

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

Odyssey ORACLE

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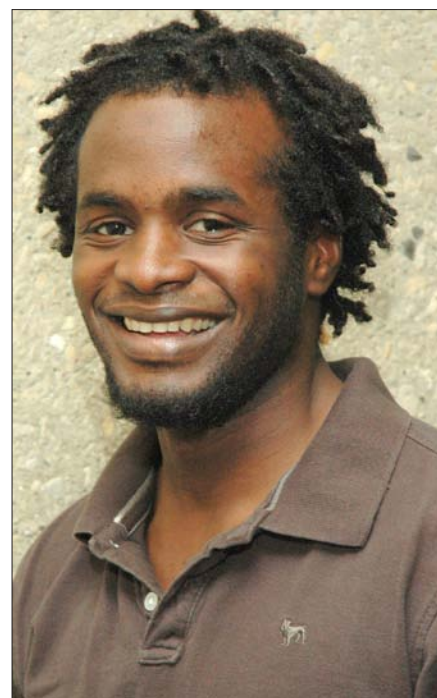
A Look back at Nigeria and "Freedom"

By Haroun Omar

Faces around me wore different kinds of emotions. In some I saw fear, excitement, fatigue, frustration, and in others just plain confusion. If you had looked into mine, you would have seen boredom, confusion, maybe even anger. Making a ton of hand gestures, our team leader yelled, "Row! Move it! Row! Row! Faster!" He urged us on, encouraging, pleading, threatening us to increase the pace so as to widen the gap between the teams behind us, catch up to the teams ahead of us, and win the competition. He worried a lackluster performance might invite ridicule, victimization, or even punishment, an unofficial rule that was executed more often than not.

We were competing for the annual "Bush Camp Watermanship Trophy." The setting for "bush camp" that year was Jos, Plateau state, Nigeria. It is easily the coldest region in Nigeria.

Wet, cold, and tired, I found all of this frankly made no sense. I thought to myself, most fifteen year olds around the world are learning how to date and here I am. I hated all of it. The majority of my teammates were fifteen and some a year or two older. We were all in Nigerian Military School (NMS), Zaria, Kaduna state. It is notorious for





its brutality but widely admired for its academic standards. The general perception of military schools is that they produce bright and disciplined young men.

Although I was born and lived almost all my life to that point in Nigeria, my heart was everywhere else—in all the places my parents, uncle, and aunts had lived or visited, and also in the movies with all the stars—as elusive and exotic as James Bond, as rugged and free as John Wayne in his Westerns, as wild, charismatic, and defiant as Marlon Brando in *A Streetcar Named Desire* or *Wild One*. Their world was fun. They were not required to salute every adult or stand rigid “at attention” every time an elder brother walked by. The grown-ups in “this world” were cooler; they were not as robotic. It was a free world and people were not as restrained

as they were in Nigeria. Even the kids I saw in “this world” could act stubborn but their teachers and parents hardly yelled or punished them. They occasionally gave them time outs, which was not bad at all. I yearned to be in “this world.”

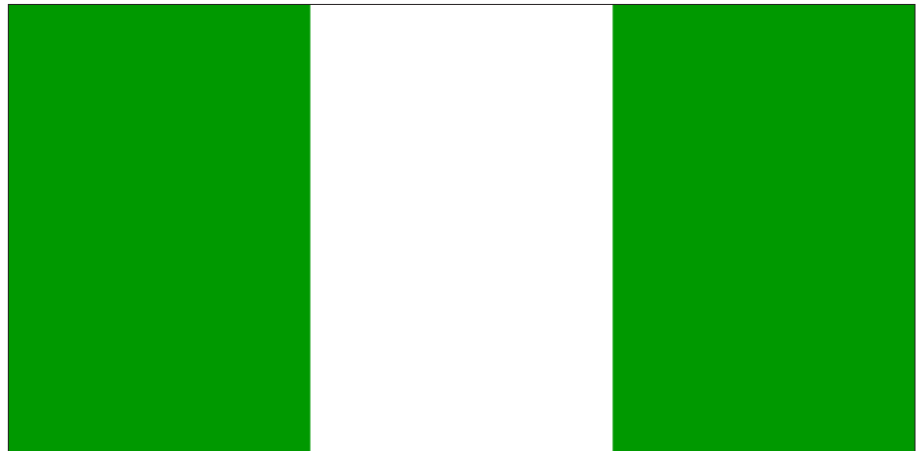
When I was about 11 years old my parents thought it a wise decision for me to go to high school in Northern Nigeria. It was going to be an opportunity for me to learn my culture and have a

fun adventure. At the time I was thrilled by the prospect of going to military school. Visiting my father’s ancestral land was grand. What an exotic experience it was going to be, I thought to myself.

However, not long after I got to military school the reality of the situation sank in. This was no fun at all; it was a hellhole. I was in seventh grade; eighth graders and above were permitted to discipline or punish me. Military rules and traditions dictate that everyone must obey a superior. I was subordinate to thousands of people, students in grades above me, and also instructors and officers. The officers were superior to all students, but they were all zombies, stiff in mind, and corrected us at every turn if we went out of line. Everyone yelled and barked out orders like rabid infected dogs. I hated being ordered around. “Discipline” was overrated.

Despite all my reservations, resentment, and disregard toward military school and all its rules, I still managed to graduate. Finally I’ll have an opportunity to travel the world, I thought. My first stop was New York and then Washington D.C.

I loved D.C. Daily subway



trains ran through three different states: DC, Maryland, and Virginia. The subway train bubbled with life. I liked the air and look on people around, their swagger, arrogant walk, and confidence. They were venturesome. Everybody went about his or her business. Like the subway train, I would plow along and go everywhere and do whatever I please, and nobody dared to bother me. I found my new sense of freedom intoxicating.

With little or no restrictions in the “free world,” I soon lost my way. The practice of sleeping and waking up late became my routine; experiments of drinking and smoking became habits. Wandering the streets with friends without a purpose became my daily ritual. I got into fights and trouble often. I did not study or do anything progressive. I refused to write or study for any standardized tests or apply to any college. My parents found me irresponsible, rebellious, and out of control. Truancy had become my life. Three years had passed, and this was a revolving theme until one night.

I was arrested for driving under the influence. Too drunk to comprehend the severity of my situation, I sang as the cops drove me to the precinct. I woke up the next morning petrified. In the midst of all kinds of haggard people, I did not look any better. This was not the “time out” for a 5-year-old boy for throwing tantrums. This was the kind of “time out” a 23-year-old man got for being stupid. It was a wake up call. After all, the “free

world” had rules, laws, and limitations that finally caught up with me.

My guardians bailed me out the next day. My cousin and aunt were in tears, and my uncle was furious. I never felt so embarrassed; I was ashamed of myself. I said to myself that I would never come back here again . . . ever!

Sober from my rude awakening, the next couple of weeks I pondered my life. The memories of military school came flooding back. How lucky I really was to go to NMS. Maybe if my parents had not sent me there, I would have been worse. I probably would have been a drug addict or something hideous.

I believe military school tamed “the beast” in me. Granted sometimes it was tough, but a thousand kids went through the same thing and most came out fine. When you made a mistake in military school, they corrected you because they wanted to make you a better person. It was not the military school that was wrong—it was I. I was blinded to all the good it offered because my perception of freedom was perverted.

Reminiscing back to bush camp in Jos, we won the watermanship competition. The setting was very beautiful. Jos is easily one of the most beautiful and

exotic places in Nigeria. It had a lot of mountains and fertile and colorful hills. We were all happy and we owned bragging rights for a whole year. NMS was not always grim and gloomy. It was memorable and adventurous too.

Now I am in school trying to earn some credits through the Odyssey Project, and I am not as impatient anymore. I love and respect my parents and value people. I value even the experience of hardship. I miss NMS, Nigeria, the food, and the people. I miss how nurturing everybody was; I hope to visit sometime in the near future. As I see it now, my time there was magical!

If I were to see the officers today, I would thank them because they cared about my well-being and future. Freedom, perhaps, is what we make of it. Freedom can either be a prison or a liberator. We owe it to ourselves and people around us to make responsible choices. A wrong perception of freedom can be devastating.



Discovering Emily Dickinson

J. 248

Why—do they shut Me out of
Heaven?
Did I sing—too loud?
But—I can say a little “Minor”
Timid as a Bird!

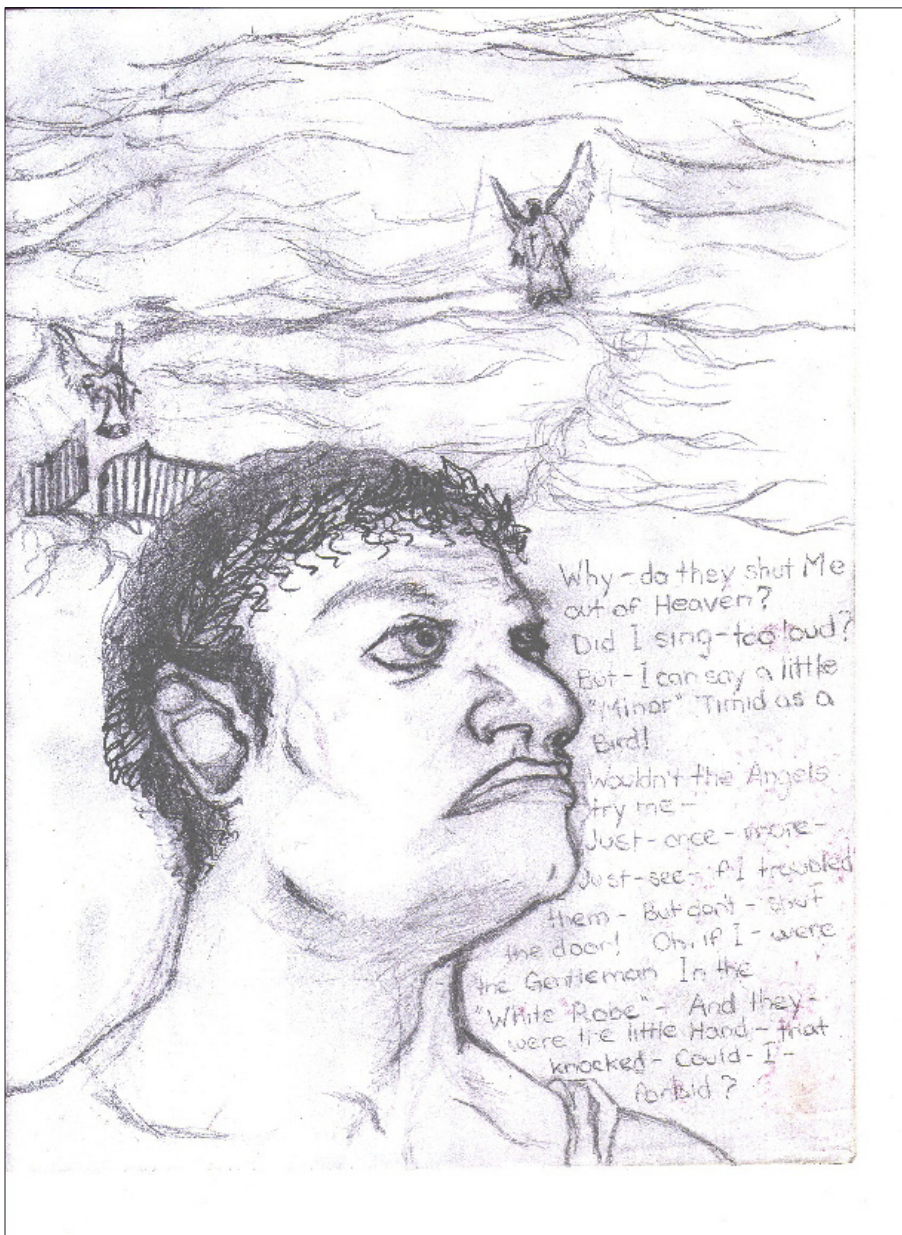
Wouldn’t the Angels try me—
Just—once—more—
Just—see—if I troubled them—
But don’t—shut the door!

Oh, if I—were the Gentleman
In the “White Robe”—
And they—were the little Hand—
that knocked—
Could—I—forbid?

She wanted to go to heaven,
but was there something so wrong
that she did that they wouldn’t
let her get in? In the end, she

questioned
if she could
ever be that
cruel if she
were God.
She would
not turn
others away
like she felt
she had been
done. God to
her should be merciful.

She was probably challenging
the church system, priests, and
some of the restrictions placed
on women, especially outspoken
women. She’s saying they
should not condemn her for
not conforming to some of the
corrupt and oppressive doctrines.
(Loretta Smith)



By Brenda Tompkins

J. 254

“Hope” is the thing with
feathers—
That perches in the soul—
And sings the tune without the
words—
And never stops—at all—

And sweetest—in the Gale—is
heard—
And sore must be the storm—
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm—

I’ve heard it in the chilliest land—
And on the strangest Sea—
Yet, never, in Extremity,
It asked a crumb—of Me.

Emily Dickinson creates
an image for a feeling. Birds
symbolize resilience and

freedom. Even when a bird is not where it is most comfortable, it still sings; it still has hope and joy. . . . The bird is optimistic even when the weather is adverse.



I enjoyed the poem because it communicates the importance of being hopeful. . . . I never thought of an animal having hope, but why not? Does an animal hope for adoption when it is at an animal rescue? Even though an animal does not speak, it communicates hope through its eyes, wagging tail, or saliva. **(Ivonne Ramos)**

. . . Hope rests in our soul the way a bird rests on its perch. In the next few lines Dickinson explains how a negative person that destroys hope feels (“sore must be the storm / That could abash the little bird”). Nowadays we would refer to this individual as a “hater.” This person destroys hope with the storm of negativity for themselves and others. In the lines at the end of the poem (“I’ve heard it in the chilliest land—and on the strangest Sea”), Dickinson is letting you know that there is always a reason to have hope. It is heard in the most cold and sad places. Hope exists for everyone as long as you don’t let it go.

This poem really hit home with me because in that life that I have led so far it seems as if hope

is all I have sometimes. I know that life is not made to be perfect, but when you’re constantly struggling and wanting to give up,

you hope for change. I really lean more towards my faith instead of hope. But I do feel that those two go hand in hand. I love this poem because at the end of the day when you have all these haters trying to make you give up, you can think of this poem and imagine that sweet song of hope that a bird never stops singing... telling you to never give up.

(Sheriah Quartey)



Hope is an invisible yet visual realm of nature and natural human existence that soars throughout our soul’s nostrils just as a breath of pure, fresh, clean air keeps us alive. The metaphor in the poem is the beautiful, free, innocent bird with feathers. Hope is perched deeply within the soul’s core singing a mysterious rhythmic beat beyond the soul’s comprehension of words, persistent to voice its message, sweet, humble, and comforting to the soul’s ear. . . . It melts the coldest, hardest, chilliest heart to hear hope’s song. Hope doesn’t die even in the deepest, most dreadful, drowning sea waters. . . . Hope invisibly soars asking nothing of the one who hopes except to BELIEVE! . . .

On a personal level this poem reminds me of my grandmother when she spoke to me about God and how he might seem invisible yet, like hope, roams deep within the soul. . . . My grandmother used to sing me a song: “His eye is on the sparrow so I know he watches me.”

(Sherri Bester)



J. 255

*To die—takes just a little while—
They say it doesn’t hurt—
It’s only fainter—by degrees—
And then—it’s out of sight—*

*A darker Ribbon—for a Day—
A Crape upon the Hat—
And then the pretty sunshine
comes—
And helps us to forget—*

*The absent—mystic—creature—
That but for love of us—
Had gone to sleep—that soundest
time—
Without the weariness—*

She speaks about death in a way that when we die she’s heard that there is not pain, that our bodies get colder until we’re gone. Even though everything seems so dark and gloomy the day someone we care about dies, she then says that another brighter day will come and help us move on and not be so sad. Even

though that person may be gone from our presence, they are no longer suffering. They're asleep now, and the love is still there.



I felt this poem deep in my stomach. I just went through this—losing someone unexpectedly that I cared for deeply. I know he's not suffering, and that gives me comfort.

(Candy Gonzalez)

J. 324

*Some keep the Sabbath going to Church—
I keep it, staying at Home—
With a Bobolink for a Chorister—
And an Orchard, for a Dome— . . .*

*God preaches, a noted
Clergyman—
And the sermon is never long,
So instead of getting to Heaven,
at last—
I'm going, all along.*

Emily Dickinson's "Some keep the Sabbath" refers to her personal communion with God. Dickinson's "Church" is under His heaven, with the bird as the chorus. Her enjoyment of listening to the bobolink and looking over the orchard and up to her sky is her heaven, and she is not waiting till death to enjoy it. She is in heaven alive and now.

This poem reminds me of William Blake ["Everything

that lives is holy"]. I also think God is part of everything. To know each creation is to know God and heaven and peace. No

one ought to dictate the rules of how individuals can commune with their creator.

(Jessica Bhan)

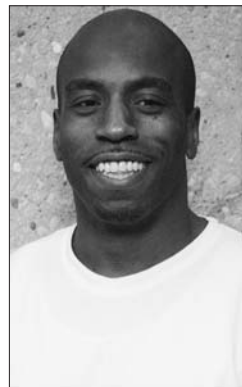
. . . When I was a kid I'd tell my mom, "I don't want to go to church. How come we can't let the Lord know we love him right here on the couch watching the Packers play?" I've always found it strange that people actually pay for salvation. If anything in the world should be free, it's air and salvation.

"Going all along": this last line makes a brother smile. After years of behavior that I thought would keep me from walking through the pearly gates, it seems I've been in heaven all this time, right here on earth.

(Dwayne Blue)

J. 338

*I know that He exists.
Somewhere—in Silence—
He has hid his rare life*



From our gross eyes.

*'Tis an instant's play.
'Tis a fond Ambush—
Just to make Bliss
Earn her own surprise!*

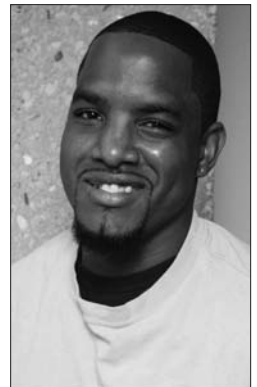
*But—should the play
Prove piercing earnest—
Should the glee—glaze—
In Death's—stiff—stare—*

*Would not the fun
Look too expensive!
Would not the jest—
Have crawled too far!*

The title and the first stanza would leave one to believe that Dickinson was talking about God; however, by the time the reader finishes, he or she will see that she is actually talking about death and the grim reaper.

This poem talks to me on the level of always wondering about whether or not I have done all there is to do when my number is called.

(Charrod Miller)



Emily Dickinson here is confused about the existence of God. First she says that she knows he exists and he is hiding himself somewhere. Then she says God is probably playing a kids' game of hide and seek:

hiding and not showing himself so we can not be all sure he really exists. I also think that Dickinson here is angry at the fact



that she knows God exists but she has never seen or touched him. She even says that this game that God is playing is not fun for her anymore.

Yes, that can be a little frustrating sometimes. . . . I wonder why he wants us to believe he exists and yet won't show himself. It can even raise a



By Naomi Kharrazihassani

few doubts. The doubts can get even worse in hard times when no matter how much you pray you may feel you are on your own. (Nosihle Lukhele)

The use of "He" may be a reference to a joyful life. She writes "He" has hid his rare life from our gross eyes, as if life itself had hid its joy from her own life. . . . Her use of the words "bliss," "glee," and "fun" in the poem seems clearly to refer to joy and happiness in life. Her choice of words such as "ambush," "surprise," and "glaze" indicates that any joy and happiness would be sudden, brief, and unexpected. In the end, joy and happiness escape her. This is suggested when Dickinson writes "wouldn't the jest have crawled too far," as if to mean that any fleeting, momentary happiness in her life had been just a joke.

I understand how she feels. When I think back to my childhood, I had events in my life that were not happy moments. As a child I was so sad that I didn't have parents. Knowing that I was an orphan put a lot of pain in me. I saw my classmates at school when their parents came to school on Mother's Day or Father's Day. When I participated in the folklore dance or other events at school or night time, I was the only one whose parents never came to take pictures. . . .

As an adult woman, I married and suffered for a long period of time in my marriage. I was always sad and kept my pain inside me. . . . Then I got divorced

after a couple of years. I was alone with my two small children. I always asked myself why I had to suffer and could

not find happiness. I didn't know I would make it this far or find a family in the Odyssey class. (Naomi Kharrazihassani)

J. 383

*Exhilaration—is within—
There can no Outer Wine
So royally intoxicate
As that diviner Brand*

*The Soul achieves—Herself—
To drink—or set away
For Visitor—Or Sacrament—
'Tis not of Holiday*

*To stimulate a Man
Who hath the Ample Rhine
Within his Closet—Best you can
Exhale in offering.*

This poem seems to be about finding your inner happiness. The wine is something that makes the body feel good, but not as good as a happiness that comes from the soul. I believe in the last part of the poem, the closet represents the soul and the Rhine



is a wine that is making a person feel good. So if somebody already feels good in their soul, you can't really do anything to bring them down.

(Mandisa Hayes)

J. 442

*God made a little Gentian—
It tried— to be a Rose—
And failed—and all the Summer
laughed—
But just before the Snows*

*There rose a Purple Creature—
That ravished all the Hill—
And Summer hid her Forehead—
And Mockery— was still—*

*The Frosts were her condition—
The Tyrian would not come
Until the North— invoke it—
Creator— Shall I— bloom?*

The first line of "God made a little Gentian" reminded me of myself. God made a child with spina bifida. Will that precious baby and child survive? Only God knows.

The third line—"And failed—and all the Summer laughed"—reminds me of Rudolph the red nosed reindeer. The other reindeer wouldn't play any reindeer games with him and

laughed at him. I too could relate to that: I had many kids not wanting to include me in recess games because I

couldn't run as fast as the other kids, and sometimes it was because I wasn't white enough.

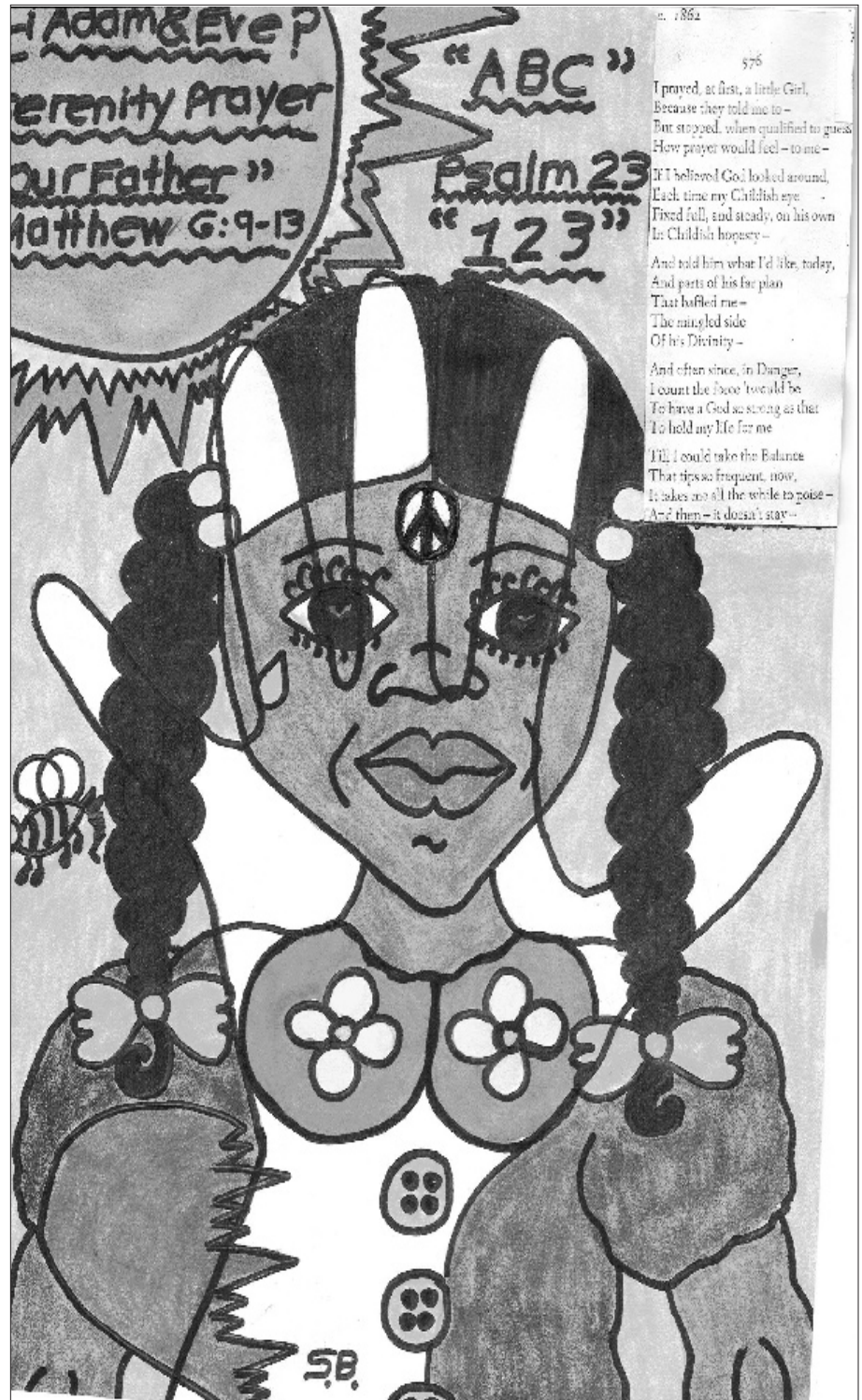
The last line spoke to me as well: "Creator—Shall I—bloom?" The flower is asking, "Do I have permission to live?"

The Creator is saying, "Yes, just bloom where you are planted."

I decided to "bloom" where I am planted—too.

(Debby Loftsgordon)

God made the little purple



By Sherri Bester



mountain
flower, the
gentian. It tried
to be something
it isn't, a rose.
When it failed,
summer in its
floral majesty
mocked.
Right before
the snows,



the gentian finally bloomed so
beautifully and magnificently
(Tyrian Purple) that it took over
the entire hill. The summer
couldn't look because of the
sheer enormity of the sight, and
the mockery stopped. . . .

We all have our season.
We are born to be who we are.
Though others mock, be who you
are because you are part of the
whole. We may not be in control
of when our season comes, so
be faithful. God, is it my time to
bloom?

(Kevin Schoen)

J. 543

*I fear a Man of frugal Speech—
I fear a Silent Man—
Haranguer—I can overtake—
Or Babblor—entertain—*

*But He who weigheth—While the
Rest—
Expend their furthest pound—
Of this Man—I am wary—
I fear that He is Grand—*

I think she is using the word
“fear” in place of “respect.” She
to me is talking about the respect
she feels for someone who takes
the time to listen and then uses
their words carefully—not just

talking to
be talking,
but to use
discernment,
to give
thought to
what they
say, and to
know the
power of
words.

I would like to be a man of
frugal speech—to be able first to
listen and understand how to talk
to someone so my words would
have power to bring about clarity.
(Rockameem)

A man of little words is feared
because it's hard to know what
he's about. He can not be figured
out like someone that blurts
out all that is on his mind. In
contrast, the haranguer that loves
speaking to large audiences or a
babbler that has nothing to say
exposes his worth and is not a
complicated
opponent.

I like this
poem. It
encourages
me to be
more frugal
with my
words. It's
wise to think
more, speak
less, and
reserve my words for beneficial
conversation.

(Ozanne Anderson)

The more you talk, the less
you really know. The person
that is silent is the one to watch.



This is the
observant one;
therefore, he
takes in more
knowledge.

I have often
gone on and
on about a
subject I felt
knowledgeable
about. After
I took the time to shut up and
listen, I found out that I didn't
know as much as I thought.
(Valerie Williams)



J. 632

*The Brain—is wider than the
Sky—*

*For—put them side by side—
The one the other will contain
With ease—and You—beside—*

*The Brain is deeper than the sea—
For—hold them—Blue to Blue—
The one the other will absorb—
As Sponges—Buckets—do—*

*The Brain is just the weight of
God—
For—Heft them—Pound for
Pound—
And they will differ—if they do—
As Syllable from Sound—*

In “The Brain is Wider than
the Sky,” Emily Dickinson
expresses the importance and
greatness we can show through
our brain. She lets us know that
no matter what, we never can
learn too much. Through the line,
“The one the other will contain,”
I feel she is expressing that we
can learn anything from the world
with no limit; therefore, our



“Hope is the thing with feathers, that perches in the soul, and sings the tune
without words, and never stops at all.”

-Emily Dickinson

“brain is wider than the sky” and “deeper than the sea.” This poem gives everyone a spectacular view on what his or her brain can absorb and conquer. She also continues with weighing our power of the brain as like the strengths and powers of God himself.

This poem made me think of the mind in a new way. It opened me to the thought that the powers of our brains are endless and can be great when used to their full potential. When I finished reading it, I felt that I could achieve anything that I set my mind to. . . . Being in the Odyssey class and reading poetry about there being no limit to what our brain can achieve is truly inspirational. . . . As long as I look at my learning experience with endless possibilities, I will never stop feeding my brain with more knowledge.

(Sheriah Quartey)

J. 668

*“Nature” is what we see—
The Hill—the Afternoon—
Squirrel—Eclipse—the Bumble
bee—*

*Nay—Nature is Heaven—
Nature is what we hear—
The Bobolink—the Sea—
Thunder—the Cricket—
Nay—Nature is Harmony—
Nature is what we know—*

*Yet have no art to say—
So impotent Our Wisdom is
To her Simplicity.*

In this poem, Emily Dickinson uses contrast and contradiction. First she says that Nature is what we see; then she contradicts herself by saying that Nature is Heaven. She repeats the pattern with things we can hear, and then contradicts herself again. She finally concludes that Nature is all of the above, and that our understanding is too limp to describe it.

This poem makes me feel small in a vast place. I am in awe of all the great beauty around me. My knowledge of Nature’s majesty is so limited. This poem also reminds me of William Blake’s poetry about children at play on a green grassy knoll, which he contrasts with other children playing in dirt or working inside chimneys.

(John Shields)

J. 816

*A death-blow is a life-blow to
some*

*Who, till they died, did not alive
become;
Who, had they lived, had died,
but when
They died, Vitality begun.*

Some people live their whole life dead, not actually in the physical state of dead, but more of an emotional and mental state of death. They live their lives being powerless nobodies. It’s not until they die that they actually become someone—someone with the power to live and endure.

This reminds me of Emily Dickinson herself. She knew that death was inevitable, as it is to all. She also knew that through her poetry she would live forever. By her leaving her poetry around to be published, vitality did begin for her. She is an active force who died in 1886 but still lives.

(Ronnie Jones)

J. 1193

*All men for Honor hardest work
But are not known to earn—
Paid after they have ceased to
work*



In Infamy or Urn—

I believe Ms. Dickinson is saying that all men throughout their life work hardest towards honor, which can either be a tangible symbol signifying honor, a state of being honored, or the quality of being honorable and having a good name. However, honor is not something that one can be paid for while working towards. She explains that payment for such hard work comes after one has ceased to work through infamy (a state of extreme dishonor; evil fame) or in an urn (after death).

This poem spoke to me because I believe we as a people spend an entire lifetime working to seek another's approval. Why? Is there any profit in doing so? Typically honor is acquired when one ceases to care what another thinks and finds it within him or herself. People are going to talk about you no matter what, good or bad, alive or dead.

(René Robinson)

J. 1272



*So proud she was to die
It made us all ashamed
That what we cherished, so
unknown
To her desire seemed.
So satisfied to go
Where none of us should be,
Immediately, that Anguish
stooped
Almost to Jealousy—*

Emily Dickinson speaks of someone who is prepared to give up all pursuits in life and pass away. All the pursuits of the living mean nothing to the individual. These pursuits are of vanity to this dying person. Those continuing living are touched by an anguish and jealousy because what is of utmost importance to those living means nothing to the one dying.

Sometimes I have stopped in the middle of my life to analyze my wants and desires. It is as though I am preparing to die, but this is only a transformation. If tomorrow I was granted a huge portion of money, I wouldn't go on a wild shopping spree. I'm sure I would become a great philanthropist. What was once important to me is no longer.

(Jessica Bhan)

J. 1317

*Abraham to kill him
Was distinctly told—*

*Isaac was an Urchin—
Abraham was old—*

*Not a hesitation—
Abraham complied—
Flattered by Obeisance
Tyranny demurred—*

*Isaac—to his children
Lived to tell the tale—
Moral—with a Mastiff
Manners may prevail.*

Abraham was told to kill Isaac, the young lad, as a sacrificial offering. There was no first or second thought about the matter. Abraham, being older and wiser, did what God told him to do.

God was flattered by Abraham's obedience and therefore declined to use Isaac as a sacrifice.

Isaac lived to tell his children this story. The moral of his story is if a Mastiff (large dog—powerful force) were to walk up to me, I would humble myself in its presence.

It's the same thing with God: we must humble ourselves in his presence.

(RJ Knight)



“He ate and drank the precious Words, his Spirit grew robust; He knew no more that he was poor, nor that his frame was Dust. ”

-Emily Dickinson

J. 1587

*He ate and drank the precious
Words—*

*His Spirit grew robust—
He knew no more that he was
poor,
Nor that his frame was Dust—*

*He danced along the dingy Days
And this Bequest of Wings
Was but a Book—What Liberty
A loosened spirit brings—*

This poem is about a man who begins to truly live once he starts to read. The words and concepts allow him to temporarily forget that he is but a man, living in poverty. Instead, these words allow him to soar, to experience other levels of reality.

I chose this one because in many ways it is about me. My mother would read to me every night. It started when I was still in the womb and continued until I was four years old. At that point, when story time came she handed me the book and told me to read. See, the beautiful thing about reading is you can be anybody who ever lived, go places you've never been, and do the most amazing things. Ever since she handed me a book, I've been reading. I now read some two to three books a week for leisure in addition to my free research I do every day.

There's a reason why I say that



my mother was a saint, and it's because she released the shackles of my mind. My mother couldn't give me the material world, and she knew that; instead, she gave me the universe. She taught me how to fly and travel through dimensions.

(Justin Wilson)

J. 1677

*On my volcano grows the Grass
A meditative spot—
An acre for a Bird to choose
Would be the General thought—*

*How red the Fire rocks below—
How insecure the sod
Did I disclose
Would populate with awe my
solitude.*

I believe this means on the surface we all wear masks. The volcano is the surface of who we are, and this is what most people see: a meditative spot. This is the perfect place for most individuals to start to get to know a person. It is the most common spot, a general thought, as Ms. Dickinson explains. However, there is another side deep within this volcano that is not stable, rather unsettling, and disturbed. The red fire rocks within this volcano or person. The pain that is waiting to escape leaves a path of pain and destruction along the way, touching and destroying everything, man and woman.

This poem I can relate to because I don't like for people to see or know my pain. I try to hide my pain and do not like to ask for help. I feel alone all the

time because I feel no one understands me truly. My mother used to tell me all the time I was like a volcano because I kept things inside, not sharing my feelings. She also said that one day I would erupt and it would not be good.
(Jeffery McCarroll)

**J. 1763**

*Fame is a bee.
It has a song—
It has a sting—
Ah, too, it has a wing.*

This poem is full of metaphors. Like bees, fame is everywhere. . . . The third line describes the price of fame... This poem reminds me of Hollywood today, especially the whole Brittany Spears saga. We the audience may wish we were in her position as far as fame and money are concerned, but her personal life as we can see is literally stung like the bee.

Fame does not protect anyone from the hardships of the world.
(Josephine Lorya)



Whose self-portraits do Odyssey students want on their walls?

The Van Gogh self portrait expresses the feelings I have been having lately. The swirls in the swirls to me would symbolic confusion and inner turmoil. He looks like he is ready to explode in the picture. Almost like a can of pop that has been shaken, he needs to release his stress and frustration.

(Mandisa Hayes)

I would pick Albrecht Durer. There's something about the cold stare and the way his face has no affect, but it holds you. It also gives me a comforting feeling because it reminds me of Jesus.

(Valerie Williams)

Frida Kahlo's self-portrait stood out to me, with her expressionless face, except for the arc in the unibrow telling a story of anger. The most interesting image in this painting is the circle of

thorns around her neck and the blood oozing from the cuts.

This is a portrait of pain she tries to keep hidden inside, shown by the expression of

her face. However, the thorns around her neck cause the pain to be exposed. I try to hide my pain, but the people that truly care for me can see my pain, no



Albrecht Durer self-portrait



Van Gogh self-portrait

matter how hard I try
not to let it show.

Upon finding more
information out about
the artist, I believe the
true reason the painting
speaks to me is because
of the guilt I feel. I've
cheated on and have
abused women in my
past, but most recently
I've neglected a very
special woman. This
painting I would want
as a reminder of the

pain I've caused and
to ensure that I never
repeat my foolish
actions.

(Jeffery McCarroll)

The eyes of Frida
Kahlo's "Self-Portrait
Dedicated to Dr.
Eloesser" would follow
you anywhere around
the room. The unbrow
frames the eyes, making
them formidable. I like
the look of observation
in her eyes, as if at
once she is truth while
searching for its twin.

A look of personality,



Rembrandt van Rijn self-portrait

intelligence, and beauty are derived from the self-portrait. The flowers on top of her head may not only reflect the natural beauty of Mexico but define her as a beautiful woman who reflects upon beautiful things.

But her earring of fate and necklace of thorns tell me that being a woman also has its disadvantages. If her fate is to be a martyr, her strength will not fade. Darkened skies and the force of nature may restrict her, but her pride will never falter because her hair is never out of place. She always wears it like a crown. (Tom Gardner)

Rembrandt's portrait shows him wearing a hat and appearing to look sad and lonely. The background is dim and gloomy looking. I'd hang this picture on my wall to remind me to do whatever I can while in my youth to avoid looking like him when I grow old. (Albert Watson)



Frida Kahlo self-portrait

What's in a Name?

Elizabeth Angelique Red Cloud Krohn

Elizabeth means "consecrated to God." My mother named me Elizabeth after my great-grandmother's middle name. Angelique was the name of one of my mom's favorite actresses from the 1970s. She thought the name was beautiful. It was supposed to be my first name, but my grandmother wanted it to be my middle name so that Elizabeth would be first. Red Cloud is my father's last name--a strong Native American last name. I was told Bear Red Cloud, my great grandfather, was a medicine man.

Meet the Donor: Chris Wagner

librarian (lī-brāf-ē-ən) n. 1) a custodian of the library 2) one trained in library science.

Odyssey student Rockameem writes, “Chris Wagner of the South Madison library is so much more than those mundane things: she is a person of vision with sight and insight, ability and agility.”

Chris Wagner donates to the Odyssey Project in many ways: she sponsors the Odyssey class in the Harambee Center adjoining the library and arranges for overtime staff to keep the building open; she repeatedly contributes her own money to help pay for performance tickets, textbooks, and other needs; she helps Odyssey students and their

families find books and conduct research; and she sponsors workshops at the library on topics related to Odyssey material.

Originally from Peoria, Illinois, Chris came to Madison in 1976 to go to graduate school in Social Work. She worked at the Rape Crisis Center, Basic Choices, and the Alliance for the Mentally Ill until receiving a second master’s degree in Library Science.

When asked why she chose her second field, Chris responded, “I became a librarian because I loved helping people find information in any format and to encourage reading, writing, and performing art by making a wide range of material available

to help people find what they need to know and how to express themselves. I think of libraries as community-building when they are at their best. Unfortunately, they can also be ‘another brick in the wall’ when they are at their worst.”

Longtime library patron Rockameem not only believes Chris epitomizes

librarians at their best but writes that he would give her his “Jesus Walking” award. “Much love I’ve got for you, Chris!” he exclaims, “a love for your spirit, your soul, and your mind.” In particular Rockameem wants to share his gratitude that to Chris for her role in “putting up the space for me and for my class, the 2008 Odyssey Project.”

Rockameem wants Chris Wagner to know that because the efforts of Odyssey Project supporters like herself, he now feels “the power to know, to think, to write, to become so much more than I was, because of this education” and chance to “encounter Socrates, William Blake, Plato Shakespeare, the Memorial of the Cherokee Nation, James Madison, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, Henry David Thoreau’s Civil Disobedience, and so much more! I’m hooked on Socrates. I know Mr. Frederick Douglass. I’m coming out of my cave.”

Another Odyssey student, Sherri Bester, shares Rockameem’s use of hyperbole when describing Chris Wagner. “Chris Wagner to me is a soft, fluffy, warm pillow where I have laid my head to rest, pray and dream for 18 years!” Sherri exclaims. Sherri envisions Chris in the South Madison community as “an unbreakable steel bridge reaching into deep dark caves leading out into unlimited blue skies of freedom for ALL!”

Chris chose to work at a branch library because she wanted to get to know her patrons



by name and make a difference in the community. “I am passionate about learning,” she admits, “people’s right to express themselves in the arts, especially at a community, non-professional level, where some of the most meaningful art happens.”

Chris appreciates the fact that students in the Odyssey Project are striving to overcome obstacles and insecurities. In her own life, she confesses that until she was 35, she “would rather die than speak in public.” She almost didn’t attend her graduation from library school because of fear of getting on the stage to get her diploma; she went only because of her husband’s coaxing, and the library director had to help her onto the stage.

That all changed one day when she was asked to speak about a program at the South Madison branch library called Second Chance for children who couldn’t afford to pay their fines. “I really believed in this program, and the idea of my speaking was to get other librarians to adopt it. I spoke without fear (OK, with a little fear) and have been speaking ever since.”

Why does Chris support the Odyssey Project in particular? She

comments, “My late husband used to say that ‘an adult educator is someone who knows how to arrange the chairs in a circle’ . . . that the BEST learning takes place when we sit face to face and learn from one another. That’s the kind of learning that Emily

facilitates in Odyssey—the kind of learning that is EDUCATION, not teaching. There is a place for teaching, but there is a bigger place for EDUCATION!”



Jacob Lawrence series: The Library

Ebenezer Scrooge and My Mother

By Maria Torres

I believe that we all at some point in our life have experienced the feeling of being an Ebenezer Scrooge. Personally I think I've acted in the past like Mr. Scrooge towards my mother.

I had a difficult upbringing. It all started when I was 8 and my mother walked out on my father, my brothers, and me. She left us not because my father was a bad person, from what I remember, but for another man. She spent a lot of her time drinking and partying. I lived with our father until I was about 11. That's when my mother asked my father to take her back. He did so only because he thought that would be best for us, but in no way would it change their relationship.

My father was a migrant worker, and that same year he went up north to work and left us with our mother. She in turn told us that our father had left us and wasn't coming back. She moved us to a different town in Florida, and everything changed for us. She continued to drink and was living with a boyfriend who beat her all the time.

I hated my mother for drinking; I hated having to put up with her at all when she was drunk; I hated seeing my brothers go through this. I moved out at age 12 to a close friend's house. Although they treated me well and gave me a roof over my head, it wasn't the same as to have your own place to call home. My father visited me often. I really didn't see my brothers very much; they had no choice but to

stay with our mother. My father wasn't stable because he migrated so much to work. Basically we were on our own.

My father passed away when I was 13 years old, and that really hurt me very much. I didn't have anyone to turn to but my best friend and her family. I couldn't imagine the world without my father. I blamed my mother for his passing. I hated her for screwing up our lives.

I continued to live with my friend until I was about 16. That's when my mother and two brothers came looking for me to see if I wanted to move to Wisconsin with them. She said she had stopped drinking and had left her boyfriend. I so wanted that "being at home" feeling that I agreed to move with them, but the drinking continued. By now it had already passed on to my 13-year-old brother, and my 11-year-old brother was on his way to juvenile detention and eventually to prison. All I could think of was how I wished I was married so I could have my own home to take my brothers with me.

So at age 18 I married my first husband, had a baby, took my brother in, had a second baby two years later, and put all my dreams aside just to feel the warmth of a home that I had never felt. Since I was a child I had always said I was going to be a lawyer. I kept going to school just to keep that dream door open. I have changed my degree choice to becoming a Social Worker. . .

I divorced in 1996 and



moved in with my mother. I struggled so much to stay together for my boys' sake, but I too eventually started partying and following the same path as my mother. My determination of not wanting this for me and my kids quickly helped change my thoughts. That's when I met my current husband, got myself together, started working, and saw everything just fall into place. Even my mother stopped drinking.

She was then diagnosed with renal cancer. I started to spend more time with her, but most of that time was spent on negative conversations, finger pointing, and a lot of blaming. I was basically a scrooge to everything that involved her. I had very little if any respect for her. I felt she owed me a lot. I felt that she was to blame for all the wrongs that went on with my brothers and me. I also blamed her for all the screwed up children she had—nine in total, aside from

my father's children. The girls lived the same life she once had lived, and the boys were basically homeless bums. In short I basically treated her very badly, but she meant the world to my boys. She treated them with lots of love. She always tried to show me that same love, but I was too busy being so negative that I didn't even realize it. . . .

In 2005 after I gave birth to my younger son, Ivan, my life once again changed. My mother had a stroke and was diagnosed with cancer cells in her brain. I was so heartbroken because the possibility of losing her to death was now a reality. I took her in and took care of her because I felt a nursing home couldn't do the job right. I was her hands and feet. I watched over her. I cared for her. I finally realized how much I really loved her; I realized how much I really needed her. I took that time to ask her for forgiveness. I cried with her. I begged her to find strength to get well.

Who was I to judge her life? Who was I to blame her for the choices she had made? Who was I to judge without knowing what she had been through? Now that I was an adult

with my own children and own life, who was I to dare disrespect the one person that brought me into this world?

I wanted to take the hands of time and move them back, but I knew that I couldn't. All I could do was pray, ask for forgiveness, and show her I was there for her with love and with the love of my children. I let her know that God loved her and that she was worthy of all that love. She also asked for forgiveness. Taking care of her was nothing compared to what I should and could have done for her in life.

Sadly on October 9, 2005 she passed away surrounded by my family, my brother, and friends. I was so devastated. But at the same time I was at peace with myself. I so dearly wished I could go back in time. I now know how much life I wasted pointing fingers and blaming that I didn't realize how precious her life was to me. I vowed that I would not live her life, that I would always be there for my children to show them, to guide them, to bless them, to give them a home, to give them all of what I have within me. Even having said that, I still struggle with that inner me that just doesn't do a good job at being a mother or that person who just wants to give up. Sometimes I wonder if my mother felt some of this at one point. How I miss her laughs, her way of showing love, and all that made her my MOTHER.



Letters to and about Dr. King

I had often heard of you and your work but never as intimately as your *Letter from Birmingham Jail* conveyed. It not only captivated me but inspired and taught me as well. It melted the iceberg in my heart and rekindled the fire of hope and love. It amazed me how you responded in the face of so much hatred and hypocrisy with such eloquence, patience, wisdom, hope, love, and honesty.
(**Haroun Omar**)

This letter let me know that as an African American I do not have to be filled with bitterness, hatred, and frustration over the continued existence of racial discrimination. I have learned that there is a more excellent way of love and nonviolent protest. Knowing that you wrote this profound letter while sitting in jail and using whatever means you could get your hands on should give encouragement to all individuals who feel defeated at the first sign of consequences. . . . I have a newfound confidence in my right to protest, my right to demand fair treatment, my right to not obey unjust laws and suffer the consequences, and my right to not feel ashamed of going against what others have accepted. "Right defeated is stronger than evil triumphant."
(**Sheriah Quartey**)

Thank you for your unprecedented convictions and faith in the belief people can and should govern themselves, and thank you for being so eloquent against deceptions and bigotry. . . . Race, class, and gender in the United States are still used to keep the people under control. . . . We the people have a lot of work to do. To say that you are missed would be an understatement. It's as if we have lost our way—going backward. But as you know, there is hope and faith. Like Jesus, you came to show us the way!
(**Rockameem**)

When you wrote in your letter about the two opposing forces in the Negro community, I recognized myself in your description of complacency, and I felt as if you were telling my story. Because I lived in Wisconsin, the major issues of segregation and the brutal nature of racism really did not affect me as directly as my Southern brothers and sisters, and therefore I did not actively protest injustice. . . . I could feel your spirit of love and integrity.
(**John Shields**)

How could the clergymen think that your being in Birmingham was "unwise and untimely"? If you were to sit back and wait for the "right time," nothing would have been accomplished. Direct

action needed to be taken immediately in this hatred-filled city.
(**Jack Crawford**)

You are a man of character and great charisma. You took the time, not worrying about the consequences, to write a letter expressing your yearning for peace among blacks and whites.
(**Josephine Lorya**)

I firmly believe that we should all stand up for the miscarriage of justice. I have many medical complications of my own due to the birth defect of Spina Bifida, and I myself have been discriminated against by the very institutions that you mention in your letter. I almost didn't receive proper medical insurance by the courts. . . . I also was discriminated against by schools that believed I "cost too much" and "needed too many extra accommodations."
(**Debby Loftsgordon**)

I am 35 years old and have never before had the opportunity to read this letter. I have attended Public Schools my entire school age life and never heard of the letter. I now have two high school age children (a junior and a senior) that have not read this letter either. I think our children need to know how not that long ago we all weren't able to eat together,

play together, or ride the bus together in harmony. I believe this letter shows us how we as people need to stand up for what we believe in. . . . I hope you will add Dr. King's *Letter from Birmingham Jail* to the high school curriculum as a required reading before graduation.

(Candy Gonzalez)

As an African American who has heard stories about King for as long as I can remember, I feel I have been cheated out of some very valuable information: I had never heard of *Letter from Birmingham Jail*. . . Dr. King says "Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly." . . . In my opinion, the letter in its entirety should be included in the civic and government test that is required before graduation from high school.

(Brenda Tompkins)

"Letter from Birmingham Jail" inspired a growing national Civil Rights movement. Think of how it could inspire this generation. . . . Jesus had the message, Gandhi had the method, and Dr. King carried it out. Non-violence should be taught to the "Gangster Generation," but where are the teachers? **(Elizabeth Red Cloud Krohn)**

Everyone knows that in 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue, and that he did it in the Nina, Pinta, and the Santa Maria. Since almost



everyone and their mother can recite this, then how come not everyone knows that Martin Luther King Jr. should be addressed as Dr. King? Everyone remembers President Kennedy's "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country" from his 1961 inaugural address, but how many people could tell

where the saying "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" came from? . . . Dr. Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" should become required reading for all graduating high school seniors.

(Charrod Miller)

The King's English: The Rhetoric of Letter from Birmingham Jail

Contributed by Sherri Bester and René Robinson

Parallelism

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

"It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority, and the segregated a false sense of inferiority."

"There is no greater treason than to do the right deed for the wrong reason."

"Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust."

Repetition

"This 'wait' has almost always meant 'never.' We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional rights. . . I guess it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say 'wait.'"

"Was not Jesus an extremist for love? . . . Was not Amos an extremist for justice? . . . Will we be extremists for hate or will we be extremists for love?"

Rhetorical Question

"Isn't segregation an existential expression of man's tragic separation, an expression of his awful

estrangement, his terrible sinfulness?"

Allusion

"Just as Socrates felt it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis, an objective appraisal, we must see the need of having nonviolent gadflies . . . that will help man to rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood."

Irony; Paradox

"We can never forget that everything Hitler did in Germany was 'legal' and everything that Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was illegal."

"An individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust and willing accepts the penalty by staying in jail to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice is in reality expressing the very highest respect for the law."

Simile

"Like a boil that can never be cured as long as

it is covered up but must be open with all its pus-flowing ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must likewise be exposed . . . to the light of human conscience in the air of national opinion before it can be cured."

Metaphor

"Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear-drenched communities."

"They have carved a tunnel of hope through the dark mountain of disappointment."

"So here we are . . . with a religious community largely adjusted to the status quo, standing as a taillight behind other community agencies rather than a headlight leading men to higher levels of justice."

Personification

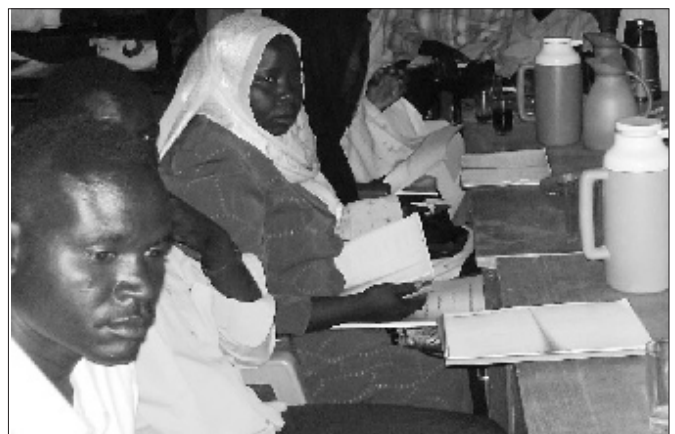
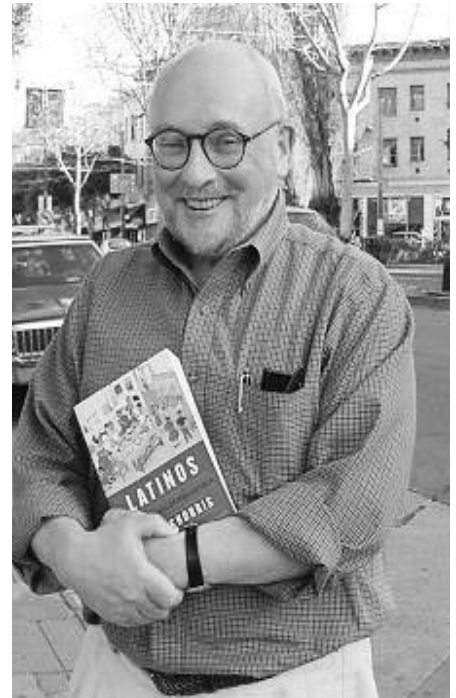
"Yes, I love the church; I love her sacred walls."

"I have watched white churches stand on the sidelines and merely mouth pious irrelevancies."

Plato in Darfur

The UW Odyssey Project got its inspiration in part from the Clemente Course in the Humanities founded by Earl Shorris in New York in 1995. Through exposure to great works of philosophy, history, literature, and art, adults begin a journey out of poverty into power. "I will make you dangerous," Earl Shorris tells students at homeless shelters, prisons, American Indian reservations, and community centers.

Variations of the Clemente Course are now found throughout the U.S. and in many nations. The most recent course just started in war-torn Darfur. In these photos, students are beginning to study Plato in Arabic.



First Grade By E. Oroki Rice, '07

1959

Chicago's Westside

Theodore Herzl Public School

Teacher: Mrs. Cecilia Castile

She's pretty, she's colored.

It's her first year as a teacher.

We students are many varied
shades:

Chocolate, Coffee, Tan, Russet-
Potato, High-Yellow,
Dark, Real Dark, Black.

Mrs. Castile presents us with a
used reader, delivered
from the white schools.
The reader is named Look and
See.

It is accompanied by a workbook
named Think and Do.

In my reader and workbook I
meet new friends, pink
friends.

There's Dick and Jane, their little
sister Sally with curly,
yellow hair, their Mom
and Dad, their cat, Puff,
and their dog, Spot.

I love school.

I love Mrs. Castile.

I love reading, but something
seems wrong somewhere.

I spent years with Dick, Jane, and
Sally, their Mom and Dad,
their cat, Puff, and their
dog, Spot,

Years watching Tarzan swinging
through the jungles of
Africa colliding with
people who could be my
cousins,

Years feeling uncomfortable
watching my dark-hued
classmates root for the
cowboys killing off the
Indians,

Years singing My Country 'Tis
of Thee, Sweet Land of
Liberty, even as Four
Little Girls were killed
while in Sunday School in
a Birmingham church.

Mrs. Castile did a remarkable job.
She nurtured wounded spirits
with love and care
through recycled Look
and See readers and Think
and Do workbooks.

Mrs. Castile gave me a gift that
was never tarnished in
all the damp, dark, dusty,
desolate, sometimes
damning places that I
have traveled since 1959.

Mrs. Castile determined that I
would read.

When I read, I look.

When I look, I see.

When I see, I write.

When I write, I think.

When I think, I do.

SALLY DICK AND JANE



Two American Writers Tackle Cultural Stereotypes

Barbie Doll

By Marge Piercy

This girlchild was born as usual
and presented dolls that did
pee-pee
and miniature GE stoves and
irons
and wee lipsticks the color of
cherry candy.
Then in the magic of puberty, a
classmate said:
You have a great big nose and fat
legs.

She was healthy, tested
intelligent,
possessed strong arms and back,
abundant sexual drive and manual
dexterity.

She went to and fro apologizing.
Everyone saw a fat nose on thick
legs.

She was advised to play coy,
exhorted to come on hearty,
exercise, diet, smile and wheedle.
Her good nature wore out
like a fan belt.
So she cut off her nose and her
legs
and offered them up.

In the casket displayed on satin
she lay
with the undertaker's cosmetics
painted on,
a turned-up putty nose,
dressed in a pink and white
nightie.
Doesn't she look pretty?
everyone said.
Consummation at last.
To every woman a happy ending.

Shirley Temple Went Native

By Linda Rosenthal

Shirley Temple went native
yesterday.
It was the last thing I expected.
She had sat in the nude for many
years,
because I lost her dress
and never found or replaced it.
With her stiff legs spread straight
out,
wearing only that stupid, perfect
smile,
she reminded me of how the
police found
the corpse of Marilyn Monroe.

I never particularly wanted that
doll,
And why I
kept carrying
it, I do not
know.
She lived her
cute life, not
saying a word,
Perhaps
feeling that
silence was
survival,
until one
Saturday
morning, as I
was leaving
for my
shamanism
workshop, she
asked to tag
along.
She sat in the
car, waiting
through the
sand mandala,

soul retrieval, and the return of
my lost body parts.
When it was over, she begged to
wear in her hair,
one of the macaw feathers
hanging in my car. . . .

She cackled, "No more
goddamned Good Ship Lollipop."
I gave her tattoos, shells, and
beads,
she borrowed my crow's foot
to put a mojo on the neighbor. . . .

For the first time in years, I really
looked at her,
She'd been traveling with me for
a long time,
She belongs . . . where she can be
seen
and definitely heard.
Or, when her time comes, buried
with honor.



Shirley Temple

Pecola Breedlove in Lydia Diamond's adaptation of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

It don't matter how hard I try, my eyes is always left. And I try. Every night I pray for God to deliver me blue eyes. I have prayed now going on a year, but I have hope still. I figure God is very busy, and I am very small. To have something wonderful as that happen would have to take a long, long time. Blue eyes like Shirley Temple, or Mary Jane, on the Mary Jane candies. Or Jane in the primer at school.



Sheriah brought her mother along to see "The Bluest Eye." Thanks to the University Theatre and American Family Insurance for donating tickets enabling 80 Odyssey students, alumni, and relatives to attend this production.



The Bluest Eye By Susan Brubaker Knapp

I Love Odyssey By Juanita Wilson '07

I love Odyssey because before Odyssey I always felt like an outsider when I was among a group of people. I now feel that I can contribute to the conversation and feel that I am no longer a slow learner. I feel that I can accomplish whatever I set out to do. I am happy most of the time now.

I am going to be a lifelong learner.

I feel that I am not alone anymore if I need help with a problem. I feel that I am loved by my teachers and classmates. I feel that life is beautiful this year and the rest of my life because of Odyssey. I feel that there will always be help available to me. I feel blessed.

