

# CELEBRATING THE CLASS OF 2020



Odyssey Project  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

"Odyssey is a beautiful, colorful, magical mosaic.  
Each student is a different color, a different piece that once was lost.  
Now, each piece can be wonderfully placed on the art board of graduation  
and can be presented magnificently, once more, on the canvas of the world."  
-Ron Burford



Not even Odysseus on his ten-year journey home encountered a pandemic! This special booklet celebrates the UW Odyssey Project Class of 2020. Their May 6th graduation ceremony was virtual, but their hard work leading to college credits was real. See our website for a list of faculty and staff, guests, partners, and donors too numerous to thank.



"Odyssey is a mosaic made up of broken diamonds, weathered by the stones of life, brought together from all over the world into one classroom.

When the class is together, we see each other's rough edges sparkle and we soon realize that no diamond is without flaws and that we are still beautiful and worthy."

-Krista Mellott



"Odyssey is a mosaic.  
Different beliefs and minds come together as one.  
Races and ethnicities come together for the sole purpose of learning,  
Which makes one big, beautiful, colorful picture of great minds."

-Tim Mosley

Emily Auerbach, Co-Director/Founder; Oracle Editor  
Emily Azad, Program Manager  
Brian Benford '07, Success Coach  
Beth McMahon, Oracle Designer

Kevin Mullen, Co-Director  
Christina DeMars, Coordinator  
Jenny Pressman, Development & Community Partnerships  
Class photography by Emily Azad, Christina DeMars, and staff

We thank faculty team members Marshall Cook, Jean Feraca, Gene Phillips, and Craig Werner; Odyssey Junior Coordinator Karen Dreyfus; Odyssey Beyond Bars Director Peter Moreno; Financial Administrator Bobbie Wang; Classroom Assistant Char Braxton '06; and numerous faculty guests, volunteers, and partners who made Odyssey 2020 a success.

[www.odyssey.wisc.edu](http://www.odyssey.wisc.edu)



# AERIAL BAILEY



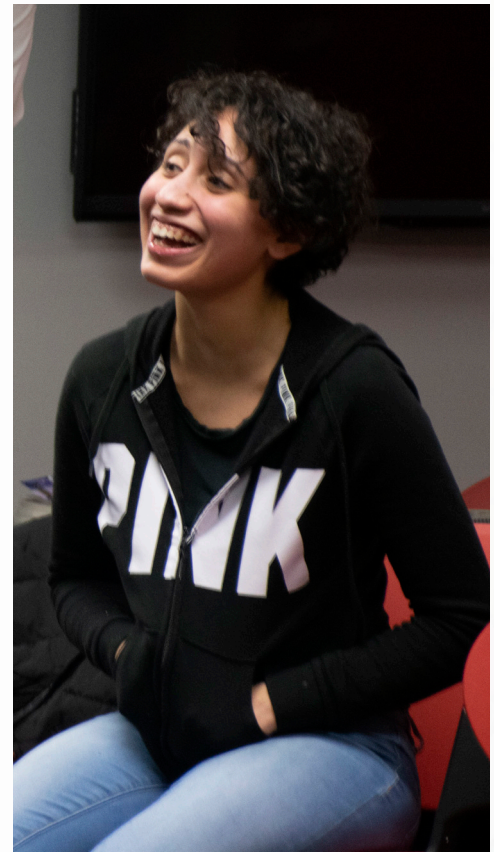
The Odyssey Project redirected me on my odyssey. Being a part of this program reminded me that I was sleeping on myself and that it's time to wake up. I've been procrastinating and procrastinating on finishing my degree, allowing life to get in the way, but truth is, life is going to get in the way. Trials and tribulations will set us back no matter what; therefore, I'd rather struggle for my success than just struggle and have nothing to show for it.

I want to personally thank Emily and Kevin for allowing me to participate in such an amazing, life-changing opportunity.

It's important for me to make my son and family proud; this is just the beginning of my success story.

## I Am an Eagle

I am an eagle  
I am strong and divine  
And I know this world is mine.  
The sky is the limit, so watch me soar.  
I'm never satisfied, I always want more.  
An eagle represents power and determination.  
I am determined to win and to conquer.  
Eagles have special diets; not everything satisfied my hunger.  
I am an eagle.  
Eagles are very protective of their nest.  
As a mother, it is imperative I give my son the best.  
I am an eagle.



# MARGARITA BARAJAS



I want to thank two people who told me about the Odyssey Project: my sister Alice Ramirez (Odyssey Class of 2019) and my best friend Brenda Carmona (Odyssey Class of 2002). I remember watching Brenda working on homework all the time and me telling her, "Girl, why are you doing homework? Let's hang out," and she would tell me, "No, I'm studying." I would leave her alone. When my sister Alice and I went to Texas last year for my grandpa's funeral and wanted to spend a few more days there, I told my sister, "Why are you leaving early on Tuesday?" and Alice said, "I have my Odyssey class tomorrow." I told her, "It's okay, you can miss a class." She said no and came back and made it to class. Now this year when people tell me, "You can miss a class," I'm like, "HELL NO! I love this Odyssey Project Class of 2020." I want to thank my boys,

Jay and Michael, for being a part of this Odyssey with me. Thank you, Emily, Kevin, Char, and too many other people to name to thank. Thank you, Odyssey.



## I Am a Cuckoo Bird

I am a cuckoo bird on a cuckoo clock.  
Every day I start the day crazy.  
Every hour I move, dance, or sing.  
I go round and round.  
I am one of a kind.  
I am loved by a lot of people.  
I am a cuckoo bird in a cuckoo world.



# RONALD BURFORD



Being in the Odyssey Project has been both fun and challenging, particularly more challenging since the pandemic. I was truly on a roll. I would go to the study sessions each week and would be greeted by awesome hugs, good food, and rockin' tutors. This was how I was able to make sure I got all my work done. But now with that taken away, I have been struggling to get any work done. It is as if I was a bull charging towards the red cloak, only for the person to snatch it away, take me to the ground by my horns, and then tie up my legs so I can't run anymore. Truthfully, I am probably the last person to actually get this graduation program entry written, and I may not get everything in on time. Sometimes I wonder what if things are like this for the next few years? Would this work towards a degree even be worth it? My answer lies in this mantra:

Despite all other fears, concerns, and anxieties, Today is a New Day, a New Session, a New Love, a New Favor, and a New Mercury, a New Devotion, a New Attention, a New Foundation, a New Effort, a New Harvest, and a New Impact; a New Joy, a New Strength, and a New Courage, a New Boldness, a New Righteousness, and a New Peace, a New Learning, a New Blessing, and a New Healing, a New Deliverance, a New Patience, and a New Innocence, a New Resurgence, a New Assurance, and a New Obedience, a New Serenity, a New Hospitality, and a New Honesty, A New Loyalty, Sincerity, Humility, Capacity, Accuracy, Authenticity, and Authority, and a New Sense of Security.



## The Odyssey Mosaic

Odyssey is a beautiful, colorful, magical mosaic.  
Each student is a different color, a different piece that once was lost.  
Now, each piece can be wonderfully placed on the art board of graduation  
and can be presented magnificently, once more, on the canvas of the world.



# ARKEIA CAMERON



The Odyssey Project has been life-saving for myself and my children. I came from a bad space before starting the program. I am very thankful and appreciate the work that staff put in for Odyssey Project students and alumni. The amount of love Emily and her family have for people in Odyssey can never be expressed—it's beyond earth. I was lost and on a journey to find myself. I just want to say thank you to Odyssey. I also thank my family for encouraging me and pushing me to do better. Thanks to my mama, sister, Holly, and my two-piece Spicy: my children, Essence and Kashton. 😊



## Song of Arkeia

Arkeia  
Arkeia, a name with spark  
A name with heart  
A strong-willed, peace-seeking  
Spiritual burst of many different arts!  
Arkeia



# LAISHA COOKE



This journey with Odyssey has had its ups and downs, but it's been worth it. I learned so many new things, met so many new people, and am grateful for it all. It may not have turned out how we all thought, but I know I'm still happy to have been a part of it all. There have been times I wanted to not come to class—heck, there have been times I didn't go to class. Whether I was feeling down or just plain ol' tired, once I missed class, I truly regretted it and missed everyone. Odyssey does that to you. It sticks to you like that.

I used to be so antisocial, but now I feel like I need to be social with others. I'm more confident in being around others, listening, and having an opinion of my own. Everyone listens and respects others' ideas, no matter how different, and that's so important. That's one of the many things Odyssey had to offer me. I'm so blessed and honored to have been and still be a part of it because once you're a part of Odyssey, you're always a part of Odyssey.

## Song of Laisha

I am Laisha  
Daughter of Leroy  
Sister of Leroy  
Cousin of Leroy  
I am the mother of Nick and Martell  
I am most proud of that  
I am striving to be better each and every day  
I will be a nurse someday, hopefully soon  
Then I will also be proud of that as well





# COREY DEAN



This was a beautiful Odyssey that I'm so happy I took part in! I never thought I would ever return to higher education because I was afraid that after my prior experiences in college, I was not cut out for school. I was afraid. But when I heard one of my best friends, James Horton Jr. (Odyssey Class of 2019) talk about the program, it reignited a passion for learning that I had lost long ago. I decided to apply, and I'm incredibly thankful that I did.

I'll be honest, before this journey I didn't know anything about Malcom X, Frederick Douglass, or Langston Hughes, but now all three of these men inspire me every day to become a better writer, reader, and black man.

Through this program I was able to learn about the history of my people, and for that I am incredibly grateful. With new perspectives on education and myself (thanks, Socrates), I plan to continue learning for a long, long time. This program has been very important to me. Alongside all of the educational value I got from Odyssey, one of my favorite parts about the course is that I was able to complete it. I'm so excited to take what I've learned and walk across that digital stage, knowing that my almost 30 amazing classmates and I accomplished our goals and are going to make the world a better place. Thank you to the Odyssey Program!



## Song of Corey

I am Corey  
Don't call me 'nigga' as an honest admission  
I done came a long way to make demos instead of demolition  
My abolition has able-bodied the appellations  
through dissemination and generational laceration  
I've seen hell that brought flame to the sword  
And I've accomplished much more than I've expected before  
Wen' toe to toe with depression, but my soul carried on  
Did it all to be just like my mom



# TIFFANY DIXON



From start to finish: those were the words I said as I began my journey with Odyssey. Being a part of something so beautiful taught me a lot about myself. It opened my eyes to things that I thought I could never do or accomplish. It gave me that extra push, that extra tug to keep fighting for what I wanted. Odyssey was the best journey that I endured and needed in my life.

I want to thank Emily and Kevin for having faith in me, for believing that I had the potential to be much more and could make it to the finish line. Most of all, I want to thank my classmates and all the others for holding my hand and giving me the extra courage to keep going—to not throw it all away when I lost my mom in October. It helped me to know that we all were one, that we

individuals started this journey on our own but we finished together. It was you all that helped me keep my head held high.

## I'm a Mosaic

Mosaic . . . is that what my life is made of?  
Different struggles, worries, and goals,  
Formed into different types of shapes  
To put together as a puzzle.

I'm human, strong, a fighter,  
Once a little girl. Molded and  
Shaped and built into the woman  
I present myself as being today.

I'm a mosaic.  
Different pieces and shapes  
Put together and framed as a  
Beautiful art work.





# KOSSIWAVI ELOH



I am a mother of two kids (one beautiful girl and one handsome boy). When I walked into Odyssey, I was a lost soul looking for how to find myself. In the last two semesters, I have found myself, my voice, and my courage. Instead of being a shadow in the background, I am now a bright, shining light.

First of all, I want to thank my mommy who takes care of my little boy. If she wasn't there for me and dealing with my late nights, I would have never been able to finish. I also want to thank Emily and Kevin for supporting me. A special thanks to myself for having the courage and perseverance to start this program with a two-month-old baby and finish. I also want to thank my classmates for sharing your lives, your emotions, and your thoughts.

Again, thank you Emily for believing in me when I couldn't believe in myself. I want to thank Coach Marshall for introducing me to a wide variety of unusual words and how to break them down. Thank you, Jean Feraca, for introducing philosophy. Thank you, Gene Phillips, for helping me discover that even I can become an artist. Thank you, Craig Werner, for letting me see the other side of U.S. history.

## **Song of Kossiavavi**

(in Ewe, French, and English)

Mugne Kossiavavi  
Mugne gnonu tsutsugban na nyne pomea.  
Mugne gnonu nukupala bevi.  
Mugne eviveno.  
Mugne ameyibo.

I am Kossiavavi  
I am the oldest daughter of my family  
A daughter of a hardworking woman  
A daughter of a farmer  
I am a mother of two kids  
I am a descendant of West Africa  
I am a traveler and a lover of new adventures  
I am an African American  
My skin is black  
I am beautiful and strong



Je suis Kossiavavi  
Je suis la premiere fille de ma famille.  
Je suis la fille d'une femme travailleuse.  
Je suis la mere de deuze enfants  
Je suis originaire de l'Afrique de l'ouest.  
J'aime les voyages et l'aventure.  
Je suis une Africaine Americaine  
Je suis noire  
Je suis belle et forte.

# RASAKI EMMANUEL



Today my tears are of joy as I am reminded of the struggles of my past. Because of choices, I allowed my gift as a man to blend in with what others thought of me, yet in these last eight months I've received and been exposed to tools to help guide me to a better life. I am proud to be able to enhance my understanding and apply myself more effectively to my family. I read, studied, and learned the value of not giving up on myself or others. My kids can see my footprints to better myself every day. My household is excited every week to be greeted with smiles from our teachers. I enjoyed every classmate and their goal to better things in their life. I'll see you through your success.

## I Am Water

I am water.

I water the lives of my family.

As a dad, I know my kids need my guidance,

As they need water to grow.

As my provisions support them,

They need to quench their thirst.

My water is needed to clean their bodies.

To keep my value to them,

I must stay pure.

Water is needed in every family.





# MELISSA HERRIGES



There are so many great things to say about the Odyssey Project. There have been so many of my classmates who have grown from the first day of class. After being out of school for so many years, I found it refreshing to have a class where you can relax and be yourself around great people. Being able to revive a dream of pursuing a college education is what Odyssey gave me when I was in a dimming place in my life. This program has brought back my passion for learning and vision for my future. Thank you, Emily, Ms. Char, and all the rest of the Odyssey staff, professors, volunteers, and funders. If it weren't for you, many of us would be without a way to live our dreams.

## Song of Melissa

I am Melissa  
I am a fighter determined to win, win, win  
no matter what  
Keeping my head up  
Eyes on the prize, seeing through the deceit and lies  
I am human, no race without a place  
Making my own, blessed and free  
My beauty is not what most people see when they look at me  
Free to be my own me and not who you tell me to be  
Fighter determined to win, keep my head above my chin

# JYNEEVA HUNT



Thank you, thank you, thank you, Ms. Emily! The Odyssey Project has been the strength to my weakness. I've learned so much in this English literature class; my vocabulary and writing skills have advanced so much. Looking forward to class every week gave me hope for a future education. I am somebody, I am smart, kind, and loved. Thank you to all my loved ones for supporting me on this journey.



## Song of Jyneevea

I am Jyneevea  
A daughter of seven siblings  
I am an angel's one and only baby girl.  
I am a product of our ancestors.  
I am God's child.  
I am high, low, weak, strong, angry, happy, proud, loving, honest, loyal.  
I am human.  
The smile I share overfills a room with brightness.  
I am rain, I am the sun,  
I am the rainbow.



# ASHLEY LEE



I would like to give a special thank you to my son Kingston. You are the motivation for my heart to keep beating. I love you more than anything, Kingston. I went back to school because you needed to see me do it. I am not strong because I want to be. I am strong because I am your first example. Sorry for all those times you had to watch cartoons alone because I needed to do homework. Most importantly, I'm sorry about all those times of separation because I needed to get this done. Everything I do is for our future. Also, a special thanks to my family for watching Kingston and to Emily and Kevin for all the love and support.

## Odyssey Mosaic

Odyssey class is a mosaic.  
We have become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic.  
Different people  
Different beliefs  
Different hopes  
Different dreams  
But together we are one  
beautiful mosaic.



# TINA MARTINEZ



I remember the first week of Odyssey, not knowing the class I sat with would become like family. I learned that we all face our own individual struggles and all have our own story to tell. Odyssey taught me to invest in myself. By focusing on my education, I learned I could be myself and break barriers, change cycles, and hold my head up high while I did it. I am thankful to all of my classmates for sharing their stories and to the whole UW Odyssey team for giving my children and me something positive to look forward to. Thanks for making this all possible. This is that moment where you get to stand tall and say how proud you are because you did it!!!

## I am a Mosaic

I am a mosaic  
I am the daughter of  
Aztec native American  
Indians blessed by  
The divine gods  
Whose spirit lives  
within  
My body is a frame  
My mind is where  
The art is created

Like a boulder shaped  
By water I am current

I have come too far  
To turn back now  
I have been enlightened  
Please continue  
To show me how

I am love  
I am a healer  
I know of  
Nothing realer





# ELIAZAR MARTINEZ-MUNGUIA



Today I would like to thank each and every one: Emily Auerbach, Kevin Mullen, Marshall Cook, Jean Feraca, Craig Werner, Gene Phillips, Em Azad, Jenny Pressman, Char Braxton, Christina DeMars, Karen Dreyfuss, Brian Benford, Baron Kelly, Christy Clark-Pujara, William Brockliss, Peter Moreno, and Jeff J.P. Pfund.

Big thanks to the tutors. Their unconditional support throughout this journey has been the best help I could ever have gotten. I wish I could have them for the rest of my life, for they are amazing people from whom I can always learn. Thanks to Lisa for giving her time, and special thanks to Beth who read along with me virtually, helping me to become a better reader. Beth, you

have no idea how much this means to me.

To my classmates, thank you all. It has been a great honor to be by your side. I enjoyed reading your writing. Every time I read everyone's writing, I felt like I was in the right place with the right people. Your sincerity, humility, and openness to sharing your minds and hearts in front of the class made me feel like I am part of your life.

Today our ship has landed. The 2020 generation, which I had the honor to be part of, has indeed risen up to the task, even in the midst of the pandemic. We now can say we made it through. Thanks to the amazing Odyssey faculty and staff who did everything possible for us to come together one more time and celebrate our wonderful graduation. Thank you so much.



## **Odyssey is a Mosaic**

Odyssey es un Mosaico.  
Todas las cosas pequenas  
Se juntan,  
Para formar un gran cuadro.  
Mi vida es un Mosaico,  
mejorando por medio de la educacion.

Odyssey is a mosaic.  
All the small things  
Coming together  
To form a bigger picture  
Through education,  
I will keep adding  
to the mosaic of my life.

# ASHTON McDONALD



This has been a really big year for me with ups and downs, but I found Ms. Emily. I got to meet these wonderful, silly classmates of mine and I truly hope to stay connected to all of them.

I want to thank my class and teachers for not giving up on me. Thanks to my family for their support and positive reinforcement to my kids. I did this for me, for us. Why settle? Why not keep learning and progressing? Keep going because it's truly fulfilling.

I'm so grateful for this opportunity, and I can only hope and pray that I have this much fun and support continuing my education and life goals. It's been great; I'm really gonna miss you all, so don't forget me!



## **I love Odyssey**

I love how good it feels to be here with you all.

I hope everyone likes being here as much as I do.

I love that we are all in this together, and I have not seen or experienced anyone being wrong, mean, or hurtful to one another.

I love Odyssey.



# KRISTA MELLOTT



Today is a day filled with mixed emotions. It feels like the end of something. Our Odyssey classes are done. Wednesday nights will never be the same without Ron's beautiful voice randomly singing responses to questions that I didn't hear the teacher ask, or Tiffany and her fantastic improv performances from the drivers' seat of the car, or Margie screaming Shakespeare lines at boh davis like a boss. Yes, it does feel like an ending, but its not. This class has changed us in a way that has given us the power to grow. Personally, Odyssey has transformed me in a way that can never be undone. It took my heart that was once filled with shame, guilt and fear and filled it with love, compassion, and encouragement. It took my mind that was once filled with insecurities, self-doubt and impairment, and filled it with motivation, pride and inspiration. As long as we continue to nurture these tools Odyssey has bestowed up on us, our growth will not stop.

I am a tree,  
But I don't know that yet.  
I am surrounded by darkness  
I feel the weight of the earth above me,  
Yet I yearn to explore, spread, grow.  
I push forward, toward the only direction I know.  
If I don't push through the darkness  
I will not reach the light  
If I do not reach the light, I will not grow  
If I do not grow  
I die.

We have no choice now but to grow. We started the second we applied for this incredible program. I remember the day I applied and I never believed I would be accepted. I wanted to stop making mistakes and start making progress. Through the grace of God and the Odyssey staff, Emily and Kevin, they saw this desire in me to push forward into unknown territory and through the darkness. They believed in me. I want to thank them from the bottom of my heart for not only giving me this opportunity, but also for providing this class for those that came before and those yet to come.

A special thank you to my fiancé for always being supportive and encouraging with regards to school. He spent many nights listening to me talk about class, books we have read, and people we learned about, proofreading my writings and always making sure I have no excuse to miss class or not finish my homework.

I want to thank my family, mom, dad, sister, and brother, for always loving me, even in my darkest of days and for believing in me when I couldn't believe in myself. Hearing you tell me you are proud of me melts my heart every time.

I also want to thank my classmates for accepting me and sharing all your stories with me. The laughter and smiles will be something I will miss dearly as we part onto bigger, better places in our lives. Congratulations Everyone!

# TIMOTHY MOSLEY



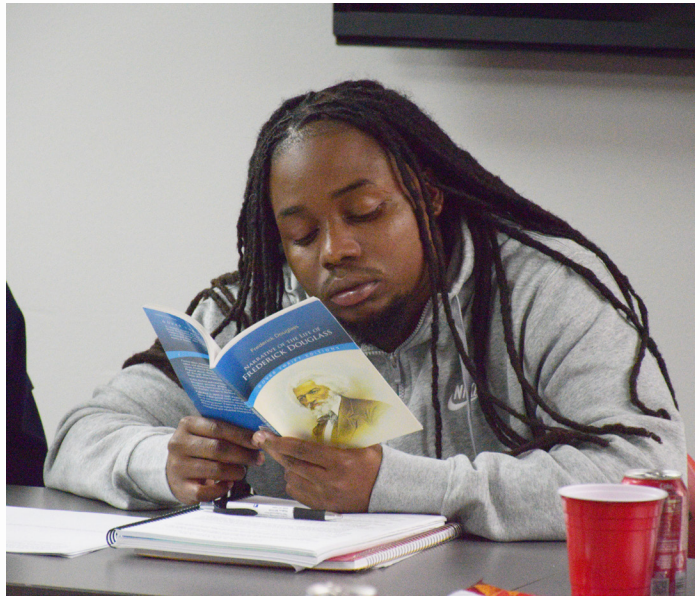
I was lost and in legal trouble when I applied for the Odyssey Program. I heard about the program through my girlfriend, Maya Bracey, who attended and graduated from the program in 2018. She told me how good she felt when she went and how great of a program it was. Hearing the way she spoke so highly of everyone that was involved in the program made me want to give it a shot. I have to say, getting accepted and seeing exactly what the hype was about has changed my life. Everyone in the program is truly there for you and always has your best interest in heart. I always wanted to further my education and go back to college. I just didn't know how to begin with taking the first steps in doing so. The Odyssey Program has opened that door for me. I just want to thank everyone that was involved in this great program, because without them

giving someone like me a chance, I don't know how I would have stepped out of my comfort zone to better my future. Thanks again to everyone that has a hand in making the Odyssey Program what it is today. You guys are truly a blessing, and I will forever be grateful for the compassion you've shown each of us during our journeys.

## Cheated

Deprived of a once-in-a-lifetime experience,  
Trying my best not to get delirious,  
At the same time, I can't help but be furious.  
How could this happen at a time I thought  
would be stupendous?

Instead, I'm sitting here still curious  
About how much more I could've got from Odyssey.  
Face to face is serious, but you've made it to where I'm shiftless.  
No longer having ambition to learn.  
No longer do I yearn for knowledge.  
Instead, I feel cheated.  
I feel cheated.





# LOCHÉ MOTHOA



Someone said something about a journey starting with a single step. Mine was more of a leap while being blindfolded. I didn't know what to expect with Odyssey, but it's definitely not what I would've expected. It didn't matter what you were going through in your personal life: when you walked into class, that warm welcoming atmosphere and being greeted by your classmates made all your problems disappear, even if it was only for a couple of hours. Wednesday night was something to look forward to. Each week's class was different, and I liked that. I could write a book on what the Odyssey Project meant to me because it's impossible to fit two semesters of life-changing experience into a two-minute speech.

Today is our graduation. We made it, through a pandemic, too! I think it's safe to say we've made history, Class of 2020! In all honesty, I've been dreading this day. I feel like a little bird who's barely hatched and is now being thrown out of the nest. I'm not ready to leave the nest. Wednesday nights will feel empty. Not seeing your classmates. Not being asked on the spot to write something and suddenly your brain just goes blank! Not sending emails to Emily and Kevin at weird hours of the morning since I don't sleep so I figured let me blow up their inboxes.

Odyssey has been my safe haven, and it felt amazing to have such great support. Odyssey truly was a journey—a journey of self-discovery and growth. There's no way you'll be the same person after being part of Odyssey, impossible! Odyssey has pushed me out of my comfort zone and challenged me numerous times.

I want to end by a reading a short piece I wrote in class, which sums me up beautifully:

I am a mosaic.  
I am bits and pieces of stained glass  
That I tried to manipulate like clay.  
Eventually I gave up trying to hold those pieces together.  
I finally let go and allowed those pieces to fall apart.  
I arranged my shattered pieces of stained glass.  
I realized that even broken things can be recycled into  
Something different, something better.  
I am no longer who I was.  
I am no longer my past.  
For I am now a beautiful mosaic.



# MORIAH PARKER



I want to thank everyone who was involved in my acceptance into Odyssey. Odyssey has been a safe haven for me and was everything I was longing for. I needed a community—a community of people who see me as an equal. Odyssey isn't the typical class because students are kept in mind when it comes to every part of the curriculum. One writer we learned about was the great abolitionist Fredrick Douglass, who once said, "If there is no struggle, there is no progress." This made me think about how sometimes we can get so caught up in things not working out in our favor and how we might have a thirst for more, but patience is a virtue. Instant success isn't afforded to everyone, but programs like the Odyssey Project are a stepping stone leading to progress for me and many others.

## Song of Moriah

I am Moriah  
The third daughter of a first child  
A daughter of a mother who's a hard worker  
A daughter of a father who was unloved and hurt  
I am my past generations' dream  
I am an educator and a learner  
I am a descendant of the motherland  
My skin is the color of bronze  
I am peace  
I am happiness  
I am Moriah





# NATIA SAFFOLD



I was lost and confused, trying to figure out what my next step in life is. I thank God for my dad, Corey Saffold from Odyssey Class of 2006, for introducing me to Odyssey. I thank God for Emily welcoming me into Odyssey. A stepping stone is exactly what I needed in life to keep pushing. Thanks for giving me the strength to move forward.



## Song of Natia

I am Natia  
I am a princess born from a queen  
A melanin princess with skin that glows like honey  
A brown princess who loves the skin she's in  
I am a boss  
A beauty who never gives up  
A beauty with a mindset of a hustler  
I am she!

# NINA SALISBURY



I would like to thank every single person involved with the Odyssey Project. The love and support that I have felt these past months is indescribable. It's incredibly humbling to know there are so many people, most I don't even know, rooting for my success. That alone gives me the confidence to keep on going towards the degree I once deemed unattainable.

To Emily, thank you for all the beautiful success stories that have evolved from Odyssey. Every single one of them has sparked a different motivational light inside of me. You are truly an amazing woman. To Kevin, thank you for the weekly reassurance that writing becomes easier with time. You have unknowingly caught the towel I was throwing in more than once. To Char, thank you for your infectious smiles, hugs, and encouragement.

To my mom, thank you for being my foundation, my walls, and my roof. If home were a person, you'd be mine. Your unconditional love, support, and knowledge have saved me many times. To my sister Maura, thank you for being one of my rocks and one of my crystals. You inspire me every day to do better, and remind me that I can.

Thank you to my class of 2020 for allowing yourselves to be vulnerable while sharing your stories of courage and hope. Sky is the limit for each and every one of you. Most importantly, to my son Damien, thank you for seeing the best version of me that I have yet to see in myself. I'm so proud that you are mine. I love you.



I am a book.

A rough draft.

Waiting to be edited, revised and published.

I've been stowed away in a box of journals amongst memories that once were.

One day the box is opened.

Sounds of nostalgia escape.

My beautiful words and scribbles are now being eagerly hammered onto a keyboard.

Sentences are added along with commas, periods and exclamation points.

Paragraph after paragraph fill the screen.

My story begins to unfold.

Yet, I am still a work in progress.

I grow stronger as the number of pages increase.

I am worked on daily, bit by bit.

Stories of hardship, courage, sorrow and love fill the chapters.

I am resilient.

I am a book.

A first draft.

There is no "The End" in sight.



# JEROME SANDERS



So many things come to mind when thinking of words that I feel will move you and make you know how special this Odyssey program truly is and how it impacted us as a whole. Nine months ago, thirty individuals sat in a room and were given information on how we could all regain control of our futures and destinies. Here we are now, graduates of the UW-Madison Odyssey Program.

I refuse to accept this honor without first thanking each of my classmates sharing this honor for being all-in, being open and willing to grow without fear of judgment or failure. I am inspired by your stories and continued efforts. I know I speak for us all when I thank every staff member associated with this program. We all know the rock stars, Emily, Kevin, Ms. Char, Emily Azad, Coach,

Jean, Craig, Gene, Bob Auerbach, and the loving memory of Ms. Wanda Auerbach. We also thank the names and faces that may not be seen or heard as much because they are working behind the scenes, but please know your efforts were not in vain.

We all truly found ourselves through Odyssey and have become this huge family from so many different walks of life but who all have fallen head over heels in love with each as we all pursue our goals and dreams in life together. I'm forever grateful to my good friend Charrod Miller, Odyssey Class of 2008, for connecting me to Emily so I could become part of this magical program. Thank you all.

I am a mosaic  
Like stained glass, filled with vibrant  
colors, stories, and multiple small pieces which  
keep me whole.

I am a mosaic. Ya' know,  
some parts of me are new and some old,  
some made of silver and some made of gold.

I am a mosaic . . . I know  
some parts of me can encourage,  
inform, humor, or uplift,  
some parts can cause pain so bad  
you would think it made your heart rip.

Some parts of me are rich, and I manifest that -ish.  
I am a mosaic, and Corona Virus is a bitch!



# MARCELLO SEGOVIA



FOR ENOUGH GROWTH: Not too much rain. Just enough sunshine.

The Mosaic of My Mind  
My mind is a mosaic  
When I read poetry  
I don't read it aloud  
I stay to myself  
My mind is a mosaic  
When I understand poetry  
There is a calmness  
I see myself  
My mind is a mosaic  
When writing poetry  
My words are waves  
Launched against  
Unknowing





# RILEY SESSIONS



Hi, everyone. As Ms. Emily said, my name is Riley, and first I just want to thank y'all for coming out. It means a lot that everyone is here showing love and celebrating our achievements this year. So thank you for joining with us tonight. I also want to thank the staff. All of you create such an incredible environment. It makes it easy to learn, to open up, and to be yourself. The support, friendships, resources, and opportunities you find at Odyssey are hard to find in life, and none of it would be possible without the hard work from everyone who's a part of the odyssey family.

Ms. Emily, your dedication to making sure we all succeed is relentless, not just in class but in life. You truly care about all your students, and I could feel that in every class. Thank you for the support and all the time you invested in me. Kevin, thank you for trying your hardest to make us fall in love with grammar and punctuation. For me, it

wasn't love at first sight but we're working on it. More than anything, though, thank you for your energy. You bring so much positivity to the classroom it almost forces you to lighten up and enjoy the journey.

I'd like to thank Miss Char for setting up the meals and keeping us fed., for your warm hugs, and for always having RnB or Soul going in the back. Em, thanks for all the unwanted pictures. Although at the time I didn't want my picture taken, those are memories I can take with me forever, so thank you.

To all my classmates: first and foremost, congratulations. We made it! Everyone in class has had their share of struggles, but we kept our heads high and kept movin'. I'm proud of y'all. And I want to thank y'all for just being you--for opening up, for being vulnerable, and for sharing a piece of your life with me. All of you doing that allowed me to do the same. It was a growing experience I needed in my life. So thank y'all.

I wanna thank my family. My little brother Micky: thanks for filling me up with good energy every time I see you. I love you, Lil Bro. My stepdad Ed: I want to say thank you for the time you put in. I think to be a good father figure, the most important thing is to just be there. No one can say you didn't put the time in, so thank you. Mama, thank you for always supporting me and encouraging me. Even though you're sick, you never let it affect your attitude or the way you carry yourself. Watching you gives me strength to keep on movin'. Thank you for everything you've sacrificed to get me where I am. I love you, Mama.

To close, I'm going to read a metaphor I wrote about myself. It's called "Headed on Up":

## Headed on Up

I am an elevator  
Sometimes I'm headed up  
Without the slightest realization  
that I'm-a-have to come down  
And some days I'm in the lobby  
My cables feel too weak  
To make it to the top  
The thing about being an elevator  
You're never on the same floor  
But people are always trying to go to the pool



# SHILOH SIMONSEN



Day one of Odyssey, I was a train wreck. I had no idea what I had signed up for, but tonight I stand before you and have completed yet another step in my journey! Odyssey was my first EVER mission that was started and completed ON TIME! Sooooo I want to say, thank you. Thank you, Odyssey Junior staff, for giving my girl an unforgettable experience. Thank you to all the tutors who helped me get where I am. Thank you, Kevin and Emily, for believing in me. Lastly, thank you to my bomb-ass classmates! Without y'all, NONE of this would be possible



## Song of Shiloh

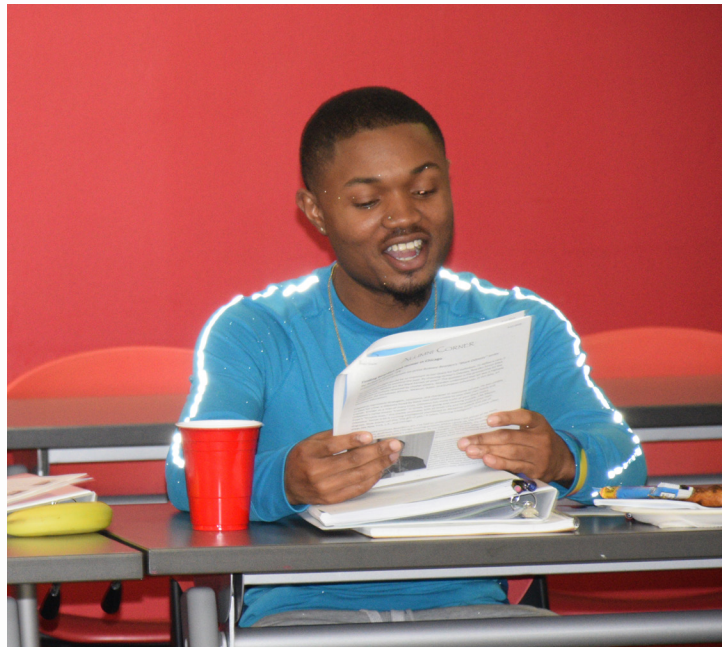
I am Shiloh  
Most commonly known as Miss Shiloh  
Proudly known as mama  
Secretly known as beans  
I am from busy roads and bus fumes  
But love beer tents and snowmobiling  
I am loud  
I am outspoken  
I am me.



# JAISON THOMAS



In the beginning, I was shy and didn't really enjoy speaking out loud or having to share my thoughts with strangers. I joined the class to help guide me in the right direction in terms of making a decision on schooling and potential career opportunities. Now I am more open in talking out loud and sharing my ideas. I looked forward to seeing my classmates, hearing about how their week was going, and learning more about them each week. It went from a room full of strangers to a family-like environment.



## Song of Jaison

I am Jaison  
I am the son of a single mother  
brother to three sisters, one older, two younger  
uncle to a niece and nephew  
great grandson of a Cherokee descendant grandmother  
owner/father of a three-year-old bichon/shintzu mix dog  
boyfriend of a beautiful young lady  
I am the son of a man I haven't spoken to  
since the sixth grade  
and lastly I am a believer in God

# CARMEN TINAJERO



First of all, I want to give special thanks to Emily and to all the big-hearted people who made this wonderful program possible. I also thank my sister because she encouraged me to apply.

What Odyssey did to me is exactly what the slaveholder warned would happen to Frederick Douglass when he said to his wife, "Teach a slave to read and he will forever be unfit to be a slave." Odyssey taught me to stop being a slave myself and made me realize that I was sleeping in a cave. Odyssey taught me to meditate, to visualize, to feel, to listen to my voice, and to not allow anything to obstruct the path I want to walk.

Now I have the strength to face adversity and improve my life and therefore my family's life. Now I trust myself and I have goals. Odyssey opened the door for me to a whole new world. I am so happy and grateful to be part of this life-changing program. Thanks to Odyssey, I am starting a new life with new dreams. Gracias, Wanda. Gracias, Bob.

## Song of Carmen

Yo soy Carmen  
Soy de donde el sol sale cada día  
Donde hay un cielo lleno de estrellas  
Soy hija de Mexicanos  
Hija de padres trabajadores y amorosos  
Soy de aquí y de allá  
Soy del lugar de la tortilla  
Soy de la casa de la abuela  
Soy de la tierra.

I am Carmen  
I am from where the sun shows up every day  
From a sky full of stars  
I am a daughter of Mexicans  
Daughter of hardworking, loving parents  
I am from here and from there  
I am from the tortilla place  
I am from grandma's house  
I am from earth





# SAVANNAH TORRES



I have done far less than most students, who worked hard for two semesters. I haven't studied like I should have, but through the Odyssey Project I have found a group of people who made me believe in myself, who gave me strength and courage to pursue my dreams. They helped me believe that people do care and showed me that they believe in me. To Odyssey, that might be their job, but for me, that brought a new me out, a positive side, a person with more ambition to believe in myself and what I am capable of doing. I needed this encouragement and people in my life to help me pursue my vision and goals and to show my daughters anything is possible. I want my daughters to know that they should never give up.

## Song of Savannah

I am Savannah.  
I am a mother, trying to survive,  
An aunty always loving and kind,  
Descendants of the Menominee tribe,  
I am native with spiritual beliefs,  
Hispanic, but Spanish I don't speak,  
A survivor with ambition to succeed,  
I am a mother when my children need.



# O'SHANE WILMOTH



I want to thank my mom most of all for always pushing me, even when I try to be a rock head. I want to thank Emily Auerbach for giving me this chance and for all her support. I want to thank Kevin for being my stronghold and always being there to guide us. I thank the entire Odyssey staff for their input in assisting us through our journey. And who can forget the meals? Yum, yum! Thanks, Char and staff.



## Corona Virus

*Anuh di best time  
Nor the wus time*

It's not the best of times.  
It's not the worst of times either.  
It's been hard and dull. Corona, you're no fun.  
You bring sorrow and sadness, aches and pain.  
Many you made cry. Corona, have you no shame?  
Please don't stay. As far as I can see, you've had your way,  
With bitterness in my heart, I just want to say goodbye,  
You can't stop us, we will strive.  
Corona, why don't you pack your bags and fly?  
Come again no more until the end of times.  
BYE BYE BYE BYE.





# SONG OF THE ODYSSEY CLASS OF 2020

Inspired by Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself"

We are the Odyssey Class of 2020.

We have worked as a waiter, cashier, dietary aide, swimming teacher, babysitter, custodian, busboy, car detailer, pizza server, light fixture assembler, hair dresser, McDonald's server, cook, housekeeper, CNA, telemarketer, carpenter, omelet maker, flooring installer, forklift driver, nanny, call center operator, security guard, oil changer, and mother.

We hail from Wisconsin, Illinois, Tennessee, Minnesota, Florida, Colorado, New York, Mississippi, Texas, Missouri, Togo, Jamaica, the West Indies, and Mexico,

With ancestors coming from Thailand, Ireland, India, Togo, Jamaica, Italy, Germany, Israel, Holland, Malaysia, Spain, South Africa, the UK, Mexico, somewhere unknown in Africa, Texas, Mississippi, Arkansas, California, Illinois, Wisconsin, and a Menominee reservation.

Speaking Spanish, Hebrew, French, Ewe, Sign Language, Dutch, German, Hindi, Thai, and English,

Worshipping as Buddhist, Rastafarian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Jehovah's Witness, and Christian, including Catholic, Evangelical, Baptist, and Coptic.

We call ourselves stressed, dramatic, pretty, positive, kind, average, fun, poetic, loved, loving, caring, helpful, persistent, everlasting, short, tall, outgoing, outspoken, busy, humble, open-minded, stubborn, juicy, happy, sweet, sassy, laid-back, determined, sarcastic, goofy, nice, efficient, aggressive, quiet, curious, authentic, hardworking, and ambitious for success.

We are the Odyssey Class of 2020.

