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

# Odyssey ORACLE

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## Welcome, Class of 2008!



*Odyssey faculty (from left): Marshall Cook, Emily Auerbach, Craig Werner, Jean Feraca, Gene Phillips*

So, you received your acceptance letter for the Odyssey Project, celebrated, and anticipated what to expect. The first day is finally here, and you can't wait to dive into your assignments. But just who *are* these people giving you homework on the first day of school? Here is a little information about them. To find out more, feel free to visit the Odyssey Project website at [www.odyssey.wisc.edu](http://www.odyssey.wisc.edu) and read their biographies.

Emily Auerbach is a professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, as well as the director of the Odyssey

Project. She will be teaching literature.

Marshall Cook is the writing coach for Odyssey students and teaches writing at UW-Madison, also. He is the managing editor for the Oracle and a Cubs fan.

Jean Feraca is Wisconsin Public Radio's Distinguished Senior Broadcaster. She is the philosophy instructor for the Project. She is also renowned for her interpretation of Lady Macbeth.

Gene Phillips chairs the UW-Madison Art History Department. He will give you

a new appreciation for art and may even inspire you to be more creative. Look forward to a tour through the Chazen Art Museum.

Craig Werner chairs the African-American Studies Department and teaches African-American culture at the UW-Madison. He will guide you through U.S. history.

These instructors will be more than happy to assist you with your course work if you feel stuck. Please ask questions and above all, make your opinions known. Now is your opportunity to find your voice and use it!

# My Odyssey by Denise Maddox

My name is Denise Maddox, and I am one of twenty-four people who were the first graduates of the UW Odyssey Project, Class of 2003-2004. I would never have thought that classes in the humanities would change my life forever. I mean "forever" without exaggeration because Writing, Art History, American History, Literature, and Philosophy transported me into a new world, where written words came alive and made magic inside my heart.

An odyssey is a life-altering journey of discovery. Like Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*, I too started out on a life-changing journey. The boat was our classroom at the Harambee Center in South Madison, and the reading materials (books by Shakespeare, Plato, Thoreau, Emily Dickinson, Langston Hughes,

Morrison, and so many more) were the rough seas we had to travel through. In each and every port we landed were wonderful lessons to learn. The Odyssey crew consisted of the UW professors and staff members who gave us supplies to maintain this one-year exploration of learning. The teachers were the compasses that directed us through these rough seas and guided us safely to our destination.

The journey started in September with William Blake's poems from *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*. We learned about a chimney sweeper who was a little child sold into slavery by his parents. As Professor Emily read the poem, tears rolled down my face. As an African American, I understand the bitterness of slavery. The poem went on to light a fire within my soul. I have been victorious in freedom. My freedom included wanting to better myself through education. This was the first time I realized how words can move you

forever, even if the original writer is gone from this world.

WOW! The transformation had started, and there was no turning back from this course. I wasn't alone on this journey. Twenty-four minds started to look at the world with different perspectives. Indeed with each lesson taught, the fire of knowledge began to burn brighter and brighter. For example, my classmate Tiffany Smith said, "I always wanted and have the will to succeed. The Odyssey class pulled it all out of me, letting me know I could do it." Another classmate named Joseph Hurst said, "I was fortunate to have been a part of the first Odyssey class. One of the great benefits of this class was studying the humanities. I have always loved history and knew about African-American philosophers, but through the Odyssey class I gained a great appreciation for the Greek philosophers, like Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates."

Jean Feraca of Wisconsin Public Radio had heard about a free humanities program for adults near the poverty level started by Earl Shorris in New York. She got Emily Auerbach, Professor of English, to set up and direct a program here in Madison. During the first-ever Odyssey Project graduation in May, 2004, Jean Feraca quoted a poem by James Wright called "Today I was so happy, so I made this poem": "An eagle rejoices in the oak trees of heaven, / Crying / *This is what I wanted.*" The reason she quoted this poem was that the graduation was a confirmation



and fulfillment of a dream: that courses in the Humanities offered to students who wanted to go to college and never had a chance could transform lives and lift them out of poverty. This was only the beginning. Our class laid the foundation for the Odyssey Project Class of 2004-2005, which has been meeting every Wednesday night since September 10, 2004, and had its graduation ceremony on May 18, 2005. Graduates of the UW Odyssey Project receive six credits in English and American Literature.

Just months after starting their journey, members of the new Odyssey Class 2004-2005 showed signs that a transformation had started. Several students wrote about the emotional experiences that they went through during the first weeks of the course.

Terry Fox reported, "This class is thought-provoking. It increases your awareness of the history of man along with the origins of many current systems we use as well as language. This class teaches me to look farther, to read about and most importantly develop my own thoughts and opinions." James Robinson, whose brother Joe graduated from the Odyssey Class 2003-2004, says, "I feel different because I did not know that I would look forward to coming to class. I enjoy this time in class because it is an escape for me, an escape for a few hours that lets me explore my mind." Other classmates report similarly enriching experiences.

Earl Shorris, who founded the original Clemente Course in the Humanities that is the model for

the Odyssey Project, explained in his book *Riches for the Poor*, "I like watching people having a second birth." His is a true statement, and I am one of the examples of his words. "Rebirth" is the perfect word to describe what happened to me. I was like a caterpillar eating everything in sight, yet I was never full until I found focused learning in the Odyssey Project a year ago. The knowledge I received helped me finally transform into a multicolored butterfly. I spread my wings into the air to dry, and now I'm flying. I am pursuing a degree at MATC and I am on the Dean's List. I hope eventually to transfer to the UW-Madison and earn a degree in writing and literature. The world might still see me as being poor, with little money and material wealth, but I am rich with knowledge and wisdom.

## Using Simple Words: The case for short words by Richard Lederer

When you speak and write, there is no law that says you have to use big words. Short words are as good as long ones, and short, old words—like sun and grass and home—are best of all. A lot of small words, more than you might think, can meet your needs with a strength, grace, and charm that large words do not have.

Big words can make the way dark for those who read what you write and hear what you say. Small words cast their clear light on big things—night and day, love and hate, war and peace, and life and death. Big words at times seem strange to the eye and the ear

and the mind and the heart. Small words are the ones we seem to have known from the time we were born, like the hearth fire that warms the home.



Short words are bright like sparks that glow in the night, prompt like the dawn that greets the day, sharp like the blade of a knife, hot like salt tears that scald the cheek, quick like moths that flit from flame to flame, and terse like the dart and sting of a bee.

Here is a sound rule: Use small, old words where you can. If a long word says just what you want it to say, do not fear to use it. But know that our tongue is rich in crisp, brisk, swift, short words. Make them the spine and the heart of what you speak and write. Short words are like fast friends. They will not let you down.



# Encouragement from Odyssey Alumni

*We've all had those moments when nothing seems to go according to plan.*

*Here are some inspired words from former Odyssey students to help keep you motivated this school year.*

Welcome to your future! The Odyssey program is a testament of hope, no matter where you are in your life. Each and every one of you will gain SO MUCH MORE than



six college credits. Your life is about to change. Believe me. Don't quit! Call Emily if you need help—she is available. See you at your graduation!

**(Mary Wells '07)**

You have been accepted into a wonderful program . . . Just by missing one class you will be missing Thanksgiving dinner. You will learn amazing things about life as well as yourself.



For me it has rekindled my love for school and higher education.

**(Tiffani Puccio '07)**

Remember and learn quickly that you are now part of a distinguished family of loved ones. Together will be the only way you will fully benefit from this experience.



**(Derrick Washington '07)**

My experience has been great, outstanding, lovely, and just awesome. May 2008 will be here before you know it, and it will be graduation night.



Hopefully you will be feeling like I am tonight . . . wishing we had another year together.

**(Darnetta Carter '06)**

Odyssey was the greatest experience I'd had since the birth of my children. I'm still in awe of how powerful education is and how it's molding me to be the person that I've always wanted to

be. . . I always arrived early, and I never missed one class from September to May. I wouldn't let nothing or nobody keep me from my journey in my Odyssey.



You'll see miracles in Odyssey. I promise you you'll never be the same.

**(Annette Bland '06)**

Each class left me empowered to learn more. I have to be honest when I say that I couldn't wait for Wednesday nights to roll around. No matter how dead tired I was, no matter how much



work needed to be done at home or on the job, when I walked into the Harambee Center for class I felt exhilarated. In my life I have had many opportunities to share wonderful experiences with fantastic people. Being part of the Odyssey class has

been the most rewarding educational experience I've ever had. Taking this journey with my classmates has been priceless. I will never forget this Odyssey and wish all of you in the new class a great journey.

**(Brian Benford '07)**

### ***Search Engines***

I am traveling on this Odyssey, and every day since embarking I have changed. I have learned, I have grown, and I have writhed back and forth, side to side, like waves on the ocean, from growing pains.

Before this class I didn't consider myself a reader, and now I can't wait to get my hands on the next book. I carry the dictionary we received on the first day of class everywhere I go.



There is no word created yet for the process that began the day I was accepted as a student in Odyssey. Someday like *google* there will be a new word added to our vocabulary that can describe the search engine

that Emily and Gene and Jean and Craig and Marshall, Diane, and my most highly regarded classmates have helped me become.

Search Engine. Yes. That is what I said. I have become a search engine, but from a different perspective. I am now the "little engine that could" search for knowledge, truth, and wisdom. And I endeavor to become a proficient search engine, objective, critical, and hungry for more. Thanks to this Odyssey with these Titans, I too have found my task: To Learn and Be Free.

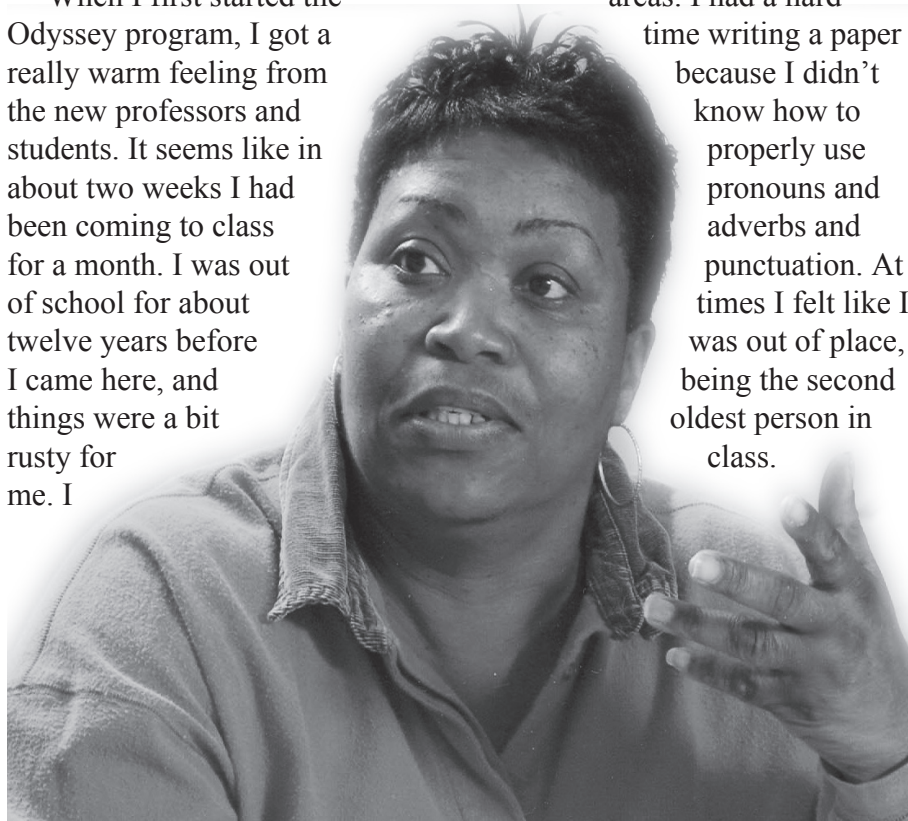
**(Molinda Henry '07)**

## **Pamela Holmes: It's never too late to learn**

Hello, new Odyssey students.

When I first started the Odyssey program, I got a really warm feeling from the new professors and students. It seems like in about two weeks I had been coming to class for a month. I was out of school for about twelve years before I came here, and things were a bit rusty for me. I

needed improvement in some areas. I had a hard time writing a paper because I didn't know how to properly use pronouns and adverbs and punctuation. At times I felt like I was out of place, being the second oldest person in class.



I thought I wasn't going to keep up with the young kids, but it's never too late to learn.

The professors gave us confidence. Emily gave us her cell phone number if we were having any trouble with our homework. The library tutors they provided were also very helpful.

I would say to the new students-stay positive and focused and try to make it to all your classes. You will get a lot of new knowledge and skills and even a new sense of being yourself when you are done with this project. Good luck to all of the new students and welcome!

*Pamela Holmes is a graduate of the 2003-04 Odyssey class.*

# WANTED: WRITERS

## BASICALLY, THAT'S YOU.

That's right. You are the staff of Odyssey Oracle. You're going to write about yourselves and each other. You're going to report on what takes place in this classroom all year (and what happens in your heads and hearts as a result).

You're going to explore the humanities together and in this newsletter. You're going to give testimony for the students who will follow you in years to come. Your writing teacher, Marshall Cook, project director, Emily Auerbach, and alumni editor/designer, Kegan Carter, will all work with you to get your writing ready for publication in the Odyssey Oracle. See p. 1 for the email addresses and phone numbers of all three. Emily and Marshall be here each week, and you can contact them between classes for assistance or questions.

The Odyssey Oracle will capture your feelings and thoughts and chart your progress on the journey. At the beginning of each class, you'll receive the latest edition of this newsletter. We'll publish your essays and poems so that we can all share them. The Oracle will circulate to other people, too: graduates of the first four Odyssey classes, people interested in the program, and anyone you'd like to share it with. If you don't want something you write to be printed in the Oracle, just say so by writing "don't share" on the paper. We'll always respect your wishes (although we might try to change your mind).

Here's your chance to earn a byline in the big OO. Pick a category, create a topic, clear it with the coach, and start writing. Here are some possibilities:

- **ADVICE/RELATIONSHIP COLUMN**
- **MOVIE/TV SHOW REVIEW\***
- **MUSIC/THEATER REVIEW\***
- **MARKET/STORE REVIEW**
- **RESTAURANT REVIEW**
- **OPINION PIECE**
- **SPORTS COMMENTARY**
- **POLITICAL/CULTURAL COMMENTARY**
- **HEALTH AND WELLNESS COLUMN**
- **COMIC STRIP**
- **HUMOR COLUMN**
- **HOROSCOPE**



\*We may be able to arrange tickets for you if you give us advanced notice of an event you'd like to attend.