# ODYSSEY ORACLE

# CELEBRATING THE SEMESTER





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Emily Auerbach, Co-Director/Founder; Oracle Editor Kevin Mullen, Co-Director Emily Azad, Program Manager Christina DeMars, Coordinator Beth McMahon, Oracle Designer emily.auerbach@wisc.edu kevin.mullen@wisc.edu emily.azad@wisc.edu christina.demars@wisc.edu 608-262-3733 or 608-712-6321 608-572-6730 608-262-0763 608-262-3885

Class photography by Colleen Johnson, Em Azad, and Christina DeMars



## WHO SAID IT?

Students were asked to make a case for why they should continue in Odyssey for second semester. Find out with our first Oracle of 2020 who said the following:

It would be devastating if I wasn't allowed to continue through to semester two.

I look forward to seeing my classmates, and it went from a room full of strangers to a family-like environment.

This class is preparing me for nursing school and teaching me discipline and patience.

I have found a group of people who made me believe in myself and gave me strength and courage to pursue my dreams.

Being in this class has helped me so much to come out of my shell.

So far, Odyssey has expanded my vocabulary, got me back in the habit of reading, and helped me think deeper.





This journey has taught me to remain humble, judge less, and seek more.

Odyssey has changed my way of thinking and helped my writing to change.

Socrates seeped his way into my openeyed outlook, Malcolm X made me understand why literacy is so important, and Frederick Douglass made me want to be a better black man.

Odyssey as a whole has been my backbone, my peace, my safety zone.

I've listened to the strength of my classmates, which keeps the fire of learning in my mind.

Odyssey is only the beginning of my journey to success because I am smart, I am important, and I am somebody.



I still have so much more to learn, so much knowledge to gain, and so many more memorable experiences to have.

It is fun to be around people with good vibes and energy.

My goal is to not miss any classes next semester and get to know my classmates better.

I'm a sponge absorbing and learning everything I can.

Odyssey has gotten me out of my comfort zone.

Now whenever I read a word I don't understand, instead of just brushing over it, I actually look up the meaning.

I never knew I would enjoy school so much, as I hated it growing up.

Odyssey has helped me open my mind.

I want to show the person I see in the mirror that you are going to be better

than yesterday.

Not enrolling me in class next semester would be like teaching a baby how to walk and not allowing him to run.

I find myself wanting this more and more for myself as well as for my son, which is huge.

Being in the Odyssey class has been a good experience for getting me back into the swing of balancing work, school, and life.

Why stop growing? I love coming to class with all my positive classmates.

The transformational qualities in this melting pot will bring out the greatest flavor in us all because we

all are rubbing off on each other like the tastiest stew you will ever have.

Thanks to the Odyssey Project, I can push forward to realize my dreams.



## NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS: It's Not Too Late to Change!

Near the end of A Christmas Carol, Ebenezer Scrooge wakes up from his symbolic dream and realizes that he is not dead after all. Now he has the chance to change his life and make amends for mistakes he has made in the past. He can repair damaged relationships with his family, become more generous, and work on being a better man. After reading A Christmas Carol, students made resolutions, large and small, as they go forth into a new year.



Personally, I don't think one needs to wait until a new year to change. I've already started working on mine. Punctuality is not my strongest trait, but it is crucial. Sticking to a schedule and being on time sets one's foundation for success, in my

opinion. Lately my business at work hasn't been producing the results I want it to, so I've been doing a lot of self-reflection to see what it is that I can do to improve within myself. If I don't improve, I can't expect my business to, nor can I expect for other things in life to improve. Sticking to a schedule will help me be more effective and efficient with my time. In addition, I've been working on controlling my emotions and not letting them control me. Being able to master your mind will lead you to be able to master life. Yes, we are human so I have the right to feel, but it's not about what you do in life; it's about how you do it. (Aerial Bailey)



My first resolution is to keep working on my relationship with my three boys: Jr., Jay, and Michael. I need to show them that they are the most important people in my life. They come first before any man. They are my young men turning into grown

men. My next resolution is to make a stronger bond with my mom. I have to also make sure I learn as much as I can from her while I still can. My own resolution for myself is to work harder on myself, show myself I am strong and that I can, and never to give up on myself again. Keep going, 'cuz life gets hard and life still goes on, no matter what. I can't give up on life or this class. One of the things

I need to work on is keeping my family in my life to show them that no matter who they are, they are important to my life. They are not any less due to the decisions that they make. They are still family—my family. We are all important in our own ways, and we all have important roles to play. Keep working harder in life! (Margie Barajas)



One of my resolutions is to repair my credit and pay off bills I know I should've paid. Going forward, I have to get more responsible about my finances. As far as things with myself and the person I am and want to be, I want to be a nicer and more

responsible person, yet still not let anyone run over me. Also I need to stop getting so involved in everyone else's business and stop letting people put me in their business. It really upsets me when someone hurts or makes a fool of someone I care about, but I have to detach. I have to let them "handle their scandals." (Laisha Cooke)



Two resolutions I have this year coming up is to be a better me than I was last year and to be able to walk across the stage. Being a better me means letting go of things I can't change. I need to seek help when I need it and put myself first.

Me walking across the stage will mean so much, too, because it will show that everything I've been through didn't stop me and I kept pushing. I will be filled with so much excitement and pride and will feel like a fighter, just knowing I made my mother proud. (Tiffany Dixon)



My resolution is to figure out what the hell I'm 'a do with my life. Am I moving out of my mama's house again? Am I going to continue being a preschool teacher (God give me strength)? What do I want to do with my future? Bro, I don't know. I'm

21. But my perspective to these questions needs to be rooted in happiness. I'm going to change my outlook to benefit my mental health. I'm going to catch up on my Odyssey work. I'm going to take my time because "that which is perfect is finished" (Quasimodo). I hope we all grow. (Corey Dean)



My resolution for the new year is to take one step forward to my life. I have to start my dental hygienists program this coming new year and go to school full time to achieve my goals. For anything I start, I want to have the determination to finish

it. I also need to be courageous, no matter what, to achieve my goals. I need to take the second semester of Odyssey seriously without missing one class so that I can get the GPA I wish. (Kossiwavi Eloh)



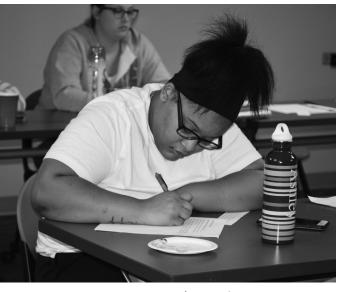
When I was young, I used to avoid people because I was different and wanted only to be around people that thought like me. As I encountered others' presences in my life, I saw how amazing others could bring the best out of me because of

what they had to offer this world. This opened my mind to not judge anyone. (Rasaki Emmanuel)



I would like to go into the new year first becoming more joyful. I have always been a happy person; I bless others every day. I think of others every day. I have a big heart. I am kind, a giver, and I pay it forward. In 2020 I want to give myself that same

kind of love. I sometimes put myself last and others first. I will continue to love on all God's people. I will continue to stay the course and be who I am destined to be. (Jyneeva Hunt)





My New Year's Resolution is to remain positive at all times and always be grateful for the things I do have. Also, I need to recognize my own toxic behavior and remove myself from people when I'm being toxic. For example, sometimes it's

not other people—sometimes it's me, which means I should separate myself and work on myself so I don't mess up people as I learn about who I really am. I also plan to lose 40 pounds by July for my trip to Jamaica for my birthday. (Ashley Lee)



My resolutions for 2020 are several things I would like to list. First of all, take care of myself by eating healthier. The second one is to stay disciplined with my reading habit; that is, read as much as I can in order to improve my writing skills.

Third, continue my education because Odyssey has inspired me to pursue other goals. (Elíazar Martínez-Munguia)



Some resolutions I have for the next year are to work on making my financial amends. I want to get a job so I can start chipping away at my debt so I can become a better provider for my family. I want to take on a larger role in the NA community

to extend any help wherever possible. (Krista Mellott)



As I go forth in the new year, I want to fix my credit. My goal is to reach at least a 630. I want to move further in my career. I want to continue to be in college. I want to break chains of bad relationships, bad vibes people that God doesn't want in my path. I

want to become a better mother, more productive in productivity, like my job. I want to enter the new year strong with a strong mindset. (Natia Saffold)



I've been slowly making resolutions as I'm on the road (driving trucks with a new position) as I pray and try managing my life through the chaos it's become. (Jerome Sanders)



This year my resolution is to keep my resolutions, which is something I've never done before. I want to continue to learn how to love myself and accept my flaws. I strive to go to the gym as well as eat more greens, not only for my body but for my mind.

I would like to make new friends for I have weeded out all of my toxic ones. I will try to journal more and hopefully gain enough mental clarity to benefit from meditation, which has been a struggle for me in the past. I figure if I make enough resolutions, I'm bound to follow through with at least half of



one. My biggest and most important resolution is to find happiness. (Nina Salisbury)

My resolution is large. I would like to be able to write in a way that helps me and others. (Marcello Segovia)



This year I have two big goals. First, I'd like to get into better shape. My goal is to work out for one hour, five times a week. My second goal is to have a conversation with my dad. I'd like to talk to him about the lack of presence

he's had in my life, with hopes of getting through some of the struggles I've been having. I'm sure it won't be a fun conversation, but hopefully it will lead to something positive. (Riley Sessions)



This coming year, wonderful 2020, is going to be a trying one. I believe that my resolution will be to continue to be a better person to my kids and in my relationship. There are many goals that I want to achieve, but the main thing is to be a better

me. 2019 has been the most trying year of my life, from homelessness, to having my boyfriend incarcerated, to not knowing where my daughter will attend school until the week before it started. My resolution is to have complete stability for my kids and keep the spirits alive as my boyfriend sits his time. I hope to be able to show them the world and keep a genuine smile on all their faces. I hope to continue to show my girls all the love even in this dark, demented world. (Shiloh Simonsen)



My resolutions going into the new year are to be more consistent and a better person overall. Lately I haven't been consistent in terms of showing up and doing the daily things I need to do in order to continue to be successful. I want to better myself

in terms of health, relationships, and mentally and emotionally. Lately I've seemed to have a shorter fuse and have been more aggressive. I've noticed this change in my actions, and I'm not happy with the person I've been becoming. I've allowed minor things to escalate to more serious situations, which leads to consequences I don't want to face. I've been making better choices as of late and have seen the positive impact it has had on my life. There are a few habits I still need to work on—things such as being lazy, selfish, and smoking too much weed. Although I truly enjoy the feeling smoking gives me, it has caused me to rely on it in any and every situation. I bash my mom all the time about her drinking but fail to realize my smoking habits are also impacting me negatively. Although I may never give it up, I've learned to live in moderation. (Jaison Thomas)

#### AFFIRMATIONS FROM CHAR'S TREE

Our classroom assistant, alumna Char Braxton '06, asked students to write affirmations to help them through the dark wintry months, and then she displayed them on a holiday tree.

"Keep trying. Find power in yourself."—Carmen Tinajero

"I will finish class and graduate."—Riley Sessions

"It's never too late. If you try, you will succeed." -Savannah **Torres** 

"Ahhhh! Push it, girl!" — Arkeia Cameron

"I will be stress free. I will earn my M.A."—Moriah Parker

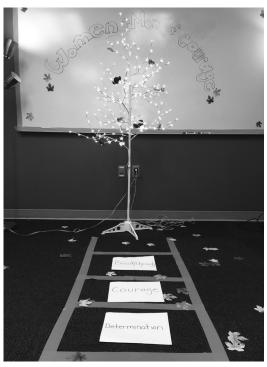
"You are enough."—Nina Salisbury

"I will write a new book and I will find a publisher." - guest Maxine Gordon

"This too shall pass."—Shiloh Simonsen

"Running away from your problems is a race you'll never win."—Ashley Lee





"Stay the course and be the change you want to see."—Jyneeva Hunt

"Forgive others and learn that we all have flaws."—Tiffany Dixon

"Conqueror of suicide, depression, anxiety, and homelessness"—Ron Burford

"Stay blessed."—Natia Saffold

"U Can Do It: Put UR Mind 2 It"—O'Shane Wilmoth

"My challenge to myself is to not give up and keep fighting, even if it feels like the impossible task. . . . Stay and don't give up. Get caught up with my work and try to get to know my classmates better."—

Ashton McDonald

"It isn't about the score on the board; it's about the players that you ran, fought, and did everything with to try winning for."—Jerome Sanders

"I will be successful."—Aerial Bailey

"Don't give up. Life will get hard but you got this. You will finish and be/do better than you have been. Smile 2 -- Margie Barajas

"Let's share together." — Marcello Segovia

"Never give up. You're capable." — Krista Mellott

"Show up to class every week and participate."—Jaison Thomas

"I am 4 feet 11 inches, but my smile is the most powerful gift I have. It gives me equal value with my peers."—Rasaki Emmanuel

"The only shot you miss is the one you don't take."—Tim Mosley

"I am never going to give up on creating art to help my loved ones and my people."—Corey Dean

"The road to success is not easy but it's not impossible! Keep going, and it will all be worth it at the end!" –Loché Mothoa

"You are almost there. Just keep going."—Kossiwavi Eloh

"When I don't succeed right away, I try again."—Elíazar Martínez-Mungia



### MORE WOMEN OF COURAGE



My Role Model By Kossiwavi Eloh

Many people in my life have inspired me, but when I take a look at my mom, she is the role model for me. She is a very strong woman. She lost her marriage at an early age and was left with four kids, she works hard, and right now she is taking care of my

daughter and three other kids.

Growing up in the village of Assiko in Togo, West Africa, my mother had life heavily upon her shoulders. She had to take on the responsibilities of taking care of my brother, who always was getting sick with high fevers, and taking care of the rest of us at the same time.





In 1987, at eighteen years old, she met my dad. Together they started

to raise us. Unfortunately, my dad died after eight years of marriage and left my mother with four kids. I know that was one of the most devastating moments in her life. I still remember coming home and my dad's things were gone. Our home somehow felt so empty. I won't ever forget the sad look that consumed my mother's face, something I was not used to seeing.

Despite being a single mom of four kids, she never stopped pursuing what she loved to do. My mother opened an

orphans foundation in her village to help, especially teaching people who wanted to learn how to sew things but didn't have money. I can't imagine how strong she was.

In conclusion, my mother, in my eyes, is the perfect definition of a courageous woman. Dealing with what life had to throw at her, she never gave up. Because of her, I learned that courage was not the absence of fear but the triumph over it. She taught me that life has problems but not any too big to conquer.



Strive to Be Great, No Matter What By Jaison Thomas

My woman of courage is my mother because in her 49 years of life, she has overcome a lot of adversity. Although times may get hard and life may knock you down, she's always encouraged me to get up and continue to stand up for what I believe in, have no regrets, and be the best person I can be. I thank her every day for everything she's done for me

and my three sisters. Without my mother, I'm not sure I'd be the person I am today.

My mother's name is Chanel Nicole Thomas. She was born July 27, 1970 in Chicago, Illinois. She had an older brother, Bennie Fleming, but they grew up in separate households. She grew up in a two-parent home on the west side of Chicago. She had a great childhood and really enjoyed being an only child.

She attended a Catholic elementary school. Every summer, Chanel would spend her vacation visiting family in Madison, Wisconsin. At the young age of 12, she tragically lost her biological father to a stroke. She said her life changed after this, and only having her mother by her side was difficult for her. After two years, her mother remarried a man by the name of Hura Brown. Things were going well, and everything was back to normal. Losing her father was one of the hardest things she had been through. Chanel went to a Catholic all-girls school, and high school was a breeze for her. She had many friends and had great grades. She graduated in 1988 and attended college the next semester.

Chanel decided to focus on school and didn't get her first job until after she obtained her associates degree from Robert Morris College. Her first job was at Unum Insurance, where she was a disability claims specialist. She worked there until she became pregnant with her second child. Once I was born, she moved to



Madison. When she got settled in, she found a job at WEA Trust, once again in disability claims. She worked there for eight years. During her first stint in Madison, she also gave birth to two more children, Danielle and Kayla. Her mother became sick, and she had to move back to Chicago for six months. When she returned to Madison, she started working at the American Red Cross. While working at the Red Cross, she also went back to school to finish her bachelor's degree. In 2016, she finally earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology. She continued to work at the American Red Cross for another year until she found a job that she genuinely enjoys. That job is at the Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation, and she couldn't be happier.

2017 was a tough year for Chanel. She lost her brother in November due to kidney failure. He was diabetic and had dialysis appointments every other day. She also got the news that her mother's Alzheimer's disease was getting worse. Her mother continues her battles with her health, spending nights in the ER due to multiple seizures and dehydration. Her health is slowing improving, but Chanel is always on alert and constantly checking in with her mother's doctors to make sure things are going well. Chanel also witnessed a homicide in the summer of 2017 at the 7-11 on Todd Drive. Two men were gunned down. Seeing that sent Chanel into a frenzy, and she was in panic mode. She wanted to pack everything up and move her family to Florida to be with her oldest child, Briana. After things calmed down and the crime in our neighborhood came to a stop, she realized that staying in Wisconsin for another two to three years wouldn't be a bad idea, considering her youngest child is still in high school. Although she would love to move, she wouldn't want to move her child away from the only place she called home and a place she grew up in. Chanel still plans on moving to West Palm. She's not sure when, but she won't let anything stop her.

I chose Chanel as my woman of courage because after seeing a homicide, losing her brother, and having her mother barely remember who she is sometimes, she's still able to get up every day and make great things happen. Her life has had ups and downs, just like anyone else, but to be there by her side to witness how she handles these make or break situations motivates me to be as emotionally and mentally strong as she is. Her courageous effort to always get up and strive to be great, no matter what stands in front of her, makes her a great candidate for a woman of courage.



Going Above and Beyond By Savannah Torres

If for whatever reason I feel proud, I know who I can call. When I received the news about getting accepted into Odyssey, she was the first person who came to my mind. I choose to write about a woman named Rhonda Morgan, a social worker who was introduced into my life when I was 14. She was someone who overcame challenges and hardships yet

worked with teens and families who were nonconformist.

Growing up for me was rough. I was constantly in trouble and had little to no respect for authority. Public schools were no longer an option. It was time for a more structured and secure setting. That's when I was introduced to Rhonda, who became my social worker. From the moment I met her, I knew she was different. No matter how much I pushed, she pulled, determined to not let my bad attitude or behavior get in the way of helping me do the things I didn't know I was capable of doing. I remember a time in school where I got into an argument with our school liaison officer. Things were heavily heated and I was now awaiting transport to jail. Rhonda stepped in between the situation, getting herself involved and asking the officers to let her take care of the situation. She did not want me arrested and explained that when dealing with me, I had to be worked with differently. I remember Officer Jones walking away from her and allowing her to take over the situation. She didn't let me get away with anything, but she would break down or explain the situation and help me help myself by finding new ways of problem solving. She always went above and beyond to help me stay focused. She took risks going against other authority figures, not knowing if the end result would hurt her while helping me.

This lady who was a part of my life went through some of my hardest years, handling me during my most difficult stages in life. She was still holding on and dedicating herself to her work. Throughout high school, she definitely was my savior, but it went beyond that. After high school, we always stayed in contact. She knew my life personally, good or bad.

No matter what I was going through, she never gave up on me. I wondered why. She eventually told



me that I reminded her of herself. I was shocked. This woman who seemed to have it all together actually didn't. She had been through some things, but she was resilient. How? How did she overcome all these hardships yet become such a beautiful soul to stay around and help others, never giving up on them and helping us find ways to get ourselves to a better us? This woman inspired me. She had the courage I wanted.

Till this very day, I adore this woman. She has given me strength and courage through her words, support, and the work that she does. I have been able to hear her story and definitely relate to her. I would have never guessed the walk of life she went through because of how well she carried herself, but I now know why she worked with us or our families the way she did. She got on our level, understood us, worked with us in a way that worked, not by what "the book" said but in a way she could relate to because she felt our pain and knew how we felt. She used her courageous personality to be the best social worker she could be. That's why I chose her to be my woman of courage!



### Bouncing Back from Tragedy By Timothy Mosley

Her name is Maya, and she was born on March 6, 1996. Maya (Odyssey '18) and I have been in an on and off relationship for about three years now. We have more ups than downs. Our relationship is great when things are good

but can be very toxic when things aren't. All in all, I love her and she's a great person. She has a very big heart, she loves kids, and her sense of humor is to die for.

Maya and I were broken up for a while sometime last year. During our break up, something horrible and downright disgusting happened to her: she was raped. When she first told me the news, I was upset and angry, more so at myself because I thought that if I hadn't made the mistakes I



made in our relationship, I would've been there and it would have never happened. I blamed myself for a while. I just couldn't believe that something so terrible could happen to someone so loving and sweet. She didn't want to tell me who they guy was at first because she feared that I would do something stupid. I must admit, I wanted to take the law into my own hands, but I knew that wouldn't go so well for me. So I convinced her into going to the police. We found out the guy's real name because at first she only knew his street name. The police did their investigation and eventually arrested the guy. He's out on bond right now, and she's just waiting to start trial pretty soon.

After going to the police and letting them do what they do, Maya was such an emotional wreck. I had to witness her waking up from nightmares crying and screaming. There have been times at night that she wouldn't even allow me to hold her because it was just uncomfortable to her. I've had to quit multiple night shift jobs because she still doesn't really feel too safe alone at night. She still faces her battles with what has happened to her. For instance, she still sees the guy who did it from time to time when she's out at the mall or just going to stores.



I chose Maya as my woman of courage because, even though this guy took so much away from her physically and mentally, she still hasn't let him defeat her. It took a while and she's still not a hundred per cent herself yet, but all in all she's still that loving and caring person she's always been. She still laughs and jokes around like nothing ever happened. She still shows so much love to the people she cares about and even people she barely even knows.

Maya has stopped working and opened up her own home daycare, which had always been her dream job. She's such the perfect example of how not to let something so tragic determine who you are. I am so proud of her for bouncing back from something that took so much away from her and still following her dreams. No matter what happens between us, I will always wish her the very best and hope she continues to stay strong.



Angel of Courage By Moriah Parker

A hero is someone who inspires others, gives you the courage to strive for your goals, never gives up on you, and always gives you the courage to keep trying. My grandmother, Dessie Lee Beene-Parker, is someone who, no matter what obstacles they face, still remains resilient. She's dealt with a painful childhood, moving to

Wisconsin with her husband at war and having six children, and starting a new journey with education and a career.

My grandma was born into quite a large family. Grandpa Leander, her father, was a provider. He had many different sources of income, from loaning out money with interest, finding different trade jobs, selling milk, meat, and vegetables



from his farm. Her father, Leander, was not a pleasant or lovely guy. My mother told me once how difficult it was for Grandma to grow up with her father. Her childhood life was filled with some difficult decisions with minimally positive outcomes. Leander had a demeanor that was harsh and damaging to his children's self-esteem. Leander's character is described as bossy, but Dessie's mother, Louise, has been described as fostering, sweet, and, pleasant to be around.

My grandfather and grandmother married on December 29, 1950. A couple of months later, Erskin was drafted into the army for the Korean Conflict. He spent a year in the army before being released. During the time of Erskin being away, Dessie moved to Milwaukee, WI. Her brothers and sisters had moved in surrounding areas, like Chicago, for employment so she followed. Grandma became very active in the church and found Milwaukee to be a home. In July 1954, Grandpa and Grandma had their first child together, Rhia. My mother was the first and five others came after her. Their marriage became rocky when Grandpa decided to become a Muslim. Both of them grew up in the same church and this change surprised her and the kids. Eventually, they got through it, and Grandpa didn't try to change Grandma's view on God and the church.

While Dessie's six children became older, Dessie went back to college and received a paraprofessional degree from Milwaukee Area Technical College. With her ever-positive attitude and never say die spirit, she turned her rough situation into a better one. She showed true courage in the eyes of doubt, and, for that, she is my hero. She enjoyed children and education so much that she became a teacher and was so loved by the staff



and students in Milwaukee Public Schools. After the children had grown and moved out, Grandpa wanted to move back to the South. He's a country boy at heart and loves nature. Grandma refused to move. She experienced a lot of pain in Mississippi and the city life was good to her. Segregation, poor schools, lack of opportunity, and childhood trauma were things she didn't want to remember. She died in September 2002 due to reoccurring strokes. I hope to be more like her and continue to get little stories and memories. We keep her name alive and tell the younger generation about her. She'll always be the glue that sticks us together: our Angel, Dessie Lee Beene.

My grandmother was a very quiet, mild mannered person. She was calm, and we never saw her raise her voice or have a short temper. Grandma showed a never quit attitude; that's what we admired and loved about her. My grandma is one of the most important and influential people in my life. She is the only grandma I will ever have in my life, and I could not ask for a better one. My grandpa always says: "I couldn't have married better woman; she was the best woman I could have asked for."



Living on Forever By Laisha Cooke

My wonderful, funny, beautiful, loving, selfless sister is who I chose to write about. Courage? A woman of courage doesn't even begin to describe what my sister was. Yes, was. She has now passed, about a year ago;

right around this time we put her to rest.

Once upon a time, my sister Linette was one of my favorite people in the world. That changed down the line, and not for the better, either. The love was always there, but we did grow apart in time.



Growing up, Linette was about ten years older than me, but you'd never know it. We were so close for a period of time. I used to go to Chicago, where she lived, every summer. When I got older, we were able to hang out and talk about more things. We talked about boys, men, hair, fashion, our life, her struggles, and our parents. I understood a lot, maybe a little more than the average twelve-year-old. My sister had been through a lot in her life—things that would've killed other people, whether physically and/or emotionally. As I write this, I realize the things she endured ultimately may have killed her in the end: the lifestyle she ended up choosing, the depression, bi-polar disorder, and the men she chose that broke her heart time and time again. Lastly, she endured our parents' deaths—first our mother's, and then our father's ten years ago.

My sister was full of life. Most of the time, she was silly and a little over the top. The sadness, though, was always present. I never knew how severe it was or about her bi-polar disorder until later in my life. After I had my first son, I stopped going to Chicago for the summer every year, so ultimately we didn't get to see each other as much. She did, however, come to Madison a few times in the hopes of moving here permanently. That never happened, though. I really wish it had, but she couldn't stay away from Chicago. Like many, that place had a hold on her. Linette had moved back to Chicago, and we kept in touch and talked here and there. I remember I got a call from our cousin saying she thought my sister was on drugs. I had to see what exactly she was talking about, so when I went to Chicago, I went to her house, and what I saw broke my heart! She was on drugs, and I never saw that coming. I wept like a small child, I wept. I just wanted her to stop. It wasn't that simple, though.

As time went on, her bi-polar disorder, drug addiction, drinking, living on the streets, and severe depression had turned my sister into a woman I didn't recognize anymore. She was everything she'd always been, but more and a little harder inside. She was still silly, but something was different. She was just different.

Although my sister went through a whole hell of a lot, even things I didn't mention, she still is the woman of courage I chose to write about. She still was a strong woman. I don't even know if I would've lasted on this earth as long as she did if I was her. All the things she went through, all the times I'm sure she wanted to give up, end it all, forget about life, and everyone in it, she didn't. She endured it all. Even when people mistreated her, beat her down mentally and physically, even when people gave up on her, she kept it moving. She lasted as long as she could until November 7, 2018. Her body was found in an abandoned building in Chicago. Although I believe there is more to the story of how she died, the medical examiners declared her death as an overdose on drugs. My sweet, beautiful sister's life had come to an end. No more pain. No more struggle. She'll forever live on in my heart, mind, and spirit.



#### Heart of Gold By Aerial Bailey

Although courage means different things to different people, the definition of courage is "the ability to do something that frightens one." Kathryn Adams, my grandmother, is the woman of courage I chose to write about because she sacrificed her own life to be a caretaker of all her family, she does what her heart desires regardless of others' judgment,

and she has a love for helping others that is as strong as gold.

My full name is Aerial Dru KATHRYN Bailey. I was named after my grandmother because she took on the role of raising me as her own when she didn't have to. I was in foster care my first week of life due to poor choices on my mother's part. My grandma could've left me in foster care, but instead she fought for me, got me back, and became my guardian. Kathryn raised me from one week of life until I went to middle school. Kathryn's health started to get the best of her, so I moved in with my father. I wasn't the only grandchild. She took care of all six of her grandkids until it was time for them to start school. None of her grandkids or family's children had to attend daycare once my grandma retired. Most people spend their retirement living for themselves, but the difference between them and Kathryn is that Kathryn spent her early retirement living for herself by getting life from taking care of others. In addition, Kathryn was abandoned by her mom at age six and was basically forced to raise her younger sister and brother. To have the strength and mental capacity to raise kids as a child demonstrates Kathryn's character.

Being concerned about what the next person thought was not in my grandma's character. My grandma did right by others and followed her heart to the fullest; she encouraged me to do the same. "If you have nothing nice to say, don't say anything at all" is the motto Kathryn taught us and lived by. My grandma married my grandfather three times—yes, the same man three times—and held a wedding each time. I'm sure if Kathryn was afraid of what others thought, she wouldn't have married my grandpa three times. Many say she's crazy, but I think she's courageous and maybe a little crazy.

Another crazy thing one might think Kathryn did was make the choice to relocate 15 hours away from home, leaving her husband and eldest child of five behind. Kathryn and four out of five of her kids moved from Richmond, Virginia, to Madison, Wisconsin. She moved to a new place, far from home, by herself as a single parent. I am a single parent of one child, and I can't imagine having to play the role of a single

mom to four kids. Eventually my grandfather and aunt moved here too. Kathryn relocated the family here about 40 years ago to escape the poverty they experienced on the east coast. Kathryn left everything she ever knew to give her family a better life than she ever had.

My grandma spent basically all her life giving others what she never had. She didn't have a mother who was present, but she was the best mother I ever had. My grandma is the definition of courage—"strength in the face of pain or grief." In instances where my grandma could have folded and been selfish, she rose, beat the odds, and remained humble.



#### MORE SONGS OF OURSELVES

Song of Jaison
I am Jaison
I am the son of a single mother
brother to three sisters, one older, two younger
uncle to a niece and nephew
great grandson of a Cherokee descendant grandmother
owner/father of a three-year-old
bichon/shintzu mix dog
boyfriend of a beautiful young lady
I am the son of a man I haven't spoken to
since the sixth grade
and lastly I am a believer in God





Song of Aerial
I am Aerial
My son knows me as Mama
I am a daughter of an interracial relationship
olive tone skin
nobody knows what ethnicity box to place me in
The Midwest is my home
The East Coast is where my family is from
I am a descendant of Pocahontas
Love to model, and I keep it very modest



#### WARMED BY THE GIFT OF SCARVES

Thanks to the Shawl Ministry of the First Unitarian Society of Madison's "Hand to Hand—Heart to Heart" program for donating 30 handmade scarves and shawls to our class! Everyone was warmed, both literally and emotionally, by the generosity of those who painstakingly knit each beautifully-colored scarf.



OMG Thank you so much for my scarf. This is so amazing! May God Bless You! So I got this beautiful handmade scarf made be the shawl ministry



created by Fran. I just want to say thank you so much. I love it and it matches my hair perfectly. A BIG THANK YOU AGAIN (Margie Barajas)

Thank you so much--I love the scarf and it's so beautiful! (Ashley Lee)

Thank you for the beautiful gift. I love it! (Krista Mellott)

Thank you for your beautiful job! (Carmen Tinajero)

This beautiful scarf will get great use this year! (Shiloh Simonsen)

Thank you for such a thoughtful and useful gift! Hand made gifts are the best! (Nina Salisbury)

Thanks for taking the time to make us these nice scarves. (Tiffany Dixon)

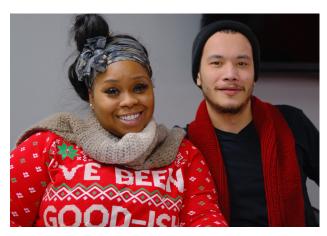
Great work, and thank you ever so much! (Ron Burford)

I just wanted to say thank you SO much for the handmade scarf. I love it and it matches my hair perfectly! THANK YOU! (anonymous)

What a wonderful surprise! Thanks for your warmth! (anonymous)

Having these beautiful and colorful scarves made us feel cared about. (anonymous)





#### TRANSFIXED BY THE GIFT OF HAMILTON

Thanks to American Family Insurance for an incredible gift: 30 donated tickets for Odyssey students to attend Hamilton for free! We were so thrilled to share the "hottest tickets in town" with our students and alumni. Demand was great, so we held a contest asking our 450 alumni and 30 new students to submit in writing why they wanted to go. We also asked them to submit photos and reviews describing their experience at the show. Over the holiday break, students who attended Hamilton will be finding ways to give back to the community.

There are many "Odyssey moments" in Hamilton: a reference to Socrates, quoted lines from Shakespeare's Macbeth, phrases from the Declaration of Independence, and comments about the Federalist Papers. Like Hamilton, Odyssey covers American history through a critical and multicultural lens, conscious of the hypocrisy of founding fathers who espoused liberty for all while owning slaves, yet simultaneously aware of the visionary nature of our country's democratic ideals. Thanks again to American Family for making it possible for Odyssey students to be "in the room where it happened"--attending Hamilton at the Overture Center and feeling like royalty, though not like King George!



First thing first,
I would like to
thank Odyssey and
American Family for
allowing my daughter
Neveah and me this
opportunity to see
Hamilton. It must
have been a sold-out
show because the
house was full! We
were seated on the
balcony where we
had a great view of
the play, Hamilton

was very catchy, so catching that the person next to me was singing almost word for word. All of the rapping and rhyming kept me interested. *Hamilton* retells a story you heard before but in a different perspective, a very funny, entertaining, upbeat perspective. Most of all, it is art at its best form of expression!

My daughter Neveah, who is in Odyssey Junior, was very excited to get to go to *Hamilton* and tells

me how much she really likes plays. She says it seems like Alexander is in a war that he is trying to get out of. She really enjoyed all of the singing and dancing, and she appreciated all the hard work the actors put in. Neveah is a little scared of heights and our seats were pretty high up there, but she didn't let that stop her from having a good time. I asked her if she would go to something like this again, and she said she would love to.

(Tina Marie Martinez '20)





I was blown away by how history and hip hop could come together to deliver a spectacular show. It was clever, and the scenery, the lighting, and the sound were well put together. The company did a phenomenal job to provide something for everyone. War, love, history, comedy, and music immersed the crowd from start to finish. For me, this surpassed my expectations and might actually be my favorite next to Phantom of the Opera. King George's powerful entrance into the scene and witty remarks were delivered at just the right time, so theatrically humorous. My son and I loved it! (Sandra Zintzun '19 with son Juan,

**Odyssey Junior**)

First, I just wanted to say thank you for this opportunity! I couldn't be more grateful than I am now.

The music was the first thing that blew me away. From the beginning with the intros, I was so intrigued by the voices.

I loved how Alexander Hamilton was portrayed as a young man with so much passion towards change. He said, "I will lay down my life if it means we will be free."

Alexander came from humble beginnings, losing his mother and becoming an orphan. He didn't

let his beginning determine who he would end up being. I was inspired by this because life doesn't hand out a red carpet to anyone. We have to make the choice to become someone to be proud of.

It was sad to see that over the years, work became more important to Alexander than family and ultimately caused him to betray his wife. At the same time, I empathized with Alexander because we all make mistakes trying to get to the top.

Once Hamilton met his demise, the people around him could do nothing but respect his hard work and push for a great country. His wife, Eliza, kept up his memory with hard work of her own.

The cast was beautiful and gave a great performance. I left feeling like I have what it takes to make my own journey memorable. I also thought, "What can I do to be remembered?" Thank you all for this once in a lifetime opportunity. (Kayasia Blake '19)



Hamilton was such an amazing musical. My son and I had an incredible time seeing it. The story of Alexander Hamilton was inspirational. To think that he overcame poverty and his mother's death and absence of a father, left his home to come to America at such a young age. He worked so passionately to create the liberty and freedom that we now know; it is nothing short of miraculous.

When I ponder his accomplishments and character, I am in awe of his altruism, his honesty and integrity, and his drive to persevere through adversity to achieve a successful campaign against King George and fight for our freedom as well as creating a great nation that could stand on its own.

Beside every great man stands a woman. Eliza chose Alexander for his ideals. I was astonished to learn that she lived for fifty years after his death; seeing him in the eyes of the hundreds of orphans that she helped raise in the first orphanage in our nation that she founded. She suffered and sacrificed so much for this nation, shared her most memorable years of married life and child rearing with her husband's passion to make this country great, often getting less time with him than she deserved.

Together, Eliza and Alexander made a difference in the foundation of our nation. They were a part of each other's narrative. She was a strong, intelligent





woman who loved deeply. He was driven and passionate, and determined to create a new world where people were treated with fairness and justice through the support of a fair government.

I can't begin to express how blessed we felt to be in the audience because we understand that so many could not be. The people who could be served most by this story and could have experienced such an impact are the same people who likely could not access it for reasons of equity:

those of us who struggle to put food on the table and gas in our cars, to keep our homes warm and our bodies clothed. Thank you so much for the generous donation of these tickets. It was a once in a lifetime opportunity that my son and I will not soon forget. It sparked a flame inside of us that reminds us that we can do anything we put our minds to. We cannot do that without the support of community members like you. Thank you for helping facilitate a lasting memory for us and a renewed belief in ourselves and what we can achieve in this life. (Jamie Lovely '14 with son Talen)



I am so thankful for being given the opportunity to see *Hamilton*. I had anticipated going to see it for a long time, and it was so great to savor the moment and enjoy the entire experience.

I was dropped off at the theatre so as to not have any stress taken away from the experience by having to figure out parking and accumulating any stress on the way in. I was so excited that I asked to take a selfie with one of the ushers! When I got to my seat, I was excited to see Ron, a friend of mine! (I did not know that he was a current Odyssey student.)

The show began. *Hamilton* was magnificent from the beginning to the end! The music, the dancing, and the storytelling blew my mind. I was a child full of wonder that Friday. I left the theatre thinking

representation matters A LOT! The story being told by a lens of color meant so much to someone like me. American History never included "me" in a way that was relevant or empowering. American History (my history) never mattered to me from a humanities framework because my part of that history reads inhumane, especially at the hands of white men. I did not previously have an ear to hear the accounts of Washington, Hamilton, Madison, Jefferson . . . I did not previously care . . . but this *Hamilton* play gave the founding fathers souls that I never presumed they possessed because Lin



Manuel was able to tell the story in a language that I could understand, in a way that I would care, in a way that I could see the contributions of the founding fathers, in a way that was relevant to someone like me.

My last thought (out of many) was Maaan! What could it be like if we could expose young people to experiences like this on a regular basis? How much more could they learn if they could hear their relevant language, see themselves, and care enough so that they could not only read about the events, places, and people, but that they may also see and embrace the souls of history? How powerful would that be?

Thank you so much again for the amazing *Hamilton* opportunity. **(Ozanne Anderson '08)** 



Clap, clap; a standing ovation for the lyrical genius and musical experience for this amazing show, *Hamilton*. Every waking moment was filled with stage rotations, dance numbers, beautiful voices, and great costumes. Seeing this well-oiled machine of fully colorful cast members made up of both men and women, mostly men of color, can move you from optimism to inspiration. The show almost felt like getting in a time machine taking you back to the history with twists, turns, and rewinds, a journey that keeps you fully engaged and gives you that "can't take your eyes off the screen" experience.

The crowd stands, and everyone is excited, hands clapping, whistling going forth, and a standing ovation as the show comes to an end. I look around and see that the crowd is dominantly all white.

I look at my row. Only three are people of color, and one of them is me. What a stomach-turning moment. After the show I was appreciative, excited, and in high spirits, but I also felt like I was a foreigner in a foreign place who could easily find himself in danger with all the security guards. I took no pictures of my own and jetted out of there as quickly as possible. One would wonder, how much more impactful could this have been for youth of color to see this show or for more people of color

to be able to even afford such an experience? Well, if we are invited, will the environment be more inclusive? Will it be done in a way that we can feel more welcomed and safe?

I treated this moment as if it was normal and just walked out of the theater. I had been to other shows in the very same building and didn't go through this out of place feeling. How could I have such a profound experience with genius and, in a moment, shift to a sour, anxious sensation? The importance is for me to see more family, more people that looked like me, in the seats and sharing in these great moments.

(Ron Burford '20)

I have to start off by saying that this play was all that I envisioned and more! It exceeded my expectations.

I learned things that I did not know about these characters because they only tell you certain things in high school. I did not know they were such powerful revolutionaries and how involved they were with the changes that were brought about in this country.

I left feeling sad, uplifted, upset, but proud of the things that were accomplished. You would think Alexander Hamilton was the favorite character, but it was his wife, Eliza Hamilton, that stole everyone's hearts and souls.

There were many Odyssey moments, but one that stood out was when Eliza's sister Angelica told her that Alexander was like "Icarus." We learned about Icarus in Odyssey.

I would like the donors to know that this was one of the most amazing experiences that I have ever had, and I am forever grateful for having had this opportunity bestowed upon me. I'm filled with so much gratitude after witnessing such a breathtaking piece of art. Standing ovation!!!

(Catina McAlister '11)



I clicked the upload button to submit my last paper of the semester (in my Master's of Social Work program at UW) as I left the house to see Hamilton. What an amazing, end of the semester gift to see this acclaimed Broadway hit! As a graduate student who is a low-income single father, I do not get out much.



I cannot remember the last time that I went to a show, movie, theatre, or any entertainment venue. Seeing *Hamilton* was an immense pleasure. As someone who is deeply passionate about politics, I appreciated the homage to Hamilton as a little-known figure in American history who played a tremendous role in shaping our young new democracy. The racial diversity of the cast and the mashed-up genres of music captivated me. For example, hearing the actors sing or rap and use modern, urban language dusted off the cobwebs of

the history portrayed and made the story lines resonate within me.

As I sat in the marvelous Overture Center with thousands of others, I marveled hearing others around me talk about how many times that they had seen *Hamilton*. In the past, I would often read with great interest the stories and reviews about the latest Broadway shows. Because of your generosity, I can honestly say that I was able to attend one of the best. Thank you so much to American Family Insurance and the Odyssey Project for this opportunity.

(Brian Benford '07)

Seeing *Hamilton* was an awesome experience. As soon as the show started, I was glued to the stage. The captivating performance had an awesome accurate story line and gave very clear visuals with their clever song choice. I loved how much detail they could pack into the performance with songs so beautifully written to tell the story.

I have always been a visual learner, and seeing this performance helped me to better understand the full story of Alexander Hamilton, not just for his contributions to our country, but on a more personal level, really understanding his marriage and him as a father. Before seeing this, I had never paid so much attention to the smaller details of his life.

I loved seeing such a diverse cast! I personally left this show feeling like I could do anything with hard work, dedication, and sacrifice. These are similar life lessons my grandmother (Juanita Wilson, Odyssey '07) always taught me. It doesn't matter how you start or where you start. As long as you always work hard and never stop learning, you can be and have whatever you want. I also learned that no matter how hard you work, never forget to take time for your loved ones. How often do

we all get wrapped up in our own lives and distracted from the small moments that have the potential to be intimate memories to have with our family? Once we lose someone, we can never rewind and get time back.

I would really like to thank the Odyssey Program and American Family donors for this opportunity. It was truly an experience I will not forget. (Isis Bernard '14)





The start of the play sent chills throughout my core. History and people leading and performing in a Broadway musical that were variations of the skin color brown.

My eyes refused to blink. I did not want to miss the story of Hamilton told through music, R&B, and soul.

This historical moment has elevated my commitment and responsibility to re-write the

narrative and not throw away my shot!

31101:

Thank you for opening up a new window during my academic journey! (Char Braxton '06)

We really had a great time. I thank American Family Insurance for the tickets. It was a wonderful gift that I will treasure forever.

The message, the music, the dance, and the rap: everything was amazing. (Denise Hardnett '05)



First of all, I want to thank the people of American Family Insurance for making it possible for us as Odyssey students to witness this spectacular show. I loved the show because the actors

are full of energy. With their wonderful voices, they make their audience feel different emotions. For example, I could feel joy with the arrival of Hamilton's baby and sadness with his death. I felt happiness with Hamilton's wedding but also anger when he betrayed his wife. We could see that she forgives him and many other emotions. And what to say about the Overture Center? It is beautiful! I really enjoyed the show. (Carmen Tinajero)





Foremost I would like to say that was one of the best shows I have ever seen. I loved watching the rap battles they would have on stage as well as breaking the third wall and interacting with the audience. It was truly a marvelous show. I loved the way they took us through Alexander Hamilton's life, I learned more about what made Hamilton, well, Hamilton. I had learned about him at school, and we also touched a little bit on his Federalist papers, but going and seeing this show, I feel like I dived right in and learned so much more in depth about his life and his characteristics as a person. There are so many elements of his life

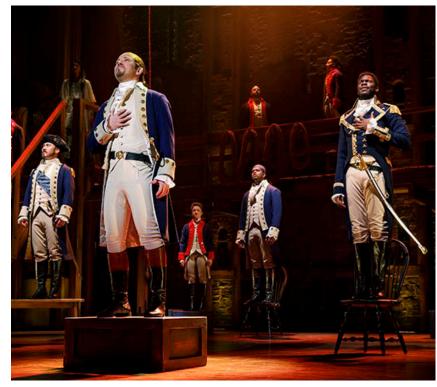
I also loved that the show provided both sides with a good and proper rationale for what they did. I feel that too often we see one side portrayed as the enemy and the other as the heroes of the story. I felt it was somewhat different in this show. It wasn't so black and white, the south is bad and the north is correct, as so many times it has been illustrated to me. Although I don't agree with many things the south did at that time, we could see that they had a rationale for why they wanted to keep a more limited form of national government and why they had certain policy positions that we still see to this day.

that I didn't know until now.

After watching the show, I could not stop thinking about how little I knew about the founding of the nation. I think before I had known the basics of what happened and, of course, I knew about Alexander and the implications and impact he had on the founding, but I nowhere knew to the extent that he did. I feel that a lot of the times we learn something, especially in History, and we say ok, that's that. Those were the events that unfolded and now we are here. To dive in and learn more in depth and have a bigger peek into Alexander's life and the founding of the nation helped me piece everything together a little better and have a deeper understanding of said events.

I would like to let the donors know that this special gift that they have given me has allowed me to watch and learn something that I otherwise wouldn't have had the opportunity to go to. I would like to express my gratitude. This was a very generous gift. and I had so much fun going and watching *Hamilton* as well as learning more about his life, and for that I thank you. This was such a good show (and their voices were absolutely fantastic), and I had such a good time.

(Yael, Odyssey Junior, with parents Victor '18 and Marisol '17)





There are great church functions, awesome concerts, and inspirational plays; nevertheless, there is nothing like a good musical. Lin Manuel Miranda, keep dreaming and don't ever stop writing. What a musical! The story, through poetry, the art of dance, OMG the voices, the music, the lyrics were absolutely phenomenal. Seven stars to this musical! I was blown away. It was excellent, remarkable, and brilliant. What a creation woven into reality: astounding, amazing, magnificent. I am so elated, inspired knowing you can be a nobody and become somebody; you can come out of nowhere and go somewhere. You never know who's going to write your story. This was good, very uplifting, inspirational. "History has its eyes on you." I honor the ten-dollar bill, Alexander Hamilton and his legacy.

This muscial was so joyful and delightful, above superior. My favorite part of the show was the song and dance of "The Room Where It Happens"—the signatures, declarations, documents, decrees. I wanna be in the room where it happens. I am still bubbling. I had a wonderful time. Thank you, American Family

Insurance and the UW Madison Odyssey Project. (Yolanda Cunningham '12)

I think what I got out seeing *Hamilton* first was just the makeup of the stage, and how the moving floor added to the ability of seeing the play as real. It added to the way the actors appeared life-like as they ran across the stage from one scene to another.

To hear hip hop in the form of education, I learned so much about that era that was unknown to me, and hip hop made it clear and emotional.

I also took away with me an understanding of revolution as much different than I had prior to entering the Overture Center. To me, people are still revolting against the lack of freedom, poverty, unemployment, lack of education, homelessness, the economy, racism, sexism, and all the other isms, lack of health care, ignorance, abuse of any kind, and the list goes on. The revolution against these obstacles to life should not end until the world, I mean the world, is rid of them.

Thanks for allowing me to share my thoughts. (Munroe Whitlock '13)





After being blessed with tickets for the Broadway play Hamilton, I left the show with an entire new perception of the music. My kid and I have listened to Hamilton almost three to four times a week in my car, and the soundtrack did only so much for me. To actually see the actors performing to the music gave me a better understanding of the storyline. It was amazing. I'd definitely see it again! Seeing the show allowed me to fill in the blanks and gave me a much better understanding. Many people I know had seen the performance without even listening to the music. To be familiar with the music, and to have it performed right before my eyes, was like a foggy day driving with the windows misty, but as soon as I turned on my wipers, I was able to see clearly. The soundtrack is the foggy windows, but the show was my wipers! I can't say thanks to American Family

enough! I had a blast!! (Albert Watson '08)

I attended *Hamilton* this afternoon, December 8th, and it was incredible.

I was first awed by the blending of voices during the first song. As a singer myself, hearing the harmony that was so on point was music to my ears. I was blown away. The microphones captured everyone's voice evenly and perfectly; kudos to Nevin Steinberg (Sound Design). I was then surprised by the diversity of the cast; the inclusiveness of various cultures gave my heart joy. Throughout the play, I became a little lulled by the slower songs from time to time but then quickly perked up with the faster songs, which gave the play more energy.

My favorite song overall was in the Second Act: The Room Where It Happens. I was glad it was sung a couple of times.

My third favorite actor was Thomas Jefferson, played by Warren Egypt Franklin. I loved the tone of his voice, which was unique and made me smile throughout the second act of the play.

My second favorite actor was King George, played by Neil Haskill. He was like a box of chocolates; I didn't know what to expect. His voice along with the dialogue and movements made his character hilarious.

And my Emmy goes to Roberto Sinha. He was not only the conductor for the ensemble, but he also played the keyboard throughout the entire play. He was flipping the pages of the music, directing and controlling the tempo and playing the keyboard all at the same time. I found myself watching him

at times when I should have been watching the play. He was impeccable.

Lastly, deep down on the inside I wondered if *Hamilton* was as good as people were saying. Well, that mystery is solved: it is! The hype over *Hamilton* is well deserved.

Thank you to American
Family Insurance for donating
a gift such as this to the
Odyssey Project. If not for
your donation, we would not
have had such a wonderful
experience.

(René Robinson '08)



More reviews of Hamilton coming in 2020