

ODYSSEY



ORACLE

INTRODUCING THE CLASS OF 2022!



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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

608-712-6321
608-572-6730
608-590-5862
608-580-5948



Jonathon
Adeyanju



Amanda
Bell



Brandyn
Bess



Ericka
Booe



Jermaine
Booe



Capri
Booker



Kayanna
Branch



Katrina
Collins



Yasmine
Dobbins



Ontario
Frazier



Erendira
Giron Cruz



Cynthia
Gonzalez



Talaisha
Goodwan



Cinderria
Harwell



Zaria
Hunter



Yael
Jimenez



Crystal
Johnson



Helena
Lee



Michelle
Mack



Mariam
Maiga



Mashell
McCarter



Reginald
Moore



Laronda
Morris



Will
Nunn III



Cylinthia
Olle



Benji Gomez
Ramirez



Kimari
Rogers



Jessica
Saldana Ortega



Naquila
Taylor



Mechele
Williams

FEELINGS ON JOINING ODYSSEY

The first night, students described how they felt when they learned they had been accepted into the UW Odyssey Project Class of 2022. The winning adjectives were “excited” and “nervous,” with others including “proud,” “happy,” and “ecstatic.”



Nervous, excited, determined, all at once. I was happy and nervous at the same time to be accepted into a setting that I knew would be an adventure.

(Jonathon Adeyanju)



I was very excited when Emily said I was accepted into this wonderful program. From what I heard from pervious graduates, this experience will change my life (in the best ways possible). I’m eager to start class and succeed in life. Thanks for allowing me to be a student! It means soooo much to me! God Bless!!

(Amanda Bell)



I felt proud and like excited to begin a new chapter in my odyssey.

(Brandyn Bess)



So excited!!! **(Ericka Booe)**

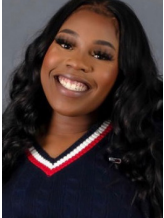


I felt like I’m finally taking that step forward that I always have been wanting to take instead of walking in a circle, also testing my ability in school to find out if I want to do full time. **(Jermaine Booe)**



I was so excited. I thought this is my chance to actually get a head start in life.

(Capri Booker)



I felt very proud of myself. I know that this is only the beginning to great things.

(Kayanna Branch)



I was so excited! I couldn’t speak or move. **(Katrina Collins)**

I am ready for a life-changing opportunity to better my family. **(Yasmine Dobbins)**

Super excited, nervous, ready to see classmates. **(Ontario Frazier)**

I was really excited that a door might have been opened to continue my studies and achieve a dream of mine and my parents. If I remember correctly, I think I shed a tear. I’m happy. **(Erendira Giron Cruz)**

Honestly, I’m my worst critic. I definitely thought I wouldn’t get in, and when I did it felt great. I love learning and reading and in general going to school, but due to money issues I was really never given the chance.

(Cynthia Gonzalez)

I felt relieved. I’ve had to put school on hold due to me having two children under the age of two, so getting accepted into this program made me feel like I am getting closer to my goal of becoming a nurse.

(Talaisha Goodwan)

When I was accepted into the Odyssey program, I felt like someone believed in me. I was happy, overwhelmed, stressed, and excited. I was super excited. I’m now saving up to study to be a medical assistant. My next step is becoming a registered nurse, which is my five-year goal. **(Cinderria Harwell)**





I was very excited and grateful for the opportunity. I'm happy to see where this takes me! **(Zaria Hunter)**



I felt absolutely ecstatic once I learned I was accepted into this class. I felt such joy as well as feel very fortunate to be granted the opportunity. Additionally, I felt super excited to be joining the class. **(Yael Jimenez)**



I was excited to get a chance to push myself and to interact with adults looking to further their education and to build for their future as I am too. **(Crystal Johnson)**



I was really excited. I felt it was a great opportunity. I know a lot of people try to get in this program, so I was very excited to be accepted. **(Helena Lee)**



I was so excited and really just feeling super encouraged. I was praying that I would get accepted, and I feel God opened that door. It's an honor to be a part of this group, and I feel like it will open so many opportunities. **(Michelle Mack)**



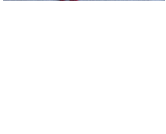
I was really excited. It had been a few weeks since I had my initial interview so I was a little worried I did not get in. But I was definitely feeling blessed to be a part of this program. **(Mariam Maiga)**



I was very excited to be in this program. It means so much to me. I hope to improve my writing skills and get help with my accounting classes I'm currently in at MATC. **(Mashell McCarter)**



I was ecstatic. **(Reginald Moore)**



I was very much excited and happy. **(LaRonda Morris)**

I felt good when I learned I had been accepted. It felt like a step in the right direction. I'm excited to be here. **(Will Nunn III)**

I was so proud to get over the first hurdle. I also felt a little nervous because it's been 10 years since school. **(Cylinthia Olle)**

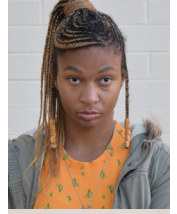
Pretty excited, nervous. I didn't expect to return to school this soon—or at all. **(Benji Ramirez Gomez)**

When I first learned that I was accepted into the Odyssey program, it was a surreal experience because it was one of the biggest blessings I had ever received. An ordinary person does not receive substantial once-in-a-lifetime blessings such as this. **(Kimari Rogers)**

OMG I didn't believe it. I was super excited because I tried in 2020 but it was too late. I'm so happy for being part of this class. **(Jessica Saldana Ortega)**

I am very excited. I am a little nervous, but I am sure I will do fine as long as I stay focused and get the curriculum into a routine. **(Naquila Taylor)**

I was very excited to get the news. It also saddened me because I knew I was in a spot another individual truly wanted. Due to the fact this is such a great opportunity, I will take full advantage of this gift. **(Mechele Williams)**



ARE YOU A WRITER?

Each student answered the question "Are you a writer? Why or why not?"



Yes, I like to say so. Sometimes or rather most of the time, the transition from thought to pen is a lot more fluid than thought to mouth. It's also therapeutic for me. Words have power to create worlds, worlds that change people.

(Jonathon Adeyanju)



I used to be an afraid writer. I would wait till the last minute to write something. I took a writing class at MATC that helped my writing go from 4 to a 9 fast. The MLA format helped and just taking the time to write helped me become better and

better. **(Kayanna Branch)**



Yes, I am a writer, but since I graduated from Verona High School in 2007, I stopped writing poetry. I am excited to begin writing again! Writing helps me express my feeling and pain that I keep to myself! Yay!! I'm so excited for writing!!

(Amanda Bell)



I am not a writer because I just write straight answers. I don't write fluff to make a story long.

(Katrina Collins)



I will say I can be a writer if given motivation. I really have great ideas, and when I get into a subject, I go hard, though my grammar and format need work.

(Brandyn Bess)



No, I am not a writer because I have too many grammatical errors and too many run-on sentences. I feel as though I could tell a good story, but sometimes it's hard for me to get it out on paper.

(Yasmine Dobbins)



Yes, I am a writer because I enjoy writing. My mom read a lot of books when I was young, and she made my brothers and me read something out of the newspaper every day. I never felt like a writer growing up,

but as I worked on my education, I developed a passion for writing. I read okay, but I develop a better understanding once I write.

(Ericka Booe)



No, I am not a writer because I struggle in school with reading, spelling, and writing. So it's kind of hard to write. It's a little easier to talk.

(Jermaine Booe)





I'm in the middle.
I feel I can write
a good story due
to taking English
courses.

(Ontario Frazier)



I'm not a writer
because my English
needs work,
especially my writing.
I have issues with
grammar, run-ons,
past or future tense.

My ideas could be all over the place,
which makes it difficult to start
writing. **(Errendira Giron Cruz)**



Yes, I am a writer!
Writing comes
naturally to me. It
just flows out (like
word vomit). I'm a lot
better at writing than
speaking out loud (my shyness gets
to me at times).

(Cynthia Gonzalez)



No, I am not a writer because I am
not good with putting my thoughts
into words without seeming as
if I'm going on and on about the
same point. I don't have really good
grammar skills.

(Talaisha Goodwan)



No, I am not a writer because I am
a comprehensive person. I love
to read and tell a story. When it
comes to writing it down, I have a
problem. I struggle with adverbs
and adjectives. I'm willing to work
hard on it.

(Cinderria Harwell)



Yes, I am a writer. I enjoy writing
poetry and stories. I love to
type, email, and talk—writing is
something I enjoy.

(Zaria Hunter)



No, I am not a writer because
although I enjoy writing, I don't
believe that I dedicate and spend
enough time to call myself a writer.
Additionally, I struggle a lot with
grammar. This coupled with the low
cadence of my writing makes me
feel I am not a writer. I do really enjoy writing and
like to express myself on paper.

(Yael Jimenez)



Can I say I used to be? I used to
write poems because I wanted to
write a book of poetry talking about
my life, school, boys, and love, just
seeing things in a different light.

(Crystal Johnson)



No, I am not a writer because I have
a hard time putting my thoughts
onto paper. I always find it hard to
find the right words to say.

(Helena Lee)



No, I am not a writer because I don't really know how to present a story. I usually get stuck and have a hard time letting the words flow. Forming sentences and saying what I feel at times can be hard. I would like to be better at writing so that I can feel confident in what I'm saying. I want to be sincere and be heard and felt. **(Michelle Mack)**



I think I am in between. When I was younger, I loved writing and making new stories. I even tried to write a book! But the older I got, the less I wrote. I did used to journal, but now I mostly only write when I'm "manifesting" or writing down goals. I think I just haven't had time to sit down and write in a long time. **(Mariam Maiga)**



I'm not a writer because I need help with grammar and punctuation. Writing has always been something I dreaded to do. It's hard to express myself sometimes. **(Mashell McCarter)**



Yes, I'm a writer. Twelve years ago, I published my first book and chased it with two more in two years. I'm almost finished with 12 books in 12 months, with one more to go. These are mostly anthologies. In total I've self-published 17 books so far. I kinda bounce back and forth between poetry, short stories, and novels. I just like to create with words. **(Reginald Moore)**



No, I am not a writer because for one I don't like my handwriting. **(LaRonda Morris)**



Yes, I am a writer because I think and I have ideas. I desire to put my thoughts to paper. I think I am, so I am. **(Will Nunn III)**



Yes, I am a writer because I love words! I've been writing poems, songs, short stories since I was very young. I love how words and books create a grand escape. **(Cylinthia Olle)**



Yes, I am a writer because writing is an instrument to change the world. Even if we just write self-reflections, the manifestation of our inner worlds is pressing beyond the words on the page. **(Benji Ramirez Gomez)**



Yes, I am a writer because when I illustrate, I draw the audience in by going in deep to touch the audience's hearts and minds. Also, to edify the word illustrate, I bring fantasy, illusion, and mirage to the audience's illustration of whatever they will imagine or picture as they read my writing. Importantly, I also want to make the writing make sense to every reader who chooses to dive into my writing. **(Kimari Rogers)**



I am not a writer because I don't find things to write about and also because I do repeat so many words in the paragraph. **(Jessica Saldana Ortega)**



Yes, I am a writer because I have always had notebooks full of poetry based on things I was feeling during the day or overall. So my "diary" was like a poetry diary. Also in school English was usually my strongest subject. **(Naquila Taylor)**



Yes, I am a writer because I write everything down. I enjoy writing in a journal, but I found myself only writing in it when I was feeling down. I would like to express my joy on paper as well. **(Mechele Williams)**

SENTENCES ABOUT US

After reading Emily's three sentences about herself, students each came up with three sentences to introduce themselves to their classmates:

- » I have three adult children and three granddaughters (ages 5, 9, and 13), and I love them to pieces.
- » My husband is 18 inches taller than I am, so we look ridiculous on any dance floor.
- » I'm known for giving lots of hugs, and I'm so sick of COVID!

(Emily Auerbach)



- » I love to write—it's therapeutic for me.
- » I have a twin brother.
- » I'm very quiet until comfortable. **(Jonathon Adeyanju)**

are my pride and joy!

- » I am currently single but it feels great!!
- » I am a sweet, outgoing, full-of-energy woman. I love to read and write. I am also sick and tired of COVID!

(Amanda Bell)



- » I have one daughter who is almost two, and she is my world.
- » I have a funny laugh and I love to use it.
- » My fav sport is basketball, and I am a diehard Kobe and Lakers fan.

(Brandyn Bess)

- » I have a twin brother.
- » I have four sons and no daughters.
- » I love to cook.

(Ericka Booley)





- » I am the second oldest and the shortest.
- » I plan on getting married.
- » I love sports.

(Jermaine Booley)

- » I have a child age four and four other siblings.
- » I am engaged and feel we will make it if we both succeed in life.
- » I'm very honest, blunt, and helpful to everyone.

(Capri Booker)



- » I have two children, one age five (Kayden) and one on the way, due September 17th (named Summer).

- » I'm known for being funny and always being a leader. I'm very short and always get a lot of shocked faces when I tell people my age.

- » I come from a big family and have an active mother I'm very, very close to.

(Kayanna Branch)



Congratulations to Kayanna on the birth of her daughter Summer on September 11th!

- » I am a giving person.
- » I am a caring person.
- » I have two kids.

(Katrina Collins)

- » I have two children, ages three years and five months.
- » I am a very supportive/empathetic person.
- » I really love to travel.

(Yasmine Dobbins)





- » I have three smaller children, ages 9, 6, and 2, two girls and one boy.
- » I'm very shy and quiet.
- » I can't wait for class to begin.

(Ontario Frazier)

- » I am a dog mom: his name is Benji, turning four years soon.
- » I have been with Odyssey before but as a teacher for the Jumpstart children.
- » I'm tired of COVID as well.

(Erendira Giron Cruz)



- » I have a six-month-old daughter named Laila! She can sit up on her own and has two teeth.
- » I work as a Universal banker as well as a bartender on the weekends.
- » I enjoy reading non-fiction books (anything that has to do with history).

(Cynthia Gonzalez)

- » I have two children, a boy and girl 22 months apart, so I am a busy mommy.
- » I currently completed a course to obtain my Certified Nursing Assistant certificate (CNA).
- » My favorite color is baby blue like the sky.

(Talaisha Goodwan)



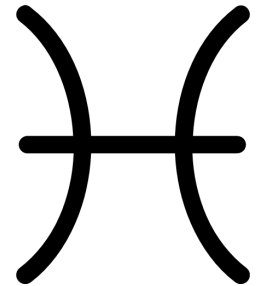


- » My name is Cinderria Harwell, and I also have a Junior.
- » My daughter is three years old.
- » I love to socialize, and group activities are what I'm looking forward to.

(Cinderria Harwell)

- » I'm originally from Chicago, Illinois.
- » I'm 22 years old.
- » I'm a Pisces.

(Zaria Hunter)



- » I have two younger siblings (ages 9 and 11), and I miss them a lot!
- » In my free time, I enjoy throwing pottery.
- » I am beyond sick of COVID!

(Yael Jimenez)



- » I have a 12-year-old diva who's very smart and outgoing.
- » I make my own Jolly Rancher drinks which you can drink as juice or add liquor and make it a margarita.
- » I'm so blessed COVID didn't affect my job, but it did give me a break from the office to work virtually, which they didn't think was possible. I caught up on a lot of sleep LOL.

(Crystal Johnson)

- » I am 21 years old.
- » My favorite color is sunset orange.
- » I love to work on my free time.

(Helena Lee)



- » I have a three-year-old son who is the main focus of my world, and I love being a mom.
- » I love learning and finding out new things.
- » I'm a woman on a mission with strong faith and who loves the Lord.

(Michelle Mack)



- » I have four adult children and grandchildren who mean the world to me.
- » I like cooking in my spare time.
- » I'm currently going to MATC for accounting.

(Mashell McCarter)



- » I have one daughter who's one year old, and she's my entire world!
- » I love to travel even though I haven't been able to much lately.
- » My family is originally from West Africa, but I was born in Atlanta.

(Mariam Maiga)



- » I have four kids.
- » I love to write.
- » I love to interact, so I'm also sick of COVID.

(Reginald Moore)

- » I'm an identical triplet, the first set of triplets born at Madison General Hospital (now Meriter).
- » I work with special needs children.
- » I stalked Emily.

(LaRonda Morris)



- » I have all boys.
- » I love to travel and eat.
- » I'm best known for always smiling.

(Will Nunn III)

- » I have three kids, one on the way (age eight, one going on two, and going!)
- » Family is my life and I value it a lot.
- » My dream is to become a psychologist.

(Cylinthia Olle)



- » While I was born in Madison, I'm very proud of my Mexican heritage.
- » I play ukulele recreationally.
- » I love potlucks and community events.

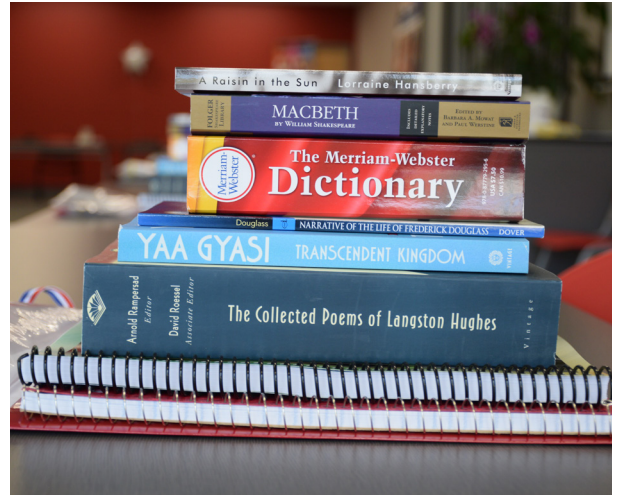
(Benji Ramirez Gomez)

- » I am a very kind and caring person.
- » I love learning.
- » I have a knack for facing difficult challenges.

(Kimari Rogers)

- » I have two kids, a boy and a girl (Henry and Jamie), and they are my life.
- » I love to dance to Latin music.
- » I know people think that I do not like to talk, but that is not true because I love having conversations with people.

(Jessica Saldana Ortega)



- » I have two children, both boys, ages one and five.
- » My favorite thing to do is fun activities with my kids, like water activities, baking, and holiday activities.
- » One of my favorite colors is lavender.

(Naquila Taylor)

- » I am a loving mother to seven children, who range in age from 6 to 27 years old.
- » I have been trying to finish my associate and bachelor's degrees for about the last eight years.
- » I have a diploma in Addiction Studies from Madison Area Technical College.

(Mechele Williams)



ALUMNI CORNER

MY JOURNEY

BY RENÉ ROBINSON '08

I was born in Chicago, number eleven of fourteen children. At one point in my life, we had ten people in a three-bedroom, one-bathroom apartment. It was lively, challenging, and sometimes disappointing, but never a dull moment. It was family, my family. I didn't have a choice in the matter.

We were poor. How poor were we? We were so poor that my uncle, who worked at the Campbell Soup Factory, would bring us cans of soup that couldn't be sold because of flaws (bends and dents). The cans didn't have labels but contained numbers, which identified the type of soup. We memorized the numbers because we had to. If you didn't know the numbers, you were stuck with the soup no one wanted, which in our house was the tomato soup.

Survival, that was my life. Not only did I have to survive on the south side of Chicago, in the ghetto, the low-end as we call it, but at home as well. Can you imagine fourteen children vying for attention? Fourteen children wanting to be loved? Fourteen children striving to be better than the next?

It wasn't all good but neither was it all bad. We were taught principles, morals, and Christianity. We were required to excel in school. You would think that such an upbringing would produce upstanding and productive individuals, and it did for ten of us. Unfortunately I was one of the four who didn't quite meet the challenge. I was persistent at taking the wrong path and making poor decisions. I had my oldest son at sixteen and was forced to attend a high school for pregnant girls. I married at seventeen and had my second son at eighteen. It was a blessing to have a husband who was also the father of my children (where I come from, that was a unique happening in itself), but unfortunately with that came physical abuse.

I could go on and on about the many ups and downs due to the poor decisions I made over those thirty years, but I want to talk about the good news! I made it out of that situation and relocated to Madison, WI. I got a job, an apartment, then a used car. I joined a church that made me feel at home, and then I heard about the UW Odyssey Project, one of the best decisions I have ever made.

Odyssey is for people just like me; those who wanted to do better but couldn't for whatever reason. Having made so many poor decisions in my life, I feel I'm somewhat of an expert in understanding how easy it is for people to mess up, to make mistakes, and choose the wrong paths.



Odyssey gives you the feeling like the little red engine we read about in elementary school, “I think I can! I think I can!” It releases the “Wow” factor as in “He did that? She did what? Really? They left Britain to do the same thing in America? I didn’t know that.” Then it begins, the desire to know more, the desire to understand, the drive and tenacity to do better and to critically think, analyze and understand what you are reading. And what’s so fantastic about Odyssey, it’s generational. I tell people that all the time. Not only does it change the lives of parents, it changes the lives of their children, which will change the lives of their children, etc. Odyssey is a “Mind Opening Experience”!



Before Odyssey, if someone had asked me to write a poem or told me that I would be analyzing Socrates, Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson, and Frederick Douglass, I would have rolled my eyes up, down and sideways. But there I was, at my Odyssey graduation, earning six UW Madison credits and reading this poem I wrote about the value of lifelong learning:

My Journey

My journey started about nine months ago.
 How I would fare, I really didn't know.
 Reading, writing for sure there would be,
 But from six to nine PM, that I couldn't see.
 The professors were there for all to meet,
 Outlining History, Humanities, and Philosophy.
 I was scared but I didn't know why,
 Maybe it was the thirty years that had quickly gone by.
 Getting acclimated was a little rough at first,
 But soon thereafter to read books I would thirst.
 See, prior to Odyssey, I didn't read.
 All the info I got was from the TV.
 But things have changed, mainly the screen
 From the TV to the computer, I'm now a Google Queen.
 My journey, my journey, who would have thought
 Would be the beginning of me being taught,
 Being taught the importance of opening my mind,
 Instead of sitting around wasting my time.
 Thank you, Odyssey, for choosing me,
 I've found knowledge, my greatest discovery.

René Riffs on Plato

I believe the prisoners in Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" are us: people, human beings in general. It has nothing to do with race, economical or educational status; I consider those sub-caves. We have all been fettered (shackled and chained) from generation to generation. We have been taught how to think and what to think. The expansion of our mind has been limited to our surroundings. We have been made products of our environment by our communities, our neighborhoods, and our upbringing; we were all born in a cave.



The cave is like a one-sided coin: seeing only one side. If you are born rich, do you know what it is to be born poor? If you are born poor, do you know what it is to be born rich? The importance of getting out of the cave is to find out what's on the other side of the coin; such as Socrates' example of going from the darkness to the light. I believe every human being in this world is dealing with some form of darkness, whether by force or choice.

We need to walk towards love, passing by hate. We need to walk towards courage, passing by fear. We need to walk towards "I can," passing by those infamous words, "I can't."

René performs as a musician, motivational speaker, and dramatic reader (Sojourner Truth, Maya Angelou, and others) in church, at community events, on the radio, and for every Odyssey class, and serves on the Friends of the UW Odyssey Project Board of Directors.

I LOVE ODYSSEY

BY JUANITA WILSON '07



Juanita (1936-2019) inspired her granddaughter Isis to graduate from Odyssey, too.

I love Odyssey because before Odyssey I always felt like an outsider when I was among a group of people. I now feel that I can contribute to the conversation and feel that I am no longer a slow learner. I feel that I can accomplish whatever I set out to do. I am happy most of the time now.

I am going to be a lifelong learner.

I feel that I am not alone anymore if I need help with a problem. I feel that I am loved by my teachers and classmates. I feel that life is beautiful this year and the rest of my life because of Odyssey. I feel that there will always be help available to me. I feel blessed.

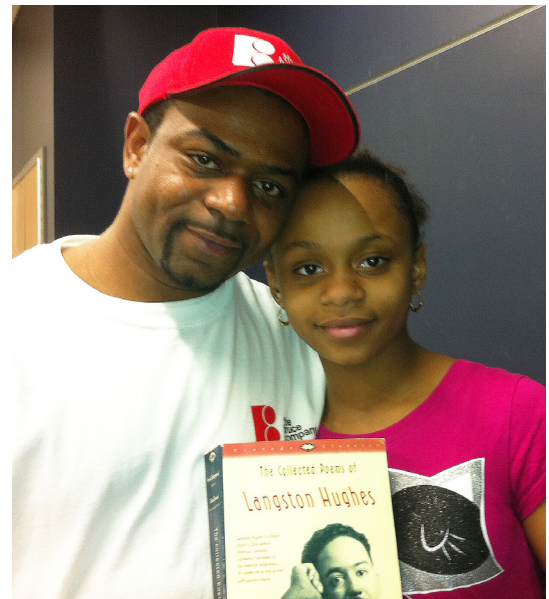
I LOVE MY WEBSTER'S

BY TOSUMBA WELCH '13

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



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



Tosumba's daughter Denaria attended Odyssey Junior.