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# ODYSSEY ORACLE

## LETTERS TO CLASSMATES



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# LETTERS TO CLASSMATES IN THE ODYSSEY CLASS OF 2021

*Dear Classmates,*



I can imagine when we all started this journey, we had no idea of what was to come. Think of all the things going on around each one of us, all the uncertainties, all the unknowns, all the changes that came with the pandemic, and all the thoughts of what is

next. Each one of us was able to come out on top in the middle of a negative situation and turn it to something positive. It was amazing to watch each one of you develop your thoughts and find those voices that some of us might have forgotten were there. I've met some of you in person, and it's an awesome feeling to say she/he was part of my Odyssey journey. I hope everyone is well and still developing those voices that the world needs to hear. May each one of you and your families continue to be blessed. Peace, Love, and Positivity to all. **(Betsy Alfaro)**



We made it! I would have never thought I could create such a strong bond with so many people I've never met in person. We've spent the last year learning so much about each other from our names on down to our ancestry. We became a tight knit family

who looked forward to seeing each other via Zoom each week!

Life has changed because this isn't a usual situation, but it's now the new normal. I've seen most of you go through your darkest, hardest times during this year but still somehow log into class and still participate as if your life weren't falling apart. That's resilience at its finest. **NONE** of us were quitters, even during the worst of the worst.

I'm so grateful to have been a part of this class. You all are amazing, and I've learned so much from each one of you! I can't wait until we're able to meet one day. Don't let your fire dim out after this; keep it burning and keep going by chasing your dreams and achieving your goals. This is just the beginning. Cheers to the Class of 2021!

**(Tawania Alston)**



Dear classmates  
I'm salty we weren't in a  
classroom, real talk.  
I imagine we would've turned up  
And wilded out  
LOL picture the smiles  
Dear classmates  
You guys are awesome for real

Beautiful talented kings and queens

**DO NOT EVER KNEEL**

Dear classmates

I love you

I shared me

And experienced you

I'll have that forever

This much is true **(Calvin Balentine)**



Can you believe it is the end of the year already? It is so crazy to look back and feel like we did a whole year together, and through a pandemic at that! I am so happy that I applied to take this class. Best decision ever. It was something I have looked

forward to every Wednesday since September, so I would be lying if I said I wasn't sad to have it come to an end. I was sad and missing everyone during Christmas break, so this farewell will be much harder. You have all become a second family to me. Even though we have not met in person for class, I feel like I have gotten to know you all. Through chats and reading your stories in the Oracle, I have grown a love for you all. We did it! Now on to conquer the world! I hope to meet all of you someday at an alumni 2021 party or something! We all need that, and I can't wait. GO CLASS OF 2021!! **(Sarina Benford)**



We're not going to lie to each other: most of the time, you'd rather do something other than go to class, work, or even study. You could, for example, go out with your friends or watch the latest hit series on Netflix. But the problem is procrastination won't

give you good results. You have no choice: if you want to succeed in your year, you have to work.

Everything is possible for those who dream, dare, work, and never give up. The excuse of "anyway, I



suck at school" won't help you to succeed, whereas by working and looking for solutions to improve your level, to reach your goal you already have more chances of success. Get there! You have Mrs. Emily and Mr. Kevin who assist you seven days a week if you need it.

If you don't believe in yourself and your abilities, you won't, or in any case you will be, less successful. It is by adopting a winning attitude that you will be successful. Even if you feel like you are behind the other students, don't give up! And redouble your efforts: persistence always pays off. To finish, never forget that: "the winners find the means, the losers, the excuses" Franklin D. Roosevelt. **(Souad Bidar)**



I wish each and every one the best in life, and to continue to succeed in life. Even though we didn't meet in person, I feel like I have met every single one of my classmates in person from reading the Oracles. I also have made a lot of connections with the class from

the Oracles.

When I applied for this program, I had no clue it would all be over Zoom. I have to say it's been a long, stressful, but exciting journey. It's been hard with not having stable internet connections, personal problems, turning homework in late; I know many can say the same, but we did it. Nine months later, we are still strong, didn't give up, and are graduating and moving on to the next chapter of our lives. **(Anjelica Brown)**





We finally made it! This year has been one for the books. I don't know about y'all, but this has been one challenging school year. Virtual learning was something I had to get used to. I had to persuade myself to keep going. I quit this class in my head so many times. We have some of the best staff ever because they were the ones who encouraged me to keep going.

I also looked forward to the virtual interaction we had twice a week. Lord knows I missed the interaction with people. The Oracles were very interesting and exciting. There are so many different cultures in this class. I was born and raised in Chicago, IL. The cultures are segregated in education. It is like I am on an adventure reading everyone's articles in the Oracles. Hopefully, we can all meet face-to-face. **(Tisha Butler)**



When we were down,  
we got back up.

Self-meditated, mind elevated,  
we graduated! **(Cashae Davis)**



Being a part of Odyssey and having the privilege to meet and get to know my classmates has really helped me realize situations in my life. How strong all these Odyssey students are--fighting their own battles but still waking up, moving forward, and staying focused on

their dreams. I can say that in all my life of living, this was the best classroom setting. It made me feel comfortable, made me wanna write more, bringing out energy I never knew I had lol. All of the students had great writings and did not give up. **(Paris Foster)**

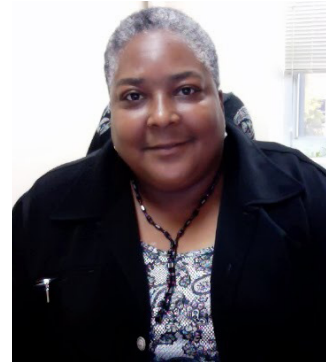


Dear Classmates of 2021, we did this s\*\*t! TOGETHER! I am so f\*\*\*ing proud of each of you and of course myself! This has not been a slice of cake, but a whole fruit cake. Ya hear me! I know many of you so much more, I have even

met many of you in person and I am grateful for our relationship now. I wish nothing but the best for us all in our future endeavors.

HUGE shout out to Miss Diane! You are the real MVP of this entire Odyssey class. I am so honored to have read your writings out loud in honor of you and your presence here in Odyssey. It gets greater later! Psssttt I am going to Alaska this September for my birthday. I will bring you back a souvenir...See you soon, Miss Diane.

*[Editor's note: Diane enjoyed reading the Oracles and watching the graduation ceremony on May 5 but passed away on May 12. A resiliency award has been set up in her name.]*



Congratulations Odyssey Class of 2021!!! I am willing to book a PRIVATE movie screening for us. Upon graduation next month, just text me if you would like to join me and my FOUR PIECE SPICY TRAVEL CREW for an awesome view! Keep up the great work team...yes, we are a team! LOL **(Sarah Galinski)**



I have no doubt in my heart that each one of you will continue to be the amazing caring human beings I had the pleasure of meeting. This year, you guys have not only accepted my own flaws but taught me to be more kind and accepting, even though we only got to meet

over Zoom. **(Erika Gonzalez)**





Hello everyone! I want to say that it was a pleasure being amongst all of you. I learned so many different things in the two semesters that I had with you. I want you to know that no matter what anyone says or does, we are all special in our own way. Keep your head always

high in the sky, lift one another up at all times, forgive and love everyone to the best of your ability, and, most of all, take care of yourself so that you may take care of everyone else. Love you, my friends!! **(Valeria Gordon)**



This has been a long and unusual process, but I'm glad we were able to get through COVID and Zoom meetings. We weren't able to meet face-to-face, but the Oracles gave us some insight on each other. While Zoom gave us the next best thing to being in

each other's presence outside of class, I would have preferred in-class with childcare, but they say everything happens for a reason. It was nice meeting all of you, I mean Zooming with all of you! LOL **(Bresha Green)**



Prepare for a journey that will change something within you. Today you may think this is only an English class, but you will come to learn it's so much more. Get ready for conversations that will challenge what you think you know. Prepare to take journey

through time, music and new ideas.

The reason you chose to being the journey of taking this class will change before it ends. I guarantee that you will not be the same and you will find a better version of yourself along the way.

The unique people you get to know as your classmates will inspire you beyond your wildest dreams. As you all work together unknowingly, you all will reach the end. The teachers and support for this class are beyond amazing.

Allow yourself to let go, have fun learning and make room for the new you to come. You made it. Congratulations! **(Melissa Herriges)**



It has been wonderful going through this journey with you all. I started this program thinking I was going to be the one in the "back" of the class just letting everyone else speak. I'm kind of a shy person, but with the help of you all encouraging me and checking

in on me, I feel like I found my voice. I loved hearing all your stories, both the good and the bad. The good positive ones helped give me ideas about what I wanted to write about, and the ones that were mostly about going through different type of challenges made me more aware that there are more people in the world who are going through way more than you realize. You all have gone through struggles and you came out champions.

If I learned anything from this time I shared with you in Odyssey, it's that anyone can make a difference. No matter what life may throw at you, there is always a way to come out on top. **(Kwan Hogan)**





look forward to someday soon meeting everyone face-to-face.

I'm so grateful to have been able to share this experience with all of you. I'm very grateful to staff for making the program available to us in the midst of the pandemic. This was a trying time for all of us, but look...WE DID IT! Every one of you holds a very special place in my heart. I know this program was a stepping stone for me in my education. I hope all of you get everything you deserve in life, and, once again, I look forward to seeing you all face-to-face. **(Jessica Jacobs)**



I don't know if you knew this, but I already consider you all to be my friends. I know this is a ridiculous thing to say, but I am not only happy to see everyone each week, but also honored to be with you in this class, in this, our Odyssey.

Please know that if you ever want to hang out, have a cookout, exchange thoughts or poetry, or just chat you can reach me via email or by phone.



To my peers, classmates, fellow Odyssey members: this is not the end. We had such a long, rough year, but all of you made it to graduation. Keep that same energy now. Continue to pursue your dreams with writing, art, poetry, college--you name it, you

can achieve it. I loved your writing, poetry, and conversations. We had deep discussions that I feel like a lot of you should further pursue. So many future leaders and builders of a better community are in our class. This class was so inspiring, and so were all of you! **(Brianna Johnson)**

I remember our first class, with my poor English and all, I was hesitant to speak, but everyone's humbleness made me lose that fear. Now, I'm always writing in our chat room. Hehe! Thank you for your beautiful writings, I remember them vividly the first time I read about most of you, if not all of you. I hope you all decide to get further in life, further in education. I surely am. Cheers!

**(Henry Irisson)**



Man, what a year it's been for us, huh? I never thought we would do the whole program on Zoom when I first applied, but that's how it turned out. I





I am glad that you all have been on this crazy journey with me. I know it's been difficult considering we are not in person and in a crazy pandemic. I applaud all of you for taking all the steps with me with me. We are heroes. We have made it and have accomplished more than we know. I want to thank you for the opportunity to get to know you. I will be able to look back years later and tell my children and grandchildren, "You know, me and my class—we made it through a pandemic. We didn't even know how strong we were until we joined the Odyssey Class of 2021." I want to say thank for not giving up, thanks for not closing the book, and most of all, thanks for letting your voices be heard. This will always be our journey. **(Yvonne Johnson)**



I appreciate you more than you imagine. Although we have never met nor have I had many one-on-one conversations with you all, I know without your companionship and inspiration during this time, I am not sure if I would have made it through.

Although it's been tough for many reasons, it was motivating to have something to look forward to. Knowing I had colleagues, other people trying to grow like me just on the other side of the computer screen, gave me hope. And to be honest, I have always done a little better under pressure. That cushy life ain't for growth.

I hope I bump into you all around someday. I feel we made friends although we haven't met. This time of separation has shown me that to live in contact and in a community is more important to me than ever before. I am going to live until I die and not die to live. I am afraid of lots of things, but my worst fear is to let fear win and to not live at all. I strengthen my immune system and mental muscles and keep moving.

I have no doubt I will see you all in these streets soon, being advocates and the kings and queens of our community. **(Feather Lloyd)**



I read Plato's cave a long time ago on a Wikipedia binge. I "understood it"; that is to say, I could grasp the concepts. But it seemed static and academic to me. If I related it to anything at all, I thought it was probably about the ignorance of religious belief and as a teenage smarty pants, I was enlightened and above all that.

"I'm not in a cave" I probably said, as the bats flew over my head.

What I love about the Odyssey is the life experience everyone brings to the table. The cave is not just some fusty old concept. It's us, it's now, it's life or death. It's abuse, poverty, addiction, toxic relationships, low self-esteem, and the limits of perception. At the end Plato says that ultimately Earth is the cave, and the sun is the lamp. I think we all took a big step towards the light, and I'm so proud to have gone on this journey with you.

Thank you, thank you, thank you. I love you all. Where's the party at? **(Farren McDonald)**







Writing this letter fills my heart with sorrow. After May 5th I do not know what I am going to do with my free time. I look forward to every Monday and Wednesday to connect and learn with all of you! Thank you for being so open and sharing some of the darkest

times in your life with me. Reading your stories in the Oracle made me cry, laugh, and inspired me in so many ways. Every one of you is a fighter and has overcome unthinkable journeys in life that made you stronger. I look forward to the day we can all meet in person; that is when the real party will begin.

Remember this class gave us tools to go beyond the unthinkable. Your hardships gave you strength and wisdom. This combination will make all of you unstoppable. With all the ugliness and racial injustices surrounding us, I hope you channel what you learned here to make a difference. We need every single one of us to stand up and be an active member in the community and make this a better place to live. As an individual you can make some noise, but as a class we can make a huge blast! And shake things up!

I am not going to lie: I am disappointed that we had to do this class via Zoom. I feel we missed out on a lot, but at the same time we turned sour lemons into lemonade. Having class on Zoom helped me open more in my reading and writing. I felt more comfortable sharing personal stories with the class. I do hope this is the last class to have to use Zoom. I am praying by next year COVID will be under control. Stay safe and keep moving forward to better yourself. This class was only the beginning of your journey. This is not goodbye, but until I see you again. **(Michelle McKoy)**



It has been an absolute pleasure being a student in this program and an honor getting to learn and grow with all of my classmates. This has been a challenging year for each of us as we were faced with the COVID-19 pandemic that

halted and altered our normal way of life. It not only impacted the way we lived but learned. I was looking forward to attending the Odyssey course on the University of Wisconsin Madison campus and experiencing a little bit of campus life, which I had not done previously.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic forced the course to transition to virtual learning, I was still afforded the opportunity to have an enriched and rewarding experience. I not only learned the course material; I discovered the tenacity which I possess to let nothing hinder me from my success. I was motivated by my peers, who continually overcame their own challenges and committed themselves to the program and their educational goals. I am grateful for the course instructors and tutors who dedicated their time and talent each week and invested in my success. I am excited about my future because of the solid foundation that this course has laid for me. The possibilities are endless, and I look forward to exploring all that come my way. I wish everyone great success. Please remember, the best is yet to come!

**(Stephaney Obi)**







We made it! Over the last eight months I have enjoyed getting to know each and every one of you. I am thankful that I was not alone on this Odyssey. Every step we have taken in this course, we took together. I have watched each one of you learn and grow. From writing to role play, we managed to do it all virtually.

I have made many new friends I hope to keep for a lifetime. I also was blessed with the opportunity to meet Diane, beautiful inside and out. Although there have been many bumps in each of our lives, we still managed to get here. It was not easy, but it was worth it and I would do it all over again with you guys! I wish you all success in your future endeavors and hope that we will get to meet face to face one day! **(Asia Pearson)**



I'm so honored to be a part of such a great experience; my heart feels weak that our soulful class is ending. I love, love, love our class; our journey doesn't end here. I can't wait to see what doors open up for each and every one of us. I love seeing all of your beautiful

children's artwork; my daughter Zoomed with some kids and I was very happy to see them engaged like a family.

I wish everyone the best of luck on your futures.

Don't be a stranger; I'm going to try to stay connected to Odyssey as much as possible. Let's help people the way we've been helped. Hopefully we all graduate from UW someday, and be like, "Hey, we went to Odyssey together." **(Burnett Reed)**



Since I've been a student, I've been nothing but proud to associate myself with the UW Odyssey Project, a name that carries so much weight and respect both locally and nationally. No matter where I am, people know the name UW Odyssey Project. I miss logging

onto Zoom every Monday and Wednesday to see all of the faces and hear all of the accents learning many new and interesting things. I didn't know what to expect knowing the program would be run virtually. Not only did I get to "meet" you all as classmates but also as people. Reading the Oracles, I've seen the beauty of all your hearts. Thank you all for telling your stories; they led my way through the dark.

I had just had a baby all alone when we started. You guys made me feel like I'm not alone and that anything is possible. It inspired me to open up my lid and let some steam out. I am grateful for you all. I can't wait to meet in person. Thanks, you guys. **(Delisha Smith)**





What could you do when time is up? This journey flew by so fast. I can remember the first meet and greet on Zoom, seeing everyone, hoping to find a familiar face or two, feeling awkward and not as engaged, but because I came for a purpose, I focused. Then comes

October, November, December. We finished our first semester. Now I know a few more people than when I first started and feel a little more like a family. I remember writing the essay 'why should Odyssey allow you to continue?' I remember staying because I can do it... and guess what, y'all? WE DID IT!

Now that May is slowly creeping up on us, it's time to tighten your loose ends and if you haven't yet, make new friends because what could you do when time is up? Nothing, because time is up.

**(Thedora Smith)**



Be at peace with yourself even if you are not at peace with anyone else. Think positively about your goals and future. Now more than ever, self-love at this moment in life is important and healthy. The focus and passion you've been having can take you and your families on to a great odyssey! We all know

what they say about Odyssey: BETTER TOGETHER! Be humble to all, and you will reap great things. Love always.

**(Dana Stokes)**



Gratitude is my attitude! Although I may not have gotten the opportunity to meet all of you in person, I truly appreciate getting to know you virtually. In fact, I feel as though this unique class has provided me with the chance to really listen and learn from my

peers. There was this element of focus provided that may not have happened for me in a normal classroom environment. Many of you helped to change my perspective on people in general. It was a good change! My faith in humanity has been restored. I wish all of you nothing but positivity and

blessings as you continue your journey!

**(Faleshuh Walker)**



I know this has been a hard year for all of us. I am so proud of all of us for completing this chapter of our lives. Some of us had no daycare, suffered from depression, lost close ones, and battled COVID-19. We are STRONG! I thought this class would be hard because we didn't

know each other personally. I thought to myself how would that work? I loved getting the Oracles and reading everyone's writing. It made me feel closer to you guys. Odyssey gave me hope and something to look forward to. I will miss seeing you all on Monday and Wednesday nights. **(Sunni Walker)**



This has been a great experience with you all. Being a part of Zoom meetings during class, I felt like I got to know some of you well. A lot of you all's writing has been much help to me in some of the things I've been going through and the encouragement we all give each

other during class time. I've learned over the class times we have all become some sort of family. I love that all of us have said kind words to one another and given each other the encouragement and push that we probably needed during those times. But overall, this was an absolutely great experience, and I'm grateful to be a part of the class of 2021. I wish you all the best, and I hope you continue your journey and stay focused! Don't forget to be kind to yourself. I hope to meet all of you in person!

**(Keyanna Wilson)**



I must say it was definitely a pleasure to have been a part of the class of 2021. Everyone was very welcoming and adapted to the instructors and classmates. I know that if you're feeling a bit nervous or have a feeling of giving up in the future, don't! The class has many

resources, and staff are very helpful. So, Class of 2021, as we keep going, keep your head high and rock it out. **(Shiquita Woods)**