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ODYSSEY



ORACLE

INTRODUCING THE CLASS OF 2027!



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ODYSSEY CLASS OF 2027



Omar
Arenas



Julia
Bell



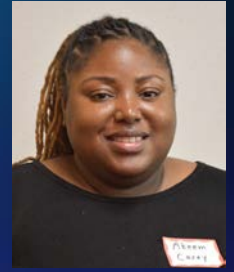
Tawatha
Bell



Nakenya
Brown



Shannon
Burch



Akeem
Carey



Sabrina
Carpino



Sconesha
Coleman



Zora
Davis



Stephan
El



Claudia
Gómez



Niquiria
Graves



Takela
Harper



Tamara
Harper



Shanice
Hendrix



Jessica
James



Shirley
Jones



Yaressi
Lara



Dar-Nasia
Lewis



Kiarra
Little



Rocio
Madrid



Sharvez
Mitchell



Lettice
Murphy



Bahrullah
Noori



Shaunta
Richmond



Ahmanda
Sanford



Samantha
Sobrevilla



Phig
Uriostegui



Victoria
Westwood



Kyanna
Williamson

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 2027. The winning adjectives were “excited” and “nervous,” with others including “proud,” “happy,” “grateful,” “honored,” and “blessed.”

When I learned I was accepted into this class, I was overwhelmed with joy. I have not been to school taking classes since I graduated high school in 2012. There was also a bit of fear, but in the best way possible. I know that growth will only happen when I challenge myself.

(Omar Arenas)

I feel great. The more I learn about Odyssey, the more confident I am. At first I was nervous, confused, and not sure what I was doing. Sometimes I get afraid of failure or as if I’m not good enough.

(Julia Bell)

I cried. I was so happy. I know me being here is going to change my life. I called everyone and told them about it.

(Tawatha Bell)

Learning that I was also the first person Emily interviewed and I was accepted, I was overjoyed. A blessing is an understatement. I feel like I was seen and heard. I felt like I was definitely somewhere I belonged.

(Nakenya Brown)

When I initially received the news, I was very emotional. I’d talked myself out of applying for years, and when I finally did in 2024 I was not accepted and became discouraged. I bit the bullet and tried again. I poured my heart into the application and here I am. I could not be happier.

(Shannon Burch)



My grandfather, Sanford Jones, went through and graduated, and I was happy that I can make him proud. I was happy for myself as well, but I really want to make him proud.

(Akeem Carey)

When I learned I was accepted, I cried. I have had a hard year with my decisions in life, and this was not to be missed. I am happy for the support and the faces I recognize. I hope to find help on my journey at Madison College my first year, and I feel people and their stories help.

(Sabrina Carpino)

When I learned that I had been accepted into this class, I was overly excited and thrilled because I knew without actually knowing that this class would and could possibly change my life. I felt that if I came and gave and continue to come and give 100%, then I would become the person I knew and dreamed of since I was a child—the person I’ve been waiting to be my entire life (the best I could possibly be, ME).

(Sconesha Coleman)

Honestly, though I felt good and like I was on top of the world, I was also discouraged and I still am. I felt as if I wouldn't be enough. Though that feeling has gone, it still creeps up on me, but yeah.

(Zora Davis)

I felt a burst of pride and a dash of hope as well as excitement for a new endeavor. I felt grateful and a little bit seen. I felt anxious for myself because of all the times I didn't finish something due to life's interferences. **(Stephan El)**

When I found out I was accepted into the Odyssey Project, I felt very excited. I was, and still am, truly grateful for the opportunity, but honestly receiving the email describing what to expect made me very anxious—emotional, grateful—I couldn't believe it. **(Claudia Gómez)**

I had all sorts of emotions when I got accepted into the Odyssey Project. My kids and I have been through a lot of things during this last season of our lives. From housed to homeless was a struggle for us, but I never gave up even when I felt like people wanted me to and as if Journi and Jaleah—my babies—were the only ones. I, as their mommy, never will give upon us and never have. We are a small but beloved family. God places us here for a big and huge purpose. P.S. we move into our home on Tuesday <3 **(Niquria Graves)**

When I learned I was accepted into this class, I was very excited. I was nearly in tears because I just knew for some reason or another I would not make the 30. I felt very proud to be able to tell my son I would be starting college classes. **(Takela Harper)**

Learning I was accepted into Odyssey was very exciting and life changing for me. I'm so used to being denied and being told no that finally hearing I was accepted felt like everything to me. I was very happy to know that I would be on my way to a bigger step in life. **(Tamara Harper)**

I was surprised. I think I was the last interview, and I thought Emily had picked her class already. I was also happy to know that I was selected. **(Shanice Hendrix)**

When I learned I'd been accepted into the Odyssey program, I thought a mistake had been made. I came to Wisconsin last year and so many doors opened for me, even in my homelessness and with my poor credit score. I feel like this class will teach me about more than just humanities. I am grateful to Emily and her team for accepting me and my children. I'm not alone anymore. **(Jessica James)**

When I first found out I was accepted into this class I felt proud and excited. I initially called Takela to share the amazing news. When she said she was

accepted also, I felt so emotional and powerful that we both were going to be in it together. The feeling kind of felt unreal because I was so nervous about getting accepted.

(Shirley Jones)

I felt so grateful when Emily called me and said I was accepted. I felt scared and overwhelmed, but I told myself that this was a good way to learn proper grammar since English is my second language.

(Yaressi Lara)



I was more excited than I've been in a long time. I've wanted to start my education, just didn't know where to go. This is the push I needed to get my life going. **(Dar-Nasia Lewis)**

When I learned that I had been accepted in the program, I felt nervous yet excited! I have put so much doubt in myself that I began to feel incapable! Receiving the acceptance notification restored my confidence within myself! **(Kiarra Little)**



First when I applied last year, I was not expecting to be accepted into the program. I felt happy and also worried between work, kids, and family. But I talked to my children and they encouraged me to attend. My heart was full of joy when I walked into the door today because this is where I'm meant to be. Thank you. **(Rocio Madrid)**

I felt excited with a hint of nervousness. It's something new, and honestly I don't like change. **(Sharvez Mitchell)**

I was so excited and left very honored to be chosen out of 100 people. I'm truly grateful to be here and looking forward to learning a lot. **(Lettice Murphy)**

I feel very excited and will try my best not to miss a class. **(Bahrullah Noori)**

I felt like I found my golden ticket in the movie Willy Wonka and I was Charlie. Honestly, I've never been selected for anything in life. I'm beyond honored and moved by being selected. It gives me HOPE for my future. **(Shaunta Richmond)**

When I got the call from Emily stating that I was accepted into the program, I was very excited. I have been looking forward to going to school to switch careers and thought this was a great place to start. This came about at the perfect time in

my life, and I'm looking forward to doing well in the Odyssey Project program and graduating! **(Ahmanda Sanford)**

I was honestly very happy and also lost for words. Knowing that I was taking a step to make the lives of my children and me better was a blessing. I also felt scared because I do have anxiety and am very shy, but I know this will bring me out of my comfort zone and that's exactly what I need. **(Samantha Sobrevilla)**

Nervous but happy. **(Phig Uriostegui)**

I was extremely grateful and I felt (and still do) honored to have this privilege. I felt as if the universe was giving me a second chance at my academic career. **(Victoria Westwood)**

When I learned I'd been accepted, I had just checked my email randomly around 11 pm while watching T.V. with my roommate. I remember asking him if he could pause the movie. I almost worried him with how quiet I had gone afterwards before sharing the news with him. I cried. It was hard to believe someone else could interact with me and decide I was worth something. Every day since then, I have aimed to be able to live up to that. I hope to be able to hold myself up the way I felt uplifted by that news! **(Kyanna Williamson)**

ARE YOU A WRITER?

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

No, I am not a writer because I have always struggled with English and grammar. When I was in high school, I got an F in all my English classes. Sometimes it's very difficult for me to put my thoughts into writing. My handwriting is not the best, so that is also a barrier. I believe I can become more of a writer with the correct help and direction. **(Omar Arenas)**

I don't feel I'm a writer. I feel I lost my touch and skills. **(Julia Bell)**

Yes, I am a writer, just not a good speller. I don't mind writing. It's just in 2026 most people text or email. Some of us don't write as much as we should. I don't mind writing, just wish I was a better speller. **(Tawatha Bell)**

I am not sure if I'm a writer. I'm not sure because it's been a while. I know how to write, of course, but I'm not sure what characteristics would make me considered being one. **(Nakenya Brown)**

Yes, I am a writer because I've always loved doing it. I wrote my first book in the 4th grade. I gave it to a friend to read, and she passed it around the entire school. I was angry at first but learned everyone loved it. From that point I continued to write but I have never published anything. **(Shannon Burch)**

Yes, I am a writer because my ability to convey thoughts, emotions, ideas, and perspectives through written word has always been strong and stellar. I can paint a mental picture with words. I can dance with words. I can convey love and desire with written words. I'm real nice with a pen. **(Akeem Carey)**

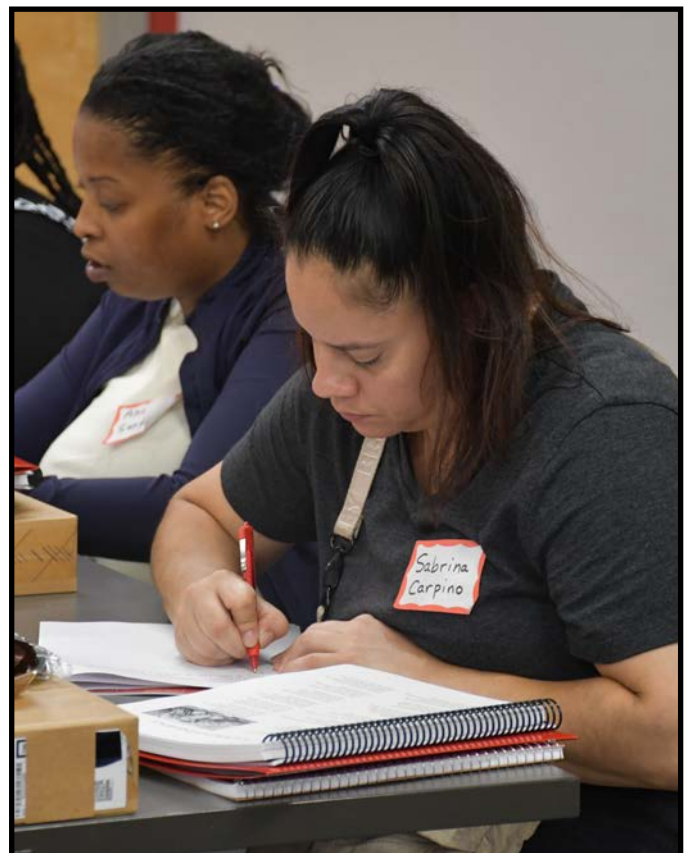
No, I am not a writer. High school I was, but since I graduated in 2004 it has changed. **(Sabrina Carpino)**

I am not a writer because I'd rather voice whatever there is to say, but I would like to get better at writing. **(Sconesha Coleman)**

Yes, I am a writer because I write. Or I luckily have the ability to write. We're all writers with a beautiful story to tell; some just are able to express those feelings/thoughts more easily. Do I believe I'm one of those who can? I don't know; we'll see. **(Zora Davis)**

Yes, I am a writer. I am a writer because there are stories in my head. There are tales I must tell if only to have them find others like me who feel unseen. **(Stephan El)**

Yes and no, but I mumble a lot so I don't even know how to start. I know I can but for that I need to learn how. **(Claudia Gómez)**



Yes, I do like to write. I like to write about my experiences, life, where I want to see myself succeed, and my mental state. I write to take down notes and read them over to not forget. Writing helps me understand me better. I could be right or wrong on something. **(Niquria Graves)**

Yes, I am a writer because I have so many things to say. Once I find my footing and wording, I jump right in. I think being a reader helps with my ability to write. I can get lost in a story. **(Takela Harper)**

Yes, I am a writer because I feel I am good at expressing myself through writing more than talking. I just have to learn my punctuation marks and where to place them when writing. **(Tamara Harper)**

I'm a writer because I prefer to write out things, such as my "to do" list, my feelings, and even prayers. I find it easier to write things out than to speak on them. It's comforting. **(Shanice Hendrix)**

No, I'm not a writer because most of the jobs I've ever had in my adult life involved manual labor. I've been in retail and food services, healthcare, and even postal work. I've never had a job that



I actually had to write from the top of my brain. Most of my writings are responses to time-sensitive emails or requests for sick leave. When I do write, it's much easier to notice that my brain is always going a mile a minute in every direction. It's difficult for me to articulate things in order and in a way that makes sense to an audience.

(Jessica James)

No, I am not a writer because reading and spelling is not my strong suit. I get very discouraged when writing because there is so much I want to say but don't always know how to say it. **(Shirley Jones)**

I would say no, I'm not a writer because my grammar is not the best. I tend to write things over and over in circles. **(Yaressi Lara)**

No, I am not a writer because I jumble all my thoughts together and never get to the point. I also don't think I'm a writer because I'm very one-sided. Once I get my mind stuck on something, that's all I can think about.

(Dar-Nasia Lewis)

No, I am not a writer. I have the thoughts formed in my brain, but the thoughts never make it to paper. I used to really enjoy writing, but I have not done so in a while. **(Kiarra Little)**



Well, I'm in the middle. I haven't written for a while, but I enjoy writing. But with a busy life I haven't done much. I eventually would love to write a book about my life and my story immigrating here to the U.S. at the age of 15. Hopefully with this class my writing skills will get better, and I will become a great writer. **(Rocio Madrid)**

No, I am not a writer because I write fast with no confidence. **(Sharvez Mitchell)**

I'm not really a writer. It's something I used to do as a child but haven't done since junior high. I have trouble putting thoughts into words on paper so that they sound just as I'm thinking them. I'm hoping that this class will help me get better at it. **(Lettice Murphy)**

No, I am not a writer because I have never tried it before. **(Bahrullah Noori)**

Yes, I am a writer but I'm sure my sentences are most likely run-on sentences. I need help with paragraphs and summaries in paragraph form. **(Shaunta Richmond)**



Yes, I am a writer because I know how to write about things and make my writing very clear, specific, and thorough. I enjoy writing when I'm taking my time and writing down all my thoughts. However, in the past I have taken journalism classes which taught me how to write and use proper writing and grammar. **(Ahmanda Sanford)**

Honestly, I'm really not a writer because I never really got into it in high school and my grammar wasn't the best back then. I would love to be a writer, just have to get to know more words and meanings. **(Samantha Sobrevilla)**



No, I am not a writer because I didn't think I could. **(Phig Uriostegui)**

Yes! I absolutely love to write! I focus on creative writing, poetry, and movie reviews. My goal is to improve my writing and become an author. **(Victoria Westwood)**

Yes, I am a writer because I am a storyteller. I have always enjoyed both reading and writing stories. I once wanted to be an author. That is a dream I have kept close to myself because I think deep down I believe I can do it. **(Kyanna Williamson)**

SENTENCES ABOUT US

In class the first night, Professor Emily shared three sample sentences about herself and asked students to do the same as a way of introducing themselves.

EMILY AUERBACH

I have three adult children and three grandchildren (ages 10, 14 and 18), and I love them passionately.

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

I used to play the oboe in orchestras and bands.



OMAR ARENAS

I was born in Aguascalientes, Mexico.

I have three older sisters, and I'm an uncle of 14.

I enjoy traveling and spending time with friends and family, but I also enjoy being alone.



JULIA BELL

I have three sons—17, 15, and 13—who I love with all my heart.

I love cooking for my family; it's our love language.

In high school, I wrote a poem book from my heart.

TAWATHA BELL

I'm a mother to two boys and one stepdaughter. I am a wife and I love my husband so much; he's my best friend.

I love to cook and host events.

I'm a hard worker and I'm very hard on myself, always thinking I can't do something. I always surprise myself on how well I can do it, like being a dialysis tech.

**NAKENYA BROWN**

I am a mom of three, and I truly don't know what I'd be doing if I didn't have them.

I am currently attending Madison College for my practical nursing degree.

I'm very excited to see my own growth as well as my children's by April 2027.

SHANNON BURCH

I have two children: Quinton, 25 years old, will be graduating in 2027 from Lakeland University, and Victoria is 10 years old and wants to be a hairstylist.

I am a kidney transplant recipient and have three kidneys due to this.

I create art: canvas, digitally, and custom wearable art.



**AKEEM CAREY**

I love, love, LOVE to cook.

I'm a very sweet girl until you play with me, then it's up and stuck.

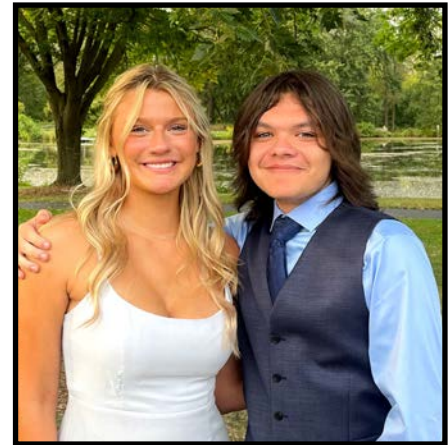
I'm very funny and love making friends.

**SABRINA CARPINO**

I have two kids: my daughter graduated college to be a teacher, and my son is currently in Madison College for IT.

I was a pregnant teen and had my daughter at just turning 16.

I love music, animals, activism, food, and working on loving myself more.

**SCONESHA COLEMAN**

I have over 35 brothers and sisters and am the oldest girl but the fourth oldest out of them all.

I have one child age 17 but will be 18 in November but he is taller than me and I have to look up to him.

The younger me used to play basketball, run track, and was on the step team and also the dance team and enjoyed being in plays.

ZORA DAVIS

I really enjoy shopping and getting out of my comfort zone!

When I was 15-17 I really loved to skateboard; it made me feel very free and the thought of it still does.

I love R&B, hard style, screamo, and trap/underground music...all types of music really.



STEPHAN EL

I am an only child who identifies as an adult orphan (both parents are gone).

I am a stand-up comic as a hobby but would love to make it big one day (sooner than later as I am running out of days).

My life feels and probably looks rather messy and complicated.

**CLAUDIA GOMÉZ**

I have two cats: a five-year-old orange tabby and a six-month white/gray tabby.

I don't have children but I have my parents and my little brother.

My sister lives in Illinois and we both love reading.

**TAKELA HARPER**

My name is Takela, and my biggest accomplishment thus far is being my nine-year-old son's super woman.

My love for books goes so deep; if I could, I'd stay the night in a Barnes and Noble.

I am the Assistant Director of the Elver Park and Theresa Terrace Neighborhood Centers. I do what I do, where I do, because I want little black girls and little black boys to see someone who looks like them in leadership.

NIQUIRIA GRAVES

I am a mother first of two daughters.

I am resilient.

I have a wonderful boyfriend that works a lot and he loves us.



TAMARA HARPER

I am a single mother of three beautiful children: two girls and one boy, ages 13, 10 and 8.

I suffer slight trauma from my children's father passing away in 2021 from gun violence. We were together eight years, from high school until he passed.

I graduated from MATC with my HSED. I decided to go back after I dropped out of high school when I found out I was pregnant at 16 years old.

**JESSICA JAMES**

I have three school-aged children and one adult son in college (ages 8, 10, 14, and 21) that I still feel like I'm winging motherhood with.

I moved to WI from the DMV [DC, Maryland, and Virginia] last year and never plan on going back.

I'm actively working on trusting God and curbing my anxiety.

SHANICE HENDRIX

I have two sons 12 years apart.

I have a passion for children and early childhood education and development.

I am NOT photogenic.

**SHIRLEY JONES**

I have three children (12, 7, 1) who I adore so much.

I really want to further my education and become something in the education/social work field.

This year makes four years working at the high school I graduated from, and I can honestly say I love working with the youth.

YARESSI LARA

I have three children aged 4, 7, and 8.

I don't know how to swim.

I love to spend time with my children and take them to different events.

**DAR-NASIA LEWIS**

I have two kids, Brooklyn and Bronx, but have never been to New York.

I used to "play" the flute in middle school but never learned how to read sheet music.

I have over 15 siblings and I'm one of the youngest.

KIARRA LITTLE

I have four children (ages 10, 4, 3, and 1), all who I share with my high school sweetheart.

I am introverted and enjoy the company of myself much more than being in groups.

I have a passion for caring for people living with dementia.

ROCIO MADRID

I have three children—Kate (21), Chris (15), and Liam (9)—and they are my whole world.

My friends say I'm very funny and friendly.

I love to dance and spend time with family.

**SHARVEZ MITCHELL**

I have four brothers and one sister.

I work two jobs and have 50/50 of my son.

I don't like expressing myself because in life it taught me they don't really care!

**LETTICE MURPHY**

I'm very family oriented.

I love to cook.

I love animals.

**BAHRULLAH NOORI**

I am 25 years old.

I have no relatives or a partner yet.

I like to play chess, study, and go biking.

**SHAUNTA RICHMOND**

I'm a 46-year-old woman and mother of three girls, guardian of my cousin (had him since 11 months old). My children, two girls and one boy, are ages 25, 22, and 11 years. Oh yeah, I must add I'm a "GlamMa" (grandmother of a beautiful girl, Yi'Lynn who is five months).

I'm a workaholic and life hasn't always been easy for me. I've been broken so many times at life. I feel like I own the blueprint on rebuilding myself and people.

I love the woman who I am today. This chapter I call my second lifeline.

**AHMANDA SANFORD**

I just moved here last year from Dallas, Texas.

I have a four-year-old daughter named Sugar and a puppy named Spice.

I'm afraid of the winter season here, but I'm ready to embrace it.

SAMANTHA SOBREVILLA

I have five children ages 16, 10, 7, 3, and 1.

I want to go to school to be a social worker because I love helping people.

I'm very shy, but I'm a really nice person.

**PHIG URIOSTEGUI**

I am nonbinary, which means I'm not just one gender or both.

I love fall: the leaves, pumpkin spice, the colors, and the spooky vibes are all my favorite.

Stress cooking isn't the best for me but it helps calm me.

VICTORIA WESTWOOD

I play the violin and would love to play the piano and electric guitar one day.

I want to visit as many countries as possible.

I am in the process of curating my own personal library, and I currently own around 200 or so books.

**KYANNA WILLIAMSON**

I have four younger siblings from middle school through a sophomore in college, and they have been the most important thing to me since I gained each of them.

I have two cats, Megatron and Mufasa, both of whom are fat, lazy, and very cuddly; they give me strength.

I performed at Carnegie Hall in 2023 with my high school performance choir.



ALUMNI CORNER

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.

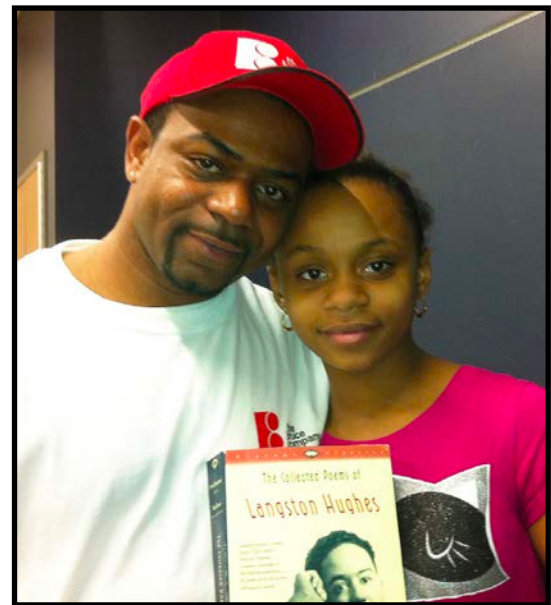
I LOVE MY WEBSTER'S

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.

UNAPOLOGETICALLY ME

By Adrienne Farrow '25

There's a lot that I am
 There's a lot that I want to be
 This is real life, no pause, no delete
 I have failed so that I could learn to succeed
 I have been put at the end of the line
 So that I could learn to lead
 I have learned there's no shame in falling
 As long as you get back up and continue daring greatly
 But at the end of the day
 When the battle is won
 And the enemy has accepted defeat
 I'll speak aloud about my trials
 And sing for you my testimony
 So with self-assurance
 I'll hold my head high
 And speak to the masses with glee
 Telling them a story from my past
 About a different version of me
 How I overdosed and almost died
 But a voice inside said open your eyes and breathe
 I was humbled, and started trusting
 Laying everything at his feet
 After countless hours, days, and weeks
 I stopped saying and started doing
 It's the actions of vulnerability and accountability for me



So now all I see is light
 And the source of it is me
 Shining brighter than a star for all to see
 Now I take pride in my talents
 I cater to what Adrienne needs
 It's the praying, the coping, the standing
 even when I'm weak
 It's the focus and my drive
 As well as being a mother to my seed
 So I look in the mirror
 Eyes opened to see
 Air in my lungs to breathe
 These simple things almost lost to me
 I'm here, I'm alive, and unapologetically me.
 (An Overdose Awareness Poem)