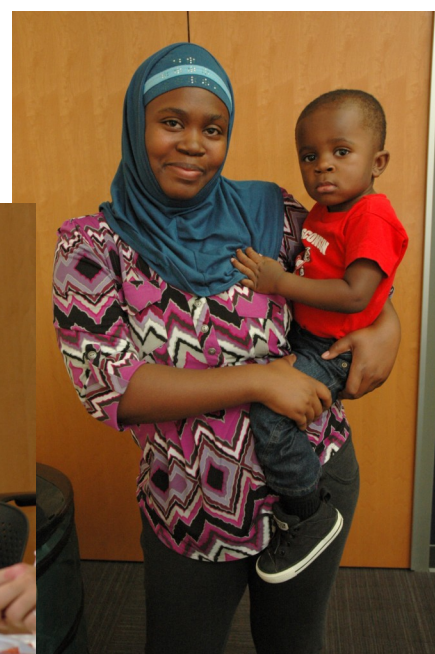


ODYSSEY ORACLE

INTRODUCING THE CLASS OF 2015



"I believe this program will help open doors for me that would otherwise be closed."



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"It was a blessing to be accepted into the class."



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"Writing helps me release stress and helps me take myself to another place, something like my own world."



"I like writing, but at the same time I don't!"



"Writing not only opens doors, but it also helps you to grow as a person."



"Finally, people who care."



EXCITED AND NERVOUS: FEELINGS ON STARTING THE JOURNEY

New students were asked how they felt when they learned they had been accepted into the Odyssey Project.

I was very, very happy and excited. I was just really, really, really happy, and I felt so good that I was going to be starting on this journey. **(Tenishia Bland)**

I was overwhelmed with excitement. I thought of a new beginning and a journey to success. **(Lakoyé Buford)**

I felt happy but also a little scared because it has been so long since I've been to school. **(Margarita Cid Luna)**

Oh my, I was ecstatic! It was like my prayer was answered, and this was the calling I have been waiting for! **(Michelle Conley)**

I felt good. It was a blessing to be accepted into the class. **(Derek Dodd)**

I believe this program will help open doors for

me that otherwise would be closed. **(Melissa Dominguez)**

I was excited and very happy that I was chosen!! I couldn't wait to tell my friends and family. **(Myisha Ellis)**

I was/am joyful to be in the program. **(Tiame Hanaway)**

I didn't believe it. **(Kelly Hayes)**

I am feeling eager. I also felt grateful for the opportunity. **(Jessi Hodges)**

I felt overcome with joy that finally something was coming together in my life. **(DeAngelo Hood)**

It gave me hope knowing that someone is willing to help and give me the proper guidance that I need to meet success and face my weaknesses that are keeping me from being the intelligent woman I see myself to be. **(Prodajaé Huntley)**



When I received the phone call from Emily, I felt excitement, and I was anxious to begin. **(Latesha Jackson)**

I felt so excited, amped, nervous, but ready. I'm looking forward to learning new things and am open for new experiences. **(Nitia Johnson)**

I felt great, really happy, and excited to be part of this program. I was really looking forward to coming. **(Brenda Juarez Cruz)**

Finally, people who care.
(**Dorothy Katana**)

Excited, nervous (**Matthew Kruger**)

I feel I made a big accomplishment in my life for me and my family.
(**Joseph Lentz**)

Proud, happy, excited, curious, impatient (**Ashley Linjer**)

I was very excited and felt as though I was given a second chance with my life. (**Patricia McKnight**)



I was really excited and also nervous, not knowing what to expect. (**Heydy Pichardo Reyes**)

I felt wonderful, honored. It's a blessing to be given a chance. (**Mikiea Price**)

I was trying to talk myself into being OK to receive a call telling me that I was not accepted. When I knew that I had been accepted, I felt like I didn't fit inside my own body. I was filled with joy.
(**Sahira Rocillo Ramírez**)

Excited, confused, fearful, and full of joy
(**Lenora Rodin**)

I felt so happy and lucky to have this amazing opportunity.
(**Natalia M. Rodríguez Miramontes**)

At first I didn't know how to feel. I was excited and intimidated. I carried a "whatever" attitude, but deep down I felt like here was finally something for me. I kind of wondered how out of all the candidates I got chosen, but either way I'm glad I'm here.
(**Shaneika Sanders**)

I was so, so happy. (**Veronica Tinajero**)

I was so emotional when I learned that I had been accepted. I was screaming and crying from the happiness that I felt. I couldn't believe I was getting a second chance.
(**Nissa Uriostegui**)

I felt extremely excited and blessed to be a part of something that helps students prosper in life. (**Christopher Villalpando**)

I was very excited, and I felt like finally I can accomplish something! (**Janina White**)

I was excited! I feel like I'm so ready to get a degree after all these years. (**Brandi Whitlock**)

Note: For this answer, "excited" won the contest for the most popular adjective, with 15 students choosing a form of it. Second place was "happy" (7 students), and there was a two-way tie for third place with "nervous" and "filled with joy" (3 students). Memorable adjectives chosen include "ecstatic" and "intimidated."

ARE YOU A WRITER?



I am a good writer, but I used to write more than I do now, so I don't feel like as much of a writer as I used to. When I was younger, 18, I had my first boyfriend from when I was 16. He got into some legal trouble and back then I used to write all the time. I was so

good with words. I wrote the judge that he was going before to be sentenced. When it was time for court, the judge let him know my letter was one of the reasons he would receive a light sentence. I was so impressed in court when I heard him bring up my letter. There I was, didn't even know I was a writer. **(Tenishia Bland)**



I've always vocally expressed myself as a writer, but what's crazy is I don't write. Well, I used to until I lost all my confidence. Instead of digging deeper and improving my writing skills when I saw or heard others' work, I grew intimidated.

The positive experience I've had with writing was the opportunity to read some of my poetry to a high school audience, where I was applauded. It made me feel at the time somehow what I wrote and said was heard and appreciated even through some side conversations. I guess the negative experiences were just the red ink on papers about my mistakes from teachers.

My writing opened up this door to be a part of the legendary Odyssey Project! Emily read something that made her see I was a good candidate to be a player on this team.

Am I a writer? Yes, but one that needs to write . . . again. **(Lakoyé Buford)**



I don't consider myself a good writer. I need a lot of help with spelling and grammar. When I was in high school (11th grade) I had a teacher who really made me feel stupid because of my writing and reading. I think too much, but when it is time to write

I freeze, I overthink and second guess myself. So at the end I don't end up writing anything.

(Margarita Cid Luna)



I consider myself a writer because when I write my readers can get a clear visual of the point I'm trying to get across.

A negative experience I had in school was when my teacher told me I write too much. A positive experience I had in school with writing was when I had to compare myself with the characters in stories such as *Maus I* and *II* and *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, etc.

The story I wrote to get into this class was to show my determination and will to do better as a mother and as a child/woman thirsty for education. **(Michelle Conley)**



I enjoy writing. It's a form of expressing yourself. There's feeling and a story in writing. Yes, I'm a writer. I tell a story. My essay writing to get into this program opened up a door for me to enhance my life and life dreams, my goals and choices, my wants and needs, and my desire

to make a difference and give back. **(Derek Dodd)**



Well, do I consider myself a writer? The answer is Yes. When I'm sad or mad I grab a notebook, any notebook, and write down what I'm feeling. In school I did not write because I had a teacher that was very critical of my work. It was hard

for me because the first language I learned to read and write was Spanish. And when I was nine, my mom moved us back to the States where I had to learn how to read and write in English. It was hard for me because the teacher was so hard on me to get it right. I love writing to my family and friends that are far away, and I also like inspiring people that I know that are going through rough times. Sometimes all somebody needs are kind words.

An example: A friend of mine was going through a rough patch in her life and wrote down on Facebook that she didn't want to live, and it broke my heart. I wrote a letter to her and let her know that no matter how hard life may seem, there are people that truly care for her. I didn't let it go until she gave in. Later she called me and told me that my words to her really meant a lot to her, which really meant a lot to me. **(Melissa Dominguez)**



I would consider myself to be a writer because it's the only way that I feel I can express myself with emotions. I have time to think about what I'm going to say and if it makes sense before I say it or write it. I put my emotions and feelings into my words when I write. I see colors

to match my emotions and expressions. I've had some negative experiences with my writing. I wrote quite a few negative letters and poems to my husband and they caused violence in my

home. I've had quite a few positive experiences as well. I use poems to express how I feel, and I've gotten a lot of positive responses from teachers, classmates, friends, and family. My mother said I should be a screenplay writer, but I still don't believe I'm that good! I've written love letters to past and present lovers to express how I felt other than just vocal or physical emotion.

I feel like I opened and closed doors with my writing. For one, I opened a door for this course and understanding myself and others. I believe writing is what closed the door to my marriage. Me being who I am and not very vocal with my feelings led to me writing to express myself, but it came with consequences as well.

(Myisha Ellis)



I love to write. I just can't spell very well, but I write to my husband on a daily basis. We write poems to each other. My children ask me to tell them stories and 80% of the time they love them. So I write them when I'm finished.

To this day my 15 year old still asks to see my story book and she carries it in her backpack to school. I have lived in a lot of different places and done a lot of things. So I'm not sure if I'm a writer, a story teller, or a poet? I did graduate from high school with my class and three children. My mother went to school for 14 years and is a part-time teacher at Omega and a waitress. I have decided if I'm going to do this I'm going for the gold school in a field where I'm always needed—a job with children. My oldest child was killed in 2007 at eight years old. To this day I still don't understand how people hurt children, so I am very focused on helping, healing, and loving children—mine and others. **(Tiame Haraway)**



No, I'm not a writer. I must say I do not enjoy it. My spelling is always wrong and my grammar is not how it should be. But I know I have it in me to become a better writer.

I think about high school and papers that were due. The teachers used red pens and just passed me along. But somehow I made it; was it me, or a broken school system? **(Kelly Hayes)**



I would love to share my feelings on writing. I do consider myself an amateur poet. I have spent free time writing poetry and used it as a tool while in prison. The most negative experience I have had with writing is research papers. I struggle with taking

learned information and turning it into a report. On the opposite side of that, freelance writing has helped me vent and release life stressors helping me avoid negative consequences. My words have instilled me with pride. To see my feelings leak out of my pen on paper and result in something you can feel and has an impact is motivating. It definitely convinced me I may have a purpose and I may be able to influence others in a positive way. **(Jessi Hodges)**



I honestly believe I'm an ok writer. English was always one of my favorite subjects in school, but partly because of the excellent teachers that I had. Of course, not everything I wrote was perfect. I made common grammar errors and a couple of misspelled words here and there.

However, I think I need to reignite my passion for writing because I haven't done it in so long. The first time I've written anything since finishing high school was my admission essay for Odyssey. Reading that passage from Frederick Douglass and being able to feel his pain and relate it to my own life really brought tears to my eyes as I was writing. **(DeAngelo Hood)**



As a writer I would consider myself as a rookie or a beginner . . . I've tried to practice different writing skills and techniques to further my writing skills and nothing seems to enhance my writing skills. The only way I was able to pass most

of my English courses is because I have a story to tell, and I was in class taking notes on how to paint the picture of my story in writing. I've never liked the fact that when I write my hands hurt, I get off topic, or I'm just overall not good at it. One particular writing assignment I really enjoyed was kind of a scrapbook autobiography that included different styles of writing explaining one subject, which was myself. Even though the story was about me, my brainstorm ideas were not, and it didn't fit together to paint the picture I wanted my readers to have. However, that project opened my eyes and my mind about the ideas of writing, and someday I plan to master that assignment on my own. That's how I know I overcame an obstacle that I have been trying to overcome for years of my life, even as a young adult. Overall, I feel if I take my time with some of my writing pieces I can create some great materials. I find that other stories and ideas inspire my stories and ideas to be more detailed . . . which makes my story as a whole more exciting and empowering to read! **(Prodajaé Huntley)**



My strength in writing is brainstorming. It's not a problem for me to come up with ideas. I believe my weakness may be wording what I am trying to say.

Sometimes I may be lost for words or just need help re-wording what I am saying so that others may get my point.

I like to express myself in writing, but sometimes I may have trouble putting what I am saying into words or an order where others can understand and relate. **(Latesha Jackson)**



I believe that I once was a great writer. I was always on top of my skills back in high school and junior high. Since then I haven't done much writing, but I'm looking to get back into it. During my schooling I became quite good at poems and short stories, as

well as editing other students' rough drafts. I'm excited about giving these things growth and life again within myself. **(Nitia Johnson)**



I don't consider myself a writer because I still need to work on grammar and where to put periods, commas. One of the negative experiences I've had in school is when I had to do an essay in my CNA class. It was really hard because I had to fix it two times, so it was kind of stressful but at the same time good because I was learning. A positive experience was when I worked with a tutor and she helped me understand some of my mistakes. A time

when I wrote something and opened some doors was for this program and my CNA school. It made me feel good getting accepted with an essay I had written about my life. **(Brenda Juarez Cruz)**



I truly do not consider myself a writer. I never have. I have had many opportunities to get better in writing and never really took the opportunity seriously.

The negative experience that I've had in writing is

organizing my thoughts in a formal way for the final paper. Even after doing an outline and a rough draft, my final product never looks the part. Because of my grammar and spelling, I've always made it a point to avoid writing, and so far it hasn't gotten me anywhere. It has held me back from numerous things. It's my greatest regret that now in my life I'm trying to correct. **(Dorothy Katana)**



I think there are three kinds of writers: those who can, those who do, and those who don't. I believe that I fall into the category of those who can. I think that when I need to write something, I'm very good at it. Those who do write do it as a hobby, or as a

want, or as a profession. Those who don't write either choose not to or simply can't. I enjoy writing, but I don't think I do it enough. I guess that will change during my time at Odyssey. I've had both negative and positive experiences with writing., mostly positive. I've always felt good about writing, regardless of the content. I like to re-read what I've

written. It makes me feel good that I'm able to put my thoughts into words on paper. That's one of the many things that makes people special. That's the positive side. The negative side is that I spent a lot of time writing while in jail. I was using writing as a way to kill time. A lot of the material was about the negative aspects of my life. This should've been a positive thing as I should've learned from my mistakes, but I didn't. I think the first thing I remember writing opened the door of writing in general for me. It was a class assignment on any animal of my choosing. I copied the whole thing, but seeing an entire page in my own handwriting gave me a warmth inside that I had never felt before. **(Matthew Kruger)**



I love writing and, yes, I do consider myself a writer. Writing helps me release stress and helps me take myself to another place, something like my own world. Some negative experiences in school and public when writing was reading in front of crowds, but the positive experience was I did a lot of writing and reading to the public. I have grown accustomed to it. I love having people hear what I have to say. My best writing comes from my poetry and stories. I am currently writing a book which hopefully can change the perspective of people's lives. A lot of doors have opened for me through writing by love, church, friends, family, and life. **(Joseph Lentz)**

Yes, I consider myself a writer! I'm definitely not a good speller, but I love to read and write. Writing, reading, speaking, and learning are all things that were drilled into me as important growing up. I won a few



contests when I was younger writing poetry and descriptive stories. The one thing I hate about writing is doing it with a short deadline! (Like this!) This program, I believe, has opened one big door for me. I'm really hoping that when I walk through this door, there are 20 plus more doors waiting for me!

Can't wait to find out . . . **(Ashley Linjer)**



I remember when the Jackson 5 first came out, and how I used to be in love with Michael Jackson. He stole my heart.

I used to make up stories and write for hours. I have an older cousin, Rhonda, and she loved Jermaine Jackson. We'd spend the week with each other at Grandma's and write and write. We'd read them to people and they'd say they were really good. I also used to write poems about different places. I also write music and I use real life situations. I journal about my life, and I'm very good at writing letters when I need to get a point across. So, yes, I use writing as a tool to express myself. I practice making sense of what I'm trying to say and use my feelings to express myself. I love to write. It takes up time in my head and takes stress off of my mind and heart. I need to spend more time writing and talking about what I see and feel. **(Patricia McKnight)**

Yes. The reason I consider myself a writer is that I love to read. Reading has not only helped me expand my vocabulary a little bit, but it has also helped me expand my



imagination. I believe writing not only opens doors, but it also helps you grow as a person. I am really shy, and writing helps me let my emotions out and also helps me reflect on myself.

and creative writing. I wrote an autobiography filled with stories about my life experiences and some poems.

It is now used as an example for other ESL students on how to write their story. I have a copy, and I'm very proud of it. **(Sahira Rocillo Ramírez)**

I had to write a couple important papers that have opened doors for me. I had to write essays for college applications and I also had to write papers for scholarships. An important paper that changed my life was my immigration letter stating why I deserved a visa. During school I had good experiences with my teachers. They always took the time to go over my essays. My proudest moment was in my junior year in high school. A year after I was moved from ESL classes and I had to write an essay and I got an A. **(Heydy Pichardo Reyes)**



I consider myself to be an excellent future writer, and now that I am in this class the potential is limitless. I have written poems that have not been published. I have written three chapters in my book, and when I read it to

one of my teachers at MATC she cried. I have varied experiences which enable me to provoke different feelings in the person who is reading what I have written. **(Lenora Rodin)**



I like writing, but sometimes I'm afraid of writing because of mis-spellings, not being able to use correct grammar, or using big words to express myself. Often times when I'm on Facebook and I give my peers and family encouragement, I tend to get

tons of likes, but when it comes to now (school) I feel so left behind that I am scared to write . . . but I know if I educate myself and learn the right way to write, then I do believe I would be a great writer. **(Mikiea Price)**



I think I'm not a really good writer. It is so hard for me to express my feelings.

I always look for help in books, magazines, or the internet.

I will practice my English and I will read more in English. This way I'll have more ideas on how to express or write. **(Natalia M. Rodríguez Miramontes)**

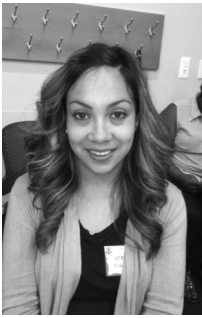


I am a writer. I love writing poetry and stories. After taking a creative writing class I became a bit insecure about my writing structure and passion. In high school, though, my ESL English teacher based our class around books



Yes. I've always been able to express myself through writing with no filter. I write what I want with no worries or concerns of others' feelings except who I'm writing for. It got me into college in Atlanta. It was the only thing that got me in there—that and God.

(Shaneika Sanders)



I don't consider myself a writer. I am still learning English, and it has been very difficult to learn all the words and all the rules that this language has and also the grammar.

My positive experience that I had is having an English tutor. She is very nice and smart. She is trying to teach me, and I am trying to learn to write properly. **(Veronica Tinajero)**



I feel like there are many different kinds of writers. So in some ways I guess I am a writer. I love to write poetry, testimonies, and essays. However, I don't do so well with reports and stories. I always had negative experiences in high school due to the fact that my grammar and spelling was so

terrible, which made me give up on writing for a couple years. Then in 11th grade I found myself wrapped into the music of Tupac and found some new inspiration to discover the enjoyment of writing. I started writing poetry on a regular basis about anything and everything. I began writing poems about my friends, broken hearts and the reality of the world. Anything I felt strongly about I found a way to put it on paper. I don't write poems anymore, but I have written testimonies for church that have gotten standing ovations and have changed the way people look at their faith. These testimonies have let me close the door on my past and open the door to my new life. **(Nissa Uriostegui)**

I like writing but at the same time I don't! I know that I write well and am able to express myself extremely well when I write, but at the same time it's not enjoyable to me. In turn this at times pushes me to move fast and almost scribble something down in order to be done with what it is I am writing. In simple terms, I believe I am a



writer. I cannot think of any negative things with writing in school. Positive, yes. I recall in class writing a poem and getting a standing ovation for how well it was written. I personally believe that my cover letter and resumé were so well written that they

got me interviews for jobs that I do not qualify for. **(Christopher Villalpando)**



I do not consider myself a writer, mainly because I have trouble spelling and don't know a lot of words I'd rather use other than the basic. Negative experiences were always so many corrections on grammar and spelling. I wrote a poem in 9th grade about having a child so young and needing a

break. It touched me and was the only time I was honest about how hard it was. The people that came asked to publish it, but the school told me to say no because it's just a way to make young black mothers look bad or give people room to judge. **(Janina White)**



I think that I'm an OK writer. I always know in my head what I want to say, but it is hard for me to put it in words. In school I was a bad speller and got a lot of red ink on my paper. Grammar was bad. I didn't think that I could do it or I felt that it was hard for me.

I have all kinds of made up stories in my head. Since I was little, I gave myself another life. When I was in 5th or 6th grade I did write a poem, and that was the only time I got good reviews. I used to keep journals, and I thought I did OK with that. My kids' father was in prison a while ago. I wrote him lots of letters that I'm sure moved him, but then again he was in jail! **(Brandi Whitlock)**

FREE TO LIVE MY LIFE IN VICTORY

MEET ALUMNA FELICIA JONES '09

The Odyssey Project in 2008-2009 is where I got my feet wet in pursuing my educational goal to become a Social Worker. Prior to Odyssey, I had not been in school in 22 years outside of getting my GED in December 2007.

After Odyssey, I started at Madison College September 2011 as a part-time student in the Liberal Arts Transfer Program. My first semester at Madison College I held a 4.0 G.P.A. My second semester I earned a 3.8. I have remained on the Dean's List ever since. I also was nominated to be inducted into the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, Beta Beta Psi Chapter, in September 2012. I was also nominated by my instructors and advisor to become a Student Ambassador as well as a Board Member for the Vice President Student Advisory Board.

Before all these wonderful achievements took place, I had quite a few struggles, very hard life-threatening challenges. Although we had our differences, my mother and sister stood by me during hard times.

To describe some tragic, life-altering events that I had to overcome to be where I am today, I will be using a poem I wrote that won a prize in an Odyssey Project sonnet competition.

My sonnet called "Restoration" begins like this:

*I started off having a pretty good life,
Being a dedicated mother and a loving wife.*

My husband and I grew up together. We had two lovely children and got married before our third child was born. I was a postal employee, and my husband was a brick mason. We both made good money. I left my husband in 2006 and moved to Madison. I transferred to the Post Office here in Madison and made a good living as a single parent up until 2004.

*Then I turned from that familiar road,
I never knew how my life would soon unfold.
There was so much pain misery and strife.
All I tried then was to end my life.*

I became chemically dependent upon alcohol, crack cocaine, and marijuana. I lost my home, gave my children to my mother-in-law, and sank deep into the world of an addict. That November of 2004, I took 175 triazadones 200mg, drank a liter and a half of vodka, and smoked over a half ounce of crack cocaine. A friend found me unconscious and called the paramedics. I woke up three days later in the ICU of Meriter Hospital. The doctor had stated to me it was medically impossible for me



to be alive. I did all that because I did not know how to stop getting high, and I did not want to be an addict.

In 2005 I went to jail for the very first time. There I met the jail chaplain who would later become a good friend and a very influential mentor in my recovery process. I also became part of the criminal justice system, where I was placed on probation. My addiction continued to rapidly progress. I made the news three times in 2006. I was beat unconscious and sexually assaulted. I was almost the third victim in a double murder in which my friend murdered two people. I showed up after he had murdered two people, and I left immediately after seeing all the blood in his apartment. I later found out the bodies were in another apartment. I went to jail again, and that is where the healing started to begin that August of 2006. I went into treatment from jail, did fairly well. but again that April through September of 2006 my addiction resurfaced greater than before. This time I sought help immediately and returned to treatment.

My Sobriety date is my daughter's birthday: September 21, 2007. I have not relapsed. From that day forward, I have been sober and reaching out to others who struggle with the same issues I faced.

*I soon found out that wouldn't be.
God had something better in store for me.
With God's mercy grace and love I am now free,
To live my life in victory.
There are many things I have yet to do,
One thing I know God will see me through.
I know He watches from Heaven above
Showering me with His unending love.*



ODYSSEY STUDENTS GET POLITICAL



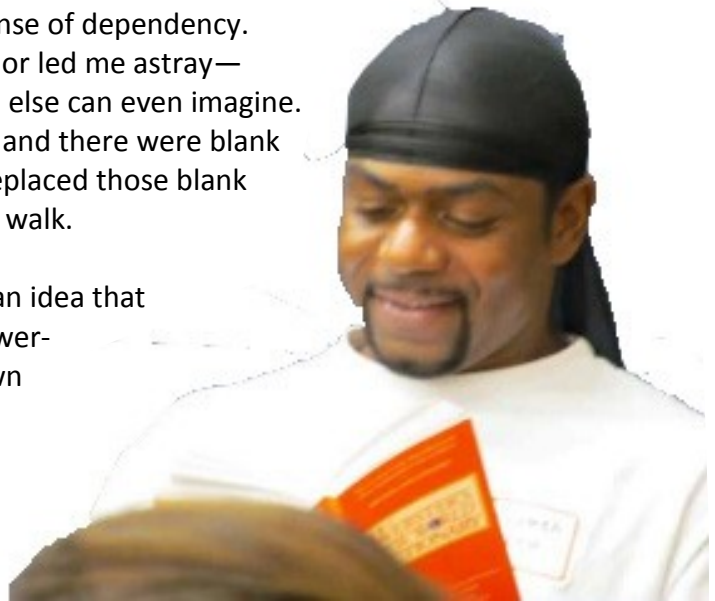
Felicia Jones and Betsy Pelto '09 both recently met with Senator Tammy Baldwin. Betsy also received a letter from President Obama in response to her letter to him about the achievement gap.

I LOVE MY WEBSTER'S

BY TOSUMBA WELCH '13

I love my Webster's with a great passion and sense of dependency. Webster's has never stood me up, let me down, or led me astray—never! It tells me secrets that sometimes no one else can even imagine. One time I was walking through a path of words and there were blank spots on the path. Out of nowhere, Webster's replaced those blank spots with words, and I was able to continue my walk.

Webster's sat me down one night and gave me an idea that landed me second place in an essay contest answering the question "Why Vote?" I have never known Webster's to be anything but perfect. Webster's has given me 230,000 reasons to be in love with it. I love my Webster's. (Tosumba Welch)



SEARCH ENGINES

BY MOLINDA HENRY '07

I am traveling on this Odyssey, and every day since embarking I have changed. I have learned, I have grown, and I have writhed back and forth, side to side, like waves on the ocean, from growing pains.

Before this class I didn't consider myself a reader, and now I can't wait to get my hands on the next book. I carry the dictionary we received on the first day of class everywhere I go.



There is no word created yet for the process that began the day I was accepted as a student in Odyssey. Someday, like Google, there will be a new word added to our vocabulary that can describe the search engine that Emily and Gene and Jean and Craig and Marshall, Diane, and my most highly regarded classmates have helped me become.

Search Engine. Yes. That is what I said. I have become a search engine, but from a different perspective. I am now the "little engine that could" search for knowledge, truth, and wisdom. And I endeavor to become a proficient search engine, objective, critical, and hungry for more. Thanks to this Odyssey with these Titans, I too have found my task: To Learn and Be Free.

