

ORACLE

A learning tool for students of the UW-Madison Odyssey Project

Contents

This Page...Song of Odyssey

Page 3...Call and Response

Page 7...Japanese Block Prints
By Severn Anderson

Page 7...What's in a Name:
R.J. Knight

Page 8...Why Fund The Odyssey
Project?

Page 12...Responses to
The Bluest Eye

Page 14...Listening Hard to
Langston Hughes

odyssey.wisc.edu

Editors/Contributing Writers:

Kegan Carter
Odyssey 2004 Graduate, Designer
uwodyssey@gmail.com
608-442-8893

Marshall Cook
Writing Coach
mcook@cds.wisc.edu
608-262-4911

Emily Auerbach
Project Director
cauerbach@cds.wisc.edu
608-262-3733/ 712-6321

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Song of the Odyssey Class of 2008

Inspired by Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself"

We celebrate ourselves and sing ourselves.
We are the Odyssey Class of 2008.

Our ancestors came from Sudan, Kenya, Swaziland, Ghana, Nigeria, England, Australia, Canada, Belgium, Norway, Ireland, Iran, Canada, Palestine, Kashmir, India, Poland, Panama, Spain, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and Prussia,

From New Orleans, Louisiana, Whispering Pines, Mississippi, Tampa, Florida, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, Macon, Georgia, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin,

Speaking Spanish, Swahili, Arabic, French, Italian, Kuna Indian, Portuguese, Lotuko, Gaelic, German, Siswait, Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele, Hebrew, Yiddish, Urdu, Kashmiri Hindi, Fulani, Hausa, and Farsi,

Calling themselves Catholic, Southern Baptist, Muslim, Pentecostal, Evangelical, Unitarian, Lutheran, Quaker, Buddhist,



Presbyterian, Mormon, Methodist, Jewish, Episcopalian, Hindu, atheists, mystics, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

We have lived in Siphofaneni, Swaziland and Santa Ana, El Salvador, in Houston, Texas, St. Paul, Minnesota, Denver, Colorado, Wilmington, Delaware, Kankakee, Illinois, Okeechobee, Florida, Pasadena, California, Reading, Pennsylvania, El Paso, Texas, Greenville, Mississippi, Paducah, Kentucky, Spanish Harlem, Appalachian Virginia, the Robert Taylor Projects in Chicago, and the University of Wisconsin Hospital.

We have repaired trailers, installed tile, laid roofs, tutored children, detassled corn, cleaned bagel machines, jackhammered floors, cut grass, shoveled snow, painted houses, bagged groceries, cleaned parking lots, operated carnival rides, sewed canvas boat covers, managed Burger Kings, counseled juveniles, restored the carousel at Ella's Deli, cooked chicken for Boston Market, sorted mail for UPS, laid asphalt in the Army, and worked under the open sky corralling buffalo and horses on government land.

We have been called museum floor guide, paperboy, lifeguard, cashier, leasing agent, soccer coach, usher, babysitter, library page, dishwasher, waitress, pharmacy technician, upholsterer, cook, caterer, waiter, busboy, carpenter, electrician, machinist, hairdresser, massage therapist, CNA, translator, summer school dance teacher, drug and alcohol counselor, and dietary aid at a nursing home.

We are articulate, complicated, charming, observant, sensitive, cultured, philosophical, considerate, progressive, optimistic, determined, blessed, creative, inspired, romantic, nomadic, indecisive, spiritual, irrational, alcoholic, skeptical, intelligent, courageous, musical, open-minded, respectful, tall, short, chubby, thin, petite, vivacious, diligent, disabled, lovable, kind, hyperactive, superstitious, empathetic, altruistic, ambitious, sensual, serious, quietly forceful, original, idealistic, happy-go-lucky, busy, nosy, witty, analytical, thoughtful, thoughtless, scared, brave, daring, shy, unsure, outgoing, conflicted, down-to-earth, diverse, energetic, funny, mysterious, sweet, crazy, eccentric, passionate, inquisitive, open, deep-voiced, daring, caring, loud, and verbose.

We consider ourselves thinkers, connoisseurs, procrastinators, intellectuals, enigmas, dreamers, perfectionists, prayer-warriors, worrywarts, lovers, loners, poets, singers, readers, motivators, organizers, survivors, and creators.

We are the Odyssey Class of 2008.



Jacob Lawrence's *Graduation*

Oracle Call and Response



Haroun Omar's Look Back at 'Freedom' in Nigeria

I can empathize with and relate to Haroun about how "freedom can either be a prison or a liberator." I



didn't have the strict upbringing like Haroun, but I did get in some legal trouble at age 18. I got two felonies, went to jail, and got put on probation for five years for a battery and forgery; they still continue to "imprison" me to this day. People that know me realize I made a mistake and know that I am not a bad person, but the guy interviewing me for a job doesn't know that.

I agree with Haroun when he says "we owe it to ourselves

and the people around us to make responsible choices." . . . I recently saw a movie called "Lars and the Real Girl." The main character, Lars, asks his brother, "When does a guy realize that he is a man?" His brother tells him, "When you decide to do what is right, not only for yourself but for others as well, even when it hurts."

A lot of the material we have read relates to these principles. Like Haroun, I believe it is our responsibility to put these into motion.

(Severn Anderson)

Plato in Darfur

I thought it was good to know that the Odyssey class was happening all around the world.

(Rockameem)



This is so amazing and inspiring, to know that my fellow Sudanese, thousands of miles away, are also



experiencing an odyssey of their own. Plato was a very influential man, and this just proves how powerful words are. Who would've thought that students in Darfur would be reading Plato in Arabic? The students in Darfur did not let their poverty prevent them from gaining knowledge. This should encourage students in parts of the world like America, where education is feasible, to work even harder . . .

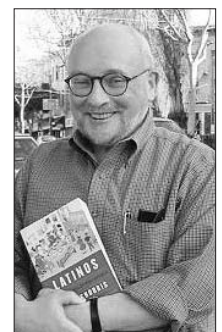
(Josephine Lorya)

Earl Shorris Responds to the Oracle

Dear Emily,

Thank you for sending the Emily Dickinson essays. . .

.Please tell your students that I enjoyed reading their interpretations of the works. Although I have been reading Dickinson for more than 50 years, I am not quite sure of what she means in many places. The students speak more plainly and clearly than I do about her.



In my old age I have begun to think more about her poems on the question of death. . . .

Please thank the students for giving me some time with her and with them. As she is a poet, so are their readings poems. Their hearts are as open as hers.

. . . It may please you and your students to know that within a year, if all goes well, we will be sending them pictures from Clemente Courses in Rwanda and Palestine.

(Earl Shorris, President, The Clemente Course in the Humanities)

Linda Rosenthal on her Poem

[Michigan writer Linda Rosenthal was pleased to learn that her poem "Shirley Temple Went Native," excerpted in the last Oracle, could be related to class discussions of The Bluest Eye, Pecola's obsession with Shirley Temple, and racist concepts of beauty.]

Hello, Emily,

I will tell you a bit about me. I am not Native American, although using that theme in this particular poem felt natural to me. Re-reading it now, the memories come back of the circumstances of when and why I wrote it. The doll is real and I still have it, tattoos, feathers, and all.

I'm 50 years old. When I wrote the poem I was like a volcano that is just beginning to ooze the lava of a lifetime of unexpressed anger. For me, the poem was a declaration of freedom from the projections of

this-is-how-a-woman-should-be and the way that I had been living that lie. . . . I was going to throw off the shackles of my timidity and claim my real self. The beginning of my journey to doing just that is represented in "Shirley Temple Went Native." The doll and the poem helped me move on . . . and let go.

Although they are different colors in the same palette, racism and sexism are not far removed from each other, are they? I can easily see how a different interpretation of the poem could be made and it would be correct for that interpreter.

Your email made my day and reminded me of how far along I have walked ahead and away from the terrible bitterness.

Meet the Donor: Chris Wagner

I have much gratitude for Chris Wagner. Not only do her donations help keep the Odyssey program

running, but she was also instrumental in developing the Second Chance program for the library. I had taken out library books several years ago but, due to job changes and a lack of transportation, never got back to return them. I was very embarrassed and overwhelmed



at the thought of having to pay for replacing those books so I just avoided the library.

However, since I have started Odyssey, my desire to read has just grown stronger so I took worked up the courage to go into the library to try to clear my account. I expected that it would take me months to pay off the fines and be able to check out books again. I was pleasantly surprised to find that with a small down payment I was able to start checking out books immediately. I was even able to return some of older books I was able to locate and reduce my balance even further. I now have a clear and well used library account. My children also enjoy being able to go to the library and pick out books and movies.

Thanks again, Chris Wagner! The Odyssey project reignited my desire to read, and the Second Chance program allows me to fulfill that desire.
(Mandisa Hayes)

Chris Wagner is omnipresence at the library. I concur that Rockameem and Sherri have witnessed an absolute treasure to the community.

Every Wednesday is a circus in the library. Like a ringmaster,



she visits each circus ring. With precision that is only exemplified by soap opera surgeons, she is the ringmaster. (Tom Gardner)

Volcanoes

I enjoyed reading Jeffery McCarroll's response to Emily Dickinson's "On my volcano grows the grass—a meditative spot." I can relate to Jeffery a lot. I too don't like for people to see me in pain. Maybe it's because big boys don't cry. Today, I'm learning to share much more.

(Jack Crawford)

Maria Torres' "Ebenezer Scrooge and My Mother"

This was very painful to read because of Maria's loss of her parents. I am happy that Maria realized before it

was too late that she loved her mother and had the opportunity to take care of her.

My two sisters were abandoned and left in a boarding school at a very young age by our mother.



Unfortunately my older sister Crystal passed away in 2001 of psoriasis and Hepatitis C. I know it is because of the drinking; our mother set the tone for her daughters. Kendra is still resentful and confused by our parents' choices. She is despondent whenever speaking of these issues with me, but only after a few alcoholic beverages.

Emily Dickinson wrote in "I make His Crescent fill or lack," "And front a Mutual Day—Which is the Despot, neither knows—Nor Whose—the Tyranny." This part of the last stanza has really made me think about my Judgment Day or "Mutual Day." I don't want to have all these resentments, or the feelings associated with my lack of things I can't control in my life affect me. I just want to live a happy life, love who I am supposed to love, and stay on good terms with everyone. I don't want to be the "Despot" or "Tyranny."

I am going to send a copy of Maria's article to my sister. I hope that my sister realizes what Maria and I have learned very recently.

(Severn Anderson)

I really loved reading this entry by Maria. I felt like I was reading an excerpt from an autobiography. I really can relate to your story, Maria. I don't even know how to put into words how much I admire you for realizing that you should not hold your mother's mistakes

against her forever. Once you decided to take the responsibility of caring for her, you were still able to show her that you truly do love her and you need her in your life. When she passed I am sure it was with the comfort and reassurance of having her daughter's forgiveness. . . . This beautiful story gave me an even greater outlook on the effort that I am going to put forth to mend the broken relationship between my mother and me.

(Sheriah Quartey)

I really enjoyed Maria's "Scrooge" essay. Her honesty was touching. I felt both sad and happy as I read about her

making peace with her mom. Not everyone gets to feel that sense of completion with a parent. I am even a little jealous of that. (Kevin Schoen)

Oroki Rice's "First Grade"

Oroki, you have taken me all the way back down the hallways and into the classrooms of the first integrated elementary school of Greenville, Mississippi . . . where the



strange world of Sally, Dick, and Jane met me at school in my childhood years each and every day



faithfully side by side with the scorching, hot, blazing sun rays of steaming southern discomfort. I tried so hard, yet I just couldn't imagine, grasp, or comprehend the world of Sally, Dick, and Jane. In the classroom, school playground, and lunchroom, I couldn't read, play, or eat with Sally, Dick, or Jane. At a family reunion I even discovered that I had some blood relatives that looked and acted just like Sally, Dick, and Jane. At the end of the school year I realized I would in the strangest beats of my heart somehow perhaps miss Sally, Dick, and Jane throughout the summertime heat waves of my little ALL black world of Mississippi madness. . . . What a mystery to ponder and behold at such a young age. . .
(**Sherri Bester**)

Excellent poem by Oroki Rice about Dick, Jane, Sally, Mom, and Dad: nice white



family of the fifties. Until reading Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, I never realized how deep and penetrating the idea of the norm hurt those who were not of the norm—pink skin, blue eyes, Mom and Dad at home, “normal” family; not dark-haired, dark-eyed, single mother household. There were no drug addicts, gamblers, and prostitutes in those reading primers; no out of work dads or evicted from rental property families; no wars, no hide under the desk from the atom bomb. Sally, Dick, and Jane just smile away. . .

(**Jessica Bhan**)

I think Miss Oroki Rice [Odyssey '07] exemplifies freedom of expression. Many of her writings open my mind up to greater dimensions. She enables me to take a better look at my blackness.
(**John Shields**)



Candy Gonzalez Introduces Her Son

Stephen Taylor is 17 years old and presently enrolled at the Challenge Academy located at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin. He is on a military base. Before he left, he was drinking, smoking weed, fighting, and coming home when he felt like it. He

had dropped out of school. He was going through a lot of personal challenges, wouldn't listen to anything

I said or to anybody else. He would say things like, “You don't know me,” or “Yeah, uh huh,” never really listening.

Emily's been mailing copies of the Odyssey Oracle to Stephen at the Challenge Academy so he can read about the class and begin thinking about a college journey of his own some day. In response, he wrote something to share with others as to why he is presently enrolled in Boot Camp:

What got me here was first my temper and me not having much self discipline. Getting in fights led to court cases about 70% of the time, and me following my goofy friends or associates and never wanted to stay committed in school. Friends and fun were more important at the time. I just stopped doing my homework, got lazy, and turned in work that was usually not to my best abilities. I realize these things now. Some may say it's too late, but with how much my mind state has changed and where I'm at in my life now, I think the timing was perfect. . . . Ma, I love you. [Stephen's photo will appear in next Oracle.]



Japanese Wood Block Prints with Gene Phillips at the UW Chazen Art Museum

By Severn Anderson

During winter break I had the chance to see the exhibition *'Competition and Collaboration: Japanese Prints and the Utagawa School'* exhibit. These prints date back to the late 18th and early 19th centuries. There were over a hundred designers with the prolific school name attached to each artist's last name to show respect.

Block printing is a meticulous process that involves a number of different carved blocks catered to each color. The print dries, then may get another coat or different color. Some prints may have up to eight different colors, all organic from vegetables or fruits. During 1820 to 1830, a synthetic blue or "Prussian Blue" from Berlin became quite



popular with the Utagawa designers. The prints during this period were saturated with this tranquil hue, but after 1830 the artists were involved in a tough competitive market and began to use different techniques.

My personal favorite is part of a triptych by Utagawa Kuniyoshi circa 1847 called *'Graffiti on a Storehouse Wall.'* These are simple, not as intricate as the other prints, and depict caricatures of popular Kabuki actors. What I enjoy most are the facial expressions of the actors: some show complete disgust, annoyance, or enthusiasm at the graffiti. I enjoy these stylized prints because they are comical and remind me of surrealism or contemporary pieces. The composition of the actors suggests they are looking at the Edo storehouse graffiti, which includes a cat and some scribbling in Japanese with graffiti in red colors. The red cartouche at the top right of the print frames the design title.



What's in a Name?

Rosalyn Leontye Jones-Knight

My birth name was given to me by my parents.

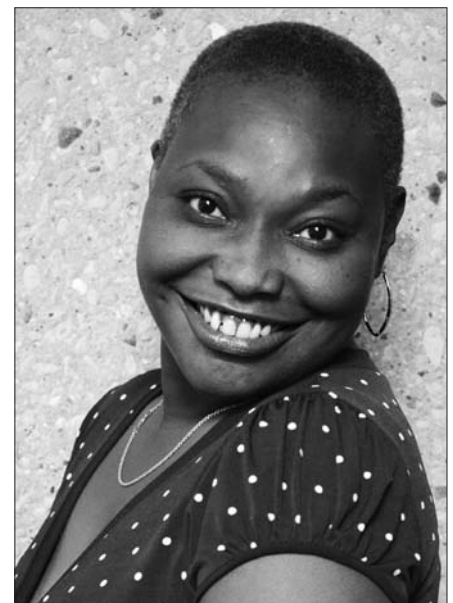
My mother chose the name Rosalyn because I reminded her of a rose in full bloom. My dad chose the name for a totally different reason. My dad had a great fondness for Rosalind Russell, the actress.

My middle name was selected, again, by my dad, who had seen Leontyne Price (famous opera singer) in concert and predicted I would be a singer, like my namesake.

My last name has been a part of me for longer than I can remember- Jones. Several clichés have followed the name Jones: *keeping up with the Joneses*, and *who wants to be like the Joneses?*

As for my siblings and me, we were taught to carry our name with character, dignity, and above all else respect.

Knight is the name I borrowed when I married, but when I divorced I decided not to return the name. RJ is simply a process of using initials.



Why Fund The Odyssey Project? Five Students Respond



Severn Anderson:

Funding the Odyssey Project helps an individual like me who has always been curious about Classic Literature and Philosophy to grasp the concepts of important literary works. The professors and alumni involved with the UW Odyssey Project provoke my mind with in-depth lectures, required reading, and vocabulary builders that give me the structure to write about the materials being covered. They encourage me to relate to these thoughts and principles so I can compare, discuss, and incorporate them in my daily social settings. Without the Odyssey Project, I really don't know where I would be today. I feel that it came at a time

when I really needed change but did not know how to go about pursuing it.

From the start of the fall semester until now I can honestly say that the Odyssey Project has painted a portrait for me. I viewed poetry as either black or white; now I see it in full-blown color. I was a bit like Ebenezer Scrooge. I would utter, "I hate poetry! It's boring." Now I can't get enough of Emily Dickinson or Walt Whitman! My mental foundation has been paved; I have an avid interest for researching and interpreting other literary works.

The Odyssey Project has shaped who I am today. I am more enlightened, not better than another, but with a universal awareness that I have not had before. I have questioned myself and my interactions, my moral obligations with society have been heightened, and I have renewed my karmic aspirations

when communing with nature. On a macrocosmic level I am a celestial body, revolving, evolving, aligned with the stars and planets drifting further out into opaque utopia.

When you decide to fund the Odyssey Project, you help individuals like me who honestly thought that the UW would never accept them. The generous hearts of my professors, advisors and donors changed this for me. Now I have a desire to pursue an English or Classic Philosophy degree and to go way beyond that.

When you fund the Odyssey Project, you encourage your Madisonian neighbors to expand and cultivate their minds. You not only help strengthen the community but invest in yourself as well.

Socrates declared in 'The Allegory of the Cave' "the law is not concerned with making any one class in the city do outstandingly well, but is contriving to produce this condition in this city as a whole, harmonizing the



citizens together, through persuasion or compulsion, and making them share with each other the benefit that they can confer on the community.” You lend a warm hand by leading a poor individual out of a dark, gloomy cave and into the light of education and companionship.

Funding the Odyssey helps a less fortunate person acclimate themselves to the large and intimidating UW system: especially someone with a tight budget that has not had a chance to visit or catch an exceptional play or event here.

Providing a donation to the Odyssey Project gives people a chance to prove their capabilities and to help steer them in a direction of change. The Odyssey and its affiliates produce more than a project, but a tight knit group of friends. The level of trust, hospitality, and love for one another will always remain and live in my heart. The friendships I have made have been a gift to me from the generous donors, professors, and alumni that have helped

beyond monetary donations.

I am glad to have been on this excursion or ‘odyssey’ with so many wonderful people. By funding the Odyssey Project, you give a gift for someone’s future.

René Robinson:

. . . I had read about the Odyssey Project in *Umoja*. It had pictures from their graduation and everyone looked so happy. I remember feeling a tingling inside emitting a feeling of joy in my heart. And right then and there, I had hope. Emily Dickinson writes:

*Hope is a strange
invention—*

*A Patent of the Heart—
In unremitting action
Yet never wearing out—*

*Of this electric Adjunct
Not anything is known
But its unique
momentum
Embellish all we own*

Hope! Yes, hope—a hope, which allowed me to realize that deep down on the inside, I had always wanted to go back

could help make me happy.

You see, I’m a lady that likes to have nice things; however, in order to do so, you need to have a really good job and in order to get a really good job, you need an education. There again in lies hope! And along with that hope came the realization that I needed to get up off my butt and do something about it; the realization that I need not be afraid; the realization that failure comes only after you have tried; the realization that nothing comes easy; the realization that hard work implodes self gratification. And for me, self-gratification equals happiness.

This brings me to my point, the answer to the million-dollar question: “Why Fund Odyssey?” Odyssey should be funded because there are a lot of people in the world just like me: people who as children made mistakes and poor decisions but have not lost hope; people who may not have had both parents in the home or no parents at all but have not lost hope; people who might have taken the least

to school but didn’t have the means to do so. Deep down on the inside I knew having an education





desired path but have not lost hope.

The Odyssey Project should be funded because it exudes hope: hope for those who refuse to give up; hope for those who refuse to be stuck at the poverty level; hope for those who want a better environment to raise their children; hope for those who want to make a difference; hope for those who want to give back. That's what the Odyssey Project does! It transforms hope into knowledge and as we all know, knowledge is power.

Personally speaking, I never knew the likes of William Blake, Henry David Thoreau, Socrates, or Gandhi. I never knew the difference between the Republican and Democratic Parties. The Federalist Papers, The Bill of Rights, The Stephen Douglas and Lincoln Debate: I had heard of them but that's about all. And slavery: My God, I'm Black and it hurts my heart to publicly admit it, but I never knew one iota about it. Therefore, to read an on-hand account by Frederick Douglass

was overwhelming yet at the same time enlightening. By the way, John Brown, get this, I actually thought he was black. Last but not least, Emily Dickinson: I never heard of her or her poems. May God bless her confused

soul!

Yes, this might be surprising to you, but in my world, where I come from, not knowing exists; it's sad but true.

So why fund Odyssey? Funding Odyssey is generational. Odyssey passes forward knowledge and learning skills that will undoubtedly be passed down to our children, our children's children, and their children. What better way to make a better America?

Candy Gonzalez:

When I first applied to be in the Odyssey Project, I did it more for college credits. I saw "free books; free class, food, childcare." I didn't really see a wonderful opportunity, a life changing moment, an example for my children and friends.

This class has changed my life for the better. It not only got me back to reading

"Any time you have an opportunity to make things better and you don't, then you are wasting your time on earth."—Roberto Clemente

and writing. I actually enjoy history, which has been and still is a challenge for me, but at least I'm motivated now to try to understand it. I've learned that using a dictionary is a tool to understanding.

We as a class not only gain credits, but we gain knowledge, a family, and that extra little boost to believe in ourselves. We can go through a very difficult book like Emily Dickinson's poetry and not get intimidated; we know how to figure out what we're reading. We've gained resources and have met some wonderful and passionate teachers/professors who really do care about our education.

Thanks to the Odyssey Project, my son now wants to go back to school. He had dropped out of school a year and a half ago. I also want to continue my education now. I never thought I'd go back to school, but now I can't see my Journey ending. I know it's just beginning.

With only a month to go to the end of the class, I'm feeling kind of hungry still. I need more, so I know I will have to find a way. So I thank all the past and future donors for funding this wonderful project. It is so needed and appreciated.

Naomi Kharrazihassani

In my personal opinion I think Odyssey should be funded because Emily is doing an excellent job giving the opportunities to people like me to continue their education. This program is a stepping stone to continue in our education and what we would like to accomplish at the end with our careers.

I am a single mother with two children and have the hardship of being able to pay for tuition at school for further courses. Without the grants that Odyssey receives, it would be impossible for me to obtain the necessary education to advance my career or social economic development.

Education is the key to success and the only way to break the cycle of poverty and underachievement. Financial assistance helps people like me change our lives forever. We in turn will give back to the community through our new knowledge and experience.

Being in Odyssey I got inspired by reading books that I never thought of reading in my whole life. The professors have helped me to develop critical thinking. Studying American history has furthered my understanding about this country . . . and its values and ideals.

Odyssey has not only supported me through the educational program but has also provided dinner every Wednesday. Sometimes I came

More Odyssey Alumni Awards

Mary Wells ('07), now on the Dean's List at MATC, has just won a 2008 Business Forum Scholarship. Kegan Carter ('04) has won not only a renewal of her 2007 Business Forum Scholarship but also a new UW Osher Returning Adult Student Award. Sherreallyum Allen ('05) has won an MATC Foundation Award. Denise Hardnett, winner of two Business Forum scholarships in the past, will receive her Associates Degree this spring. Many other Odyssey alumni are working their way toward degrees and winning recognition. Congratulations to all!

to class directly from my job and was unable to stop and get a bite, but at Odyssey we always get a hot meal.

My classmates are able to bring their kids and have childcare available. Isn't that wonderful? While the children are in childcare, we can get our education.

This program besides giving us the education also provides us with books and other materials. For instance, I have had a hard time seeing while reading. Odyssey provided assistance to purchase a pair of glasses for me.

Thank you, Odyssey, for all that you do not just for me but for all the other people like me.

Sherri Bester:

Why fund the Odyssey Project? When you decide to fund the Odyssey Project you slice the sun in half and invite me into the middle of a great light of warmth, beauty, and change from frozen blinding darkness. You open up a package of the moon and stars and place them within my reach . . . as a whole new world . . . of hope-filled stars

and moonlit guidance.

When you fund the Odyssey Project you befriend a once depressed, fearful, wounded woman to break out of years of hidden, secret hibernation in a lonely closet, from behind a closed door . . . tightly buried beneath bedroom walls of flooded fountains of drowning tears. Please realize when you fund the Odyssey Project you knock down walls of separation and isolation to invite a woman's searching, hoping, believing mind to come back out to dwell and be covered within mighty millions of paper pages of dreams with directions of how to become truth. I then see, smell, hear, taste and touch masterpieces of rainbow-colored pathways that lead straight into a golden pot of golden knowledge, wisdom and virtue. . . .

When you give funds to the Odyssey Project, you give waters of life and bread from heaven to a thirsty and hungry woman searching past mere survival to find clear, honest, righteous pathways of life towards freedom. . . .



Responses to *The Bluest Eye*

Lydia Diamond's (left) stage adaptation of Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison's novel about racism, abuse, incest, poverty, and family struggles triggered deep responses:

I felt sadness, anger, happiness, and sympathy during this play. This play hits home on a topic most people wouldn't care to admit still exists in today's society. Many of us try so hard to hide the low self-esteem and self-hatred we have.

That self-hatred or low self-esteem can come in many forms. It can be the color of your skin, size of your nose, or color of your eyes. Maybe for you it is the texture of your hair, the sound of your voice, or the size of your hips. . . .

How can we rid ourselves of the hate? We must start with ourselves and being truthful with what is deep inside.
(Jeffery McCarroll)

Experiencing "The Bluest Eye" made my skin cringe and at the same time made me laugh. To

use the word "relating" would be more than an understatement of how I received the character of Pecola!

At the tender age of six I was cursed with a disease that caused the skin under my eye to change to a pinkish color. That day I went to school I wanted to disappear . . . to not exist! I was branded as ugly and an outcast. I felt Pecola's bone chilling pain. When she was raped, I felt her pain.

It took every bone in my body along with God's strength to keep me seated in that chair. I had a hate/love feeling for the play.
(Ronnie Jones)

I believe the story being told was deep, very deep! It hit home so hard. While I was at the play certain scenes sent chills through my body. . . . I know how it feels to want to "just disappear" as a child, as a teenager, and still as an adult. . . . To all my classmates that share my pain or my survival, I love you!
(Candy Gonzalez)

It was something

that made me think about how I felt about living here, and all the hurt—for just being black!
(Rockameem)

It was my first play and it blew my mind. It is always hard to talk about sensitive issues such as racism, the evils of conformity, emptiness, and some of the barbaric norms of any culture.
(Haroun Omar)

The Bluest Eye was unbelievable! I found it disturbing, not because of certain things that happened in the play but the way they jumped from story to story, not going a straight path. . . . I wanted more!
(Brenda Tompkins)

I truly could identify with the characters; it made me feel as if I could be living in those times. . . . The play made me take a look at how I adored Shirley Temple growing up. . . . I recall times when I would perm my hair and comb it like a white man to make myself feel better.
(John Shields)

I too have gone through the same things that Pecola went through . . . of not being accepted by my peers or having them talk behind my back just so that they could fit in with the cool kids.
(Charrod Miller)



I'm used to reading novels and seeing movies with happy endings. Reading this novel made me feel depressed, especially after seeing the play. . . . I think the reason why Pecola hated herself was because of the fact that she was never loved by her parents and was ashamed. **(Nosihle Lukhele)**

I couldn't resist crying while watching how this little child's innocence is taken. . . . While watching this play, all my emotions came up. I was living the play in myself. **(Naomi Kharrazihassani)**

It is a very tough subject to watch depicted because it takes me back to a place of powerlessness. . . . All in all, it was very believable. **(Kevin Schoen)**

The play *The Bluest Eye* touched my spirit in places that had been buried so deep in the pit of my soul. Funny thing is I never wanted blue eyes; I just wanted respect and positive acknowledgment. Each day I walk this journey I am faced with some sort of racism. **(RJ Knight)**

I'm embarrassed to openly admit it, but the play inspired me to do so some self-reflection. I thought back and tried to recall if I had ever asked to be or wanted to be white. . . . The earliest I can remember was a Christmas that I didn't get anything and a neighbor who was white had so many gifts that they wouldn't fit under the tree. . . . But I'm so proud to be a black man. Being blessed by the lord as one of the most desirable beings on the planet 'ain't all that bad.' **(Dwayne Blue)**



The actors and actresses were amazing, but the story took me to a dark place where I never want to go again. **(Ozanne Anderson)**

I wanted to run! I wanted to hide! I wanted to fly! . . . I wanted to forgive! I wanted to love! I wanted to help end such pain forever! **(Sherri Bester)**

I felt happy, sad, and confused. I kept asking myself why Pecola hated herself so much. I felt like shaking Pecola and telling her to love herself. . . . The novel was very lyrically written. It sounded and felt like music. As I was reading it, I related it to Beethoven's music. . . . During the whole play, I experienced cathartic moments. **(Josephine Lorya)**

I very much enjoyed the narrator; her character interested me tremendously, especially her feelings towards the white dolls and her understanding that years later she would find out it was unhealthy. **(Jessica Bhan)**

I remember at the age of ten pointing to the dentist that under my teeth was a brown pigment which I believed meant something was wrong. He looked at me, smiled, and told me it was my pigment. "But your gums are pink," I said. He kindly told me that on me it was healthy and on him healthy was pink. I didn't feel bad about myself. "Oh, he's white and he has pink gums; I'm brown with brown gums." I'm glad nobody made me feel inferior. **(Ivonne Ramos)**

Toni Morrison is a wonderful writer. Mrs. Breedlove is so bitchy and reminds me of my grandmother. I love the part when Claudia thinks her mother's voice "was like an earache in the brain." **(Severn Anderson)**

It seems yet again that we are products of our environment. The novel states that Pecola's family was born into ugliness. We are born as we are, but unfortunately society and those around us define who we are. **(René Robinson)**

Listening Hard to Langston Hughes

Dream

*Last night I dreamt
This most strange dream,
And everywhere I saw
What did not seem could ever be:*

You were not there with me!

*Awake,
I turned
And touched you
Asleep,
Face to the wall.*

*I said,
How dreams
Can lie!*

But you were not there at all!

This poem says, “Hold fast to your dreams” and continue to reach for your goals because without dreams life can be

broken, unfulfilling, and stuck on the ground. Be vigilant in trying to achieve your goals, for when desire is gone, life will be cold, like a field where nothing can grow.

When I read the line “Hold fast to dreams,” what comes to my mind is to hold on to the hope of a better tomorrow, for without that we cannot succeed. My life once was like a barren field frozen with snow, but with hope and a dream of re-educating myself, I can see new possibilities. It all started with a dream.

(John Shields)

Deferred

*This year, maybe, do you think I
can graduate?
I'm already two years late. . . .
Maybe now I can have that white*

*enamel stove
I dreamed about when we first
fell in love. . .
Me, I always did want to study
French. . . .
All I want is to see
My furniture paid for. . . .
Montage
Of a dream
Deferred.
Buddy, have you heard?*

This poem is about struggles and how dreams are always being postponed or “deferred.” I empathize . . . because I hated my high school, dropped out, now am going to the UW in my thirties; but how will I afford it? The want for his “white enamel stove” is akin to my want for a “white shiny macbook”!

(Severn Anderson)



Dream By Mia

Mother to Son

*Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal
stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the
floor—
Bare.
But all the time
I've been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now—
For I've still goin', honey,
I've still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no
crystal stair.*

As a mother describes her life's hard journey to her son, she lets him know that she is still in life's struggle too. She tells her son of hardships in her life and reminds him to look upon her now as she continues "goin'" and "climbin'." She tells her son not to turn back or give up during his struggles.

My life is lived alongside my son and my mother, and I am constantly reminded of their strengths. As Joshua has learned to walk just recently, he is a bit wobbly, and sometimes he falls. Almost every time he rights himself without any upset.

My mother, too, has a bit of arthritis. She's older, recovering from a broken hip, and asks me to come watch her physical therapy session. "You should have

seen me walk across the room. Wait. I'll get Nick [the physical therapist] and I'll show you!" This enthusiasm she reserves just for me.

These are the instructions upon the lessons in life that will and are my inheritance.
(**Jessica Bhan**)

The message the mother is trying to give the son says there are plenty of obstacles in this life that require inner strength to overcome: "tacks . . . and splinters . . . and boards torn up." Her point of view represents the maternal concern any mother has for her son: to grow up to be an honorable and self-righteous human being who respects life.

The dramatic dialogue she uses puts emphasis on her personal hardships, but she says: "I've been a-climbin' on . . . reachin' landin's . . . turnin' corners." The mother is calming her son's fear of unpredictable events in the statement, "And sometimes goin' in the dark / Where there ain't been no light." She has had no guideposts mapping out an upward direction. After the horrible failure of Reconstruction, blacks had no knowledge of the realities of a free-market society and had to fend for themselves.

"So boy don't you turn back," she says to him, and goes on to tell him that he would disrespect her image of him if he gives up. She believes he has the same courage as she has tried to summon up to take care of him: "And life for me ain't been no crystal stair." Since this refrain is repeated twice, much like a blues

stanza or a church song, I can only relate it to the stairway to heaven theology.

Crystal is like fine china; both are considered part of a lady's kitchen. The reference suggests she has not been treated like a lady in her lifetime. What upsets me is that she does not come right out to say to her son, "The world thinks black women are second class and black men are third class, so your struggles will be harder than mine. They will try not to teach you, they will try to lynch you, and they will try to work your body to the bone, but I will always be here for you."
(**Tom Gardner**)

In this poem Hughes writes of the wisdom that a mother passes on to a son. . . . The poem reflects both the hardship and suffering in life as well as the support and love his mother had for him.

Although my real mother died of cancer when I was a baby, I can relate this poem to my relationship with my grandmother, who was also very caring and supportive of me. My grandmother (Anselma) encouraged me to continue school and pursue my degree. She mentioned all the time, "One day I won't be around you anymore."

The only thing I'm going to have to get me through life and to have more opportunities is an education.
(**Naomi Kharrazihassani**)

Freedom

*Freedom will not come
Today, this year
Nor ever
Through compromise and fear.*



*I have as much right
As the other fellow has
To stand
On my two feet
And own land.*

*I tire so of hearing people say,
Let things take their course.
Tomorrow is another day.
I do not need freedom when I'm
dead.
I cannot live on tomorrow's
bread.*

*Freedom
Is a strong seed
Planted
In a great need.
I live here, too.*

*I want freedom
Just as you.*

*Wear it
Like a banner
For the proud—
Not like a shroud.
Wear it
Like a song
Soaring high—
Not moan or cry.*

Langston Hughes in this poem is tired of waiting. He has been waiting for freedom too long, and he keeps hearing people say things may change tomorrow. He also says that he too has the right as any other man to stand

and own land. He says he needs freedom now, today, and not when he is dead. He cannot wait for a tomorrow because he has already waited too long.

This poem reminds me of Martin Luther King Jr.'s letter to the Alabama clergymen from Birmingham Jail where he said he has been told to wait. He has been patient for so many years and has finally realized that the wait means never. If change needs to happen, the best time is today or we might not get a chance. We need to take action while we can.
(Nosihle Lukhele)

Still Here

*I've been scared and battered.
My hopes the wind done scattered.
Snow has friz me, sun has baked me.
Looks like between 'em
They done tried to make me
Stop laughin', stop lovin', stop
livin'—
But I don't care!
I'm still here!*

The seventh line, "But I don't care!" spoke volumes to me. When I had a lot of hospital procedures done as a child, I had so many doctors touching my private parts that after awhile the child who is at the doctors' mercy says, "But I don't care! Poke and prod those metal objects at me. After all, I'm a Nobody!"

I could also relate to Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*. . . . She became an "invisible child" like myself.

The eighth line, "I'm still here!" reminds me of any survivor of molestation, rape, medical procedures, alcoholism, drug abuse, child abuse, and neglect. No matter what your lot is in life, and no matter what cards are dealt to you, shout from the mountaintops, "I'm still here!"

(Debby Loftsgordon)

This poem is about never giving up. I see this theme recurring a lot in Langston Hughes' poems. I related this poem to slavery. Slaves were scared, they were battered, and they were outside in the snow . . . freezing . . . because they had no clothes. In the hot summer they burned but they still picked the cotton in the fields. Their owners tried to make them stop

loving, stop living, stop laughing, basically to dehumanize them, but they didn't let that affect them. Today the products of those slaves are living, laughing, and loving life.

(Josephine Lorya)

Ku Klux

*They took me out
To some lonesome place.
They said, "Do you believe
In the great white race?"*

*I said, "Mister,
To tell you the truth,
I'd believe in anything
If you'd just turn me loose."*

*The white man said, "Boy,
Can it be
You're a-standin' there
A-sassin' me?"*

*They hit me in the head
And knocked me down.
And then they kicked me
On the ground. . . .*

He talks about how the Klan beats him to force him to say he believes in "The Great White Race," basically saying to him that whites are superior to blacks. They also say he's getting smart with them when his answer to their question is that he'll believe in anything if they let him go.

This poem just makes me so angry because it's so true. This and even worse things really happened. I just can't understand how people can think they're better than someone else, especially because of the color of their skin.

(Candy Gonzalez)

Walls

*Four walls can hold
So much pain,
Four walls that shield
From the wind and rain*

*Four walls can shelter
So much sorrow
Garnered from yesterday
And held for tomorrow.*

Four walls could have so many different meanings. It could be your home, a bedroom, an office, a closet, a bathroom, or even a jail cell. What goes on in that room is the pivotal aspect of the poem. That per se is the sorrow and pain one feels within that room, which could be brought on by your husband, your boss, what you're going through, or what you have or have not done. Unfortunately, we have a tendency not to let those feelings go. Yesterdays and tomorrows can go on for years.

(René Robinson)

A Song to a Negro Wash-woman

*Oh, wash-woman,
Arms elbow-deep in white suds,
Soul washed clean,
Clothes washed clean, —
I have many songs to sing you
Could I but find the words.*

*Was it four o'clock or six o'clock
on a winter afternoon,*

*I saw you wringing out
the last shirt in Miss White
Lady's kitchen? Was it
four o'clock or six o'clock?*

I don't remember. . . .

*Yes, I know you, wash-woman.
I know how you send your*

children to school, and high-
 School, and even college.
*I know how you work and help
 your man when times are
 hard.*
*I know how you build your house
 up from the wash-tub
 and call it home.*
*And how you raise your churches
 from white suds for the
 service of the Holy God. . .*

*And I've seen you in church a
 Sunday morning singing,
 praising your Jesus,
 because some day you're going to
 sit on the right hand of the
 Son of God and forget
 you ever were a wash-
 woman. And the aching back
 and the bundles of clothes
 will be unremembered
 then.*
Yes, I've seen you singing.

*And for you,
 O singing wash-woman,
 For you, singing little
 brown woman,
 Singing strong black woman,
 Singing tall yellow woman,
 Arms deep in white suds,
 Soul clean,
 Clothes clean,—
 For you I have many
 songs to make
 Could I but find the words.*

This poem is about a woman willing to sacrifice her own comfort to ensure the security of her family, while all the time maintaining her dignity and keeping her head held high.

For she knows “we do what we have to in order to do what we want” (The Great Debaters).

This poem should be the spoken anthem for every parent. . . When it comes to our children and their needs, there are no second thoughts on what we as parents won't do.

The students who are a part of the Odyssey Project are directly related to this poem as well. In the face of ridicule and adversity, we all know that we must press on in this program.

Bettering our futures is the focus, so when people look at us older ones, getting on the bus with our backpacks on, we hold our heads up, our chests sore from the pride!

(Valerie Williams)

Let America Be America Again

*Let America be America again.
 Let it be the dream it used to be.
 Let it be the pioneer on the plain
 Seeking a home where he himself
 is free.*

(America never was America to me.) . . .

*O let my land be a land where
 Liberty
 Is crowned with no false patriotic
 wealth,
 But opportunity is real, and life is
 free.
 Equality is in the air we breathe.*

(There's never been equality for me.
 Nor freedom in this “homeland of
 the free.”) . . .

*I am the poor white, fooled and
 pushed apart,
 I am the Negro bearing slavery's
 scars.
 I am the red man driven from the*

*land,
 I am the immigrant clutching the
 hope I seek—
 And finding only the same old
 stupid plan
 Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush
 the weak. . . .*

This poem should make a lot of people have a reality check. If you cannot see the very same problems in America today that Hughes wrote about in this poem, then you have not been paying attention. Does every child in this great land have access to decent healthcare? Is anyone going to bed hungry tonight? Can each of us truly express who we are in public without fear of reprisal?

“Every” means both “each” and “all.” Unless we can show that each of us is free—free from hunger, free from poverty, free from discrimination—, then all of us are in denial. If the American experiment fails, it will be because we were afraid to get rid of injustice. It will happen if we are afraid to live up to our ideals. . . .

This poem speaks to me of our need to work together, our wish to eradicate injustice, and our belief that what the Declaration of Independence states should be realized. America has problems, many of them deep-rooted. It also has great citizens. Hughes gives us a cry, a call to become part of the solution. If you can't hear his plea, perhaps you are part of the problem.

(Sheriah Quartey)



Illustration by Sherri Bester

My People

*The night is beautiful,
So the eyes of my people.*

*Beautiful, also, is the sun.
Beautiful, also, are the souls of*

my people.

I believe that when Langston Hughes wrote this poem, he was simply saying that black is beautiful in every way. The night is compared to the dark color of Afro-Americans, and the stars

are compared to Afro-American eyes. The sun warms the earth, and I believe Langston Hughes is saying Afro-Americans have warm souls or hearts. Hughes says so much with so little words. I believe in this poem.
(Albert Watson)



CLASS OF 2007-2008 GRADUATION CEREMONY

THE ODYSSEY PROJECT



WEDNESDAY, MAY 7, 6:30-8 PM
RECEPTION FOLLOWING

Tripp Commons, Memorial Union
800 Langdon Street, UW-Madison Campus

You are cordially invited to attend the graduation ceremony for students of the UW-Madison Odyssey Project Class of 2007-2008. Project Director Emily Auerbach and Writing Coach Marshall Cook will present certificates attesting to students' successful completion of six introductory UW credits in English. UW System President Kevin Reilly will make congratulatory remarks.

From September to May, students in this rigorous humanities course have discussed great works of literature, American history, philosophy, and art history while developing skills in critical thinking and persuasive writing. The evening will include brief remarks or performances by each graduating student; recognition of supplemental teachers Jean Ferraro, Gene Phillips, and Craig Warner; acknowledgment of Odyssey Project donors and supporters; and music and refreshments.

Web site: www.odyssey.wisc.edu