

ODYSSEY ORACLE

ENJOYING CLASSMATES



The Oracle is like our public diary. We write our most personal stories. I have gotten to know each one of my classmates in a different way. It is amazing how each one of us has a different story, but we all are trying to head towards the same future.

The Oracle is the place where we make our most private secrets public. I love the Oracle. I have gotten to know some amazing people with some amazing secrets.
(Heydy Pichardo)

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EDITORIAL CORNER



Raise the Minimum Wage

How can you honestly expect someone to survive off minimum wage? Just the word “minimum” in itself is an insult. You’re basically asking me to show up on time every day and work my butt

off for pocket change. Is my hard work not good enough to receive a decent wage? How is \$7.25 an hour enough to be able to provide for yourself? And God forbid if you have a family to provide for. Rent alone in Madison is roughly \$700 to \$1,000 and sometimes more. Then add utilities and the ever-rising cost of food on top of that. You would need to work 70 hours a week to even be able to live comfortably.

That’s why minimum wage should be at least \$15, especially if you work in retail, where you’re considered full-time if you work 32 hours a week, but you still don’t get the benefits. I believe that if society made it easier to survive, then there wouldn’t be as much crime as there is now. People wouldn’t have to turn to doing illegal things just to make ends meet. **(DeAngelo Hood)**



House Our Veterans

“Let’s protect those, who protect us.” I have decided to talk about the issue going on under the roof of my house: the lack of help for our veterans. I can’t help but to feel sadness and anger as I think of my husband having to wait

months just to get an appointment or him not being able to have dental or vision care. I believe and know that veterans should have more options than just going to a VA hospital. Veterans should have the choice to seek care at the place of their choice and with the doctor of their choice. The

government should and has to make this possible. After all, they make it possible for veterans to get deployed to any place they want them to go.

Research in 2013 showed that there were 57,480 homeless veterans on a single night. While we sleep in our beds feeling safe and enjoying what we have, those who fought to protect us sleep out in the cold and without safety. Many of you might not agree with war or the motives that send this nation to war, but one thing I am sure all humans will agree that our sons, daughters, and neighbors who fought for us can not go without health care or a roof above their heads. The government has to come up with more shelters for veterans only, where they can help them get their lives back. **(Heydy Pichardo)**



Care about the Homeless

I dare you to care about the homeless people in Madison. I dare you to stop and help some homeless person who is a stranger to you and take a man, woman, or kid into your home. Allow them some rest in your warm house, a

cozy bed, food on the table, and cable television; I dare you. Or put them in a hotel for a week or two, or deal with their mental issues. Promise them help, address the situation, protest for their well-being: cheaper housing complexes for the homeless. I dare you to storm the Capitol and demand help. Come up with a solution like low-income housing with treatment programs and schooling with a small fee for those who have an income coming in. This fee would go toward keeping the housing and programming going with some help from the government. We all know it’s about money and antipathy when it comes to the government. **(Derek Dodd)**



House the Homeless

Have you ever wondered what goes through a homeless child's mind? Most children get to go home and worry about getting their homework done, or what clothes they are going to wear. A

group we often ignore, the 1,200+ homeless children of the Madison Metropolitan School District, have to worry about where they're going to stay that night and where their next meal is coming from. All children should be carefree, and none should be forced to live with the worries of homelessness on their minds.

As a mother or father, you are willing to do anything in order to protect your children. That's not an easy task to fulfill when you're homeless and have lost all hope in life. My children and I were homeless for a couple of years, jumping from house to house, sleeping in our van, and never feeling the security of shelter. During those two years of applying to shelters, I was never accepted. I even tried to stay with my ex-husband for a while, thinking it would be a safe and secure environment for my children. Within a couple of weeks, however, he started showing signs of drug abuse, and one night he got angry and beat up my oldest son, Claudio. I never felt as hopeless as I did in that moment. Yet, the fearless gleam in my children's eyes was the only reason I kept going.

There are only five homeless shelters in Madison, and The Road Home, YWCA, and The Salvation Army are the only ones that deal with homeless families. In the limited number of shelters, there are a limited number of rooms and limited funds to help the growing homeless community. Last year, 1,035 individuals and families were turned away from shelters in the Madison area. An established program (Housing First) in other states around the country has made a dent in homelessness and has saved the community money. Policymakers in Utah, a state that has adopted the Housing First Program, have

estimated that the average homeless person costs approximately \$17,000 a year between ER visits and incarceration. The Housing First Program can save taxpayers approximately 35% of this cost.

It's very possible that the Madison homeless population is costing the same amount, if not more. Especially with our cold winters and wind chills dropping down to 20 degrees below, the homeless don't have a chance to survive in Wisconsin. Let's be the first city in Wisconsin to adopt the Housing First Program and provide hope for Madison's forgotten society. Is it not time for us as a community to work together to help all our neighbors? **(Nissa Uriostegui)**



Respect Immigrants

Would you ignore 11.4 million residents living in the US? With that large number of unauthorized immigrants, it is imperative that Americans support immigration reform. The US Constitution gives us freedom as a basic right. The

Department of Homeland Security estimates that there are 11.4 million unauthorized immigrants living in the United States. These 11.4 million people do not have the same freedoms as every other citizen, yet they are expected to pay taxes. People living in the US have responsibilities as well as rights. If immigrants are fulfilling their responsibilities, they should also have rights.

Immigrants are not allowed to go back to their home countries again. There are many cases in which they are in emergency situations: for example, if a relative dies, they cannot travel to their native country to go to the funeral. Some parents get deported, leaving children behind with a single parent, and, as a result, the children don't get enough attention. In the worst-case scenario, the children commit crimes as a result of not enough parental support. And let us not forget how it would be for the person who got deported.

Politicians should work on an immigration reform plan instead of fighting with each other for power. Many immigrants come to the US, escaping their home countries because of war, lack of work, and poverty. Emma Lazarus states, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." This is what the United States stands for, and this is why all residents should be welcomed and treated with the respect that all human beings deserve. **(Veronica Tinajero)**



Feed the Children

The rumble in my stomach woke me from an already rough night's sleep. The pain got greater as the daylight reminded me it was a summer day, so there would be no nutritious meals waiting on me and my siblings at school today. I

wouldn't be escaping the heat in anyone's pool, attending any glorious events on Madison's square, or venturing off on an exciting family getaway. Nope, I would be here, roaming the Simpson Street/Broadway neighborhood looking for change, hoping an opportunity to eat would come my way. My mentally ill mom had already gone to her second job, praying we would make it to her next payday. Recently she lost all state-funded assistance because she earned one too many dollars, putting her over the eligibility limit. She would have had to quit her job to continue receiving any assistance at all. Her pride was not willing to accept that route. As a mom, she was determined to instill us with a strong work ethic and a character that would continue to fight though this tough life. Expenses continued to get greater. There was no dental coverage or health care. Her childcare costs were more than her bring-home pay. It all added up to more than what a single, honorably discharged veteran could generate. There weren't any programs for support in place. It was not a gradual process: benefits were cut the minute her income reached that limit. Even her status as a vet didn't offer any help. It was just my mom and her three kids,

alone on this hard journey we call life.

The world around us was caught up on the numbers, and humanity wasn't on anyone's priority list. Madison stakes claim they are the number one city to live in. The majority here believe all the starving children are overseas, oblivious to local realities. I'm writing to enlighten some of the ignorant to the truth. Hi, my name is Jessi, and our local system starved me. If you have the time, I would take you on a short journey. I'll introduce you to what's beyond the budget and all political propaganda, and I'll bring you to the people. We'll stop by Tiffany and her baby brother Steven, the next generation. They are starving just like I did, but today. While their parents are busy trying to make a way, we could bring lunch and save the day! Then maybe we'll be able to think and act beyond what we read and can react based on what we see! Let's all do our part. Once we are aware, our conscience will intervene. I promise it's simple. You can sponsor your own Madison child for just a few cents a day! **(Jessi Hodges)**



Protect Our Daughters

Human trafficking is happening in our state. Although it includes both men and women, I'm going to focus on our young women. To date, more than 200 potential cases of trafficking have been identified in Wisconsin. The

victims can come from any race. In my line of work, I witness young girls putting themselves in danger without even knowing it: jumping into cars with people they don't know, looking for love in the wrong places, running away from an unhappy home, believing someone who promises to take care of them. Too many times I've read in the newspaper about women making underage girls have sex for money.

Parents, educate your children! Know who they are hanging out with. Then tell them how beautiful they are so they won't seek love

somewhere else. Monitor their computer and phone time. Let them know it's okay to say no and not be a part of the crowd. Let them know that human trafficking is going on and what to look for.

How can we as a community help? Increase the prison time for people who commit the crime. Register them as sex offenders. Provide a safe place to young women at risk by giving them shelter, training, and counseling. This could be your daughter. What are you doing to help our most vulnerable in the state of Wisconsin?

(Brandi Whilock)



Let Parolees Vote

When you are convicted of a felony, you are not allowed to vote while you are incarcerated and for a certain time period while you are on parole or probation supervision afterwards.

Voting is considered a privilege. There was a time when only homeowners were allowed to vote. There was a time when only white people were allowed to vote and also a time when women were not allowed to vote.

So who dictates what a privilege is? Who decides who is privileged to vote, considering the fact that there was a time when you could not vote simply because of your social standing, gender, or race?

I believe that being physically incarcerated for a crime (you may or may not have committed) should be considered just punishment. After you have been released from prison and are successfully productive while supervised by appointed and qualified parole/probation agents and the judicial system as a whole, part of that successful reentering back into the community should include allowing you to vote. There should be requirements from the time you are released

from your incarceration and while you are being supervised until you have proven to society and the DOC that you are cooperative, productive and crime free. But when those requirements are being met, the privileges of voting (if it is a privilege at all) should be reinstated. Voting should be a right, not a privilege.

(Patricia McKnight)



Stop Elder Abuse

It is a fact that each and every one of us will get old. The question that is set before us this day is: when the time comes, who will care for you?

According to the US General Accounting Office, "In recent years the percentage of nursing homes (30% of the nation's 17,000 nursing homes) cited for deficiencies involving actual harm to residents or placing them at risk of death or serious injury remained unacceptably high." What this is saying is that the people who are entrusted to care for our elderly are in fact abusing them. This must come to an end because our elderly deserve better care.

Here are two suggested solutions:

1. Increase the wages for the C.N.As / caregivers because the work is very hard. People are not willing to do all that is required on the salary that they are being paid.
2. Limit the amount of clients given to each caregiver so that they can give quality care to the ones that they are assigned to.

The elderly have worked hard, paid their dues, and have earned the right to retain their dignity during this vulnerable stage of life. So the question that is set before us this day is: when the time comes, who will care for you?

(Lenora Rodin)

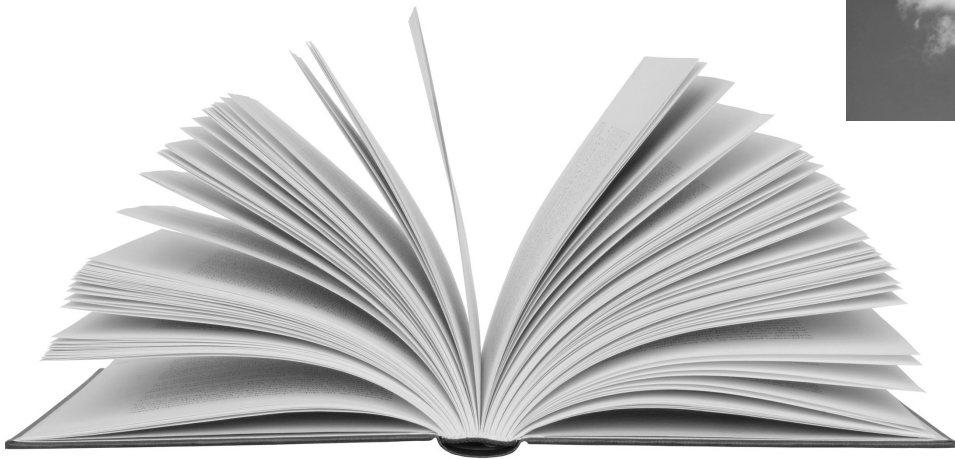
THINKING FIGURATIVELY

Book, oh Book . . .
Take me to a land of make believe
So I can discover animals not known to man
To savor the sweet and juicy fruits of
Forbidden lands.

Book, Book, Please
Don't ever leave
I don't want a Nook or any other screen
Give me a dusty cover any day
To feel your aging pages in my hand
And imagine myself in a faraway land.
(Nissa Uriostegui)

I am a cloud. I fly though the transparent sky. I
am light, free from worldly concerns.
I am the symbol of freedom, flying high above.
I am a cloud. I have traveled from place to
place inconsolably. I am a cloud that
sometimes cries because it can't stand being
lonely— loneliness in my soul, knowing that
you are not here anymore.

(Margarita Cid Luna)



I am an open book,
where my child can find answers.
I am a book full of experiences,
wisdom and knowledge.
I wish my child would understand
and listen to my advice.
I will prepare you and
I will guide you through the path
until the last page has been read. **(Natalia Rodriguez)**

I am Triple A, always just a
call away, and eager to save
the day. I'm constantly
worried about others, with no
time for me. Don't get too
excited—I'm far from free.
Fail to pay your fees, and
watch me and my resources

leave you on the side of the highway to
freeze. **(Jessi Hodges)**





I am a bird flying high in the sky, looking at buildings from up above, wondering what I can learn from each one, and seeing what I can bring back to the nest for the little birds. **(Teniesha Bland)**

I am a comic book, very colorful and full of words and actions. No matter how you read me, I always show different meanings. I am a comic book, action packed and full of laughs. Every page is a different scene, just like me, but everyday has a different means to make all smile. Some will cry and turn the page, but I'll have you smiling after a while. I am your comic book. **(Joseph Lentz)**



That lost, last sock. The only one left in the dryer. It has multiple colors and a jazzy texture. Even if you wanted to, you can't match it to any other. So you have to make a decision: whether to keep it or throw it away. Is it relevant alone or will it eventually find its partner and become a full set someday again? That's how life truly is—when you're lost in a cycle, within a large load. **(Dorothy Katana)**



My hair is cotton candy, a big piece of fluff. Some days it's wild, tame, or uncontrollable. I love my hair, and it's free to do whatever it wants. Sometimes I change color or change style just to keep you guessing. My hair has a mind of her own. It's a jazzy, classy, curly kind of chic . . . I am unashamed of my natural hair because it's who I am. **(Brandi Whitlock)**





I used to be a cigarette. I'd make smokers crave me and throw off their focus if they tried to resist the urge of me. I became a necessity to those who chose to make me a habit. I was so needed that smokers used me during a drink, on their work breaks, after a meal, or just while in deep thought. I'd pollute the air for those with virgin lungs, and I manipulated their world too. I was cancerous. Whether my actions gave me a good reputation or not, I was always the topic of somebody's conversation. Everyone knew my name . . . and then I burnt out.

(Shaneika Shanders)

Sleep is life's best friend
You can drift away in a dream
Or imagine yourself on the
Globetrotters Dream Team.
Sleep, one of my life lines,
But I rarely get to rely on you all the time
Sleep
Stumblin' to put my clothes on and
Found my face planted on the ground
Damn sleep
I didn't rely on you, now I got a busted lip,
a rug burn, and all confused

Sleep, one of my life lines,
But I barely get to rely on you all the time.
(Michelle Conley)

I am a Honey Bee
Busy, busy, busy
Going from flower to flower
Gathering knowledge and power
Pollinating my mind with everything that is
sweet and divine
Do tell me if this is just a Dream of mine?
So tender and so kind
Why would I want to hit rewind?
The past has made me who I am today
and let me tell you that I have come a long
way

Waiting for the time when that sweet honey
called Life is ready
so nice and steady
Until then I will work hard to make sure
that I do not leave one flower untouched
even though I know it will be rough
I am a Honey Bee
Trying to fly freely
And believe when I tell you that it has not
been easy
From the blowing winds and the rain that falls
I know that I will make it through it all!
(Melissa Dominguez)



CREATIVE CORNER



Some may call it crazy,
But I say it's bold.
To leave your comfort zone,
And learn the true meaning of cold.
No family or friend to be found
New places new faces all around
Everything's new and I feel free.
You can take me out of the country
But I'm still lil' country ole me. **(Nitia Johnson)**

I am a daughter of Mexico and of Immenzo Verdor, daughter of a hardworking woman, granddaughter of a farmer, descendant of Aztecs and Mayans. I am Mexico. I am from an ancient land, blessed by the gods. My skin is brown like the sand. **(Margarita Cid Luna)**



The sun shines all around
The birds with their splendid sounds
Singing songs of glee
Rejoicing in the warmth of the town
The flapping wings of the butterflies and the bees,
Sound like the cascading waterfall to me
At the spring where the lovers go
With the countless shades of the river trees
I find myself dreaming of the glow

Of the balmy streets of Mexico.
But suddenly I open my door
to the bitter Madison cold and snow. **(Veronica Tinajero)**

Derek, like a strong scent of good-smelling cologne, seeking to become spiritually strong with God, God alone. Though Derek sometimes will fail, fail will not prevail. Like the smell of success, it's in the class of the best, those who are determined to not be labeled like the rest. Wow! I wonder about the smell of success. **(Derek Dodd)**



Only if you knew how much love I have for you.
My whole day begins and ends with you.
Only if you knew, I never like to see you blue.
When you cry, I cry, we cry together.
Only if you knew, my whole world is you.
I live for and will die for you.
Only if you knew the love I have for you. **(Kelly Hayes)**





There, the beautiful place
I used to call home
where the sun slowly hides far in the horizon
every evening
it seems like it is hiding a secret
maybe it just went away to look for some hope.
Anxious I am to come back to my homeland
And witness another wonderful sunrise.

The blue sky overlooking me
Expressing the immensity of what liberty means
Hugging my people with hope.

The sound of the waves striking the rocks
eases my sadness, the strength of the tide
gives me the courage to
pursue my freedom. (**Natalia Rodríguez Miramontes**)



Who Am I?
Who am I is the question I'm asked,
As I sit and think behind this flawless mask.
Should I dare to disclose or let people in,
Or just let it out on paper with pen?
You may see me smiling from ear to ear,
But little do you know I'm fighting back tears.
I'm bruised and broken but you'll never know
Cause I'll throw a mask on and never let it show.
I'm tired and weary with a heart full of pain,

And it just seems like life is nothing but rain.
So who I am, I'll never show,
Cause the pain I feel no one knows. (**DeAngelo Hood**)



Children's Needs
Children hungry, children hurt, so much wasted food in the dirt, full bellies
laugh at their consumption, while empty bellies cry for some munching,
something flavorful. While the body aches for a vaccine, we sit in good
health while they wither away to deadly toxicities. I cry for these young
souls, wishing to give my life to save all their lives so they may live how we
do in greed and luxury rather than fear and misery, wondering when the
next meal's going to be or how long I can live with this disease. Time to
look in our hearts and put aside our needs, for there are starving, sick

children who need to be seen. (**Joseph Lentz**)

IDENTIFYING WITH THE FAMOUS



Even though I am not famous, I identify with Leticia Calderon, a famous Mexican actress, because she is dedicated to her two sons just as I am dedicated to my children.

Leticia Calderon has been an actress since she was fourteen years old. Calderon has won several awards for her acting in movies, soap operas (also known as telenovelas), and theater. Additionally, she wrote a book about her oldest son, who was born with Down syndrome.

Calderon was told that her second child was also going to be born with Down syndrome. The doctors advised her to stop the pregnancy. Her faith helped her decide not to do it. As a result, she received a miracle—her baby was born without the syndrome. I admire Calderon's faith and her willingness to accept God's will. I also believe that God gives us challenges in life and we need to accept them. **(Veronica Tinajero)**

I've always loved, admired, and related to Tupac. He was a rapper, actor, and motivational speaker and just the true definition of "Hip-Hop." Every time that his pen hit the pad or when his voice was on a mic, he had a story that all poor black kids could relate to. He spoke with such passion about the topics we talk about in class all the time. From drugs, to violence and police brutality, to the strength of women, hatred, love, black history, God, money, etc., Pac fed us the truth of what he saw being done, and the world punished him for it. The love he showed you through his arts and crafts made you feel like you knew him personally and also like he cared for you as an individual.

I identify with him because I come from that rough background that he talks about. I write about these types of topics in my music and journals, and I discuss these topics with anybody willing to listen. I believe most of my generation is built on lies, and we have no knowledge of our history. In return we have a whole race fueled with self-hate. That's why I love Pac. He was educated and hood and shed light on these dark places. I live in that same mind frame, with his similar background. Like him, I believe in the truth. **(Shaneika Sanders)**



Shakira became my idol in my last year of elementary school and has been one of my favorite artists since I was 10 years old. My friends and I enjoyed her music and used to talk about her all the time. I was very fascinated by the tone of her voice and particularly by her lyrics.

The first CD I ever had was Shakira's CD; my mom gave it to me as a present. I was so excited and thrilled to finally have my own CD, especially a Shakira CD. All of the music that I used to listen to was recorded on cassettes back then, and having a CD made me feel modernized and cool.

I identify with Shakira because she is natural and a common human being. She really cares for



children, especially the poor with scarce resources. I love and admire her big commitment to helping poor children all around the world. She has become a great activist by giving and raising money to build schools for children and encouraging them to continue their education.

I believe that every artist should have campaigns to help raise money for education since they are able to be heard by millions of people all around the globe. Like Shakira, I believe that the best way to combat poverty is to provide education to every single child in the world. Education should be very accessible; it is everyone's right.

Countries should stop fighting against each other to prove who is more powerful. Instead, countries should be fighting to find solutions to end illiteracy. Instead of sending troops to enemy countries, governments should send over teachers and instructors to provide education to cities in need.

This is why Shakira is so successful—she cares and helps people in need, people that seem to be forgotten by the government. **(Natalia Rodriguez)**

The first time I heard of him was like a peaceful and magical music. It was on a summer day when my mom came back home from the store. It was a really hot day, so she had brought us some popsicles and ice cream and groceries for the house. She also bought a movie called *Shark Tale* for us. My siblings and I very excitedly opened the movie and put it on. While time passed and the

movie ended, there was a part that got stuck in my head. The part was when two jellyfish were singing a song. I can remember those words, saying "Don't worry about a thing, cuz every little thing is gonna be all right." Since then, those words were my excuse, and they helped me when I felt sad. Remembering those words made me stronger because I knew that I was not the only person who gets sad or has bad days. I would keep my chin up and get back to being happy.

Later on when I got to middle school, my teacher brought up a guy named "Bob Marley." She told us everything about him and that all his work was mostly aimed to make peace around the world. As we learned more, I started to become one of his fans, so I looked up some of his songs. There it was: my one and only special song. I was extremely happy, and I was so shocked I couldn't believe it. The person I liked for all the things he does to make peace was the singer of my special song.



I can connect to Bob Marley because I can't stand violence, racism, or anything that hurts anyone. When I'm stressed, I put his music on and relax. It makes me think in so many positive ways, like to think before I speak when I am mad. After a while, I started listening to more music and looking at pictures of him. I also love to read about him and learn new things. He died of cancer when he was 36 years old, and that was really sad. The way he died wasn't really a right way; at least that's how I feel about it. He was the son of a white person, and he went through a lot. **(Brenda Juarez Cruz)**

I remember I was eight, not much older than my daughter is now. My family and I had just moved from Kenya and were living in our cramped apartment on State Street. My father had just bought our first colored television, and it



This is a hard topic for me. Over my life I have always found specific situations or individual experiences I can relate to, but I've just never felt connected to another soul, past or present, in this world. I spend a lot of time

was remarkable. It was like watching High Definition television; the quality of color on our 19-inch television meant "we have arrived." My father always made it mandatory for us to watch the news any way we could. That day, December 9, 1998, was very significant. On that particular day, I got to watch the first woman ever becoming president: Mrs. Ruth Dreifuss [of Switzerland]. She looked like any other white woman that I'd encountered in my four months in America, but there was such great pride watching her accept the presidency.

President Dreifuss was making great landmarks for not only being the first woman president, but also being the first Jewish woman, now about to lead a country that was making its 150th anniversary as a conservatively anti-Semitic state. As a social democrat, now she was going to preside over a seven-member cabinet, who were all men.

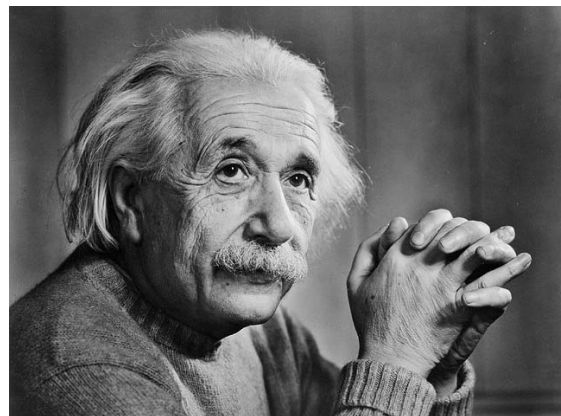
Now looking at where my life stands, I always remember my first encounter with Madame Ruth. I always have pride in all the powerful woman who break the barriers, but her life was very significant to me.

She overcame so many things, just as I had, during the most important year of our lives. Facing new obstacles and a new way of life is the same way I felt in 1998. I was young, but I knew that the drastic move that we'd done to America was going to change my life completely. I was at my most optimistic. I knew that challenges and adventures were to come, and the way I'd make a mark in this world was to be the first to overcome them.

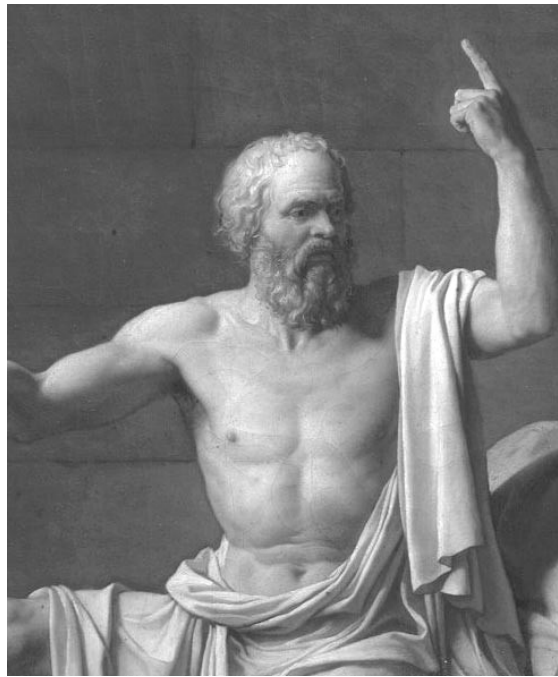
(Dorothy Katana)

feeling like me, mostly confused about what direction my soul is pushing me to seek. For the sake of this assignment I dug deep, and after hours decided I did not want to force a connection with just one individual. I find myself in tune with a lot of great thinkers. Quotes tend to motivate me. Albert Einstein once said, "If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough." So when I find myself confused, or unsure if I can tackle a feat, I remember that strength comes from knowledge and I get to work learning. It's a process, but thanks to great thinkers like Einstein, instead of accepting defeat or listening to others criticize my crazy, I start my journey. I am then able to overcome all obstacles with understanding, through knowledge.

Another one of my favorite Einstein quotes is when he said, "If you want to live a happy life, tie it to a goal, not to people or objects." That's where I am happy. This is where I find worth and get the confidence that my time here will not be a waste. I live to follow my curiosity and withstand hardship, while focusing on today and being okay with my mistakes. I've learned the rules. Again thanks to Einstein and other great thinkers like him, I just play better. **(Jessi Hodges)**



“And a good life is equivalent to a just and honorable one,” Socrates told Crito. Socrates stood up for what he believed in and what he believed was right. He also had a habit of thinking outside of the box and pushing the people around him to do the same. In my family, I stand on my own when it comes to my faith. They don’t understand the personal relationship I have with God, and since discovering Socrates, I began telling everybody how important the relationship between God and one’s self is.



of the pursuit of happiness, liberty, freedom and equality.

King did not just speak for the Black people, but he spoke of and to all people all over the world. His bravery and dedication to God pushed him to be a leader that would open the eyes of people everywhere—especially the people who were for the unjust, immoral control of people who deserved the same life as those trying to deny them their rights because of the color of their skin.

I have also learned to read outside of the box since I discovered Socrates. What I once believed to be true is nothing but an image of my past. I am now aware that I can be a photographer, pianist, or maybe even a philosopher. I want to change the world one listener at a time. **(Nissa Uriostegui)**

I was born of the “African” American descent. I was born in 1958 and raised in Madison, Wisconsin. I was in third grade in 1968. Martin Luther King was shot and killed because he was a chosen leader. I believe he was not necessarily chosen by the people but by God. He was chosen because at that time the African American nation needed a leader who was not afraid to carry the message of God to the world that all men are created equal.

I can only imagine what it must have been like to feel the ultimate degradation of slavery—to not be considered as a human being worthy

If not for Martin Luther King and many others of all nationalities, where would I be today? Certainly I would not be writing about the appreciation and gratitude that I have for him and his strategies to fight and lead a people. Watching his triumphant non-violent execution of unjust Civil Rights was amazing.

I realize that through every endeavor that I pursue in my life and the interactions that I have with other people, success will be determined by my attitude and actions. What I believe is so simple and human, as should everyone: that is, to



do unto others as you would have them do unto you. That simple, realistic, humanitarian gesture is what will ultimately prevail. Anyone in their right mind would want to pursue this understanding. As a matter of understanding and moral equality, through the help and leadership of a strong, fearless man, we came to believe that a power stronger than ourselves would restore the logical understanding of God.

It is still a long and winding road, but let FREEDOM ring. It is only right. **(Patricia McKnight)**

The famous person I identify with is Bishop T.D. Jakes. Why? I want to help bring souls unto Christ. I will be a voice to be heard for Christ, just like Bishop Jakes. I care about other people more than myself. I want to spread love to all, like Bishop Jakes, stand strong in my faith, and do God's will, like Bishop T.D. Jakes. **(Derek Dodd)**



Sonia Sanchez is one of my favorite poets! My mom introduced me to her in my early twenties. When I first read her poems, I felt touched; alive that she actually wrote about how I felt sometimes. I just fell in love with her style of writing. Sometimes I have a hard time expressing my thoughts, but when I read what she writes, I get it. Her love poems make you fall deep in love with the words that she uses and just deep in love, period. Her love poems are very sexy to me, without her having to use explicit words. This is her poem "Ballad":

*I fixed my body
under his and went
to sleep in love.*

Sonia Sanchez makes me feel loved and like I can love better when I read her poems.

(Brandi Whitlock)



From the first time that I heard your raspy voice and drawn out "aye's," I knew that I found someone who sings the pain that I dealt with, so deep that you can hear it in your voice—the hunger, the pain, the drive, and how you knew that no matter what happened around that next corner, you were going to keep pushing. Sometimes when you would metaphorically say some of

the things that you've seen or gone through, you were so close to me that at times I would feel a tingle inside of me, a momentum or a fire becoming bigger and stronger. It was a drive that pushed me to do better even with things I was doing wrong.

I can still remember a friend telling me about you; at the time I pre-judged you by your name [Jeezy], thinking you were another fad— someone who will come and go. Then, I heard that one song. That one song that was about a survivor, about a man that was



that was done or will be done, drives me, for I have been through and seen so much of what you talk about. And for this, I am and will always be grateful for the truth that you speak about through your pain, experience, and music. **(Christopher Villalpando)**

I am going to start by saying that I respect people who admire all of these big names and people. One thing that this class has taught me is to speak my mind. I want to say that I do not admire any famous person, but I

thrown to the wolves and was determined to make it out alive, to make it out a free man and not be subjected to being another number. I could listen to this song and the entire album and every metaphor. Every between-the-line lyric that you put together would hit home so close. It was as if I could take the lyrics from your songs, write them out, and write my life story. It's crazy how two different people from two totally different parts of the country could have so much in common. Yet the sad thing is that there are many more just like the two of us. We came from poverty, determined to break the cycle of living off state help.

admire my classmates. Each one of them has a story that they overcame each day, and when they overcame obstacles, it seems like another one was already waiting for them.

I especially admire Sahira because during class she has been an open book. It seems like she has gone through a lot since she was a child, yet I see her every Wednesday with a smile on her face. I believe that in one of her papers she said that her husband is not a fan of her going to school, yet she is in class every week. I mean, she even

thinks of us outside of class. How do I know this? She brings us gifts, and she makes food to share. I secretly hope she brings more iced coffee. I am sure that for a couple of us, she was the only one to give us a Valentine's card. She has a big heart and positive attitude. She is beautiful inside and outside, and that is why I admire her.

(Heydy Pichardo)

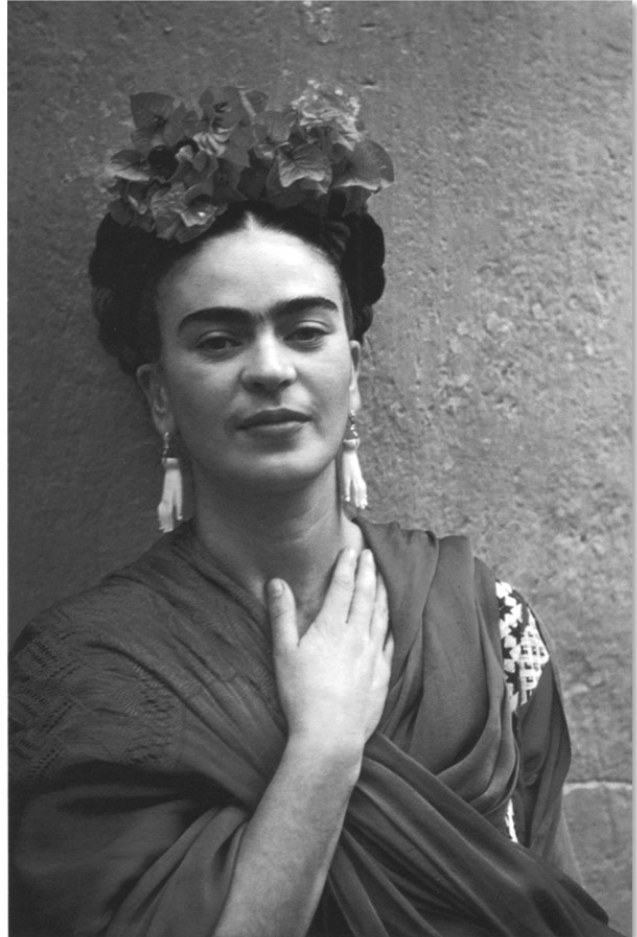
As I've accomplished so much in just over a year of being home and getting compliments on how proud or impressed people are with my progress, I still am not satisfied. I programmed myself to be as such so that no matter what, I am and will never be comfortable in the position that I am in. I starve myself by wanting more for myself and my family. Your words and pain in your voice, the hunger that comes deep from within even when speaking about the wrong



THE BLUEST WALL

BY SAHIRA ROCILLO RAMIREZ

I still remember the first time I saw her. It was an afternoon during a hot spring day. I was wearing my middle school uniform. It was so warm that I had to take my sweater off. My cheeks were red; I knew this because I could feel the warm blood running through my body. My white school shirt, damp with sweat, felt cold against my back as I leaned on the metal chair. I was a 12-year-old girl, seated in front of a computer. The internet was the new sensation, and the only way to have access to it was through a learning center or by renting a computer by the hour in places called Cyber Cafés. It must have been the first or second time I got to surf the internet. I was in my first year of middle school and had just got done painting with oils for the first time that morning. Our teacher was talking vaguely to us about traditional painting styles and Mexican artists. So I began typing: famous Mexican painters... click. I scrolled down a bunch of pictures of men, and then I saw her.



There she was, her warm smile hiding a secret that no one would ever know about, contrasted with the honesty of her dark brown eyes. Her face was framed by a crown of blushed flowers on her neatly weaved hair. She had bold eyebrows, a hint of blush on her lips, and softly rough skin. Her right hand caressed the left side of her neck. She was leaning on the bluest wall, which looked as deep as the sea, for she seemed to be floating gently on its surface. I could feel her gaze; she was looking right through me. A pair of tiny hands was dangling from her ears as earrings. Her plum-pink shawl was guarding her chest as though everything that she bore inside it could pour out if she wasn't wearing it. My eyes darted away, and when I looked again I felt her piercing dark eyes on my soul. Perhaps that's why she was smiling so secretively. She knew me, and she could see inside of me. She knew something about me that I wasn't sure if I even knew myself. Who is this woman? Frida Kahlo, it read at the bottom of the picture.

After reading about her life, I found out that she went through more than a fair share of emotional and physical pain. It felt as though she was made to suffer from the moment she was conceived. Her mother was depressed when she was pregnant with Frida because her

infant son had died. She was already being boiled inside a womb of hot brewing pain. When she was a little girl, she overcame polio, but she walked with a limp for the rest of her life. Then she was involved in a bus accident that permanently brought a lot of physical pain and health complications, and it also stripped her capability of bearing children. Once she had to have an abortion because of her critical health. When she was "better," she had a miscarriage. Her impaired spine and legs, the abortion that she had to have performed, and her miscarriage were recurring themes in her paintings. Then there was Diego, whom she described as the biggest tragedy that ever happened to her. She once said, "There have been two great accidents in my life. One was the trolley, and the other was Diego. Diego was by far the worst."



It was hard to believe how someone that went through so much pain and sorrow could love and cherish life so much and bring such color into the world. Whenever I come across something she painted or something she wrote, I can relate in a direct way. I remember how I



giggled when I came across one of her quotes because I felt she was talking about me and how I had always felt like a misfit. She wrote, "I used to think I was the strangest person in the world but then I thought there are so many people in the world, there must be someone just like me who feels bizarre and flawed in the same ways I do. I would imagine her, and imagine that she must be out there thinking of me too. Well, I hope that if you are out there and read this and know that, yes, it's true I'm here, and I'm just as strange as you." When I read this quote, I felt as though the doors of a new tribe had been opened just for me. I felt part of a community of freaks, but in a good way—the kind of freaks that leave a positive print in the world, or at least in the people that they touch. I said, "Here I am, Frida, thinking of you too."

Dear Frida,

On my list of "Things to do before I die" there's this special task that I have to accomplish. One day, I will visit your Casa Azul in Coyoacan, Mexico. Even though it is forbidden to touch your paintings, photographs, or personal belongings, I secretly plan on touching the fabric of one of your dresses or your jewelry, or to run my finger through a small brush stroke in one of your paintings. See, it will be as though we were shaking hands for the first time. Since we were born in different eras and I can't do it in person, this said act will be the only way I can feel accomplished about our relationship. It is the only way I can touch you.

When I see your paintings, I realize that I, too, tend to create out of the things that pain me. Instead of painting like I used to, I write now. I use metaphors to throw lethal secrets as hidden bombs. I hide my pain through sentences because I just have to let all that pain bleed out somehow. I think I've stopped painting. I still don't know if only for a while, or if I have actually stopped painting forever. Unlike you, I find myself anxious about the bluntness of a painting. I, too, used to paint my own realities. I have never painted dreams, and even though I have respect for abstract art, I don't feel anything when I try to express myself like that. Perhaps it is because I don't feel I am being honest with my soul. After all, "A picture is worth more than a thousand words."

I don't think I have stopped painting completely. I know this because to this day, I still pick up all kinds of art supplies at thrift stores and craft stores. It's like I'm gearing up for a storm that I know soon will come. I feel the brushes staring at me through their case, and the paper asks for the moisture of the paint. I know they will catch up to me sooner or later. As Benjamin Franklin said, "You may delay, but time will not." I've tried to ask myself if I am scared of painting again. I usually throw my subject matter right on the canvas. That can be scary, you know? I will paint something that no one knew I had inside of me, I will paint someone that no one thought was in my mind, and I will paint sorrows that no one knew I was going through. That's why I resort to words right now, I think, because I can be as explicit as I want, yet the subject can still be trapped in the middle of a sentence--lying there, without a face.

While I gather strength to paint again, I think it is worth mentioning how thankful I am to have found you that hot spring afternoon, for I don't feel like I suffer alone in this world. I feel like I am walking and you are right next to me, giving me courage and reminding me to always be creative and follow my heart, ambitions, and dreams. You came into my life through my eyes and made a revolution in me like a bolt of lightning. You are one of the warmest memories of my adolescence. Your art and the way you carried yourself through life still inspire me every day. I aspire to be as brave and bold as you were and to start being honest to myself. Thank you for being yourself at all times,

*Yours truly
Sahira Rocillo*





