

odyssey oracle

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I Love . . .

I love words. Literature and poetry give me the opportunity to express more of me than I could normally. Poetry has always been a way for the voiceless to discover a resounding voice. It's a way for those who are shy and whisper to be eccentric and elaborately colorful in black and white. It's a way for us to tell our stories on our own terms using our own means of expression.

No two poets can express the same feelings in the same way. No two people can read the same poem and relate to the words in the same way. This is what draws us in and holds our imagination. These words help us escape our personal hells and hold on to the heaven tangled in the texts. The passion or pain a writer feels is released when those words are written. Poetry provides productive, unabridged, healthy therapy. The language heals and expresses emotions that oftentimes can't be expressed any alternative way.

In many ways we can be superheroes through poems. We can be women, men, or children again. We can travel to distant places, eat exotic foods, or travel back in time. We can be blind, speak a different language, live a day in a wheelchair, or inhabit an imaginary distant planet with alien life. Poetry is limitless and timeless, yet extremely accessible to everyone.

Poetry can come from the illiterate or highly educated. The wonderful thing about poems is there is no training required to master this art. The only prerequisite is a passion for expression simply for the purpose of expression. It's an art form where you get from it just what you put into it. It may not make you rich or famous, but the world of words you create—your language and imagery— can make



you immortal. Isn't that great?

Words and poems take on a life of their own, but they die if we just pass them by. Create poetry in your own way, every moment of every day. Listen to words and watch the life they take on in the songs they are sung and sentences they flow through. Read into the worlds they create when they are paired and matched in inventive ways and take a moment to stay. You too will fall in love with words and poetry and long to create the literal life of immortality. (**Takeyla Benton**)



I love creativity. I love art, music, jewelry (beading), cooking, writing, sewing, etc. . . . Creativity is amazing. The certain things people's minds can come up with are truly extraordinary.

I am a very creative person. That's why I like the arts so much, I guess.

I am currently learning how to play the guitar, and it's exciting. I think this will be another activity of creativity that I will like a lot.

(**Shardetra Ofori-Anim**)



I love my mother so much. One memory I have of her is when I was sick. She visited me all the time. No one else could handle it, but my mother was there.

I don't know where

I would be without her. She's the most caring person ever. If I need anything, I know she has my back. She is a Christian



woman who loves God, and God is in everything she does. I want her life to prosper.

But on the other hand, we have our days. There are some days when she's not my favorite person. But the love she has for me soon blocks that out. I don't love her just because she's my mother. I love her because she's my friend. (**Nikyra McCann**)



I love Selena Anderson, the most amazing woman I know. Standing at only 4'8" and maybe 135 lbs, she can easily get lost in the crowd, but don't be fooled by her small frame: she has the biggest heart of anyone I know. She would take the clothes off her back and give them to someone if

they needed them. She would spend her last dime if that meant it would help someone else.

Who is this, you ask? Selena Anderson is my grandmother. She stepped into my life when I needed her the most, and she made an impact that will stick with me forever. With both of my parents being addicted to drugs and not being able to care for me, I was headed straight to the foster care system. My grandmother refused to sit by and watch that happen. She took my brother and me into her home and cared for us like we were her own children.



I'm sure it was not easy for a woman who was already up there in age to step in to care for two small kids, but she did so without even blinking an eye. How she took care of us on a fixed income, I still can't figure out. I never knew we were poor until I was older because she worked her fingers to the bone to make sure my brother and I had everything we needed and most of what we wanted.

Whenever I need her for anything, she is there for me. Whether I need advice or a shoulder to cry on, she is there! Whether I am right or wrong, she is there, no matter how far away from home I am.

When my son was six months old, I was very upset at my then-husband because he was supposed to buy our son a coat and he didn't. I called my Granny very upset and vented. She told me everything would work itself out and for me to not get so upset because my son didn't need to see me like this. The next week I got a package delivered to my front door. When I opened the box, inside was a little coat. I called my Grandmother and she just said, "I told you, baby, everything would work itself out."

Recently I found out that my Daddy is not my biological father, and I was devastated. Of course the person I called to help me through my emotions with this was my grandmother. As we were talking and I told her I want to get a test to find out the truth, she says, "Baby, if you want to get a test you do that, but I don't need a test to tell me you are my granddaughter. I raised you and I love you. Now that is all that matters to me."

It is scary for me to think of where I could be today if it were not for my grandmother. I am the woman and mother I am today because of her. I could not thank her enough. When I think of what love looks like, sounds like, and feels like, I think of Selena Anderson; to me she is love.

**(Morgan
Chichester)**



Movie Review: Black Swan

by Shardetra Ofori-Anim

Over my winter break I watched the newly released "Black Swan." This drama about an emotionally disturbed ballerina stars Natalie Portman (Best Actress, 2011). Ms. Portman has been acting for years, also starring in other movies such as "Garden State" and "No Strings Attached."



This movie is basically about a dancer struggling with pressure from her dance instructor and from her mother, who was a ballet dancer herself until she became pregnant with Portman's character. Her mother gives her so much trouble because she wants her to be perfect. Her dance instructor comes on to her sexually because he feels this will bring out the darker side in her. In a way, it does. She begins to hallucinate and to scratch herself until she bleeds...

I liked the movie because it showed how, under too much pressure, someone can crack. I really enjoyed how the film illustrated her dark side as well as her elegant side. I could relate to how she was so dedicated to what she loved that she went mad. I would recommend this movie to anyone who wanted to see something new.



Moved by Martin Luther King, Jr.

Odyssey students summarized King's eloquent "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," wrote to the Madison School Board suggesting it become a required part of the curriculum, and penned their own letters to the spirit of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Summarizing "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"



Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. . . . tells why it is so important to use "nonviolent direct action" and what the difference is between a just law and an unjust law ("a code out of harmony with the moral law" . . . one that "degrades human

personality"). He points out that all of his moves might not seem timely to outsiders but they are very well-planned and long overdue. The plan was to force politicians and whites to fulfill their requests for desegregation by displaying direct action, even

if it got them imprisoned. . . . He felt that the church was not following its responsibilities to black people, hiding behind the "anesthetizing security of stained glass windows."

. . . I commend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.! Even though the world hasn't completely been erased of racism, I can definitely see where his words and actions have helped make our world a better and more just place.

(Precious LaShore)



The letter Martin Luther King wrote from jail addressed how he felt about injustices in America—how blacks were beaten, jailed, killed, and taunted, how they couldn't sit at the same lunch counter with white people, and how their children could not go to fun parks



Images contributed by Edwina Robinson and Helen Montgomery

like white children or to the same schools. He was disheartened by the way some of his people behaved towards the Civil Rights Movement. Some did not want to be a part of the movement and just accepted that this is the way life will always be; they were used to being oppressed mentally. . . . He was hurt about how many of the churches reacted because the church is supposed to help build people up. . .

He believed in non-violence and that equality and freedom would come. He believed in equal justice for all races of people. His faith in God remained strong, and his dream and vision did not die.

(Marie Hill)



. . . King writes that nonviolent tension will lead to growth. King lines his views up with Socrates's idea of creating a tension of the mind so one can rise above lies and ignorance. King says that the

privileged don't give up power to the oppressed; the oppressed have to fight for it.

. . . King tells the clergymen how disappointed he has been with their position in this matter. He feels they are more devoted to order and negative peace than to justice. He feels that they are condemning the African Americans for being oppressed and not supporting them in acquiring their due rights. He criticizes those who say this is not the right time for this; he feels time is always on the side of goodness.

. . . King writes for three or more pages about his disgust for the church, not religion but the fact that they have for the most part been very unsupportive and have not put their beliefs into action. He does thank the few brave clergymen who have risked their lives and their positions in the church to stand up for what is true and just.

. . . After really feeling the passion and brilliance in King's words, I know I will truly never be the same.

(Danielle Rosales)

Dear Madison Metropolitan School Board,



Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail" . . . was a very important part of our history. . . . I believe if our youth come to understand the effectiveness of the effects of the nonviolent campaign through the reading of this essay, they will

learn what true integrity and patience can achieve.

At that time Birmingham was the most segregated city in the U.S.; the record of police brutality was the worst compared to other areas of the country. The justice system in Birmingham did not care to solve the many unsolved bombings of black people's homes and churches. Black leaders made constant attempts to negotiate with the political leaders, but they refused to engage in



good faith negotiation, as Dr. King explained. . . . You, as Board members and adults who reside in the U.S., must understand that even today our rights are violated daily. I implore you to consider making King's writing a part of our high school curriculum.

. . . In this letter King makes reference to the First Amendment, and how preserving segregation unjustly denies citizens the privilege of peaceful assembly and peaceful protest.

(Bonita Greer)



I'm writing to inform you of the importance of Martin Luther King's uplifting and powerful "Letter from Birmingham Jail." This work needs to be assigned in every high school across the nation from 9th to 12th grade.

Martin Luther King had an undying passion so enduring that he poured all his energy and dedication toward one goal: to eliminate racial injustice in segregated America...He evokes an example of early Christians, many of whom suffered and died for what they believed in but managed to transform their society through strong faith... King expresses his sorrow for the deteriorated, weakened church. Not only does he feel cast out and deceived by should-be allies, but those same people are praising Birmingham police for supposedly anticipating street violence during the demonstrations. He disapproves of them with this quote: "I doubt that you would have so warmly commended the police force if you had seen its dogs sinking their teeth into unarmed, nonviolent Negroes."

I believe this is one of the most important, astonishing readings in any history, and I clearly recommend that this will be studied in all schools for years to come. **(Marseills McKenzie)**

As a parent of a Black child in the Madison Metropolitan School district, I struggle with how



deep into our culture and history I should immerse my sixth grader... One dreamer the children need to read about is Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. More than his *I Have a Dream* speech should be studied. While this is an amazing speech that inspires and requires us all

to look at the disappointing reality and dream about something better, his *Letter from Birmingham Jail* is equally as amazing. Dr. King questions the harsh racist realities of his time in such a soft, logical manner that one cannot help but to question with him.

Dr. King references other great writers and speakers, using their messages to master the point he eloquently elaborates in his letter. King's use of logic and reasoning gives you a reason to read on. The imagery he creates helps you compile a mental picture of his experiences even if you haven't walked in his shoes or lived one day of his life. The words he weaves together pull his logic and critical conclusions into cohesion. Why not give children a chance to experience the genius that is born from chaos and destitution?

Dr. King opens the letter by appealing to the clergymen who wrote him a letter in such a way that elevates him to their level. His use and mastery of language is awe-inspiring. . . . One of his most famous lines is "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." . . . Would this not inspire children to get involved with the world? Would those lines not compel them to stand up to bullies and gangs threatening their fellow students? . . . Why not expose youth to a logical call to action?

"We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed." Lines like these will inspire power in the powerless. It will show them that although they are not powerful now, or in the majority now, they can take power in a positive, constructive manner.



For those children who feel they should wait until they are older, or wait until they have more power, King writes . . . “Justice too long delayed is justice denied.”

. . . Behavior problems would cease to exist at an intolerable rate if children of color understand what was sacrificed and what was held sacred in order for them to have the freedoms they take for granted. “We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right.” How many ways can this line be used to motivate and inspire and help children stop to think before they conspire to do wrong?

Dr. Martin Luther King ends his letter just as humbly as it began and leaves us with hopes and dreams, writing, “Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear drenched communities, and in some not too distant tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all their scintillating beauty.”

Words written by those who live the life they preach despite threats of death and torture . . . remain in our hearts and minds long after the texts are put away. Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living”; we should encourage

children, especially those of color, in Madison to examine life in all its beautifully imperfect facets. We should encourage them to read the words of the courageous, outrageous, and unknown in search for a spark that will change the world, or simply their understanding of the world. This letter should be included in the list of required reading material for children.

(Takeyla Benton)



in their own schools. I believe this important piece of literature can open their eyes to things they may have never thought of otherwise.

In “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” Martin Luther

I am writing you this letter to implore you to make “Letter from Birmingham Jail” an assigned reading piece for all high school graduates. There is so much our young people have to face today, from peer pressure, sex, and drugs to the threat of violence

King Jr. addresses some key issues that the civil right leaders faced during that time. The civil rights movement alone can teach all our kids how to deal with injustice. Every day, children are confronted with some type of harassment or bullying in schools. If we could teach our kids to have the same kind of self control and poise that African Americans had during the civil rights movement, it could have a positive impact on everyone.

I believe our kids today are so far removed from the struggle and hardship of slavery and Jim Crow they don't fully understand the sacrifices African Americans have made. I don't think it's a white or black thing; it's a generational thing. We as African Americans are given the same opportunities as our white counterparts, but the current generation doesn't understand the sacrifices that were made.

I know slavery and Jim Crow are both eras in American history that we would like to forget and some would like to pretend it never happened. That is not the solution to this issue. These are two ugly blemishes that, if we took them and used them as a teaching tool, could help our kids in all aspects of their lives. They would learn to treat others the way they want to be treated. They would learn to never give up, no matter how many times you

have been told NO! From studying "Letter from Birmingham Jail," they would learn dedication, patience, perseverance, self control, self esteem, and brotherly love, all traits that we want our kids to embody. You will not regret adding this thought-provoking and timeless letter to the curriculum.
(Morgan Chichester)

Letters to Martin Luther King, Jr.



Dr. King, I am writing in response to your letter from the Birmingham Jail. I must start by saying how beautifully and earnestly you expressed your feelings. I agree with your attempts to get things done by using direct non-violent methods.

Violence is not always the answer. There are more positive and constructive ways of settling issues. I

think that the way a man shows himself in times of trouble shows the content of his character.

You describe the injustice inflicted on our people as "like a tranquilizing thalidomide relieving the emotional stress for a moment only to give birth to an ill-formed infant of frustration." To



me this means putting a Band-Aid where surgery needed. You also described injustice as “a boil that can never be cured as long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its pus-flowing ugliness to the natural medicine of air and light.” You must expose injustice and bring it forth to the light of the world for all to see.

. . . It truly vexes me to the point of disbelief that men of the cloth, Christian ministers, did not join you on this journey. How could they who are supposedly spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ not see that you, our Moses, were trying to bring our people out of our Egypt from the Pharaoh of injustice and segregation? If they can manage to sleep at night while you talk the talk, walk the walk, and end up in jail, they are a special kind of hypocrite. How can they sit idly by and say the courts should handle this problem, knowing that the courts have not been on the side of the people? I see them as cowards, not Christians.

Dr. King, you, your words, your teaching and preaching, and your method of direct non-violent action will have a profound influence on people long into the future. It seems to me you gave a good tongue lashing to those who don’t get it, but it was done so graciously and eloquently that they don’t even recognize it.

(Eleita Florence)



I have just finished reading your “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” and I must say it left me speechless and filled with mixed emotions. Your letter touched me in many ways because I could feel your anger, love, and sincerity flowing from the

pages like a crystal clear waterfall. I can appreciate you standing firm on your beliefs and speaking your mind on what you felt should be just laws in this country, especially in Birmingham, Alabama, the most segregated city in the United States.

I’m sure it was very hard at times to stay calm and not react violently towards those who have inflicted so much hatred and pain, but I can tell your faith in God kept you stable and sane. I commend you on the way you handled such atrocious things that were thrown in your path of trying to make the world a better place. I couldn’t imagine not wanting to fight back with my words or my fists after being beaten or told that I couldn’t sit in the front of the bus because of the color of my skin.

What really got me was you being told to wait. How dare they have the audacity to tell you to wait after all the pain and suffering you all have been through, from the sit-ins and marches you have led, the bombing of black churches, and not being able to take your child swimming because the pool was for whites only?

You also spoke of Socrates, whom I also admire, because he was such a powerful, educated, well-spoken, and bold man. You mentioned how Socrates felt the need of having nonviolent gadflies to create tension in society that would help men “to rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.” . .

(Catina McAlister)



Dr. King, in reading your letter I noticed that you mentioned the great philosopher Socrates at least three times. You felt that you and Socrates shared some similar beliefs, such as you both “practiced civil disobedience.”

This entails a

commitment to truth. I agree with you in the goal you seek and your method of direct action. No individual should be able to put a timetable on another man or woman’s freedom or to violate that man or woman’s constitutional rights.

My neighbor, Lisa McNair of Chicago, mentioned to me about the recent bombings and that

her first cousin, Denise McNair, had succumbed in that recent church fire. Badly burned, charred bodies were lying in the streets amid the chaos, with families shaken like a string of loose beads. That is the image she described to me. . . .

Dr. King, with your righteous intentions, the world was not ready for you! You have been to the mountain top, and there are many that stand beside you to continue on in your legacy! I am proud that my son, Jarrel Brannon Montgomery, won the 2010 City-County Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Humanitarian Youth Award “for making outstanding contributions in our community, while exemplifying the true legacy of Dr. King.” On his award certificate, signed by the mayor and the county executive, is a quotation from “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”: “The time is always right to do what is right.”
(Helen Montgomery)



you said that you are not afraid of the word tension. My mind’s eye immediately flashed upon tension’s partner: conflict. I realized to be unafraid of tension is to be unafraid of conflict, and for the first time non-violence did not seem weak to me. You helped me to look at my misconceptions and wrap my brain around the strength stirring the movement.
(Stephanie Pamperin)

. . . I will not lie and say that the concept of non-violence sits easily with me, but I will tell you that your words have caused me to re-examine my approach to this life. Thank you for your candid discussion of tension. You made me proud when



Madison is under protest by the Democratic Party. In his Budget Repair Bill, Governor Walker is taking away the rights of unions and also taking away parts of healthcare and pensions. He also is the kind of governor who cares more about the health of his pockets than the health of the poor in his state. Right now more than 15,000 people are in a non-violent protest against him and his Budget Repair Bill. I have done two days of protesting and thought that it was too long, but you did weeks, months, and years so that I could get a cup of coffee from a lunch counter. Thank you for all the hard work and jail time you did for me, my family, and friends. (Kiara Hill)



Dr. King, I have had the pleasure of reading your letter. It’s quite famous, and I know you are in heaven smiling because of all your hard work and touching speeches. You would be happy to know although we have not won the race, we are still running in the race. I got to witness history in the making: our first African American president, Barack Obama. This was a step started by you so very long ago. . . .
(Marvin Pratt)

Dr. King, I am a young woman from Madison, Wisconsin, who was raised in a not-as-racist world as you. I was very privileged to go to a school where kids of color sat with white kids. . . . Right now in Wisconsin, the capital city of

A Symphony on Sunday

by Stephanie Pamperin

Sunday's weather was frightful, but inside the Overture Center was delightful. I arrived an hour early for the 2:30 pm event so I could saturate myself in the elegance of the venue. Time disappears when you step inside all that glass and chrome. One would think it would be an ice castle complete with cruel employees, but entering allows you a passport to a long forgotten land. Small lights cast a warm glow with the temperature set at a very comfortable sixty-eight degrees, giving you no reason not to pay a visit to the coat room. The Overture Center gives us a glimpse into what nobles experienced in times past. So it is fitting that I took mezzanine seat three forty-seven inside Overture Hall to enjoy Elgar, Beethoven, and Prokofiev. Each artist had his music brought to life through the Madison Symphony Orchestra under the direction of John DeMain.

Director DeMain dressed in tuxedo tails, as was each male member of the orchestra. The women were wearing either black dress pants with black tops or black dresses. Simone Dinnerstein, guest pianist, graced the stage in a long flowing black dress with a royal blue accent sown into it. DeMain and his orchestra opened the afternoon with Elgar's Pomp and Circumstance March in C Major. I was pleasantly surprised as unfamiliar sounds reached my ears. I expected the sounds of graduation to seep from the stage; instead, I felt like I was witnessing the birth of spring. I then learned from my program

booklet that Edward Elgar created five Pomp and Circumstances over the course of thirty years. The six minute piece made the icy winter weather melt instantly, and I eagerly awaited Beethoven.

A long time fan of both Ode to Joy and Fur Elise, I could not wait to hear Beethoven's Concerto No. 5 for Piano and Orchestra in E-flat Major. The Hall was silent— not strangely so— as we awaited the piano being placed upon the stage. Mrs. Dinnerstein placed her fingers upon the Hamburg Steinway, given as a gift by Peter Livingston and Sharon Stark, transporting me to a place of ultimate freedom. I had found my passport into the land of sharps and flats where every good boy deserves fudge. I had gotten to enjoy Beethoven as an adult, not a child, and instantly wanted to do so again. Mrs. Dinnerstein's fingers fleeced the keys with gentle fierceness; I understood why my program states she is "a throwback to such high priestesses of music as Wanda Landowska and Myra Hess."

It was a delight to listen as she transfixed us for thirty minutes, and as intermission approached, I was doubtful her performance would be topped. After Intermission we returned to the Hall for the last and final piece. Sergei Prokofiev's Symphony No.5 is definitely ear candy. He left nothing out, making full-use of every instrument in the Madison Symphony Orchestra. The forty-three minute piece flew by with a crescendo of percussion at the finale.

The house lights came up and I gathered myself to go home, longing to use my passport again soon to the land of sharps and flats at Overture Hall.



Encountering an Emily Dickinson Poem

*Some keep the Sabbath going to Church—
I keep it, staying at Home—
With a Bobolink for a Chorister—
And an Orchard, for a Dome—*

*Some keep the Sabbath in Surplice—
I just wear my Wings—
And instead of tolling the Bell, for Church,
Our little Sexton—sings.*

*God preaches, a noted Clergyman—
And the sermon is never long,
So instead of getting to Heaven, at last—
I'm going, all along.*

The theme of the poem is clearly you don't have to go to church in order to know your God. Why must

we build buildings and wear extravagant wardrobes to give praise to the most high? Everything in nature, everything around us, and our own bodies are an extension of God; embodying these spiritual qualities is the way of truth.

I certainly agree with the author's point of view. . . . True, worshipping collectively is great, but it doesn't have to be done in a mechanical setting. I live my life according to these principles. Often my life has consisted of a constant struggle to choose a religion, a church, a faction. But I've realized getting in oneness or fullness with God is a way of life, not something you can label. It's almost like the law of gravity. They really didn't have to define it to begin with because it's something you experience. It simply is. **(Eric Rodgers)**

This poem speaks to heaven and church being inside us all. While others attend church, listen to the choir sing and the clergymen give sermons, the poet stays home and praises God in her own special and personal way. The writer knows she will go to heaven while others must abide by church rules in order to solidify a place at the pearly gates. The wings the writer wears illustrate that she is already doing God's work without the church guidance. Church is not a place you attend on Sunday; it's the place you put yourself in every day you live your life. . . . The guiding light in us all should be our navigation.

I can relate to the poem. As someone who cannot wrap my mind and heart around the rigidity of religion, I still long to be close to God. I believe God is within us all and occupies every atom in the universe. This church is every day, and sermons are in our actions to each other in every way. . . . **(Takeyla Benton)**

This poem is about people worshipping outside of a traditional church—listening to birds sing instead of choir music, being outside in an orchard in nature instead of inside a church building, feeling no need





to put on fancy clothes but instead wearing dress-up wings, . . . and not having to wait to die to feel in heaven.

This poem touches me in a deep way. Each day that I spend with my young ones to me is heaven. We don't go to a formal religious service, but on Saturdays I try to stop the housework, stop the nagging, and play and observe them in a spiritual way. I love the spring, as I find it a time of true discovery. How exciting it is to get back into nature with my little ones! I completely agree with this poem and now realize the true spiritual nature of life in all ways. (**Danielle Rosales**)

This poem is expressing a person's relationship with the church in comparison to others. The writer explains that on the Sabbath she stays home rather than go to church. Rather than go into a church

building to listen to a choir sing, she would rather be free out in an open garden listening to birds sing. Rather than wearing the robes and dress that clergymen wear, she would rather wear what she feels comfortable in. Instead of listening to the preacher preach, she would rather listen to God.

The theme that resonates from this poem to me is to break religious tradition and worship your God on your terms. Don't get so caught up in what you should be doing by someone else's standards. Do what feels right for you, as long as you can get to heaven in the end.

This poem really spoke to me personally. I struggle with my personal relationship with God and the church. This poem reminded me that it's my walk, and I should worship my God the way I want, regardless of how others may feel or think about my decisions. (**Morgan Chichester**)



This poem says that you can celebrate God in everyday life, not just at church. We can find God in nature and our surroundings if we just stop and watch for a moment. The poet is saying that we should look forward to life and what it brings and not be so focused on the future.

. . . I feel that being surrounded by nature does bring out my spirituality, and I feel God's presence when I breathe in that fresh air. (**Leah LaBarre**)



In the first stanza of this poem, she explains she doesn't need to go to church to praise God; she can do it from her home . . . because she has everything she needs there.

. . . The church is indeed God's house and sanctuary, but if you truly believe, the power of your faith can be felt no matter where you are. That's what my mother always told me when I was a child. Because this is what she believed, we would often have our own way to worship God on Sundays. I feel with this freedom my siblings and I were able to learn about God without feeling pressured to do so. As long as God is in your heart and He knows it, you can show your gratitude anywhere, even if you don't always attend church.
(Shardetra Ofori-Anim)



The untitled poem made me chuckle because I can relate to the author's resistance of having to follow the status quo and be in a church on Sunday, every Sunday. The author's reluctance to wait for heaven and her insistence on gathering pieces of it as

she lives her life resonates strongly with me. It also recalls for me the novel *Tempest Tales* by Walter Mosley and the argument *Tempest* has with Angel regarding where one finds heaven.

. . . I relate to the sentiment that God is everywhere, not just within the walls of the Church.
(Stephanie Pamperin)



. . . The message is to honor your religion in your own way. You don't have to attend church and sing in the choir to assure your place in heaven.

. . . There are times when I do attend church, but there are also times when I do my

own worshipping at home. Whether I put on some gospel music and sing, or read scriptures from the Bible, as long as I know I have my own relationship with God, I know I will get to heaven.

(Catina McAlister)



(Bonita Greer)

. . . I believe the church is the building. It is a place of refuge. People should come together to worship and encourage one another, but that does not always happen. I do agree that one also can and should worship at home with one's family and should appreciate God's creations.



you don't necessarily need to be in a church, especially on a Sunday, to believe in God. There are many individual ways of expressing your faith. You and your friends or family can have your own ways of "going to church." We can have open-mindedness when it comes to how we

want and need to show our beliefs. . . .
(Ray Migizi Hopp)



. . . I believe you can serve and worship God in more than one place. It doesn't have to be in a building. It can be anywhere you decide because I believe God is with us all the time—inside our mind, body, and soul.
(Marvin Pratt)

Kian's Reflections

by Kian Cunningham

In December 2010, my husband of eight years got diagnosed with a Pulmonary Embolism. I didn't think this would ever happen to someone I loved so much. I felt like my whole world ended and couldn't help wonder why.

All these thoughts were going through my mind, like, why do bad things always seem to happen to my husband and me? We really never seem to get a break in life. Honestly, internally I was mad at God! I couldn't understand why this was happening. I have been angry since December and been keeping it all bottled up inside. The month we had off from school I had to take care of my husband and our two boys. I felt alone and by myself. I didn't have any support from my husband's family.

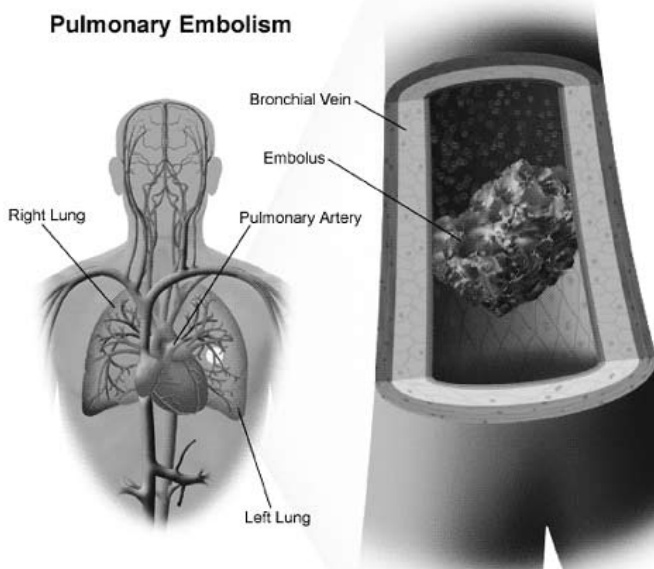
I also feel like the eight years with my husband have gone by so quickly. I think about things we have

never gotten to do yet, like all the traveling we talked and dreamed about.

I also feel like a piece of my husband was gone; he hasn't been the same ever since.

Life has been hard lately. I have been asking God, why can't you let *me* have the Pulmonary Embolism? Pulmonary Embolism is a blockage of the main artery of the lung or one of its branches by a substance that has travelled from elsewhere in the body through the body's bloodstream. In my husband's case, the doctors don't know why he has unexplained blood clots in his right lung.

For the next six months my husband will be on a blood-thinner called Warfarin and will receive Lovenox injections. All I can do is expect the unexpected for the next six months. I now know that I can pray and ask God to help us. I do want to continue my journey with Odyssey and graduate. I also hope that everyone in class continues with the Odyssey Project and graduates as well!



Editorial Corner

Every Teen's Dream? by Takeyla Benton

I was 16 and terrified. I thought my life was over, figuratively and literally. I didn't want to go home, so I rode the bus from East Towne Mall to West Towne Mall and back again, until my transfer was up. I walked in the door, defeated by my actions, afraid of disappointing my mother and more afraid that she'd kill me before I could get the words, "Mamma, I'm pregnant" across my lips.

She didn't kill me. She didn't even yell or curse. She just looked at me with such despondency and dismay that I wish she would have yelled or cursed or slapped me.

Life as a mom and a teen ain't been no dream: no prom dress shopping, no skipping school for mall hopping, and no spring break trips or college visits. My time was filled with late nights of diaper changing, immunizations, wiping a snotty nose, and buying baby clothes. Before I could even begin



to enjoy my youth, it was sacrificed to the sacred mission of motherhood. I missed my high school graduation because I had to work a double shift and couldn't afford to take the day off. There were days I couldn't eat because I had to make sure my child was full. There were years I couldn't buy new clothes or shoes because I wanted to make sure my child had extra clothes and Christmas gifts. I was determined, at whatever cost, to get it right. I refused to accept the stereotype and statistic that my daughter too, would someday be a teenage mother.

... I refuse to idly cruise along this journey. I will be the vehicle, driver, and route planner so my children will grow to become more than stereotypes and statistics.

We as parents have more control over our children's fate than we realize. We can't control every action or reaction to situations, but we can shape their image of the world and their place in it. When children and teens feel like they occupy an important place in the world, like their success and failures have significant value, then they make better choices. It begins and ends with parents making better choices about every aspect of their children's lives—what they watch and listen to, and who they hang out with and even idolize. Involvement in school is vital. Equally as important is setting a good example. The "do as I say, not as I do" mentality died when the age of instant gratification of the internet was born. We, as parents, have to make it our role to be involved in our children's lives completely. Their lives need to be our lives.

While having your mom or dad involved in every aspect of your life isn't really every teen's dream, neither is the life changing challenge of teenage parenthood. Having a baby in your teenage years isn't a death sentence or reflection of bad parenting. It is a symbol of disconnect with the dream our ancestors had as they escaped the shadows of slavery. They hoped future generations would go on to be better, live longer, and leave better legacies to light the way for others. I can't imagine all the hardships and setbacks that come with teenage parenting were a part of their dreams.



Violence in Hip-Hop Doesn't Cause Violence in America by **Michelle Bozeman**

No one can deny that mainstream Hip-Hop involves a large amount of violent images, lyrics, and persona. Most of the popular songs are about Black men killing other Black men. Most artists' album covers and videos show them engaged in war, not as musicians. This has a damaging effect on kids too young to differentiate between entertainment and reality. A child may handle a real life situation with a make-believe idea. I ask, is Hip-Hop to blame for all of this? Hip-Hop artists need to take responsibility for their content, but they are not solely to blame for the violence in Hip-Hop communities.

Hip-Hop artists usually come from communities with broken homes, a lack of jobs, police misconduct, drug-infested neighborhoods, and inadequate education. When you look further on the economic side, sex and violence are definitely profitable subjects in today's world. The more sex and violence, the more it sells. What kills me most is that they blame artists if they make a song about sex or violence to secure financial success and achieve an American dream. What's funny is that Arnold Schwarzenegger, California's former governor, made millions from starring in "Terminator" and "Conan," but he is not ridiculed and scorned the way Hip-Hop artists are for using entertainment to make money. What about heavy metal and rock artists? They have extreme lyrics, fixations with death, and lyrics about drug usage. Society doesn't blame them when white youths overdose from drugs or commit



suicide because of listening to Marilyn Manson. In addition, America's current international affairs and foreign policies are violent, especially where war is concerned. Hip-Hop is only a reflection of the violence of its surroundings.

Instead of focusing on what is negative Hip-Hop, the media should give more attention to the positive and progressive Hip-Hop artists that promote community development and peace. Artists like Lupe Fiasco and Common, both from the streets of Chicago, and The Roots from Philadelphia are good examples. Political prisoner of war Dr. Mutulu Shakur (father of Tupac Shakur) worked with Hip-Hop communities through forums and workshops to help bring gang truces and peace in and out of the prison system. Organizations like the National Black United Front, the Nation of Islam, and the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement have consistently worked with the Hip-Hop communities to stop the violence in the Black and Latino communities. In the words of my group, Public Enemy, "Don't Believe the Hype."

Pimping the Media: *The Degeneration of Hip-Hop**

by **Kegan Carter '04**

When the song "It's Hard Out Here for a Pimp" won an Oscar in 2006, it proved that the sport of degrading women has been accepted as normal behavior in modern



society. The terms "pimp" and "player" have been around for a long time and are often used interchangeably. Although both words ultimately describe a person using one or more individuals for monetary gain and

sexual gratification, “pimps/players” are seen as role models while the negative connotations are typically reserved for women, even if they are not prostitutes. “Pimps/players” are not the types of people who need to be emulated in pop culture and should be avoided at all costs, or the risk of being “pimped” is inevitable. Derogatorily labeling another person, even in jest, promotes misogynistic attitudes and self-hatred.

Society has to wake up to the messages being forced through the television and radio. Songs are featuring more and more graphic sexual language, and videos are featuring more and more scantily clad women. The videos portray the men as the “pimps/players,” and the women are whatever the new slang term for “whore” may be. Teens, in their never-ending quest to be cool, hear these songs and are taking the lyrics literally. Men and younger boys see this and assume that all women are that way. Though people do have the free will to change the channel or listen to something else, the fact remains that hip-hop culture has a significant impact on all facets of entertainment, and currently, the “pseudo hip-hop” culture is “pimping” the airwaves with these negative images and attitudes.

Some female performers, like Lil’ Kim, further aggravate the problem by referring to themselves and each other as “bitches.” Their fans, mainly women, accept the degradation and emulate the behavior. Unless you happen to be a female dog, this word is by no stretch of the imagination complimentary... In order for men to take women seriously about labeling, women have to stop doing it themselves. This shows a lack of respect for self and others. Women need to unexceptionally reject these insults...

Watch out for men who refer to themselves as “players” and “pimps.” There is no way that “pimping” another human being could be positive. Instead of using negative words as terms of endearment, men and women should have more respect for themselves. If more men chose not to support artists who popularize the “pimp” and “player” mentalities, there would be a lot less derogatory material circulating on the airwaves. If women protested against the demeaning words by not using them in reference to themselves or others, maybe things really could become “hard out here

for a pimp.”

**This piece was adapted from an editorial in the Madison Area Technical College’s Newspaper “The Clarion,” Spring, 2006.*

Understand My Disease Instead of Staring at My Skin

by Pamela Lee

I have a skin condition called psoriasis. It has a kind of hideous look to it. It is a condition that has no cure. People tend to look at me and stare. I let them know that it is not contagious, and they act as if they’ve swallowed a canary.

I think that fear can create ignorance, but I don’t think ignorance should create fear. In this day and age, the TV is swamped with commercials concerning the many different skin conditions that have come to light. It is very rude to stare and make a person with a skin condition feel very self conscious.

I would want people to be more empathetic toward those with psoriasis. It’s simply an overabundance of skin cells, and we all need our skin.



Change the Childcare Assistance Guidelines by Tracy Cunnigan

Have you ever felt you are caught in the middle between being self sufficient and depending on government sources? Wisconsin Shares, a subsidy for childcare, should reevaluate its guidelines to take into account housing, food, utilities, and other necessary expenses before establishing an income threshold.



It seems to be an imperfect process. One wants to sustain momentum by getting beyond mere subsistence before benefits are taken away. One needs an incentive to improve and the ability to develop a safety net to avoid being vulnerable to a catastrophe.

The criteria for Wisconsin Shares childcare subsidies are a stopping block for a lot of parents trying to improve their lives economically and obtain self sufficiency. A family of three is not eligible for child care subsidies if their income before taxes is \$1200 per month. Childcare for one child is about \$800 per month. One cannot maintain a job that pays well enough to keep up with costs. It's like taking two steps forward in life but one step back when you need childcare assistance.

Homelessness in

Madison

by Catina McAlister

How many people in this country will be without a place to lay their head tonight? On any given night in America, anywhere from 700,000 to 2 million people are homeless, according to estimates from the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. In 2009, the National Alliance to End Homelessness reported that there were 6,525 homeless people in Wisconsin, which is a 20% increase from 2008.

State Street is home to some of Madison's homeless population. Its heavy population of homeless and poor people is quite visible. Madison is known for being somewhat liberal, but for the most part the city would rather see this population go away: out of sight, out of mind.

There are not nearly enough homeless shelters in Madison. The ones we do have fill up so quickly, leaving many people

without a place to go. Each year in Madison over 3,500 people experience homelessness due to poverty, violence or threat of violence, unaffordable housing, foreclosure, and eroding work opportunities.

I believe if we had affordable housing, better paying jobs with benefits, and more public assistance, that this would keep people from having to sleep on bus benches and in alleys.

Pay attention to the folks you have previously been ignoring. "A homeless person is not just a person that's out pushing a cart and drunk all the time," said a woman who experienced homelessness. Lend a helping hand when they ask for spare change or something to eat. You may find out something that you didn't know before: you'll understand that they are people, too.



Walk on By*

by E. Oroki Rice '07

*If you see me walking
down the street
and I start to cry each
time we meet
Walk on by.*

It's hard to ignore them. They ride buses from one end of town to another all day long. You'll find them in public libraries, prompting an ordinance posted that bans bad odors, carrying too many bags, sleeping and *excessive staring*. Something tells me this ordinance was created to shelter and comfort *regular* people.

I lived at Porchlight, a transitional housing facility for people like me who are homeless. Homelessness forced me to look deeper into the eyes of my homeless brothers and sisters. I have to believe that not one of them said to themselves in childhood, "When I grow up I'm gonna be a homeless person." I know I didn't. Most of us had



dreams of a different life than the scorching fire we were asked to walk through. Some of us came out more reduced to ashes than others.

So the next time you encounter one of us, look us in the eye. Look past the stench. Look past the six giant garbage bags that we board the bus with. Look past the blank stares pasted on our faces as we rock from side to side in the bus shelter. Look past the smile we offer freely as we dance to our own beat on State Street with hope that you can *spare a little change*.

If you can't look us in the eye, please *walk on by*.

**Reprinted from the Odyssey Oracle, March 21, 2007*

Black History Needs More than a Month **by Marvin Pratt**

From the start it upset me: 28 days. That's not even a full 30- or 31-day normal month. For 300 years we were held down and made to believe we weren't worthy enough to be considered equal. Now today they offer me 28 days to say you're black and learn about blackness when I'm black 365 days a year. Since there isn't a White History Month or an Indian History Month, why is there a Black History Month?

Please don't get me wrong. I am thankful for the 28 days to allow others to learn about my history. But maybe one reason so many people don't understand Blackness is because it's not really thought about until February.

Instead of having a month, why can't we be taught about Black history as basic study? We are still behind. It is unfair and dishonest to pretend having a short Black History Month in February really is enough to help us understand Black History.



Make a Pathway to Citizenship **by Danielle Rosales**

We have an estimated 11.9 million undocumented people living in this country. What is our country's plan—to put them all on planes headed for their countries of origin? These are people who in many cases risked their lives to come to this great country for a better life.

I know critics would say that this group of people takes jobs away from Americans, but I argue that the labor-intensive jobs they are willing to work, such as farm work, landscaping, and construction jobs, are jobs that many Americans refuse to do. Many Americans would rather collect unemployment than pick oranges or mow someone else's lawn. Many employers are well aware of their undocumented workers' status: they pay them less and make them work longer hours in unsafe working conditions.

I think we need to give this hard-working, family-oriented group a break. They are already here in this country. Let's not ignore them or misuse them. Let's give them a legal pathway to citizenship.

We need to look seriously at the true cost of keeping this group living in the shadows. The constant toll of being undocumented is mentally exhausting; fear and shame rule their lives. This inevitably turns to anger and frustration, leading to a wide array of physical and emotional health problems such as depression and alcohol abuse.

I think we need to take a serious look at our country's history. America is built on people from all over this earth. America is a huge melting pot, or as I like to think of it, a salad bowl where all kinds of people can live side by side working for their dreams, standing for what they believe, contributing to make this country great, and at the same time being authentic to their journey and background.

