Amara Okafor - Common App and Yale questions (2026-27, Regular Decision)

Portland, OR · amara.okafor.test@example.com · Fictional applicant for the MyRound Yale sample

Education

- Lincoln High School, Portland, Oregon (public, ~1,600 students). Class of 2027.
- GPA 3.97 unweighted, 4.31 weighted. Class rank not reported.
- Senior courses: AP Calculus BC, AP Macroeconomics, AP Environmental Science, AP English Literature, AP Spanish Language, Orchestra (Honors).
- Earlier APs: AP Statistics (5), AP Microeconomics (5), AP US History (5), AP English Language (4), AP Biology (4).
- SAT 1520 (Evidence-Based Reading and Writing 750, Math 770).
- Languages: English (native), Igbo (spoken at home, conversational), Spanish (advanced, AP).

Family

- Lives with mother (registered nurse, night shifts at a Portland hospital) and brother (age 11).
- Father lives in Lagos, Nigeria; Amara spent summer 2024 there.

Activities (Common App, 10 max)

1. **Founder and lead mechanic, Spoke & Wrench Bike Co-op** (grades 10-12, 6 hrs/wk, 40 wks/yr). Started a Saturday bike-repair clinic in the parking lot of St. Andrew's church. 14 volunteer mechanics trained; 160 donated bikes rebuilt and given to students who walk more than a mile to school; free repairs for about 30 riders a month.
2. **Independent research: water-bill affordability in Portland** (grade 11-12, 4 hrs/wk). Filed a public-records request for six years of anonymized residential billing data; mapped shutoff notices against household income by ZIP code in R; found that notices were 3.4 times as common in the lowest-income quarter. Gave 3-minute public testimony at a Portland Utility Board meeting (Feb 2026); the board later asked staff to review the low-income discount sign-up process.
3. **Cashier and stock associate, Hollyhock Market** (grades 11-12, 15 hrs/wk, paid). Neighborhood grocery; trained 4 new hires; runs the Sunday closing shift.
4. **Cello, Portland Youth Philharmonic** (grades 9-12, 7 hrs/wk). Second cello, Philharmonic orchestra; chamber quartet that plays monthly at a memory-care home.
5. **Lincoln-Douglas debate, captain** (grades 9-12). Oregon state quarterfinalist 2026; coaches 9 novices.
6. **Math tutor, Multnomah County Library homework help** (grades 10-12, 2 hrs/wk). Algebra and geometry tutoring, often for Spanish-speaking families.
7. **Family responsibilities** (grades 9-12, 20 hrs/wk). Cares for younger brother after school and on nights when mother works: school pickup, dinner, homework.

8. **Stream-monitoring intern, Johnson Creek Watershed Council** (summer 2025, 30 hrs/wk, 8 weeks). Collected water temperature and turbidity samples at 12 sites; cleaned three years of sensor data and found a logger that had been reading 2°C high since 2023.
9. **Summer in Lagos** (summer 2024, 6 weeks). Lived with father's family; helped a cousin keep the books for her phone-accessories stall at Computer Village market.

Honors

- AP Scholar with Distinction (2026)
- National Merit Commended Student (2026)
- Oregon School Activities Association Lincoln-Douglas state quarterfinalist (2026)
- Portland Youth Philharmonic chamber music award, honorable mention (2025)

Common App personal essay (prompt: a problem you'd like to solve)

The first bike I ever fixed belonged to a boy named Darius who had been walking forty minutes to school because his chain kept falling off. I was fifteen, I owned one set of Allen keys, and I had watched exactly three repair videos. It took me two hours and a lot of grease to discover that the chain wasn't the problem at all. The derailleur hanger was bent, so every time he shifted, the chain was pushed off the gears. Replacing the chain, which is what the bike shop had told him to do, would have cost him forty dollars and fixed nothing.

I think about that hanger a lot. Most of the broken things I've met since then have a chain that falls off, the part everyone can see, and a bent hanger somewhere upstream that nobody looks at.

Spoke & Wrench started because Darius told his friends. By the end of that fall, there were nine bikes in my garage and my mother asked, politely, whether I planned to park the car on the street forever. Pastor Elaine at St. Andrew's offered us the church parking lot on Saturdays. Now fourteen of us fix about thirty bikes a month, and we give away the ones people donate to students who live more than a mile from school. The rule I teach every new volunteer is the one Darius's bike taught me: before you replace anything, ask why it broke.

The same question got me into trouble with my water bill. Last year our neighbor Mrs. Alvarez showed me a red shutoff notice and asked me to help her read it. She had paid; the payment had been applied to the wrong month. It took us three phone calls to fix. I wondered how many people got that notice and didn't have a neighbor with time to make three phone calls. So I asked the city. A public-records request, two months, and many hours of learning R later, I had six years of billing data and a map. Shutoff notices were more than three times as common in the poorest quarter of ZIP codes. The low-income discount existed, but signing up took a paper form, a copy of a tax return and a visit to an office open during working hours.

When I testified at the Utility Board, I had three minutes. I spent the first one on the map and the next two on the form. I didn't ask them to lower rates; I don't know enough to say what rates should be. I asked them to look at the hanger, the sign-up process, before replacing the chain. They didn't promise anything, but staff were asked to review the sign-up process, and a staff member emailed me afterwards for my code.

I don't think I'm going to fix water bills. But I've learned that I like the moment when the visible problem turns out to be downstream of a quieter one, and that the quieter one is usually about how a system meets an ordinary person on an ordinary day. I want to study the economics of those systems: why a discount nobody can sign up for still exists, who designs the form, what it would cost to make it easier. I still carry Allen keys in my backpack. I'd like to learn to carry a better set of questions.

Yale questions

Academic areas (up to three): Economics; Environmental Studies; Statistics and Data Science.

Tell us about a topic or idea that excites you and is related to one or more academic areas you selected above. Why are you drawn to it? (200 words)

Take-up. Governments design programs, like a utility discount, a tax credit or a school lunch form, and then a large share of the people who qualify never use them. I first ran into it in my water-bill project, where the discount existed but the sign-up form required a tax return and an office visit. Then I found out it's a whole field: economists measure how much a single extra step in a form lowers take-up, and some experiments show that sending a pre-filled form can matter more than raising the benefit. That excites me because it means some unfairness is not about money at all; it's about design and attention. It also turns a moral question into one you can test. I want to learn the statistics to run those tests properly, and the environmental economics to understand why water, energy and climate programs are especially full of good policies that people can't reach.

Short takes (200 characters, about 35 words each)

- *If you could teach any college course, write a book, or create an original piece of art of any kind, what would it be?* A course called "Why Is This Form So Long?": every week, students redesign one real government form and test whether more people finish it.
- *What is one aspect of yourself you hope to grow or develop during college?* Patience with theory. I like data I can touch; I want to learn the models well enough to know what my maps can't tell me.
- *What is something about you not included anywhere else in your application?* I can name every bridge in Portland by the sound my tires make crossing it. The Hawthorne hums.

Essay (400 words): Reflect on a time you discussed an important issue with someone holding an opposing view. Why was the experience meaningful to you?

My debate partner and I argue for a living, but the conversation that changed my mind was with a customer at Hollyhock Market. Mr. Hensley comes in every Sunday at closing for the discounted bread, and one night, when I mentioned my water-bill project, he told me he thought the low-income discount was a mistake. He'd run a small plumbing business for thirty years. Every discount, he said, was paid for by people like him, just above the line, who didn't qualify for anything.

I had my map ready in my head. I wanted to win. Instead I asked how much his bill had gone up. He knew exactly: 41 percent in eight years. Mine had gone up the same. We spent fifteen minutes at the register while I mopped, and by the end we had found the part we agreed on: neither of us thought the system had been designed with either of us in mind. He didn't want less help for people like Mrs. Alvarez; he wanted someone to notice people like him.

It changed my testimony. I added a sentence about households just above the cutoff, and I started reading about how benefit cliffs work. I still think the discount is right. But I no longer think the person across the counter is wrong just because he's on the other side of the line.