ODYSSEY ORACLE

INTRODUCING THE CLASS OF 2023!



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ODYSSEY CLASS OF 2023



Tameia Allen



Antoneah Armour



Kaitlin Birdsall



Jonathan Booey



Jekeiria Booker



Sarah Branch



Gabrielle Brown



Fredy Carcano



Mark Español



Curtrice Foster



Geresa Homesly



Tyrone Hudson, Sr.



Aida Inuca



Tierra Kimbrew



Maricela Martinez Munguia



Lavinia Miller



Monèl Long



Saul Naxi Perez



Keely Nelson-Gray



Gael Rodriguez



Kiana Sims



Dominique Smith



Tiara Smith



Roxanna Sobreviilla



Lupita Valerio Aragon



Andrea White



Mya Whitson



Amanda Willis



Sinetra Wilson



Zykia Wilson

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 2023. The winning adjectives were "excited" and "nervous," with others including "proud," "happy," and "blessed."



I felt like I can finally put my plan in action—to do something more with my life. I feel like this is a stepping stone to get to where I need to be. (**Tameia Allen**)



I was very fearful and excited to be accepted into the Odyssey Program. To know I was one of the few that were chosen really opened my eyes that I can do it and gave

me the motivation I needed. I am so happy to be in the program. (Antoneah Armour)



I cried. It was an overwhelming flow of many emotions. Excitement. Fear. Hope. (Kaitlin Birdsall)







I felt great attending something that made my mother and brother so proud. I can't wait to see what this program offers me to learn. (Jonathan Booey)



When I found out I was picked for this class, I felt important, nervous, and inspired. I believe this will help a lot of us become resilient, and that's something that life has already forced me to be. (Jekeiria Booker)



I was happy to find out I made it—in fact, a little honored. A lot of people I know went through this program, and I'm excited to follow some of their paths. (Sarah Branch)





Happy, excited, and proud. (Mark Español)



I was very excited and ready to start a new journey and learn new things. (Curtrice Foster)



I felt blessed to be chosen. I feel like this is my second chance at getting school credits, due to dropping out because of a near-fatal car accident. (**Geresa Homesly**)



I felt like I was actually doing something that will benefit not only me but also my kids. I honestly couldn't believe it. I've doubted myself so much in my life. I didn't think it was possible. Now look at

me! (Gabrielle Brown)



I felt great, always good to be learning. (Fredy Carcano)





I was very excited to know that I had been accepted. This is a chance for me to learn more about myself and to learn more for myself to value what education means and how important it is. (Tyrone Ozea Hudson Sr.)



I felt excited because I wanted to go back to school. Since I got pregnant, I was just dedicated to raising my child. I always wanted to continue studying and going to school, but I could not. My son now is in the

fourth grade of elementary school, and I am very happy that I was accepted into the program. I really want to thank Emily for believing in me, and I'm going to put all my best to continue my dreams of going back to school and having a career in the future. (Aida Inuca)



Honestly, it felt like a dream came true! I have been wanting to further my education for a while but something always gets in the way. When I found out about this program, I felt like it was made just

for <u>me</u>! I am looking forward to getting my feet "wet" again in the education pool. (**Tierra Kimbrew**)



I was eager to start a new journey, continue my college education, and be able to take my son on this oncein-a-lifetime Odyssey

experience with me. (Monèl Long)



I found myself excited and feeling that it can be possible. (Maricela Martinez Munguia)



I felt like I was a chosen one. I felt important, honored, appreciated, and grateful. (Lavinia Miller)



I felt hopeful, like I was given a second chance.

I felt and am still feeling proud of myself. Right now I'm feeling happy taking this opportunity for myself and to make my family proud.

(Saul Naxi Perez)







I felt very blessed and proud. Words honestly can barely describe the emotions I felt. I still feel on top of the world knowing I am a part of a wonderful program that can change my life forever. I feel so blessed to

know I can be a role model to my children. Also, I will be the first in my family to graduate from college. (**Keely Nelson-Gray**)



Really made my day when I got the call from Emily telling me I got in. (Gael Rodriguez)



Very happy, glad, something to do for my children, happy that I am in UW, freedom, proving to others

I am smart, I am not dumb. (**Kiana Sims**)



I was excited and determined to take full advantage of the opportunity.

(Dominique Smith)



I felt nervous but excited because there were so many applicants. I am hopeful that this course will help me get my foot in the door with college. Also,

I am glad to be around so many people who are different but have the same goal. (**Tiara Smith**)



I was happy to be accepted and have a chance to be a part of the program. (Roxanna Sobrevilla)

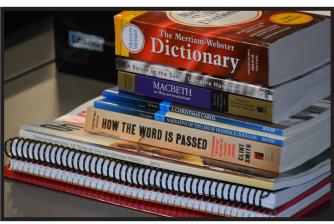


I felt super excited when I found out. I remember telling my parents about it, telling them I might not get in because it's pretty competitive. But when I got the call, we were all together and I was happy and they

were, too. (Lupita Valerio Aragon)



I felt so happy to be able to have a fresh start with school and have daycare for my kids while I'm in class. This is truly a blessing. (Andrea White)







I was excited that I'll be able to go on a new adventure of learning. I'm very happy because this program offers child care, which was the major factor in me not going back sooner. (Mya Whitson)



When I learned I got accepted into Odyssey, I was extremely excited. I felt like I got my golden ticket to Willy Wonka's chocolate factory, except Odyssey is the knowledge factory!!!! I also felt nervous and

scared and didn't know if I could do it. But every time I think about my kids, I HAVE TO DO IT!!! Another feeling I had was the feeling of being a student again, and that gives me the confidence, motivation, and comfort that I need for this quest of education and knowledge!!!! (Amanda Willis)



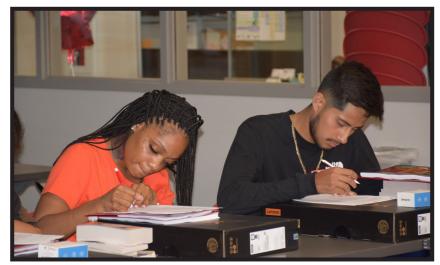
When I found out I was accepted into Odyssey, I was super excited and felt like doors were starting to open up for me to be a better learner and a mom with goals. (Sinetra Wilson)



I felt good about myself that I made it and got chosen for this program. It made me feel good about myself knowing I can still attend school no matter what age. (**Zykia Wilson**)

ARE YOU A WRITER?

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

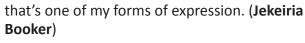




Yes, I am a writer because I really get lost in writing, and I enjoy seeing my finished product. (Jonathan Booey)



Yes, I am a writer because I have a gift for speaking and can articulate pretty well. I feel the most comfortable speaking, and I have found out





Yes, I am a writer because a lot of times I put my thoughts and feelings on a pen and paper. That's how I vent; I'm not a person that talks a lot. I personally don't have any writings to share; most of the things I write about are personal.

When I pass, hopefully one of my kids will read about all the things that I put on paper. (Tameia Allen)



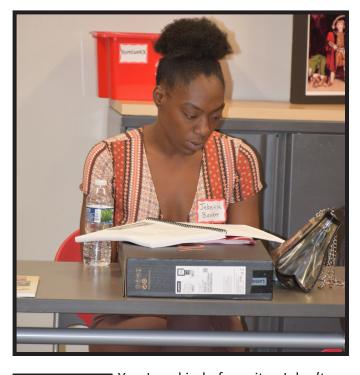
No, I am not a writer because from the time I was able to write, I worked at the Simpson Street Free Press for my grandfather. It is a great program and gave me many opportunities, but I did it for so long and so young I grew out of

it. I do take time to write down personal thoughts and feelings. It's like a way of coping for me. In that form of writing, I would call myself one.

(Antoneah Armour)



Yes, I am a writer. A majority of the time my voice gets caught in my throat and I lose track of my words. Writing has always been the best way for me to make sense of what I'm trying to say. (Kaitlin Birdsall)





Yes, I am kind of a writer. I don't write as often as I used to write, so I'm not sure if I'd say yes, I'm a writer. When I was in school, I liked to write, and the words came easy. Now that I'm older, I don't write as much. (Sarah Branch)



No, I am not a writer because I still struggle using proper grammar and punctuation marks. But I love to write.

(Gabrielle Brown)



No, I am not, but I will with Odyssey. (Fredy Carcano)





I am a writer and I found that talent after I took a creative writing class while in prison for Odyssey Beyond Bars. I found that writing helps me get over accumulated trauma that I've picked up throughout my life. It gives me the

power over things I thought I was powerless to, and it allows me to use my imagination to create the world I want to be in. (Mark Español)





No, I'm not a writer because I have a lot of run-on sentences and I can't write small—then my handwriting starts looking like chicken scratch. (Curtrice Foster)





No, I am not a writer because my thoughts overflow out of my head. I tend to get off topic while trying to write a story or even a poem. I am not a writer because I dislike my penmanship. It looks like an elementary schooler's, or chicken

scratch. (Geresa Homesly)



No, I am not a writer because writing is not one of the things that I was good at in school. (Tyrone Hudson)



No, I'm not a writer because I struggle with grammar sometimes, but I am eager to learn and get better at it. (Aida Inuca)



No, I am not a writer because I enjoy it in the beginning and then I usually get stuck and can't finish. (Tierra Kimbrew)



I lost the passion a while ago when I lost my last living grandparents. I actually lost sight of a lot of things I cherished and used to self-identify. Along the way, I slowly started to embrace poetry again and open my sacral chakra up to receive

the words that I always had but somehow blocked myself from expressing. To answer your question, I believe I come from a long line of writers, and I am also one. (Monèl Long)



No, I do not consider myself a writer in English because English is not my first language and is a little hard— or I will say more than a little hard— but I can probably do it in Spanish. (Maricela Martinez Munguia)



No, I am not a writer. Writing has not always been my strength in school. I didn't like to write much, and it was because I struggled with words and understanding the meaning of them. I'm older now, and I've learned that writing is a big

thing in life. I'm excited to write more and learn the definition of words and some grammar.

(Lavinia Miller)





Yes. I used to love writing. It was my favorite subject in school. But since adulthood, I haven't had the chance to express that how I would like to. (Keely Nelson-Gray)



I am not a writer because English is not my first language and sometimes this is a big struggle. (Saul Naxi Perez)



For now I am not a writer, but I want to get more into it. (Gael Rodriguez)





Yes, I am a writer because I have a loud voice. I am a leader and a mom. (Kiana Sims)



Yes, I am a writer because through words written I am able to express my thoughts more clearly than if I

were to try to vocally recite them.

At times I get nervous when speaking out loud and my thoughts get lost. Through writing, I can complete my full sentences. (Dominique Smith)



Yes, I am a writer because writing is one of the many ways I can express myself without coming off too strong. I can speak freely when I write. There is no judgment, and my voice is heard. Although my handwriting sucks, I am able to get

out every word I think. Being a writer is a great joy, and it helps me expand my mind, vocabulary, and outlook on others. (Tiara Smith)



Yes, I am a writer because I used to write poetry in my journal when I was young. It's one of my relaxation techniques. I haven't written anything in years. Do text messages count? When I was incarcerated, I wrote letters every day. That was

my only form of communication. Yes, I am a writer that hasn't written in quite some time. (Roxanna Sobrevilla)



Yes, I am a writer because I use writing in my everyday life. I communicate, problem solve, and remember. I also enjoy writing. It comes easy for me. It's a way to express myself. Now that I started school, I can't wait to get my writing

skills better. There is always room for improvement when it comes to writing. (Guadalupe Valerio)





No, I am not a writer because it's difficult for me to stay focused and put together a paper sometimes. (Andrea White)



I am and I'm not. I don't mind writing, but I get caught up in the technical things like spelling and punctuation. I would consider myself a storyteller because I love to talk to people. (Mya Whitson)



I'm not a writer but I hope to be!!!! I have so many thoughts and ideas that should be put down on paper. Sometimes it's hard to get them out or express myself or I am worried about looking silly. I sometimes think about how I could write about

my life. I also think about writing children's books and sometimes songs! (Amanda Willis)



Yes/no. I'm a good writer when I'm interested in something or get carried away. I don't like to write sometimes, especially when I get writer's block and can't figure it out. I love poems and political topics. (Sinetra Wilson)



Yes, I am a writer because I like writing poetry. My friends and I also wrote and published a book back in high school, back in 2005, I think. (Zykia Wilson)

SENTENCES ABOUT US

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



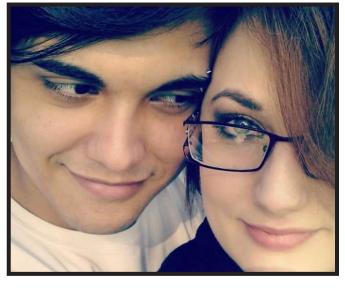
I have three adult children and three grandchildren (ages 6, 10, and 14), and I love them passionately.

My husband is 18 inches taller than I am, so we look ridiculous on any dance floor.

The house I live in used to be an old stone barn. (Emily Auerbach)



I have three children, all girls, ages seven, two, and four months, and I also take care of my eight-year-old nephew.



I have a fiancé, and we've been together for nine years already.

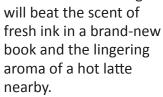
I work at a luxury assisted living place.

I cook chicken at least three to four times a week. (Tameia Allen)

I have four children, all boys.

I love music.

I look forward to getting up and going to work at the job I love every day and getting a jumpstart on my college degree. (Antoneah Armour) My favorite things are coffee and books: nothing





I don't have a strong voice: my anxieties stop me from doing a lot of things, but I'm fighting to change that.

(Kaitlin Birdsall)





I'm the oldest of four boys.

Basketball is my favorite pastime, whether I'm playing or watching.

I was born in Gary, Indiana, and moved to Madison, Wisconsin, at a young age. (Jonathan Booey)

I have three children, ages 2, 4, and 6, and they're my greatest creation.

I am currently overcoming the hardest separation in my life from my kids' father; we were together 15 years, and he was also my high school sweetheart.

I have an enormous love for the art of dance, and I yearn one day to be a part of dance family to learn dance, teach, and



one day own a studio. (Jekeiria Booker)

I have three sisters and one brother, and I am the youngest.

I have a two-year-old dog named Cookie Bear.

I'm a business owner, and my store will be opening September 25th. (**Sarah Branch**)



I have three children (ages 1, 8, and 12), two girls and a boy.

I have six siblings, and I lost two of them over the past five years.

I'm a CNA at Agrace and hoping to become an RN soon. (Gabrielle Brown)



I have a wonderful family with my wife and four kids.

I am the only one of my family in the USA.

I like to watch my kids play sports and to play with them, especially soccer. (Fredy Carcano)



I have three daughters and one son that I am super proud of.

After spending nine years in prison, I've become a person who values everything in life, both good and bad, and especially my freedom.

I am a barber, a DJ, an artist, and a student; aside from UW Odyssey, I'm also a student at Inspire Barber College for my master barber's license. (Mark Español)



I'm a single parent of three (24, 20, 18) and also have three grandsons (5, 3, 1).

My daughter moved to Texas with my sister, so the only family I have are my two children that



are here with me in Madison.

All my family lives in Chicago, and I'm currently looking for new housing that's very hard to find here in Madison. (Curtrice Foster)







I am one of five siblings and got legal custody of one of my siblings.

I'm an immigrant, and all of my blood family is in Ecuador.

I love to play the flute and piano.

My favorite thing in the sky is the sun because it gives me wonderful energy from the universe and makes me happy. (**Geresa Homesly**)

I have eight adult children, 34 grandchildren, and one great-grandchild, and I love them all the same.

I like to listen to music, mostly old school, and love sports and movies.

I live in public housing and have been here for seven years. (**Tyrone Ozea Hudson Sr**.)



I live with my husband, who is great in painting, and my nine-year-old son, who loves to sing in English.

I was able to teach Kichwa (native indigenous language) to my son, so he speaks three languages. (Aida Inuca)



I have three sons who rule my world (literally).

I am looking forward to learning with you all and rediscovering my love for reading.

I am shy. (Tierra Kimbrew)



I am a lactician.

I enjoy yoga, nature, and gym at the Princeton Club.

I am a South Paw baby! (Monèl Long)

I have four kids (18 months old, 9 years old, 13, 15), and they are my inspiration to keep going in life.

My husband is one of my biggest supporters to any project in my life education.

I'm a member of Roots4Change Co-op of doulas, the first co-op of Latinas/indigenous women in Dane County. (Maricela Martinez Munguia)



I have four children (ages 7, 12, 15, 19—three boys, one girl) that are my hearts.

I'm a single mother working two jobs.

Now I stay in Middleton and have been there for 12 years, but one day I'm looking to buy a house so I can live a little more comfortably. (Lavinia Miller)





I am a proud father of two daughters ages 17 and 19.

I have been living in the United States since 1999, and I love living in beautiful Madison.

I would love to get better at writing. (Saul Naxi Perez)

I have two young daughters who are both so smart and beautiful.

I grew up in a household where I was primarily in nature.

I am currently a correctional officer, which plays a big role in my growth from childhood trauma. (Keely Nelson-Gray)



I have a 21-year-old brother that is in the Army and a little sister in high school who is 16.

I like playing soccer.

I have a dog that likes smelling shoes. (Gael Rodriguez)



I have four kids and love them so much: they are the family I never had, and without them there's no me; I have days when I am tired and don't want to do, but I do for them.

I love art, painting, drawing, and building things.

I just moved here from Janesville; I lived here before but when I was young and without children. (Kiana Sims)



I am actively involved in a community program as a cheerleading coach for the South Side Raider football team.

I have two children, ages one and three, who are the highlight of my life.

I am a strong advocate for the color purple: I believe it is the "New Black," and it is absolutely my favorite color. (**Dominique Smith**)





I am a single mother with three kids who mean the world to me: ages 9, 11, and 17.

I am bilingual and know a little bit of French.

I'm the oldest out of eight siblings. (Roxanna Sobrevilla)

I go to Madison College, and I plan to transfer to UW-Madison.

I have two dogs, Caramelo and Zeke, ages two and six.



I have a fouryear-old daughter named Zola, and I love her with everything in me.

My favorite color is yellow.

I dream of getting my bachelor's in nursing and starting my own esthetics clinic. (Tiara Smith)



I still live with my parents and my little brother, who is still in high school. (Lupita Valerio Aragon)





I have 12 siblings.

I am Community Service Chair of the Urban League of Greater Madison Young Professionals.

I read 110 books over the summer. (Andrea White)



I have two daughters (ages 4 and 14) who are my reason for working so hard.

I love to read, listen to music, and talk (LOL).

I want to be a farmer, so in the next five years or

fewer I will buy a farm for my family and me. (Mya Whitson)

I love trying new things, like having movie/show/series night with the food and everything all laid out.

Another thing I love to do is travel.

One of my most favorite things is music because there is a song for literally anything and everything!! (Amanda Willis)



I have an eight-month-old son and graduated from high school with him on my hip.

I'm a student at Madison College as well for premed for labor and delivery.

I am the first person in my family to graduate from high school and go to college. (**Sinetra Wilson**)

I design T-shirts for a hobby.

I'm very outgoing.

My daughter is a senior this year, and I'm so proud. (**Zykia Wilson**)





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?

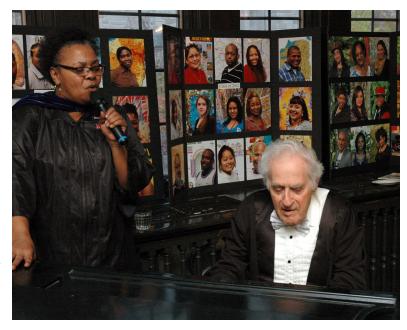


It wasn't all good but neither was it all bad. We were taught principles, morals, and Christianity. We were required to excel in school. You would think that such an upbringing would produce upstanding and productive individuals, and it did for ten of us. Unfortunately I was one of the four who didn't 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 outisder 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.

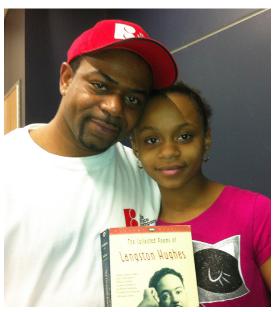
I feel that I am not alone anymore if I need help with a probem. I feel that I am loved by my teachers and classmates. I feel that life is beautiful this year and the rest of my life because of Odyssey. I feel that there will always be help available to me. I feel blessed.

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.