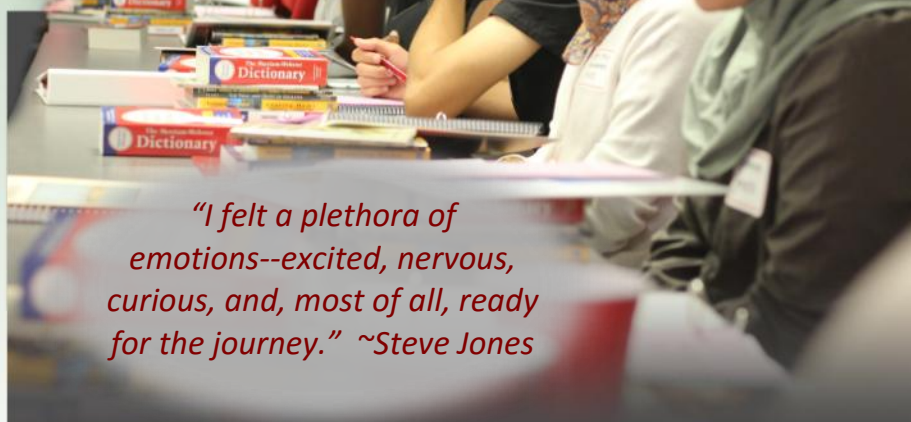
*"I was overcome  
with joy and fear  
at the same time."*  
~Jelissa Williams

*"I had somehow stepped  
into a new world of hope."*  
~Karina Herrejon

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*Photography by Dick Baker,  
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*"I felt a plethora of  
emotions--excited, nervous,  
curious, and, most of all, ready  
for the journey."* ~Steve Jones

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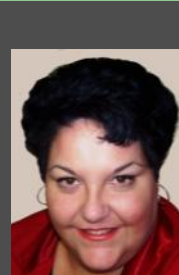
Nicki Cooper



Kelly Dixon



Bettye  
Emmanuel



Raven Fabal



Jayvonna  
Flemming



Jalisa Galvin



Karina Gómez



Brandice Hatcher



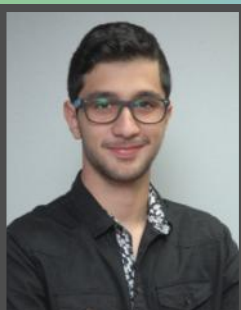
Karina Herrejon



Steve Jones



Tory Latham



Mustafa  
Mohammed Saed



Umaima  
Mohammed Saed



Lisa Partee



Carnell Perkins



Shayba Pierce



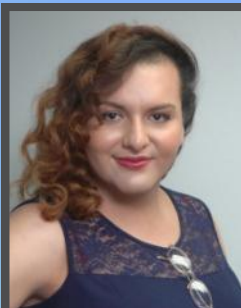
Rosalyn  
Richmond



Katia Robinson



Arkeshia Sallay



Luna Santos



Kala Taylor



Marisela  
Tellez-Giron



Mai Neng Thao



Tasha Thompson



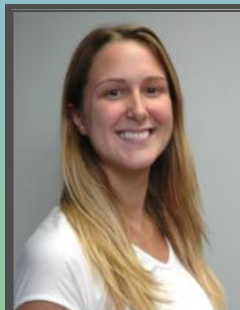
Tamara  
Thompson-Moore



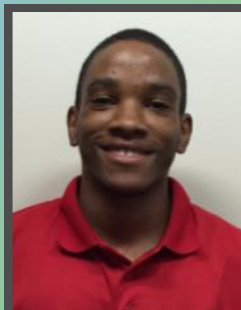
Guadalupe  
Tinajero



Jelissa Williams



Ashley Wills



Joe Young



# FEELINGS ON JOINING ODYSSEY

I was so excited. I felt that this was exactly the start that I needed. I know the only way to go is up. Education is power. (**Jayvonna Flemming**)

I felt a plethora of emotions—excited, nervous, curious, and, most of all, ready for the journey. (**Steven Jones**)

I really did not know how to feel. All I could do was smile. I usually smile, but this was a smile, I'm sure, that showed all my teeth. As night came, I lay on my stomach with my head hanging, and I gazed on my carpeted floor. I realized I had made it to UW-Madison somehow. I had somehow stepped into a new world of hope. (**Karina Herrejon**)

I was very happy. When I found out I was accepted in the class, I shared it with my sister. I knew she would be very happy for me. (**Jalisa Galvin**)

Excited, relieved (**Tory Latham**)

In the beginning I was afraid and anxious because I was concerned that I wasn't going to be accepted. I began to keep faith. And when I found out I was accepted, I was excited. Excited is not the word—I was blessed, and just kept continuing to say, "Thank you!" (**Tasha Thompson**)

I was in shock. I could not feel anything at first, like it was a shot that numbed me for a few seconds. Then I felt it . . . Hope. (**Luna Santos**)



When I learned that I had been accepted into the Odyssey Project, I immediately felt a sense of validation. I had been concerned that I didn't portray my eagerness during the application and interview process, and I had such a lack of confidence that I had effectively communicated my thirst for opportunity and education. (**Tamara Thompson-Moore**)

Excited, thankful, and renewed (**Brandice Hatcher**)

I was very happy and excited. (**Shaimaa Ahmed**)

I didn't realize it yet, but in the weeks prior to my being accepted, I had stopped breathing. After hearing the news, it seemed as though the vice that was clamped around my throat loosened—just a teeny bit, but just enough for me to feel its cool sweetness. (**Lisa Partee**)

Elated, I wanted it for so long. (**Ashley Wills**)

I felt lucky and happy. (**Mustafa Mohammed Saed**)



I felt lucky and happy and excited.  
(**Umaima Mohammed Saed**)

It was the most wonderful news I've gotten all summer. I was at Walgreen's with my sister around 8:30 PM on a Thursday night, and I just wanted to celebrate down the aisles. I was stoked. (**Mai Neng Thao**)

I was very surprised and happy. I was waiting and waiting for a call or email and it seemed to take forever but it wasn't. I was just impatient. I want to show myself I can do this, and this program and classes are a big challenge to me. I don't want to feel like I don't belong to a place. I want to feel capable of learning and understanding English books. (**Karina Gómez**)

When I first got a call I was nervous but excited. I felt it was a new beginning and my chance to just start over. (**Katia Robinson**)

I was surprised. This seemed like a passed opportunity for me. Overall I'm happy that I get to be a part of this project. I'm feeling a bit more happiness when it comes to my future. (**Kala Taylor**)

I felt extremely honored and even more motivated. (**Marisela Tellez-Giron**)

Then and still, very excited. I have been like a kid in new shoes, smiling and eager to get started. (**Rosalyn Richmond**)

I cried (tears of joy). A lot of effort that I have been doing daily to change my negative situation to positive had been going nowhere, until now. (**Kelly Dixon**)

I was overcome with joy and fear at the same time. Joy because I knew there were many applicants and to be the one chosen made me see all the opportunities and possibilities life has to offer. Fear because I didn't know what to expect. I'm doing everything in my power to ensure that nothing interferes with my attendance. (**Jelissa Williams**)

When I learned that I'd been accepted into this class, I felt so happy. I started to believe that everything is possible and that if I work hard I can accomplish all my goals. (**Guadalupe Tinajero**)

I was ecstatic. I love learning new things, feeding my mind, and challenging myself. Also it gives me a sense of heightened self-worth. (**Arkeshia Sallay**)

I was scared, honored, and nervous. (**Betty Emmanuel**)

I was very happy and anxious. I have been trying to take this class for a while. (**Carnell Perkins**)

Noticed and accepted, I felt like I was finally about to enter a unique educational situation that may fit my unique learning style. (**Nickitia Cooper**)

I was excited that I could begin my education again and not worry about the cost. (**Joe Young**)

# ARE YOU A WRITER?



I don't feel like a writer. I was always intimidated by big words, and if I see one I can't pronounce I go the other way or turn the page. I'm more of a venting type of person. I love to just write and not have to think about grammar or errors.

**(Jayvonna Flemming)**



Writing has been my release of emotion and thoughts about everything that has happened in my life. Expressing these emotions and thoughts through music has been the best treatment I've had to make myself feel better about my life and the choices I've made. **(Joseph Young)**



I like to believe that I'm a good writer. At least I once was. When I write, I tend to express deeply and may go off on a tangent, but most of the time I am proud of my pieces. **(Mai Neng Thao)**



I am not a strong writer. I confuse letters and write them backwards often because I'm thinking faster than I can write. I have bad handwriting, and I'm not consistent. I have bad grammar, spelling, and punctuation. I try hard, and while I think it sounds good in the moment, I later re-read it and it sounds childish. I have an awful imagination and that hinders my writing. When I was in second grade we had "Hooked on Phonics," and it was at the time my parents were getting divorced. I remember vividly

that my behavior was out of control and my teacher had no patience with me. Needless to say, I fell behind the rest of the class and reading was hard for me. My teacher would call on me to read in front of the class, and I was slow and couldn't pronounce the words. The class would snicker at me, and it made me feel very self-conscious. Since then, I've HATED reading, writing, spelling, and all of it. I have never picked up a book willingly and read it front to back. I can't remember what I'm reading and it's challenging. I wish I loved reading and writing like my mother, but I just don't. **(Ashley Wills)**



I like writing, but I am not very good at it because English is my second language. My problem is with grammar. I am sure that I will be a very good writer once I study hard in the Odyssey program. Thanks for your support. **(Umaima Mohammed Saed)**



I remember being very emotionless, speechless and shy when I was in high school, and I still am shy with people, mostly with men. Well, in 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade, I liked this guy who was in my choir class, musical rehearsals, and drama club. I daydreamed and imagined him as a god who was just impossible to talk to or even touch. So the only way I could express these secret feelings that I could not even make sense of myself was to write it them in my notebook. With time it became just free writing, but when I shared it with my best friend, she said it was a poem. So I ended up with seven beautiful poems. **(Luna Santos)**



Do I consider myself a writer? Yes, I do consider myself a writer, and I enjoy writing! I am a writer because I am good at what I do, I enjoy it and can write for hours. I have many experiences, from horrible to good . . . I think that writing the essay after my interview, and a poem I made in 2007, also helped me get into this class, which I am thankful for. Me being homeless and experimenting with many, many different life experiences has also helped!  
**(Tasha Thompson)**



I don't like to write a lot, but I'm trying to write more and more. When I was in high school I used to write poems and short stories. It was a really fun class. I think I need more time to finish a writing assignment.  
**(Mustafa Mohammed Saed)**



I used to write poetry, then life/business kicked in and I forgot how to channel things (writer's block). I wrote a poem:  
*I was scorned before I was conceived, and when I was conceived I was already labeled.*  
*When I was born I was tattered with a history that says women are less, worthless, made to be seen and not heard.*  
*When I was a child my mother gave me a dish rag, spoon, pot, pan, and a dustpan, and told me that this is a woman.*  
*As a teen I was told by the boys to be sexy, and to fit in I had to arch my back and touch my toes, and tell no one 'cause I'd have been labeled a ho.*  
*As a woman I am side-eyed at by sisters.*  
**(Brandice Hatcher)**



Me, a writer? Oh no. A complete over-thinker—yes. The only time I write is when I feel overwhelmed with my thoughts and the only way I can harness my mind is writing it down. I feel I can reach my ideals more if I work on my grammar and structure. When it comes to my writing, I tend to repeat myself or express the same ideas in different words.  
**(Kala Taylor)**



When I was younger and I started to read books, I thought I could be a writer, too. I started writing as a teenager.  
**(Karina Gomez)**



I don't know if I am a writer or am merely a willing vessel that allows "The Writing" to come and visit with me and tell me stories about who I am and where I come from and what I actually think about some things. The Writing came to me one day, almost five years to the day, and saved my life. And because of the significance it has had in my life and the lives of my children, I am almost afraid to take the credit for it.

Five years ago, I was just starting this journey called Recovery. I was alone and had no support from my family. I remember distinctly thinking to myself, "My prognosis with this disease called Addiction would be more promising if I were diagnosed with Stage 4 cancer..." I was so afraid that I was not going to survive because, at that point, I was beginning to have a nagging suspicion that in order for me to get better I was going to be forced to turn around and revisit some times and places in my life. I was going to be required to acknowledge some things about

(back there) that scared me and had always threatened to kill me if I came much closer. . . I then decided that since I probably was going to be a casualty to the disease of Addiction, I wanted to use whatever moments of clarity I had left to tell my children about who their mother was and what she thought about them and the life she tried to live. So I started to write. . .

I still cannot explain what happened next. Something happened every time I sat down to write. It was magical and otherworldly how my fingers would start typing; telling me things that I didn't know...no. I did know some things and had just forgotten them. When I wrote I was safe and strong and smart and insightful and had value in this world. . . and I don't know if I should take the credit for all of that.

I love and respect The Writing and I am so grateful that it found me worthy to give Its expression. So, I suppose that, by definition, would make me a Writer. **(Lisa Partee)**



I wouldn't consider myself a writer, but I do enjoy writing, especially when it is something that has my attention and has me on a roll. In the past I have turned to poetry as a way to release my thoughts and

feelings. I honestly have never been a fan of rough drafts, and have always just written freely as it went. I focused on editing afterwards. **(Marisela Tellez-Giron)**



I do not consider myself a writer. I love to read, yet I was stopped from writing poems, short stories, and notes in a diary because they told a very sad true story. I used to love to

write out my feelings, yet because of the truth my stories told, I was beaten and told to stop. So out of fear of my stories getting others in trouble, I stopped myself from wanting to write. **(Rosalyn Richmond)**



Being the youngest of three in an overly protective household comprised of many Southern women with traditional views, my only goal in life was to not speak out of turn and to just be a kid as much as possible. That

made me very shy. It was something I grew out of. I started to find my voice by writing and find that I can better express myself as such. **(Kelly Dixon)**



I am a writer, although I haven't written anything in a while. I used writing as an escape. I used to write to get all my feelings down on paper and give me that release. I would release my worries,

stressors, anger, depression, heartbreaks, etc. Writing is everything to me. I'm a little rusty, but with this course I'll bounce back in no time. **(Jelissa Williams)**



Yes, I consider myself a writer. I've learned the proper way to write as far as formatting. The negative thing about my writing is that I don't use punctuation in the correct way. At least, that's how I feel. I

love writing because I'm able to express myself with no interruption and no one arguing back with me. I like to get criticized—I like to know what I'm doing wrong or right. **(Bettye Emmanuel)**



I like to write. I don't do it often, or often enough. For me writing is therapeutic and an outlet. I express things more deeply through writing. Also, if I write something down, I'm more likely to remember it. I do love to write poems, but I have gotten away from me. Hopefully, this class will help me to get back to it. **(ArKeshia Sallay)**



I love to write, and sometimes I write because it is easier to express myself. I've written a lot of poems and I love to write letters. When I was in school I didn't write much 'cause I barely went to class. I love it now, however. **(Carnell Perkins)**



I used to write quite a bit of poetry and songs, but I just got out of the habit of doing this. I still write sometimes, though. **(Steven Jones)**



My first language is Arabic. Sometimes I feel that it is difficult to express myself in English. I would like to write a lot in English, as I can in Arabic. So I miss a lot of words and spelling. That's why I have come to this class—to learn and get confident. **(Shaimaa Ahmed)**

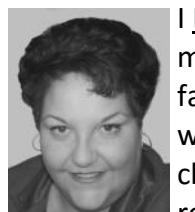


I would not consider myself a writer. Mainly because it would take me too long to express exactly what I want say in the written form. To explain a little deeper, I have a better understanding of the English

language than I display when speaking. I don't like to have run-on or fragmented sentences. Which I will have on full display in this piece. I have never been of afraid of being good at something. I have, however, been aware of how others may feel if they are not confident in their own skills. To make someone else feel better about trying new things, I may hold back. It's the same with speaking. I will sometimes ask a question that I already know the answer to. I am open to learning and teaching, as well as uplifting others. **(Tory Latham)**



Well, when I'm tested, I test well for writing. I usually dislike writing, as I do most things that require me to be intellectual or confined. However, once I'm ticked off, I'll write to the high heavens. I consider myself a writer by being gifted (by the grace of God). No negative experiences really, I just dislike confinement. **(Nickitia Cooper)**



I LOVE to write! I love to inflict my horrible "odes" on friends and family and on my blog. I just wrote a "backstory" for a character that I will be playing in a role playing game with our group on Sundays. I think I am an average writer but I tend to be a bit too wordy and I need to improve on my style, grammar, and editing abilities. I am participating in National Novel Writing Month again this year. Fun! My best serious poems are "Ode to Winter" and "Ode to the Feet of My Friend." My favorite poets include Frost and Poe, and I'd be happy to share my poems. **(Raven Fabal)**



# SENTENCES ABOUT US



I am a single mom of a brilliant 17-year-old young lady. **(Nikitia Cooper)**

My worst job so far was housekeeping, where I learned really fast how unclean folks can be. **(Kala Taylor)**

I have four children, two of them with me in Odyssey class and the other two in the library. **(Shaimaa Ahmed)**

I got married on July 14, 2015. **(Carnell Perkins)**

I've only been in Wisconsin four years, and I'm originally from Louisiana. **(Steven Jones)**

I will be opening a non-profit organization to help parents reunite with their children after incarceration. **(Arkeshia Sallay)**

I love information and love to learn. **(Bettye Emmanuel)**

I like to read books to my children, Alan and Erick. **(Guadalupe Tinajero)**



I have two boys, ages 5 and 2, who were born on the same day.

**(Jelissa Williams)**

I create my history and find much peace behind the lens of my camera. **(Kelly Dixon)**

I am shy until I warm up to you.

**(Rosalyn Richmond)**

I have a toddler who is a mama's boy to the fullest.

**(Marisela Tellez-Giron)**

I am a single parent trying to raise a young little girl into a beautiful smart woman, while also dealing with the father being incarcerated for 30 years. **(Katia Robinson)**

I have three children, ages 14, 10, and 7, who are my biggest inspiration in life, and I want to be a good example to them. **(Karina Gómez)**

I love working alongside people of color and embrace diversity, as I believe building relationships with those who differ from you will present you with the most rewarding opportunities. **(Mai Neng Thao)**

I've been writing, making, and producing music for about seven years now. **(Joe Young)**

My family is my everything. **(Tory Latham)**

I love working with children and watching them grow. **(Jalisa Galvin)**

I have a twin brother, and we are four minutes apart. **(Jayvonna Flemming)**



I am from Iraq, and I have two brothers, one sister, and a nice family.

**(Umaima Mohammed Saed)**

I like to play soccer more than watching it. **(Mustafa Mohammed Saed)**

I have two children—Bryson James, named after his father and with his middle name after my father, and Amelia Magdalan, named after the island I grew up on in Florida and my Grandmother Magdalan. **(Ashley Wills)**

I don't usually know what I think or feel until I write. **(Lisa Partee)**

I am adopted. **(Brandice Hatcher)**

There isn't one day when I don't sing, and I'm also learning how to play the guitar. **(Karina Herrejon)**

I know three languages. **(Luna Santos)**

I'm writing an autobiography and would like it published. **(Tasha Thompson)**



# ODYSSEY JUNIOR





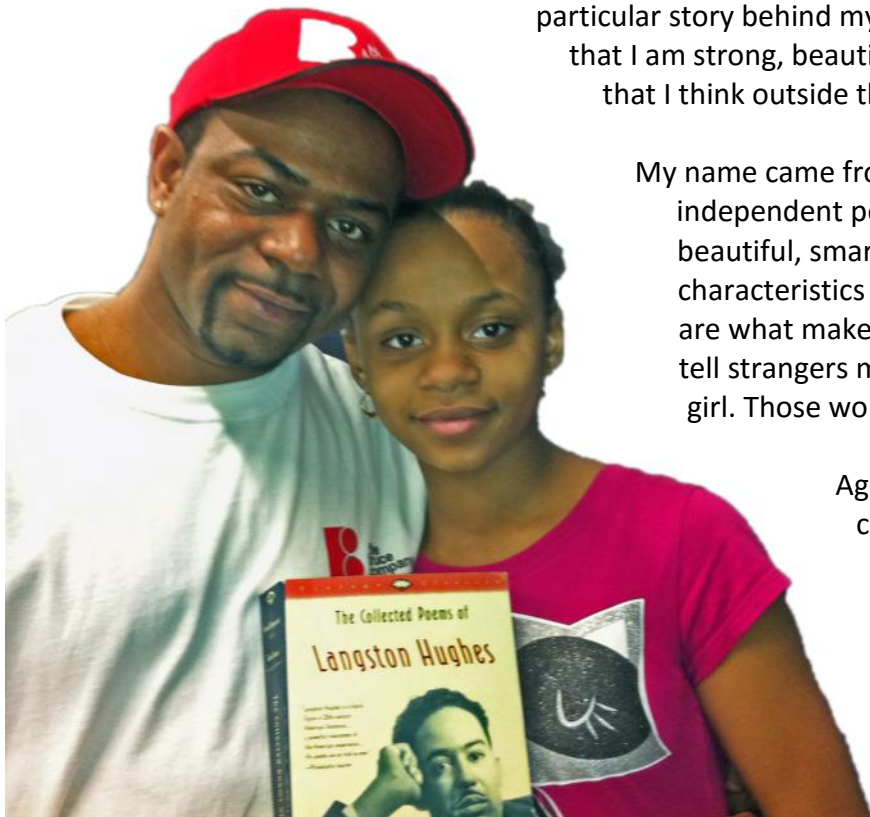


**Olivia Partee** (Grade 6): My name came from a William Shakespeare character. William Shakespeare is a great writer. I am glad that my name comes from a great writer like himself.



**Antonio Uriostegui** (Grade 7): What I think my name means to me is amazing, nice, and excellent. I was named by one of my uncles on my dad's side. I want people to say my name as "Antonio" or "Tonio."

**Denaria Rowe** (Grade 8): What is my name? My name is a name that only I possess. Well, I'm probably not the only one with this name, but I am the only person with this one particular story behind my name. My name is Denaria, and that means that I am strong, beautiful, independent, and hardworking. It means that I think outside the box from inside of it.



My name came from father, a strong, passionate, and independent person. My name was raised by mother, a beautiful, smart, funny, and intelligent woman. Those characteristics aren't just words that I'm using. Those words are what makes me. Those words define me. Those words tell strangers more than just she's a ghetto, illiterate black girl. Those words make up the definition of "my" name.

Again, I say my name is Denaria. The name came from my father and was raised by my mother. Take my name however you want, whether you think it's pretty, ghetto, or maybe even funny. Just know that my name means beautiful, independent, hardworking, and smart. No matter how hard you try, you can't change that.

**Dauntrea “Trea” Vance** (Grade 12): I don’t really know what my name actually means or if it means anything. But if I had the power to choose, my name would mean outspoken, passionate, charismatic, poetic, innovative, ambitious, and open-minded.



**Safaa Mohammed Saed** (Grade 9): My name means something clear and nice, pure. My name is after a rare rock. When you see the rock, you smile because of its beauty. The only two rocks are Safaa and Merroaa. My name is an Arabic name.

**Dianna Murray** (Grade 10): Dianna comes from Roman mythology meaning beauty and sweetness. Funny how even a “swift” name like Dianna also means huntress. How can someone possibly be so full of beauty but at the same time kill the beauty of God’s creation by being a huntress? Or maybe by being a huntress, I “hunt” down what I desire, like consuming the most knowledge, and by fighting for what I believe, like equity rather than equality.



**Jocelyn Moore** (Grade 6): My name is Jocelyn, and I like beat boxin’. I think that my name is rockin’, but I don’t really like talkin’, and I’m really good at rhymin’.

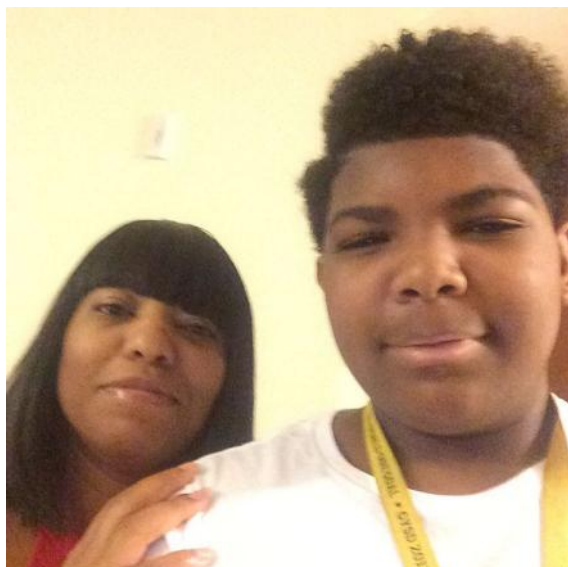


**Fernando Cachua** (Grade 12): My name is Fernando. I think it's a cool and unique name. My name represents my identity and who I am. Anyone can say my name however they want. I'm unique and different, and I like to hear my name said in different ways and pronunciations. I like being different and being seen as different from my surroundings.



**Abdul Razaq Mohammed Saed** (Grade 7): It was my grandfather's name. Before he died, he gave me his name so that is special to me. He gave me his name because he was so important. He was a doctor, and he wanted me to be special. This name was OK. I'm the second in my family to have his name.

**Deja Laongeon** (Grade 7): My name? My name is Deja. I know I may not be the only one to own that name, but I hold a meaning behind it. Each Deja may hold a different personality, different traits, such as mine. I am intelligent, smart, outspoken, and open. One thing I do know is I am very unique and different from the world.



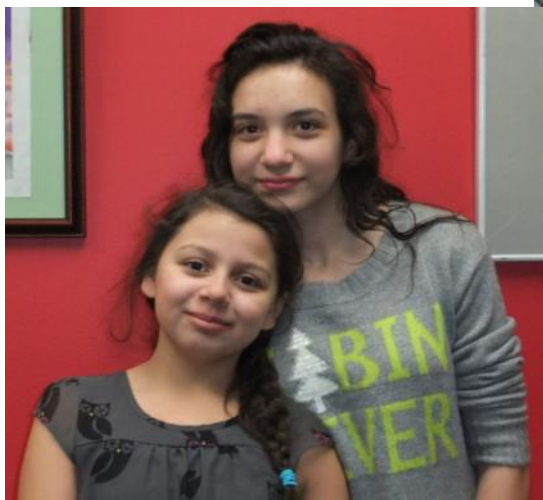
**Jaquez McAlister** (Grade 10): My name is Jaquez. Earlier in my life my mom talked to me about my name and where it came from. For the most part, what I know is that I got my name from an old football player. But when I looked my name up, it auto-corrected it to "Jacques," which is from the French language. So my name in French I think means "Prince." But also when I was a freshman I was given an African name which meant "powerful," so I like to think that it could transfer into my English name. But a particular part of my name that's special to me is my middle name, "Dawayne," because that was my grandpa's first name. I never got to meet him, but he was very special to my mom and at one point my grandma. I've heard many stories about him, so I always wanted to meet him. So my first and last name have great meaning.



**Yemi Harding** (Grade 8): My mom told me my grandma named me, and in her language it means “mother.” I thought, “I can’t work with that.” So my mom let me change the meaning of my name. I thought what would describe this name, this name that represents me.

Amazing, intelligent, graceful, one-of-a-kind, artistic, thoughtful? I couldn’t sound conceited, and anyway I couldn’t use all of those words. So when I combined those words, there was only one thing I can think of: POWERFUL!

**Janiya Price** (Grade 6): Janiya is a gift from God. Who knows what God gave us? This child is common but different—no “h.” Smart, kind, and funny.



**Trinity Rivera** (Grade 7): TRI means three or the Christian godhead as one god in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is a group of people or things (“The wine was the first of a trinity of three excellent vintages”). It is the state of being three (“God is said to be trinity in unity”).



**Kezia Bester** (Grade 12): Keziah is a name given to me from the Bible meaning “a tree deeply rooted by the waters of God.” Keziah was Job’s daughter. It is a Hebrew name but pronounced backwards as Haizek. I was named after my great-aunt and also a family friend. My middle name (Kizzieahh) is a combination of both my grandmothers’ names put together as one.



