

FOUNDATION TO HELP WITH NEXT STEP TALENT, FATE ARE ON BENSON GRAD'S SIDE

By Erin Grace

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

The young woman in the gray pantsuit walked to the microphone and surveyed the audience of 260 faces.

The stage was not unfamiliar to Amber Franklin, an aspiring actress with three years of high school theater under her belt.

Yet this stage offered no cover. No big wig or poofy dress like she wore in her most recent play. No make-believe character. And the house lights were definitely up, revealing a daunting crowd.

There was her principal, the superintendent, the mayor, the daughter of the world's second-richest man and, in the back, her mother.

Staring at Amber were 174 other teenagers whose lives hung in the balance of circumstance, with poverty and hardship at one end and talent and luck on the other.

"I should not be standing here today," Amber began, then went on to explain Omaha's high rate of black poverty and her place in that demographic. Amber was featured two years ago in The World-Herald's first installment of Omaha in Black and White, an occasional series about the city's poverty rate for African-Americans.

The most recent census figures rank the Omaha area fourth-highest among *See Amber: Page 2*



ALYSSA SCHUKAR/THE WORLD-HERALD

Benson High graduate Amber Franklin, an aspiring actress, is one of 18 students in the first group of the [Bright Futures Foundation](#)'s Avenue Scholars program. She is shown above at right with Ajanae Udo and below at left with Andrew Hilmer during rehearsal for Benson's production of "The Miser."



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