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ODYSSEY



ORACLE

INTRODUCING THE CLASS OF 2025!



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ODYSSEY CLASS OF 2025



Angelica
Alvarez Valenciano



Kyianna
Baker



Tiffany
Brenston



Qu'Anna
Caffey



Eleanor
Ceaser



Timothy
Comer



Dillon
Dahlk



Brianna
Espanol



Adrienne
Farrow



Jamal
Jackson



Aaniyah
Jefferson



Gloria
Knight



Crystal
Lee



Mariya
Lucas



Alfusainey
Manjang



Vanessa
Martinez



Alexis
McClain



Mickey
Mestiza



Jasmine
Miller



Valvree
Mosley



Daija
Pigram



Lailaini
Reed



Tiana
Richmond-Lee



Ashli
Smith



Corrie
Thomas



Daniel
Thomas



Janessa
Weichmann



Ladella
Wilson



Abigail
Wilson



Sable
Wright

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 2025. The winning adjectives were “excited” and “nervous,” with others including “proud,” “happy,” and “blessed.”

I was (am) immensely happy, grateful, and proud of myself. I honestly thought I bombed the interview. So the news made me feel so proud. **(Angelica Alvarez Valencia)**

I was thrilled! I was super excited to be able to get back into my education and finally put myself first. I feel like this is my time to prove to me that I can be something. **(Kyiana Baker)**

I was overjoyed and happy. I honestly thought someone really heard me. I just want to be somebody for my kids and peers. **(Tiffany Brenston)**

I was very excited to know I will be attending the Odyssey class of 2025, knowing I had family members do Odyssey and knowing that I’m furthering my education by attending this class. I’ll be able to meet new people and make a new family. **(Qu’Anna Caffey)**

I was super excited and very happy for this opportunity, looking forward to meeting new people and graduating. **(Eleanor Ceaser)**

My feelings were one of surprise and excitement. It also was followed up with a sense of apprehension. I was also feeling very curious about what to expect. **(Timothy Comer)**

Excited, encouraged, determined, but also a little nervous and anxious. I found out I was accepted while I was still incarcerated, so I knew I would have my hands full upon reentry and wasn’t sure what all I would be juggling. But I was also extremely excited and hopeful because of my prior experience with the program and people involved. **(Dillon Dahlk)**

I almost felt I wasn’t worthy, that someone who’s had it worse than me deserved more of a chance, but what I really was doing was diminishing my experiences and that I did deserve to go further. I’ve been homeless amongst other troubles as well. I do deserve a chance to keep going. **(Brianna Espanol)**



I was extremely excited. I felt like God gave me a second chance at getting my education. I felt that my light started to shine again with this chance to go back to school and to gain more information, as well as knowledge. I felt that by accepting this blessing into my life that it showed my daughter she can do anything she sets her mind to. **(Adrianne Farrow)**

Very happy. Always wanted to be a part of something that means something. Had it rough growing up, so school wasn't one of my best subjects. **(Jamal Jackson)**



I felt excited. It gave me hope for my future that maybe I can accomplish all that I've always wanted. I appreciated that someone saw my potential. Blessed and proud of myself for even trying. **(Aaniyah Jefferson)**

I was overjoyed because I had some doubts, so to learn that I was accepted made me shocked. I'm just excited to be one of the people that was chosen for this great opportunity. **(Gloria Knight)**

Overwhelmed, happy, blessed, excited for the new beginning for me and my kids. Ready to get myself back into the school thing so that I can continue my education. **(Crystal Lee)**

When I was accepted into Odyssey, I felt new beginnings and a breath of fresh air because all my hard work and prayer worked. **(Mariya Lucas)**

I was so happy and excited. **(Alfusainey Manjang)**

Very happy but somewhat hesitant even though I really want to be here. I always worry I am not smart enough and have severe anxiety and not a whole lot of confidence. I hope not to embarrass myself, but I like also to challenge myself, even push past my discomfort level to prove to myself that I can do it. **(Vanessa Martinez)**

I felt so many feelings that I could just cry. I felt seen and heard. Happy, curious, but most importantly, the urge to complete something that I already once attempted in the past. **(Alexus McClain)**

When I learned that I got accepted, I felt determined. I graduated high school in 2016, and in 2024 I got the opportunity of a lifetime. I realized that it was time to "clean it up" and get myself to a place and space where I could be ready to learn. Odyssey has already shown love and support. I feel ready to grow. **(Mickey Mestiza)**

When I received my call of acceptance from Emily, I almost fainted. I was so full of joy and courage because I made my step into my future by getting a chance to complete my education. **(Jasmine Miller)**

Overjoyed and excited, a little special because out of over 100 people I got picked for a spot. I was given a chance! **(Valvree Mosley)**

I felt very relieved and happy to finally start. I got a couple other good news and beginnings to start at the same time so overwhelmed also. Overall excited to be here. **(Daija Pigram)**

I was very happy and excited. I jumped up and down and called my parents. **(Lailaini Reed)**

I was very scared and nervous because I've been in college and gave up. My handwriting is very sloppy as well. (**Tiana Richmond-Lee**)

I felt a sense of hope! The things that I thought would be so hard would now be as easy as 1, 2, 3! I felt as if to accomplish it were a new beginning and that I had opened up a new chapter in my life. (**Ashli Smith**)

I was completely overwhelmed with joy. Joining Odyssey is definitely a huge success for me. I am excited to expand and learn about the program more every day. Learning new literature, new ways to write and express myself. Thank you! (**Corrie Thomas**)

I legitimately felt a whirlwind of emotion. Emotions ranging anywhere between fear, confidence, and vengeance. I honestly needed time to process it all. I did not want to merch my opportunity on people who do not believe in me. I didn't want this

to be something I accomplished to prove someone wrong. I am motivated, and if there is anything to prove, I want to be able to show my daughter the fruits of determination and hard work. (**Daniel Thomas**)

Very excited, grateful to have been accepted. I felt like Emily saw good things in me to have chosen me. (**Janessa Weichmann**)

I was excited and a bit anxious. (**Abigail Wilson**)

Very excited. I was also taken aback because I knew there was a chance I'd be picked but it caught me by surprise when it actually happened. I also felt/feel nervous because it has been a very long time since I've been in school. (**Ladella Wilson**)

When I learned that I was accepted, I was overwhelmed, screaming, thanking my God for his blessings to be a part of the program. Going to give it my ALL. (**Sable Wright**)



ARE YOU A WRITER?

In class on our first night, each student answered the question, “Are you a writer? Why or why not?” Ironically, many who answered “no” proved in their eloquent responses that they actually ARE writers!

Yes, I am a writer. I am a part of an organization called Root 2 Rise. The staff helped me on my journey to applying to the Odyssey program. Denise Hansen and her daughter Celeste pushed me and helped me to discover my writing voice. My way to express myself is beautiful.
(Angelica Alvarez)

Yes, I am a writer because I feel writing down everything. If I don’t write it down, I will forget. I was never able to express myself when I was growing up—I learned that writing out everything I’m feeling helps me. I try to journal every night—I have to take notes all the time. I always am adding things to my to-do list. Writing helps me express my thoughts. Writing is different in very many ways. You can do it however you view it.
(Kyiana Baker)

Yes, I am a writer because as an adolescent I always had a diary or a journal. I haven’t written in my journal since I was about 28 years old. Now I’m 40 years old and feel like I should start back writing down my thoughts and feelings and goals. And the Odyssey program already has me excited on what’s to come. **(Tiffany Brenston)**

Yes, I am a writer because I feel like every day is an experience to either learn something new or do something new. I feel like it’s always important to write things down because you can always look at what you wrote down and see how your life experience changed. I am also a writer because you can create your own story. **(Qu’Anna Caffey)**

I feel I’m in the middle. I don’t write a lot, but I can write and express myself very well. But there are things that I can learn and get better at.
(Eleanor Ceaser)

Yes, I am a writer because I was thought to be a good writer in school while growing up. The one thing I never grew out of was run-ons in my sentences. I believe if I put my mind to it, I can be creative in my writing style. **(Timothy Comer)**

I am kind of torn when thinking about “am I a writer.” My whole life I’ve never enjoyed writing and to this day it definitely is not something that comes naturally or easy. But as of lately I am determined to grow, and because of that I guess I am a writer (in progress). **(Dillon Dahlk)**

I would say yes, not a very good writer; however, the ideas and stories I want to tell are there. I just have a hard time with a blank page—too daunting.
(Brianna Espanol)



Yes, I am a writer because when my paper and pen touch, my ancestors feel it!

Yes, I am a writer because when I express myself on paper, mountains are moved!

Yes, I am a writer because someone has to be, someone has to write.

Yes, I am a writer because my words are powerful and need to be heard by the masses.

Yes, I am a writer because my writing will one day save nations.

Yes, I am a writer, yes, I am a mother, yes, I am Black, yes, I am beautiful, yes, I am ME.

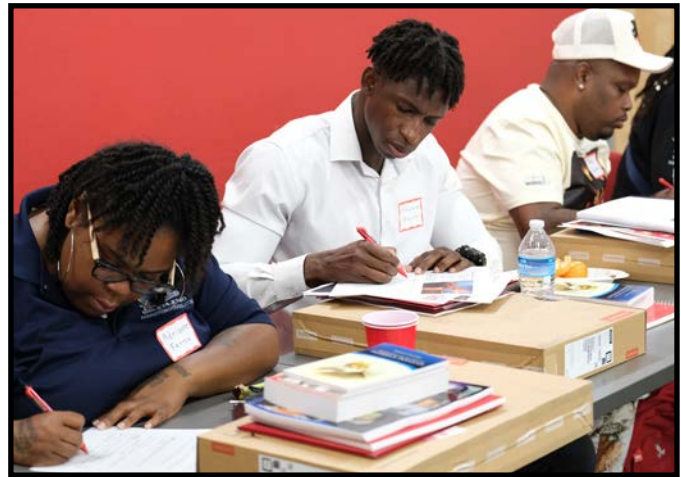
Yes, I'm more than a writer, but that's how it began, with me simply writing. **(Adrianne Farrow)**

No, I am not a writer but I am if that makes sense. When I was locked away in prison, I found myself getting bored so I started writing books, and I've completed three. Didn't think of myself as a writer 'cause I didn't learn how to read until I was about 22 years old. I buckled down and started memorizing words by writing them down, repeating them over and over until I got better. Still got a long way to go, but down for the ride. **(Jamal Jackson)**

Yes, I view myself as a writer because when I start to write about something I'm passionate about I have a way of making people listen. I can send a message/feeling through a room. I feel when I write I can create change. So, because I do, I am. **(Aaniyah Jefferson)**

I feel that I am not a writer because sometimes expressing myself gets to be hard to do. I feel that I may have been silenced for so long that I am still learning to express myself and find my voice. I am hoping to change this to being a writer in the coming months. It is a goal for me to find my voice. **(Gloria Knight)**

No, I am not a writer because I HATE my writing, and sometimes I have a hard time putting things together, especially sentences. My spelling sometimes sucks, and I did not get to properly learn my writing and punctuation. **(Crystal Lee)**



No, I do not consider myself a writer simply because I don't write much. Being a single mother I don't have a lot of time to do so. I'm just now finding the time and enjoyment in reading, so maybe writing will follow! **(Mariya Lucas)**

No, I am not a writer because I didn't get the chance, but I would really love to become one. **(Alfusainey Manjang)**

Yes, because I like to write my thoughts out so others may understand me; sometimes it's easier to put feelings and ideas to paper than say out loud. Eventually I'd like to learn to express myself verbally better. **(Vanessa Martinez)**

I would consider myself a writer but maybe not the best due to not being able to stay on track. With that said, I have so much going on in my head that I always have a response and can put something on paper. I aspire to become a stronger writer through this course. **(Alexus McClain)**

Yes, I am a writer because of the voice I have within, although sometimes I admit I fear what it has to say. It is as in we, as in naming the wounds of the world. Writing is painful, transmitting the pains of the world. My hands ache, my heart sobs, as I quietly write on this page. Suffering, knowing that suffering has yet to be understood. Gaza is heavy on my mind today. I hope that through writing we can teach each other to pray. How do we cope with the reality of the world? I am a writer because it is the best way to turn pain into meaning. I am a writer etching for collective freedom. **(Mickey Mestiza)**

No, I am not a writer because I am taking my steps now to learn to become the best writer I can be. I am open to learning and pushing myself through this journey and actually answer the question by saying I am a writer because I am writing right now. **(Jasmine Miller)**

I would say no I am not a writer because I am not good with punctuation and my penmanship kind of sucks. Sometimes it's kind of hard keeping my words or sentences in a straight line. **(Valvree Mosley)**

No, I am not a writer because I do not enjoy it. I feel writing focuses too much on the grammar, spelling, and punctuation, which I am not good at. The type of writing that was required in school never interested me. The only thing I was okay with were book reports because I do love reading, but then having to give your thoughts on the reading I always dreaded. **(Daija Pigram)**

No, I am not a writer. I like to think in my head and speak or use diagrams if I need to communicate. I think writing takes longer than speaking. My fingers and wrist get sore. My handwriting is bad. I used to be good at writing short stories in school. **(Lailaini Reed)**

No, I am not a writer because my handwriting is super sloppy and very big and just looks terrible. I also never learned cursive writing either. My hands sweat really bad as well. **(Tiana Richmond-Lee)**

Yes, I am a writer because I put thought and detail into my writings. However, I feel that I need a little more guidance and practice to be fully confident. **(Ashli Smith)**

No, I am not a writer. I feel I am not a writer for a few specific reasons. 1. Punctuation, commas, caps all jumble for me at times and I tend to throw them where I see fit. 2. I also tend to just go on and on about everything and anything. 3. I tend to write about things I feel I shouldn't share or trust with certain people so I just don't. **(Corrie Thomas)**

Do I consider myself a writer? Yes and no. I feel as though I have the ability to put ideas to paper. I have nothing published, and I'm not too versed in the rules of writing. It's a bit contradictory in the aspect I consider myself an artist on any media; and I consider writing a medium of art. **(Dan Thomas)**

No, I am not a writer because I don't write much outside of the schooling and programs I have accomplished. Although I like to write, I just don't do much of it. But I look forward to changing that. **(Janessa Weichmann)**

No, I am not a writer because I struggle to come up with ideas and when I do, half the time it doesn't make sense. Then I erase it and start all over again. **(Abby Wilson)**

Yes, I am a writer, but I am not a confident writer. I never fully applied myself when I was in school, so I don't have the confidence that I desire to have. I do believe that will change. **(Ladella Wilson)**

No, I am not a writer because writing isn't one of my strong qualities. But I am always willing to learn to become a writer. This is why I am glad I am in the Odyssey program. Who knows, after all this I will become a great writer. **(Sable Wright)**



SENTENCES ABOUT US



I have three adult children and three grandchildren (ages 8, 12, and 16), 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 am an artist. Painting, drawing, and doing activities that involve art make me feel happy and peaceful.

I have a six-year-old son who loves to sing, and I am excited to tell him about Mondays and the chance he will have to practice his singing. (He is shy but loves to sing.)

I am bilingual (Spanish).

I am a people person but my social battery runs low fairly fast. I get extremely red when I am shy or do public speaking. (Angelica Alvarez Valenciano)



I have a cat named ZB and a dog named Deuce.

I played basketball for more than 10 years of my life.

I have two older brothers and two older sisters.

Brother 1 – 2 kids + 1 bonus
Brother 2 – 3 kids
Sister 1 – 2 kids
Sister 2 – a dog
(Kyanna Baker)



I'm from a very loving home. I was raised by my mom and dad with three sisters and three brothers. I am second to the oldest.

I am a single parent and I have a 17-year-old son and an 8-year-old daughter. I love them so much.

I love love and am happy I got accepted into the Odyssey program 2025!!! **(Tiffany Brenston)**



I have one child and I have another child on the way, and I love them with my whole heart.

I played instruments in middle school and in high school, like a violin, trombone, saxophone, guitar, and I really enjoyed it.

I'm a triplet and I have 14 siblings, but one of my brothers passed away so I have 13 now and I love my family. **(Qu'Anna Caffey)**



I have one son, Jayceon Ceaser, five sisters, four on dad's and one on mom's, and two brothers.

I love to travel and sightsee.

I was point guard in basketball in middle school. **(Eleanor Ceaser)**



I am a single parent of a now grown adult child.

My love of music contains everything except hard metal rock.

When I was young, I used to love to walk on my hands. **(Timothy Comer)**

I was born and raised in Madison and love Badgers sports.

I was born two months premature.

One of my favorite things to do is spend time with family and be “Uncle Dill” to my cousin’s children. **(Dillon Dahlk)**



I love working, no matter what job I have, working overtime long days and late hours. I like to keep busy and feel useful.

If I were an animal, I’d be a cat or my brother has said a dolphin with eyelashes.

If I’m upset or scared, all I need is water— a shower, a lake, an ocean. **(Brianna Espanol)**

I have one amazing daughter that is six years old, and I have been told she stole my face.

I have an amazing family and support system. We are very close, we work together, live together, and reach our goals together.

I love to sing, and I write music and express myself through art. **(Adrienne Farrow)**



My name is Jamal, and I have two children (ages 15-16), a boy and girl.

I’ve been living in WI for 40 years.

Growing up I played football, basketball, and baseball.

I’m the middle child out of five siblings. **(Jamal Jackson)**

I am the oldest sibling in my household, but I am one of the youngest in the Odyssey program.

I believe art is in everything, art is everything.

I love finding new ways to express myself.

One extra—I'm left-handed. **(Aaniyah Jefferson)**



I have five wonderful children ages 18, 15, 6, 1, 1 (twins).

I am an exceptionally good cook. Food is my love language and how I show my family that I love them dearly.

When time permits, I paint with diamonds. It is how I soothe any bad mood I am in.

(Gloria Knight)

I have two kids (3 years & 11 months), and they are everything.

I love music and played in a drumline.

I am a graduate of Black Women's Wellness and I advocate for others.

(Crystal Lee)



I have two children ages 3 and 7 (almost 8), a boy and a girl named Tymire and Temiya. They are my reasoning for everything and my motivation to keep going and to never quit.

My dream occupation is to be a registered nurse. I have been in the healthcare field for eight years and a CNA for four of them.

I love working out. Going to the gym is one of my passions, and I find a lot of joy in exercising.

(Mariya Lucas)



I have two step children (ages 5 and 11), and I love them so much.

I am a married man and I'm attending this beautiful project with my wife (alum Kiana Manjang-Sims, Odyssey '23) and I love her so dearly.

I love to work out and go out with my family and watch TV. **(Alfusaine Manjang)**

I have four children, ages 26, 25, and 15-year-old twins that keep my life very busy.

I am 14 years older than my fiancé [Terance Nix, Odyssey '24] and feel that age isn't always a reason to avoid others (within reason) because you may have more in common than you think.

I love to read and before I had my twins I would read two to three books at the same time.

(Vanessa Martinez)



I have two beautiful, smart, and funny kids named Kejuan Jr (2) and Karter (1), whom I had 11 months apart.

I love watching sports, but I'm terrible at them. (Packers fan for sure!)

In my free time I like to draw. **(Alexus McClain)**

I have an emotional support dog named Luna.

I love to sing, dance, and play.

I am reconnecting with my Indigenous roots and redefining what it means to be an immigrant.

(Mickey Mestiza)





I have four very creative children with lots of hobbies, and I am blessed to be able to assist with every step being their mommy.

I have a very great sense of humor and I think I am very funny.

I used to be one of the fastest typing 911 dispatchers while working at the dispatcher station. **(Jasmine Miller)**



I have two amazing children who I love and care for so much.

My favorite color is pink.

I can be very shy at times but can talk your ears off once comfortable. **(Valvree Mosley)**



I love helping people and animals as much as I can, and I don't expect anything in return.

I like to make art of many kinds. I like digital art, ceramics, metal art, painting, drawing, music, and more.

I used to play the cello and trombone in school. **(Lailaini Reed)**

I play video games and crochet most days.

I help my mom take care of her two Yorkie fur babies.

I am a boy mom of a 9-year-old. **(Daija Pigram)**



I have two daughters, Malani (4) and Demi (1), and they are everything to me.

I love urban fiction novels and spend most of my time reading.

I'm a CNA currently and hope to be a nurse someday.
(Tiana Richmond-Lee)



I have two children who I love dearly and are part of the reasons why giving up would never be an option.

I love to love, joke around, and have fun!

I am very shy but when comfortable I am very outspoken. **(Ashli Smith)**

I have three children that have helped me grow to who I am today. Aziyria (7), Za'Maia (5), and Jeremiah (8).

I am a stroke survivor, nine months of physical and speech therapy.

I love to draw and color. **(Corrie Thomas)**



I am a father to the "coolest, most talentedest" little lady to ever traverse this mortal plane. She's 10 going on 20...

I like to consider myself a 'man of many hats.' Just haven't found one that fits yet.

Boredom fuels my passion for knowledge; extremes fuel my passion for discovery. I am always willing to push the limits of my capabilities. **(Dan Thomas)**



I am a mother to five beautiful and healthy children.

Everyone in my family's name starts with a "J."

I am a medical assistant and work for UW Health. This year made five years I have worked there. **(Janessa Weichmann)**



I am in two education courses at Madison College and I hope to transfer to UW Whitewater.

I work at a childcare center.

I hate bananas because of the taste, texture, and sound. When you eat bananas, you can't help but make noises as you chew. **(Abby Wilson)**



I am a mother biologically to three, but being married to my husband I have a total of nine children.

I come from a big family: I have eight siblings but was only raised with three.

I was raised by my father and his side of the family. **(Ladella Wilson)**

I have one daughter and three beautiful grandkids and a loving son-in-law.

I love to travel, dance, and go shopping at different stores.

I love to visit elderly people in nursing homes or their homes and take my dog to visit. **(Sable Wright)**



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?

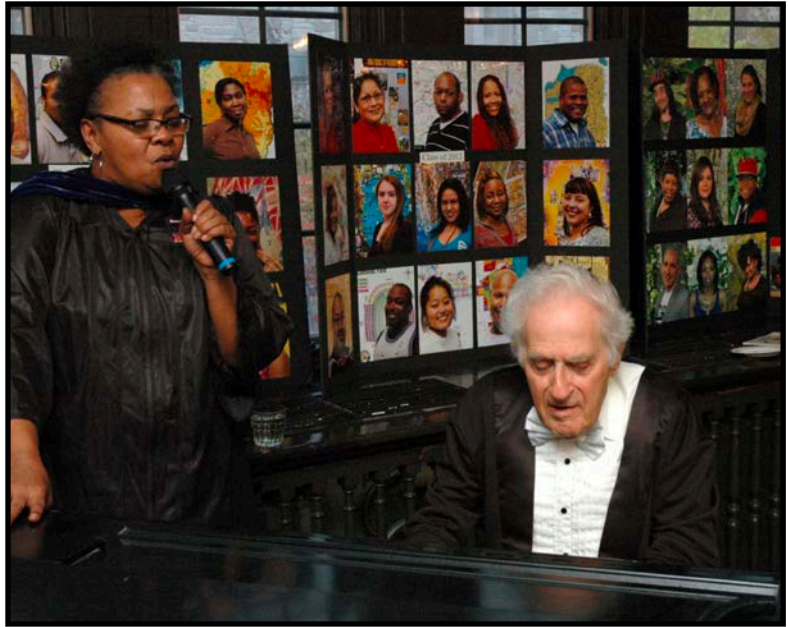
It wasn't all good but neither was it all bad. We were taught principles, morals, and Christianity. We were required to excel in school. You would think that such an upbringing would produce upstanding and productive individuals, and it did for ten of us. Unfortunately I was one of the four who didn't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

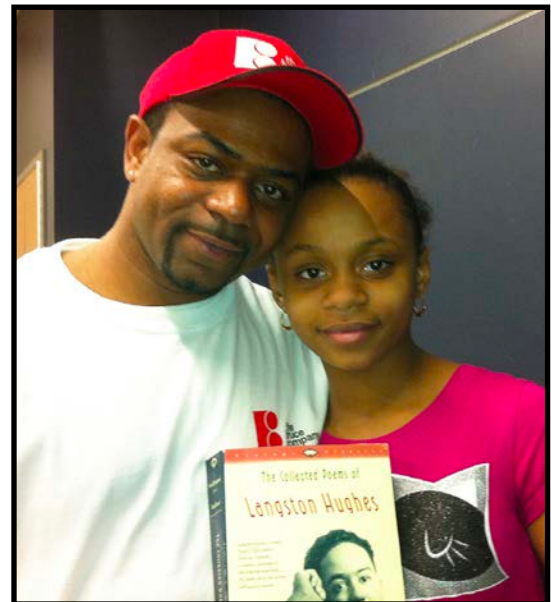
I LOVE MY WEBSTER'S

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.