

# Odyssey Oracle

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## Memorable Decisions and Moments

I think the best decision I ever made was making the choice to change the people or group that I hung out with. I say this because as a group, they cared about nothing really in life. They stayed doing goofy and horrible things. Now most of them are dead or in jail or ever living with regret for some of the things they did.

If I had continued with them, I would bet I would not be writing this. I wake up every day and thank God that I made that decision. It has made me a stronger person as a whole.

(Bradley Barner)



In the late 1980s, I became the most hated person to walk the face of the earth. Grandmothers and priests alike cursed me, as did my very own mother. I interrupted family dinners and quiet time, and it was always too late or too early. I would be asked to hold the phone, only to hear a dial tone minutes later or made to feel very badly. Spending six months at that position was a cruelty I would not wish on my worst enemy. In fact, if my children were hungry and we had no other income, I would rather they collect my life insurance. Needless to say, I will never be a telemarketer again.

(Yetta Harris)



I don't make a regular habit of regretting my actions. I believe that every event, big or small, is connected. That being said, I have done a few things that I would rather not have.

When I became pregnant in 2003, I told everyone the great news: friends, family, co-workers, absolute strangers on the street. "How are you today?" they would ask. I



would respond, “With child, that’s how I am.” I’ve always been an incurable blabbermouth. Working in the Human Resources department of a large corporation with a strict confidentiality policy has tamed me down a bit, but I still have the tendency to share a little too much information. Early into my pregnancy I was asking for name suggestions and for room color and diaper brand choices. You would have thought I was 30 weeks along instead of only three.

When I miscarried at 11 weeks, I immediately regretted that I had shared so much personal information with so many people. It was hard enough losing the child I had envisioned, but because of my over-anxious announcing, I now had to be painfully reminded of it over and over. Since nothing anyone could say would make me feel better, I wished they wouldn’t say anything at all.

Every day it was another cliché. “God does everything for a reason” would make me feel picked on. “How did that happen?” would make me feel guilty. “Oh, you poor thing” would make me feel weak. “I’m sorry for your loss” would remind me that I had lost something irreplaceable. Every kind comment, sympathetic question, or solemn look would depress me even more. I just wanted to mourn alone.

The only reason that I could be glad that I talked about it was because other people shared their own stories about miscarriages. It comforted me greatly that most of the women I talked with had children after a miscarriage. Because they could speak freely about it, I was reassured that I would certainly someday get over this difficult event. The large amount of people I spoke with that had experienced miscarriages made me feel a lot less defective and defensive.

After my experience with a miscarriage, I learned that the wisest thing you could say to someone going through it would be, “I’m here for you. Tell me what you need.”

**(Katie Pruitt)**

The best decision I ever made was moving to Madison. On October 13, 1994 at 5 a.m., I packed my kids and clothes and left Chicago. I was not happy worrying all the time about my safety, and my children’s lives were in constant danger. The

housing was too expensive, and there were roaches and water bugs running around like they paid rent. The gangs were taking control of the parks and beaches. A trip to the zoo had become worrisome for me because there seemed to be fights there as well. Finding a job had become depressing, as there was not much to choose from.

Since coming to Madison, I have made great strides with progress for my kids’ future. I have peace of mind, my kids are safe, and I’ve returned to school. I’m an Odyssey student and proud of myself for having the courage to move away from family and be alone in another state. Had I not moved here, I would not have returned to school, gotten a free divorce, found peace of mind, and felt safe and secure in my home. Leaving Chicago was the best decision I ever made.

**(Phyllis Anderson)**

We lived in Milwaukee, Wisconsin the summer before I started high school with my mom’s friend and her boyfriend at the time. While the focus of us kids’ days was figuring out what we were going to eat, the focus of the adults’ days was how they would score money to get drugs.

A scheme was devised to rob a friend who they knew would be cashing a welfare check that day. I remember we ate well that evening. While I didn’t know all the details yet, I knew something had gone down by their whisperings. We kids went to sleep and left the adults to their activities.

We were awakened by the sound of our door being kicked in and shouts of “Police! Police!” I lay in my bed afraid to move and saw my mom’s boyfriend rush into my room and scramble under my bed. I heard footsteps outside my room and shouts as the women argued with officers. My sisters and I were quiet. Suddenly the door was thrust open and an officer entered. He quickly came to the side of my bed and peered underneath. “Get



the f\*\*\* out, NOW, or I'll shoot!" he bellowed. I screamed and said, "Don't shoot him!" The officer raised the gun to my head and said, "Shut the f\*\*\* up or I will shoot!"

I think I died in that moment as fear immobilized me. I realized that being a kid meant nothing any more. **(Hedi Rudd)**

One of the worst jobs I ever had was working at McDonald's when I was 19 and out of high school. . . . It was horrible. People can be really mean. When you're working the drive through, you can't really hear the person in the drive through speaker. I handled food with my bare hands after handling dirty money. (I kept washing my hands, but I got in trouble for taking time for that.) The parfaits were made in the restaurant with dirty scoops that were just lying in the sink, and if a bun fell on the floor, the manager said, "Pick it up and use it." It was too gross. I couldn't take it, so I quit.

**(Samantha East)**



When I was three years old, I thought I was such a big girl. I went to the neighborhood park by myself and everything! I had such a good time going on the merry-go-round, the slide, and even the swings. I was the best swinger, at least until I saw the eight-year-old kids in the neighborhood jump off the swings.



Determined to get my top swinger title back, I set off on a quest to conquer swing jumping. The next day I walked up to the swings as if I owned them. As I began to swing higher and higher, I felt my blood rushing throughout my body. This is it, I thought to myself.

After one last umph, I let go of the swings and away I went . . . only to come crashing down side first onto the concrete. That's when I first learned



that I had broken my arm and wouldn't jump off the swings anymore. (**Tai'Kiah Phillips**)

The second time I applied to the Youth Conservation Camp (YCC), I was 15 years old, and they accepted me as a camper for the summer. The organization was a hold-over from the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) which was created to provide jobs after the Great Depression. The YCC worked with the Wisconsin DNR, and we teen girls were paid minimum wage to do things such as upgrade trout streams, clear park trails, dig fence post holes, and chop down trees with axes. I loved it!



Our camp was located on the beautiful Mecan River in Marquette County. There were ten log-style cabins in the middle of a grove of white pine trees, with ten girls and one counselor each. We worked outdoors every day and came back to camp dirty and tired. We took soap and towel in the river at the end of the day, before supper, unless it was lightning. ...

On the weekends we took field trips to places like the Sand Hill Crane Foundation, the Baraboo Circus Museum, and the Aldo Leopold Center. This was a six-week summer camp where you had to participate and do what was asked or get sent home.

Many of us learned what it meant to have a work ethic that summer. Being a farm kid, I already knew what it meant to work long, hard hours. I thought it was great to learn how to do different tasks and get paid for it. (**Billie Kelsey**)

The skies were clear, and there were no signs of rain clouds. It was a perfect day for hiking and fetching firewood. My sisters and I decided to have an adventurous day. For snack, we picked mangoes and guavas in the orchard. Climbing trees was fun. We would pretend to be monkeys, swinging from tree to tree in



search of the best fruits.

As always, I climbed to the highest branches, but this day was different. I did not realize that the branch I hung onto was breaking. Before I knew it, I was flying in the air and fell down with a giant crash. I smashed into the dirt. I felt all the air coming out of me.

"Help, please! Oh my, she is dead!" my sisters screamed. For a few seconds I could not move: I just lay flat in the mud. As soon as I managed to catch my breath, I cried as loudly as I could. Our day was ruined. Yet my elder sister breathed an enormous sigh of relief; at least I was still alive. (**Tatenda Bvindi**)

We used to take the best family trips. My parents would save a couple thousand dollars, work hundreds of hours of overtime, and a few times out of a year we would hit the road. Chicago, Missouri, Ohio: we had family all over the Midwest.



My mom told us for years, "One day we're going to Disneyland." I was probably five the first time she told us that. With five kids and our income, flying was out of the question, but we were used to "the Van." The Van was no vehicle; it was a feeling. My mom would stay up the night before, fry chicken, cook potato salad, and buy all the junk food you could eat. We had a TV, too. To me, we were flying first class.

When I was ten, I knew two things were certain: the US would never have a black president, and we were not going to Florida. But my mom said every year we were going. When I was 14 she said, "Next



year we are going.” I couldn’t believe it, but the rooms were booked and we were going to actually go to Disneyland. When I was 15, though, one of my brothers got into a lot of trouble, so my parents spent a lot of money that year on him; the trip was delayed another year.

Finally when I was 16 we were in Florida having the dream vacation my parents said we would have. It was the best vacation I ever had. We always will remember it because my brother didn’t make it. **(Run Barlow)**

It was November 15, 1982, my mom’s birthday and a day after mine. I was at Lincoln Elementary doing my schoolwork and saw my teacher talking to the principal and my foster sister. My heart dropped to my feet because I knew somebody had died. Always when someone dies in my family, someone other than my mom would come and get me, but I could always see it in the person’s face that someone died.



I got my things, went with my foster sister, and asked her, “Who died?” She said, “Your mom wants to talk to you.” I asked her again, but she was silent and crying.

We got to the house. There were a lot of people there. I went to my mom, and that is when my heart was broken. My mom and Grandma told me that my ten-week-old baby brother was no longer with us. I ran to his bassinet, and he wasn’t there. I started crying. At that moment in my mind, I felt it was my fault. . . .

From that day our lives changed for the worse. My stepdad left us, and my mom started drinking and staying out later and later. I barely saw her. I got depressed and pulled away from everyone because I thought I got my brother killed. I didn’t understand what SIDS [Sudden Infant Death Syndrome] was and blamed myself.

In this present time, my mom has learned how to deal with my brother’s death. She now is a minister, and I am very proud of her.

**(Nkechi Johnson)**

When I was five years old, two of my siblings and I were playing in the playground in front of the apartment building where we lived. We were playing on the sliding board. I, being an adventurous and daring type of child, decided to climb the steps to the top of the sliding board, but instead of sliding down the board, I decided to slide down one of the two poles on each side of the slide. I slid down the pole and reached the ground successfully, landing on both my feet. I screamed and clapped my hands in delight. I encouraged my two sisters to try this dangerous feat.



One of my sisters slid down the pole successfully, landing on her feet. We both encouraged my other sister to do the same. My sister climbed the steps to the top of the sliding board and grabbed the pole, but her hands slipped. She fell to the ground, landing on her face. Blood splattered onto my brand new shoes.

I screamed, “Mickey, get up!” My other sister and I began to cry. I looked around the playground for someone to help us. I spotted the maintenance man for our apartment building coming out of the front door of the building. My sister ran up to him and directed him to where my sister was lying on the ground, bleeding profusely. She was crying, “Mama! I want my mama!” . . .

When my mother opened the door, she gasped and put her hand over her heart. She asked us, “What happened to Mickey?” She directed the maintenance man to lay my injured sister on the couch, thanked him, picked up the telephone, and called for an ambulance. She put towels on my sister’s face and started praying. She asked us again, “How did this happen to Mickey?” My other sister pointed at me, and said, “She made us slide down the sliding board pole, not the slide.” I stood there in shock, staring at my sister. I could not believe that she would say this to my mother.

By this time, the paramedics had arrived to take my mother and sister to the hospital. Before they left, my mother assured me that she would deal with me later. Our next door neighbor babysat the rest



of my siblings and me until my mother and sister returned from the hospital. I was furious with my sister for telling my mother that I made them slide down the pole of the sliding board. I told her, "You are a tattletale, and I'm going to get you back." My mother and injured sister did not return home until after my siblings and I went to sleep for the night.

When I woke up the next morning, I screamed when I saw my injured sister sleeping. She had white gauze all over her face. She looked like a mummy. I jumped out of the bed, ran into my mother's room, crying. I kept repeating the words, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry." My mother calmed me down and told me that it was not my fault; it was an accident.

I felt guilty for a very long time. After this incident, I always slid down the sliding board in the correct manner. My sister recovered from this accident, leaving only a small scar in the middle of her forehead.

**(Marcia Brown)**

In late summer 1989, my family made the move from the South Side of Chicago to Madison, Wisconsin. At the age of five, nearly six, I had become accustomed to the sights and sounds of the inner city. I vividly remembered the subways, the never ending rotation of city buses, and spending what seemed like endless afternoons in my grandfather's store before he passed away in 1986.



When we reached Madison, the first thing that struck me as odd was the quiet and mellow ambience of the city. I could remember looking for subway stations when I would visit the Capitol, having become very accustomed to the hustle and bustle of the South Side of Chicago.

By the time we became settled here in Wisconsin, a sense of culture shock fell upon me. Having seen mostly African Americans in Chicago, I was now meeting people of different races, ethnicities, and cultures from the world over. Even at the age of six, I knew Madison was the exact opposite of Chicago and that my young inner-city

trained mind would have to re-adjust to the small college town mentality. **(Brandon McCarey)**

I think I was about 16. My best friend, Corey, came over to visit. It was a summer evening, still warm and humid out. My parents' house had no air conditioning; in fact, there wasn't any on our block. We went to the backyard and sat on the swing. We chatted the night away. We were the best of friends who had spent the summer apart. That night we pretty much talked about everything.



I hadn't even realized we had been up all night long until he touched my arm and said, "Shhh, do you hear that?" My response was, "Hear what?" Again he said, "Shhh. Morning has awoken."

I heard the first morning birds singing to each other or maybe even to me. The small creatures of the night were scrambling through the bushes on their way back home. Suddenly, quietly, he touched my hand and pointed. Out of the hostas surrounding our back yard a raccoon had just popped out and was confidently strutting through the yard and then across the street. He paused for a moment and stared at us briefly before continuing on his way. We heard the neighborhood dogs, who had just been let out for their morning rituals, barking greetings to one another. Squirrels were waking and scampering about looking for breakfast.

It was the first time I truly ever listened to the sunrise as it awakens in my own backyard, but it wasn't the last. **(Michelle Withers)**

I was at least 10 or 11 years old and was playing Little League baseball for the South Side Tigers. It was with 93.1 Big Mike and a few other wired, cool people, but it was fun because we played baseball with no fear or worries at all. It was just kids with the smell of fresh cut grass, sunflower seeds, and too much chewing





gum for one month.

One day the coach asked me if I wanted to pitch. My eyes lit up like headlights on high beam, but I was also geeked up because I was wearing my brand new L.A. Gears. A couple of my brother's friends called my shoes and me the light show because I would sometimes stomp my feet a little so they would light up.

That day I pitched great. If I knew what a no-hitter was then, I might have pitched one with my fast ball dancing on the corner of the home plate every time I pitched.

That year was good. I also made the All-Star team and was moved up to play with the kids 13 and older. I do remember those days of fun—fun, good old fun.

**(Donta Starr)**

The year was 1985, and it was Christmas morning. I was the first to arise. You see, I knew that I would have the latest and newest Barbie doll, so I was excited. My mom shot up just as quickly as I did because she needed to get the Christmas dinner started. Every year our whole family comes to most of our holiday meals. I remember the time and the moment the phone rang. We had all of our toys out of the boxes, and I had set up my imaginary set to which I would pretend my dolls were real.

My mom answered the phone, and from the other room I heard her gasp and then scream. Before I knew it, she was running around the house.



“Denard has jumped out of the window!” Denard was my first cousin, my mother’s oldest sister’s son. She lived on 45<sup>th</sup>, and we lived on 39<sup>th</sup>.

My mom ran all the way down there in the cold of winter—with no coat on and in just her house shoes. Denard had jumped out of the 12<sup>th</sup> story window, right in front of his mother’s eyes. So every Christmas is very sad for me.

**(Arnella Royal)**

Eleven years after arriving in the world will always be my unforgettable moment. We were in a storefront church, and there were a bunch of kids. We had choir rehearsal. I was supposed to lead this song, but I couldn’t be still. My younger sister Andrea used to go through the house singing, so she led the song. I was asked to direct the choir.



Sunday morning, we filled up the pulpit. The music started. I began to direct the choir. The spirit of the HOLY GHOST came down. We were screaming our hearts out. We sang the song forever and ever and ever and ever.

When the song ended, I was crying. I looked at my sister. She was crying and praising God. I turned and looked at my mother. Her face gave us a smile of love, peace, beauty, and faith. What a moment!

I love you, Mama Dear, Dad Dad, and Andrea too. I miss you all so much. I didn’t know back then what I know now about this human path. In coming to an understanding about life, I know that I, “Loni” (Yolanda), am going to keep on going.

**(Yolanda Cunningham)**



I remember and won't ever forget the times my family was still together and happy. My favorite memory of spending time together was during the winter. We siblings would build snow forts, and my parents would video tape us. My mom and dad were very playful. My mom would throw snowballs at us, and we would play along. **(Linda Thao)**



The best decision I ever made in my life was repenting, asking God to forgive me, being baptized in Jesus's name, and receiving the precious gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38). My life has never been the same. I have a personal relationship with the Lord. He strips you from your habits... like wearing tight dresses, smoking cigarettes as well as weed/marijuana, and smoking blunts. He puts His kind of love in you: unconditional love. He changed my life forever, and I can't see going back to my old ways. He stopped me from going out partying.



You see, it's a process. It's a walk by faith and not by sight. Just like man has laws, so does God. Sometimes I want to shout out loud and say, "Come and see and hear a man that knows all about me!" God loves you when man turns his back on you. I love Jesus. Without him, I am nothing, and I am nothing without him. **(Marilyn Johnson)**



As long as I live, I will never forget kindergarten. My teacher . . . was little, loving, and so sweet. She would always read to us before naptime, and she would always kiss each and every one of us on the forehead. She would also give us a kiss after school was out.



That's when I came alive. After a seven-minute walk from school to home, I would find my mom excited to see me. I would talk to her for a little minute, and then I always asked for my dollar. Once I got one dollar U.S. currency in my hands, I would go out our back door to the neighborhood restaurant. . . . I would get a burger, fries, drink, and a sucker for \$1. The little buddies and I would sit there for hours and talk and laugh. I miss those days! **(Terry Hart)**

A standout childhood memory is from 1972. I was promoted from the third grade to the highest fourth grade class, the class of my elder brother. Excited, I could not wait for the end of the school day bell to ring.



On our normal journey home, my brother seemed negatively affected by my accomplishment. I didn't care to try to engage, so I ran ahead to share my biggest accomplishment of my young life. After all, on many occasions the family celebrated my brother Izell and his excellence in academics. To my surprise, after sharing what I thought was a good reason for a celebration for me, there was hardly a warm hug from my mother.

Needless to mention, with this negative reaction I went to school and acted out. I was moved back to my place—number two. The nerve of me thinking I had the right to achieve above my beloved brother! My entire view of my academic career changed forever. My confidence was shaken, and in some ways it affects me to this very day. **(Abraham Thomas)**



# Poems from Our Odyssey

## **Odyssey Stew . . . Our Meal for Knowledge!**

We must begin with Ms. Emily to make this Odyssey stew  
For without her it can't be, we all know it's true.  
Then we'll add professors Craig, Gene, and Jean to spice it up a bit,  
And salt it with some Coach (all those words he's taught will surely fit!)

Next we'll add a cup of Diane and Laurie, their warmth will make it right,  
And of course sprinkle some Rene (she keeps everything smooth  
even when she's out of sight!)  
Ah, now a spoonful of all our volunteers to mix in some individual flavor  
Along with just a dash of Kegan, the taste we can now savor.

We'll season it with Yolanda and Juba, to add the perfect rhyme  
And add a capful of Marcia and Phyllis, and some knowledge from our friend Abraham.  
Oh yes, we must add some inner strengths from our own Tatenda and Beatriz  
And stirring in some Katie and Brandon, to add that touch of pizazz.

Drop in a pinch of Michele with a dash of our writer Hedi,  
But nuts, it's still missing something . . . I know, it's our own Jesse!  
Perhaps some Linda and Nkechi to flavor it with stories from their nest,  
And definitely some Keith and Terry. Oh yes! Now the stew is full of zest!

Let's stir in some Bradley and Samantha to this special class treat  
With just a touch of Eugene and Lorraine, for without them would be incomplete.  
Tai'Kiah and Run have to be in the stew, their views in each class help us learn  
And now some Shaquida out of her shell (oh, it's hot now, I hope it doesn't burn!)



Yes! Just a sprinkle of Yetta and Arnella to add  
flavors beyond compare  
Not to forget our own Donta (yea, but do you think  
we dare?)  
Then we'll add flavors from Kenya, with a tad of  
Marilyn's radiant sun  
Billie and Elvira have been stirred in as they make  
everything more fun

There are so many needed ingredients to make this  
Odyssey stew  
All of our determination and hard work will make  
our dreams come true  
For without each and every one of us, we couldn't  
have this delicacy  
You see we all add something special. . . It's our  
2012 Odyssey!  
**(Michele Withers)**

I am Odyssey,  
And Odyssey is in me!  
I have seen wonders  
On this amazing voyage  
And am sprinkled by its grace.

Now I sit on the roof,  
High on the mountaintop,



Drinking from the fountain  
Of knowledge  
That Odyssey has in store  
For me  
Enjoying the fresh breeze  
In the world of books  
My mind expanded  
My eyes stretched  
To see the world around me  
I am Odyssey  
And Odyssey is in me.  
**(Tatenda Bvindi)**

Odyssey opens hearts and minds  
and creates new loves

The caring and sharing in which we engage  
heals wounds, releases tears, and uplifts

Lies are undone  
Truths are told

An accomplishment by one  
is an accomplishment for all

Our hopes and dreams and goals  
are universally human

and attainable  
**(Billie Kelsey)**

Odyssey got me out of my routine of  
kids,  
housework,  
job  
It's helped me  
see,



hear,  
feel  
others' perspectives

It's showed me that I can  
learn,  
accomplish,  
become  
more than I thought.  
(Katie Pruitt)

Odyssey has been a race for me  
One that I ran at my own pace, you see.  
Many fans cheering, legs heavy,  
But my mind light as a feather.  
One focus in sight, you see,  
My education is the medal.  
No worry, Kenya is right on  
Schedule.  
(Kenya Moses)

My Odyssey family  
is like a building being structured  
from the ground up.  
Different materials, faith, honesty, transparency,  
stories that make up the walls with different tales.

The foundation started out weak with faulty beams,  
but then confidence showed up to strengthen  
the pillars of learning.  
(Lorraine Garrett)

Dance, prance  
Dark, light  
Fight, fright  
Smart bright lights  
Circle, square  
Short, tall  
Full of wonderful cause  
Pause, play  
Each and every day  
High, low  
Full of wonder, flow  
And bright glow  
We all know  
As Odyssey 2012, "YO!"  
(Bradley Barner)

While pens scratch  
on blank pages  
and words become the  
soul on white paper



Ignorance shatters  
as book bindings crack and  
warp.

The strain of knowledge  
ricochets through my  
cerebellum and I begin  
to bleed words from  
Odyssey's past.

**(Brandon McCarey)**

My class is like  
a fitted stone path.  
Each student supports  
and connects together  
in a tight fit.  
If one is loose  
or missing,  
the path is not stable  
until that missing stone  
is placed in its unique space.  
**(Samantha East)**

This Odyssey ship is sailing along the ocean shore.  
Me, as the captain, who could ask for more?  
I will keep this ship afloat, sailing the seven seas.  
I will sail all around the world, guiding the way for



you and me.

I will stop and pick up only a few

Who aspire to learn as I do.

If you want to take this journey of education,  
Jump aboard without hesitation.

**(Marcia Brown)**

If it was not for Emily,

I would not be a part of Odyssey.

If it was up to me

I would be running these streets.

Thanks to my family

I can make it through this incredible Odyssey.

I can see a better future apparently

Because now I take my life seriously.

**(Jesse Hamilton)**

Odyssey is forever

Odyssey is great

Odyssey is now

Odyssey won't make you wait.

Odyssey will enlighten and enhance the mind

Odyssey gives us responsibility

Odyssey makes us on time.

So will all due respect

and with nothing more to say,

Odyssey will live on forever and a day!

**(Terry Hart)**

If I would look to the sky,

I would see that Odyssey helps you fly.

Your goals and dreams are endless,

Your challenges are many,

Your knowledge and understanding of life

Are meaningful and plenty.

So say it loud and say it proud,

Odyssey 2012 is above the crowd!

**(Terry Hart)**

Without UW Odyssey . . .

Where would I be?

Without UW Odyssey . . .

Where would I be?

I probably would be

At 115 West Doty!!

**(Terry Hart)**

Odyssey has been a delving into a page  
of what could have been unwritten .  
Who I am now surely not a neat or perfect package  
But formerly wrapped to be hidden.  
some of the most arduous jeopardy questions  
I now know.

Odyssey has been the commencement  
of a formerly compartmentalized,  
buried part of my life,  
now dusted off and the hinges removed.  
**(Yetta Harris)**

Odyssey  
Dynamically stimulating and fulfilling  
Dreams creator and realization fulfiller  
Encouraging in the face of adversity  
Friends with mutual bonds.  
**(Keith Johnson)**

This Odyssey class has filled my heart  
with joy and laughter,  
but knowledge is the best part.  
I'll treasure everything,  
the big words I learned,  
the A's I earned.

The friendships formed  
will keep my heart warm.  
I'll carry memories deep in my soul  
because I am grateful,  
And after leaving so many feelings behind,  
I'll truly feel torn.  
But I'll always go back to help out,  
for the new Odyssey students  
will need encouragement, no doubt.  
I'll keep moving forward to obtain my degree,  
And that's why I'll always be grateful for Odyssey.  
**(Phyllis Anderson)**

Odyssey is good,  
Odyssey is great,  
I love my classmates and professors so much,  
I shall never be late.  
**(Eugene Smalls)**

Odyssey is a program that's unspeakable,  
Words cannot explain.  
Not only Professor Emily Auerbach  
but all the teachers and my classmates  
are a family I don't want to come to an end.  
**(Marilyn Johnson)**





## Wowed by Walt Whitman

*“Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touched from.”* I felt attracted to this statement immediately. I like the boldness of the statement and the direct manner in which he challenges the long established and powerful institutions, such as church and state. He defiantly claims his own divinity as a human man. I believe he is stating that we are all blessed by God as His creation, and we should not deny or refute the power which He has gifted us with.

*“Reexamine all you have been told at school or church or in any book, dismiss what insults your own soul, and your very flesh shall be a great poem.”* In my opinion, this is the epitome of forward thinking. I believe that all information taught and learned should be examined internally by all participants according to their morals, values, and belief systems. Then they shall decide to accept, reject, or participate in the practice, law, theory, literature, or art.

**(Keith Johnson)**

Walt Whitman is truly brilliant. His style is different but it flows. He changes topics so much that he keeps you on edge. He also invites the reader and our opinions in. He challenges us to think from all angles. The reason this is a democratic poem is because he includes everyone and their thoughts. He gives examples of politics, life, and love. He lets us dream. **(Terry Hart)**

I really, really like Walt Whitman’s Preface to *Leaves of Grass*. *“Love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your*

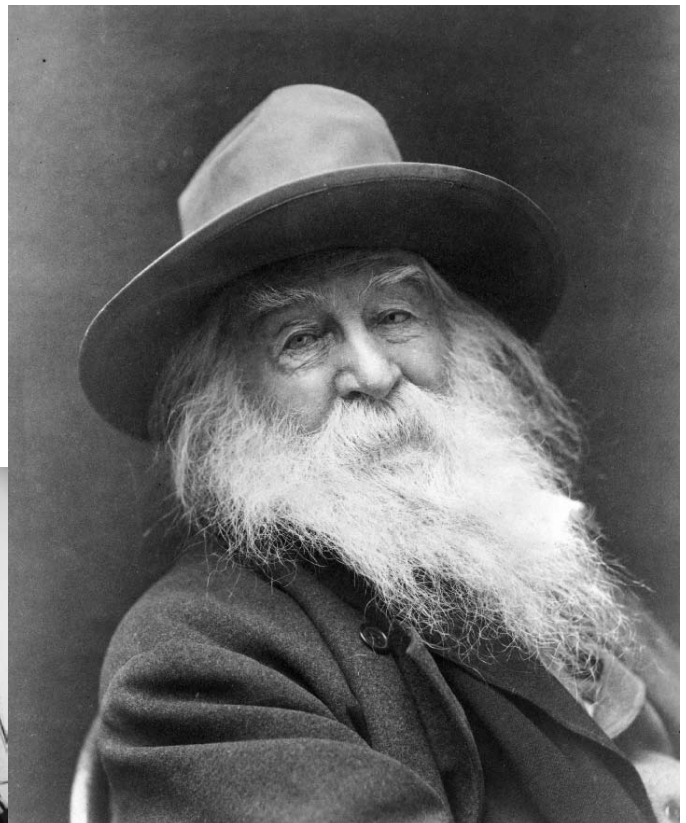
*income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience toward people . . . go freely with powerful uneducated persons and with the young and with the mothers of families . . . reexamine all you have been told at school or church or any book, dismiss what insults your own soul, and your very flesh shall be a great poem.”* I had to rise up from my chair as this poem snatched up my spirit in awe.

What I perceived from these astounding, skillfully arranged words is “Just live right. Be good. Your gift will make room for you.” Wow! I needed this. This poem woke me up. . . .

Walt Whitman speaks from his soul. His heart was able to beat to the rhythm of the thump, to follow his command as he erupted forth, boldly displaying the articulation of a mouthpiece by his selective use of his dialects of language. . . .

Whitman fell in love with the written word. What he speaks on the outside comes from what’s on the inside. He was bold and truthful, a good and noble man.

**(Yolanda Cunningham)**



## Who Said It?

**Find out in the graduation program on May 9.**

“Odyssey is my ship. I will take hold of the mast and set sail to any book set before me.”

“When I started the Odyssey class I felt like my life came back again. I found professors and students and guests that made me feel that I am very smart.”

“As a little girl I was always told I was dumb or stupid by other kids and my teachers, all because it may have taken me a little longer to reach answers. But now by having the opportunity to be part of the Odyssey family, I have learned that stupid was never in my vocabulary.”

“The Odyssey program has helped me to find my writer’s voice, one that will echo for a lifetime.”

“Wow! I am standing on the mountain top; drinking from the Odyssey fountain, I find strength. All the fears and doubts I once had have started to fade away on this empowering quest.”

“My journey in and through Odyssey has been breathtaking and life altering, and I am blessed beyond imagination. . . . I have been born out of ignorance into intelligence through the Odyssey Project.”

“Two years ago I almost applied for the Odyssey Project but I didn’t. I decided to keep running the streets. Between a little drug dealing and shootouts, I saw my life drifting down the river going totally nowhere. . . . I made it into the Odyssey Project, and there’s no turning back.”

“Coming to Odyssey has brought out the best in me. It’s shown me things I never even knew existed.”

“The Odyssey Program has taken me to another level with a touch of spirituality. . . . Odyssey . . . is an investment in the living, mostly those who thought it was over and now have a fighting chance.”

“My heart skipped a beat when I received a letter that I was accepted into the Odyssey Program. Through first semester, I had fear written all over my face. . . . I will change and succeed. My goal is to graduate from UW Madison with a bachelor’s degree in nursing.”

“While the reading, writing, and learning new things are what I signed up for, I have received so much more. I have a large extended family with new sisters, new brothers, Aunt Emily, Uncle Marshall, cousins Rene, Diane, Kegan, and Laurie.”

“I had never gone to college . . . and had no idea where to start.”

“This experience has opened my mind and given me something worth more than money. Can you imagine that somehow total strangers sat in a square and gave me myself anew? What an experience Wednesday evenings! . . . Through it I’m born again with goals and vision fit for a king.”

“When I was accepted I was afraid that I would not only let my children but myself down. . . . I intend to continue my education with completing a bachelor’s degree in Animal Sciences, continuing on to law school, and become an Animal Rights Attorney.”

“My goal is to receive a degree in Communications and/or Theatre. Whatever skills that I obtain in pursuing my education, I will use to help other people. I love my Odyssey class and hope that everyone obtains a degree in the field they choose.”

“I really wanted to become better in life as a man, but I did not know where to start. So when Odyssey became part of my plan, my imaginary light bulb in my head lit up. . . . This was a new beginning to a future that was once dim but now is bright.”

“To my classmates, I say thank you for reading and caring about what I wrote because it was very difficult for me to share. I truly enjoyed each and every one of you, especially The Class Clown Terry.”

“I would call Emily the “Mastermind” or “Actionator,” somebody who takes the main idea and puts it into play. . . . Odyssey 2012 was one of the best if not the best thing that happened to me.”

“I know that I am never alone; Odyssey will teach, encourage, and provide the tools for me to accomplish anything.”

“I will always remember when Emily said, ‘Welcome to Odyssey!’ Thank you, God!”

“My classmates are heaven-sent. You never know what’s going on in someone’s life until you read their life story in the Oracles. We laughed together, and we cried together.”

## Poetic Reflections



### Still Rising

By Shaquida Johnson

I am that person that has come from a rough childhood.  
 I am that person that didn't use her past as an excuse.  
 I am that person who has risen to a beautiful butterfly.  
 I am that person with a challenging double major and plenty of jobs.  
 I am that person 22 years old with a three year old who makes me  
 dream bigger.  
 I am that person still rising.  
 I am that person who thanks everyone for their help and determination in me.  
 I am ME and I'm still rising.

### Traffic

By Terry Hart

I love the sound of traffic  
 Whether I'm near or far  
 I love the sound of traffic  
 Whether I'm walking, riding a bike,  
 Or in a car. The smothering soothing sound of  
 tires gliding peacefully over concrete  
 roads of wisdom. Go right, go left,  
 Stop, do a U turn. Oh! All right, I  
 will continue on this journey. Thank you,  
 roads of freedom, for without you I  
 would be trapped. And mostly thank you,  
 green light, for we can continue forward  
 in life and never look back.



## Hallelujah

### Any Way

By Marcia Brown

When you can't make  
the rent  
'Cause all your  
money's spent  
Hallelujah Any Way!

When you're standing  
in a very long line  
and you're really pressed for time  
Hallelujah Any Way!

When you're on your way to  
the other side of town  
and your car or the bus  
has broken down  
Hallelujah Any Way!

When you're tired and your feet hurt  
and you don't feel like going to work  
Hallelujah Any Way!

When your heart is in despair  
and you think life is just not fair  
Hallelujah Any Way!

When your child is acting up in school  
and you're just about to lose your cool  
Hallelujah Any Way!

As I stand before you on this day  
All that I'm really trying to say is.....

When you're having a not so good day  
You should still shout Hallelujah Any Way!



## Me

By Michelle Withers

I am not a painter  
But I can feel a  
painter's pain  
I get a bit mad  
sometimes  
But is anyone  
completely sane?

I am not a fireman  
But I can still put out a fire  
I am not a politician  
But I can still conspire

I am not a writer  
But I may have writer's hands  
I am not very religious  
But I'm sure He understands.

You see, the one thing I am  
Is something no one else can be  
I am . . .  
ME.

## The Haves and the Have-Nots

I strongly disagree with Andrew Carnegie's suggestions in his essay "Wealth." Although Carnegie had good intentions, his suggestions were unrealistic. To suggest the wealthy have a duty and responsibility for poor people is unfair as well as insulting. Carnegie's belief that the wealthy are superior in wisdom because of their wealth is also insulting. Socrates, the famous philosopher, was not wealthy, yet he was extremely wise, as well as a great thinker.

Carnegie was misguided with regard to the poor. . . . Carnegie would strip poor people of their dignity and pride if allowed to control their lives because of his wealth. He suggests the wealthy become trustees over the poor, giving the wealthy control. His ideas would not work in favor of the poor but would keep power with the wealthy.  
**(Phyllis Anderson)**

Andrew Carnegie gives his perspective, as a rich person, on how inequities in wealth should be dealt with in our country. He felt that men of means should live modestly and not spend money on bling and other unnecessary things. Surplus wealth was to be administered with the "superior wisdom" of the rich, to the benefit of those less fortunate, in the form of libraries, museums, parks, and the like. This was to be the answer to the unequal distribution of wealth.  
**(Billie Kelsey)**

The Populists believed that the millionaires were getting richer. The laborers were just working to make the richer richer. The laborers felt as if they were being exploited

by the government and by the rich. The Populists said the laborers were being muzzled and their opinion treated as if it didn't count.

**(Kenya Moses)**

The Populist Preamble lays the foundation for the beliefs of the Populist Party in the late 1800s. This alliance of farmers was concerned that wealth and land were becoming concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy entities that were anti-union and exploitative of immigrant labor. They felt that this was creating two classes of people: "tramps and millionaires."

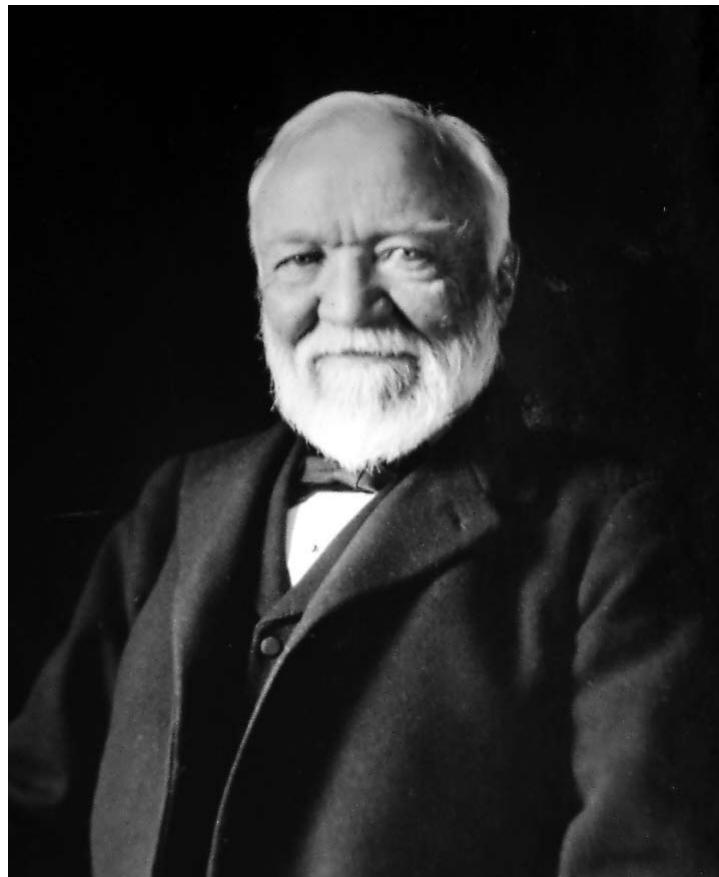
Populists were concerned for the general welfare of all people and thought that if they could reverse the trends in government to resemble the spirit in which the Constitution was written, they could end oppression and injustice.

**(Billie Kelsey)**

The Populist Party was a group of people that were frustrated by the fact that rich people were a small part of the population but seemed to have all

of the power. They felt that law benefited the rich more than the poor. Their goal was to unite all of the "plain people" or working class of the country in order to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor. The Preamble to the Platform of the Populist Party (1892) was a way of pointing out the injustice and corruption, and asking the poorer people of the United States to band together with their votes.

**(Katie Pruitt)**





## Responding to *A Raisin in the Sun*

### Marriage Advice for Walter and Ruth Younger

Walter and Ruth, you both talk at each other, rather to each other. You are mean to each other instead of showing love to each other.

Walter, instead of fussing and talking about what you don't have, talk about what you do have, which is a lovely wife and son. Please, Walter, stop trying to talk your mother into giving you the insurance money to have a pipe dream. Ruth, encourage him to want to be a better man instead of not listening to what he has to say. You, too, Walter: sometimes learn to listen to Ruth rather than talking over her. Ask her what her dreams are instead of putting her dreams down.

You both need to listen to one another rather than sarcastically talking down to one another. I know you love each other. Walter, start taking Ruth out on the town instead of hanging with the fellas. I understand it's difficult to live with your mother/mother-in-law, but you are blessed to have her.

It's about communication and keeping the spark in your marriage like it was in the beginning. **(Nkechi Johnson)**



### Analyzing Beneatha Younger

Beneatha to me is a very ambitious girl. The sky is the limit to what she can achieve (if only she could make up her mind as to what she really wants to become). I find her to be self-centered, almost selfish. She definitely comes off as a "show off"! Her ego is high-end. She opens her mind to so many possibilities just to see what and who she can get out of it. **(Arnella Royal)**



Beneatha is stuck between an old-fashioned lifestyle at home with her mother and the new ideas emerging in the world around her. Her feelings

about religion are not as deep as her mother's, and she feels that she can't say what she wants like everyone else in the family does. She is trying to find out who she is and gets only criticism the entire time.

....

Beneatha is headstrong in her goal to become a doctor, but her brother pushes her to be a nurse instead. Walter suggests she "just get married and be quiet." Mama and Ruth push her towards a rich man, but she would prefer to marry for love and only when it feels right to her. Asagai points out the fact that while she claims she is looking for her identity, she seems to be assimilating by "mutilating" her hair. Beneatha is trying to find herself but at the same time is rejecting her true self. **(Katie Pruitt)**



Beneatha is a strong-minded young lady who attends college and is better educated than the rest of the Younger family. She has a desire to become a doctor, which demonstrates her great dreams to be a highly educated black woman. Beneatha has an independent spirit and believes that she does not need to go around asking



for help. “I have never asked anyone around here to do anything for me!” (p. 37). . . . Because she wants to further her education, “Bennie” says she will not marry and wants to live as an independent woman, which shocked Mama and Ruth. “Listen, I’m going to be a doctor. I’m not worried about who I’m going to marry yet—if I ever get married” (p. 50).

**(Tatenda Bvindi)**

Beneatha’s character has goals and dreams. Beneatha speaks more proper English than her family. She enjoys trying new things such as learning how to use a camera and horseback riding, but she doesn’t stop and think how much harder Mama, Ruth, and Walter have to work so that she can be able to do these things. Walter thinks that Beneatha is spoiled and comes off stuck up because she doesn’t stop and think of anyone else. He feels that she should be in someone’s kitchen just like Ruth is, helping the family become better rather than thinking about her dreams and goals. Deep down, Beneatha is just trying to find herself.

**(Shaquida Johnson)**

Beneatha is very young, feminist, and independent. Girls at that time wore long hair, but she cut hers and wore an Afro. . . . Beneatha opts for the natural hair of the 1960s, symbolically saying, “Black is beautiful.” She feels connected to her identity and culture to her roots in Africa.

**(Samantha East)**

. . . I like that Mama sets Beneatha straight quickly . . . and has her repeat after her, “In my mother’s house there is still God. Beneatha’s interests change every week, it seems. She’s 20 years old, and I have to admit at 20 you don’t know.



You’re still young and have a lot of growing up to do.

**(Marilyn Johnson)**

Beneatha is a young, beautiful, strong-willed, opinionated African American woman living with her family in Chicago in the 1950s. She is motivated and hardworking, a college student who is intrigued with her African heritage. . . . Beneatha is arrogant and looks down on her family as country and ghetto. . . .

Beneatha is an independent and strong woman who has high aspirations. Even though she came from a poor African American family, she doesn’t care about her color and believes in women’s rights. She can show men and women that you can go for it. . . .

Beneatha was a young, free-spirited, and educated black woman. . . . Being outspoken and having different views from her family, Beneatha struggled to identify herself as a black woman, always trying new adventures and not wanting to play the role of a typical woman or housewife. She definitely had an exploring mind that her family couldn’t quite understand.

**(Abraham Thomas)**

Beneatha is an intellectual and social free thinker. She is a lot like August Wilson’s Ma Rainey. . . . Sometimes her talking gets her in trouble. She tells her family that people make miracles and there is no



God. For her comment she was slapped by Mama.  
(**Run Barlow**)

Beneatha was a young woman who wanted to demonstrate to white people that she was not scared of them. She also wanted to let them know that she could have a life just like a white person did.

(**Elvira Rodriguez**)



. . . Beneatha is arrogant and feels she is better than her family members just because she is studying to become a doctor. . . . She does not respect her family, or the fact that her mother strongly believes in God. I just about lost my cool when Beneatha blasphemed God. She feels that she arrived in the place that she occupies in her life on her own, without the help of God. I was elated when Lena slapped the taste out of her mouth for speaking out against God.

(**Marcia Brown**)



. . . Her mom was saying, "Course you going to be a doctor, honey, God willing," and Beneatha replied, "God hasn't got a thing to do with it." She doesn't believe in God and says, "I get sick of hearing about God." It seems like she's just a young person trying to find herself.

(**Donta Starr**)



. . . Beneatha's college education has helped to make her independent, progressive, and feminist. She brings politics into the home and is always about civil rights. Throughout the play we see her



struggle with her identity as an African-American woman. . . . (**Michelle Withers**)

While growing up in poverty and in the ghetto, Beneatha is worldly and rich in her thoughts and dreams. She is not afraid to be different, as she illustrates when she cuts her hair off and dresses in the clothes that Asagai brought her when she was going to the theatre with George. . . .

Beneatha does not let her family's beliefs intrude upon their own and this causes some friction, but I think they are not mad at her for it and support her freethinking. I thought it touching that they managed to buy her photography equipment and horseback riding lessons and equipment, knowing that this has to have set them back to do so. It is proof of their love for her. They want to support her dreams and not have her give up on them simply because of their station in life. (**Hedi Rudd**)



Beneatha was young and had big dreams. . . . Her attitude was snappy and sharp. This young lady knew how to use her words to put people in their place when she felt the need.  
(**Kenya Moses**)



# Parents and children both are sad to be apart

By Beatriz Mairena-Kellman



While I was reading Sonia Nazario's *Enrique's Journey*, I was crying and crying. A lot of memories and experiences came back from when I left my five-year-old son in my country, Peru, with my mother. In some ways I can identify with Enrique's mother. It was a hard separation for my son and me. I was a single mother, and I struggled with money to support my sick son; his illness was very serious. I was working and at the same time I was crying for three years. When I first arrived in the U.S., I cried every day from the time I woke up until I went to bed. I wanted to see my son, but I couldn't return to my country to visit him and my family because I was not a permanent resident of the U.S. If I decided to leave, the U.S. immigration law wouldn't let me come back in.

After twelve years I was lucky to receive permanent residency for both of us, so then I could see my young seventeen-year-old son. He came with me to the U. S. My son and I were not the same people. We started building a relationship for him to live with me as his mother. It wasn't easy, but now we love each other and he is happy to be here with me. He is a hard worker, a good student and a great son. I love him very much!

When I attended Ms. Nazario's class, reception, and talk at the University of Wisconsin- Madison campus on Thursday, October 27, 2011, I had the opportunity to tell her my experience relating to the story of the Nazario book. After Sonia Nazario's class, I had the opportunity to hug her and share some similar experiences as an immigrant that Ms. Nazario also states in her book. She signed my book and wished me courage and determination. She said she hopes I can repair totally the relationship with my son. She told me keep going and *muchas ganas*.

At the reception, I was very happy to see her again. I felt that I can see a person who survives from that terrible odyssey. I asked her if she would do something similar again, and she said no, because her husband and family were scared about

the dangerous work she was doing.

At her evening talk at Union South, I was deeply happy from the bottom of my heart when she explained to hundreds and hundreds people there how the undocumented workers do hard work which is despised by Americans. Their work helps drive the economy. When I arrived in the United States as an immigrant, it was like being in Socrates' cave. I thought it would be easy to find work and earn lots of money. I also thought people in the United States would be kind, generous, and honest. My first job was as a dressmaker. I worked from 7:30 AM to 6:30 PM, six days a week. It allowed me to earn 40 dollars a day. I had to sew 40 nightdresses to earn that money. I always took them home to finish, and I worked until midnight. Doing this allowed me just to survive, but I couldn't save money. For my next job, I worked in a meat packing plant at night. I worked 12 hours per night six days a week. Choosing this job allowed me to save a little money for my sick child and for his education in Peru. The owners of these companies showed exploitation and disrespect for human beings by paying low wages for our long hours at work. It wasn't an easy life having these terrible jobs. Also I wasn't able to write, read, or speak English. With all the time that I spent in these jobs, I wasn't able to socialize with my friends, go to school, and enjoy my life as a human being. When Ms. Nazario talked about the experiences of immigrants, people who attended the talk couldn't believe the hardships and difficulties immigrants, including children, have to go through to come to the United States. I knew it was true. I lived it.

Ms. Nazario is a smart and courageous woman of immigrant descent. As an immigrant I am so proud of her that she made this important book about immigration. Her story of *Enrique's Journey* makes her a story, too.



# Odyssey Announcements

## Graduations and Awards

Josephine Lorya-Ozulamoi, who will graduate from UW Madison in May, was named a Finalist for the UW Outstanding Returning Adult Student Award. She will be honored at a ceremony on Tuesday, April 24, at 4:30 PM in the Pyle Center along with Sherri Bester, Anthony Ward, and Billie Kelsey, who all have won Osher Returning Adult Student Scholarships for next year. Also, congrats to Kegan Carter for acceptance into the Afro-American Studies master's program at UW Madison, as well as for receiving an Advanced Opportunity Fellowship.



### Nikki Giovanni Comes to UW-Madison

On March 21st, Professor Nikki Giovanni, renowned poet and activist, visited UW Madison as a part of the Wisconsin Union Directorate's Distinguished Lecture Series. She listened to a few students read their poetry and then took the stage to talk about the importance of self-expression during tumultuous times. Odyssey's own Takeyla Benton was among the students who shared their work with Professor Giovanni.



### Beatriz's Story on Display at the Red Gym

Beatriz Mairena-Kellman's story "Parents and children both are sad to be apart" (page 22) is on display in the

Red Gym as a part of the "Our Nation of Others" series inspired by the 2011 Go Big Read book, *Enrique's Journey* by Sonia Nazario. Beatriz entered two of her stories into a contest in early February. The exhibit runs through March 30th.





# THE ODYSSEY PROJECT

## CLASS OF 2011-2012 GRADUATION CEREMONY

Great Hall, Memorial Union  
800 Langdon Street, UW-Madison Campus



**WEDNESDAY, MAY 9, 6:30-8 PM**

**Reception Following**

*You are cordially invited to attend the graduation ceremony for students of the UW-Madison Odyssey Project Class of 2011-2012. 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-Madison Interim Chancellor David Ward 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 Feraca, Gene Phillips, and Craig Werner; acknowledgment of Odyssey Project donors and supporters; and music and refreshments.*

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