

Student Spotlight

Jessica Whitehead was born in Bogalusa, Louisiana, in the early 1960s and had little formal education, completing only the first grade. She was part of a very large family, which included four brothers and six sisters. Her grandmother, with whom she lived for a time, lacked any indoor plumbing facilities.

Jessica's life as an adult has also been marked by major challenges, including residence in a homeless shelter for a period.

Notwithstanding all of the bumps in the road she has faced, Jessica remains determined to learn to read and write effectively. Her ultimate goal is to achieve her high school diploma and then to walk across the stage to the cheers of her family and friends.

Jessica's Literacy Council tutor, John Wetzel, believes that Jessica has made great strides in the four months he has worked with her. Jessica recently finished the Challenger 3 workbook and is now beginning Challenger 4. She has also completed work in the Focus on Phonics series.

To speed her learning, Jessica recently began to borrow books on her own from the Anne Arundel County library system and, at John's suggestion, has made a commitment to complete at least one book report for him each week summarizing the contents of a book.

Still not content with the pace of her self-improvement, however, Jessica recently began working with Literacy Council tutor Ruth Hartcorn to hone her math skills.

Wetzel notes that one of the dozens of books that Jessica has read to him during their tutoring sessions was a biography of the great American writer, poet and civil rights activist Maya Angelou. Angelou, who had an extremely troubled childhood that

included sexual abuse, eventually rose to international recognition and acclaim. In fact, President Bill Clinton requested that Angelou recite one of her most notable poems, "On the Pulse of Morning," at his inauguration on the steps of the U.S. Capitol in 1993.

"The challenges Jessica has faced and the determination she has exhibited remind me in many ways of the life of Maya Angelou," Wetzel said. "I look forward to continuing to work with this wonderful student - and new friend."