

Odyssey Oracle

Year 10 #2 September 12, 2012

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Happily Embarking on an Odyssey

*On the first night of class, Odyssey students shared how they felt when they learned in July that they had been accepted into the Class of 2012-2013. The two winning adjectives were **happy** (14 votes) and **excited** (12 votes).*



I cried tears of joy. I was so excited. It has been so many years since I've been in school. I just felt so blessed and thankful.
(**Michelle Whitman**)

The feeling I received after knowing I had been accepted was amazing. I took it as finally a new leaf I can turn over more quickly than planned. I'm excited to learn and succeed with such a great opportunity. (**Akilah Freeman**)



Ask Emily if she remembers that I started shouting "Yes! Yes!" into the phone receiver. I was extremely happy and excited. (**Tosumba Welch**)



I was excited and happy, and I felt really blessed to belong to this year's Odyssey family. (**Jovenus Price Pierce**)



I was excited and scared, maybe fearful of failure, not knowing if my thoughts, feelings, and opinions mattered. (**Patrice Smith**)

I felt so happy!! I screamed after I got off the phone with Emily! It's a prayer come true.
(**Dominique Haskins**)



I felt excited and nervous, happy and anxious all at once.
(**Sharisse Hancock**)



I felt very happy to do something for myself. To challenge my mind again was just what I needed.
(**Angela Jordan-Jackson**)



Yes! God does have a plan for me. (**LoLita Phillips**)

I am happy, eager, and ready to learn. (**Shalonda Hilliard-Jones**)



Here are more reactions from students describing how they felt when they learned by phone or by letter that they had been accepted into the class:

happy and excited (**Tracey Cherry**)

anxious and ready (**China Moon Crowell**)

so happy and looking forward (**Angelica Cuahuey**)

extremely happy and ready to get to work (**Fantasia House**)



I felt very happy and privileged to have a chance to start learning again with the support that the program offers. (**Michelle Reams**)

I was so happy because I know that this is a dream come true. (**Nancy Wambua**)



ecstatic, excited, lovely (**Carrie Llerena Sesma**)

good (**Derrick McCann**)



I was extremely excited. I was ready to learn and challenge my brain. (**Brandon Williams**)

I am thrilled. I am meant to complete this program at this time in my life. (**Jasmine Banks**)



very excited, nervous and scared (**Mary Millon**)

privileged and excited, ready to explore the experiences of others and share also (**James Morgan**)

happy and very excited (**Jovite Rayaisse**)

excited and accomplished (**Britney Sinclair**)

happy, glad, and surprised (**Amber Turner**)

very happy (**El-Rasheedah Wilson**)

excited to make a big move forward in my life (**Tanatnam Chaipang**)



I felt overjoyed, ecstatic, and proud! (**Eunice Conley**)

Are You a Writer?

On September 5, 2012, Odyssey students were asked, “Do you consider yourself a writer? Why or why not?” Here are brief excerpts from their answers.



I enjoy writing—maybe not so much the “technical” piece, but instead being able to express myself through words. I was always made to feel as if the actual

story or topic was overlooked due to “technical mistakes” (punctuation, spelling, etc.). As I’ve gotten older, I’ve had numerous people (family and friends) suggest that I start a blog. **(Jasmine Banks)**



I think I can somewhat call myself a writer. I like to write songs and letters. I feel that I am not that good at it yet because I still have a lot to improve on like

spelling, punctuation, and the meaning of some words. I used to hate writing because of two reasons: my hand always caught a cramp, and I was unsure if I was writing correctly. It can be very frustrating not knowing if your teacher was going to send your paper back to you with red marks all over it. **(Lewis Black)**



Yes, I can see myself as a writer because I like to read and tell stories, and I also have high emotional feelings for others. Sometimes in school I was hungry in the

classroom and had a hard time staying awake because I did not have enough sleep at night. I loved to write, but I knew I had to learn in English at the same time. **(Tanatnam Chaipang)**

I feel I’m not a writer, but I can write letters to someone to explain my feelings and tell someone



(Tracey Cherry)

what’s going on. I cross out a lot of words when I’m writing. My goals are to have a positive mind, to ask questions, to get help, and to try not to be scared.



I always loved English! Spelling and penmanship was always my thing. As I got older it became complicated. In high school my teachers would put so

much red ink on my papers and they always had a theme: “Expound on this or that!” I began hating English, but the one thing I loved was reading. They couldn’t take that from me. I always wanted to jot things down and just go. They would always red ink, telling me run-on sentences or wordy, too many words! I was always very descriptive, so filling in a thousand words was not a problem. I grew up around “educated folk” and was always corrected by Granny for grammar mistakes, so I hated writing. I love speaking. **(Eunice Conley)**



I consider myself a “first and third” type of writer as I see things from a first person point of view (of course) but in third person as well.

Positivity in my writing includes being published, referred to, and overall acknowledged for doing a fine job. Negativity within my writings includes my personal journals (which I started in junior high)—pieces that even when I read

them now in my mid-thirties bring pain. Reading them stings and makes me wince, so much, in fact, that I must close the book and put it away. I plan to continue my journal and life writing this year, but with joyous moments, not just things that irritate me. (**China Moon Crowell**)



I am not the greatest writer but I love to write whenever I can. Four years ago I worked in a place where I had to write monthly reports. As a result, I had a bad experience because writing is one of my weaknesses. So I left that job and decided to go back to school. When I write I feel frustrated and sometimes misspell words. One of my goals is to improve my writing skills throughout this year. (**Angelica Cuahuey**)



Do I consider myself a writer? Sure, sometimes. When it comes to writing, the hardest part for me is getting the words down on paper. My experiences have shown me that I can write well. I just don't have a passion to voice my words on paper. Growing up, I have always been the one to voice my opinion or give a speech or be the lead. It's easier to speak into a microphone than a piece of paper. But that's me. (**Akilah Freeman**)



Teachers in my past who used their red pens often said that I had several run-on sentences or missed important punctuation. In 2012 I feel that the sky is the limit with my writing ability. I am pleased to have this opportunity. The length of time with instructed guidance for the Odyssey Project will certainly improve my writing, vocabulary, punctuation, and style. One of my big picture goals is

to feel confident in the papers I hand in. (**Sharisse Hancock**)



I have to be honest and say I used to love to write. I wrote letters to friends whom I met in the military, and I just loved sharing my life with them. Now I am not much of a writer but feel writing is an expression of feelings. I am starting to write again. It gives me free expression and peace. I want to express all I can with this class! (**Dominique Haskins**)



I wouldn't consider myself a writer because I don't write as much as I should. The hardest part of writing to me is finding and knowing what I'm writing about. I want to be able to express myself more and be able to write whatever comes to my mind. (**Shalonda Hilliard-Jones**)



Writing and I have a love/hate relationship. Growing up in school I was told that I was an excellent writer. As I got older, the work got more difficult and I ran from big assignments. Writing a 10 to 15 page paper on one topic is my biggest fear. My goal for the class is to become more comfortable with expanding my knowledge and passion for writing as I did when I was younger. I want to become better at expressing my opinions, thoughts, and ideas on paper. I know if I take my time and put forth my best effort, I can become a better writer. (**Fantasia House**)



I love the thinking part more than the putting down on paper because my handwriting is not the greatest. I've written a lot of songs, one play, and a couple of poems, but am not confident to show the world. I'm not scared of rejection, so maybe I've been wasting time being afraid. I want the world to hear what I have to say. **(Angela Jordan-Jackson)**



When I was young, I loved reading (still do) and loved writing! I had a pen pal, wrote letters to my family, wrote notes to friends in school, kept lots of journals (still do), wrote to my husband in jail, wrote what was said in meetings or in class, wrote down my conversations, wrote down what I have to do, what I'm thinking, how I feel and my ideas. I draw pictures if I can't express it through writing. I write on labels and on clothes, and I paint words on my paintings. I love writing to express and remember. I love reading to gain knowledge and wisdom.

One high school teacher discouraged me by marking my papers with RED pen! It made me feel so wrong! Later I realized she even told me that she thought I was a great writer and was just trying to teach me to write better.

I still read and write, try and test, study, analyze, and criticize to find my truth. I am thankful for all of this! **(Carrie Llerena Sesma)**



I have been out of school for a few years, so it's going to take time getting used to it again. I do write songs and lyrics. What I plan to work on this year is being more open minded and learning different ways to write for others' eyes, to write to

relate to other races and cultures and different ways of life. I want to learn more how to write stories for books and not just music or poetry. **(Derrick McCann)**



Yes, I am a writer. I find it easier to express my feelings and opinions, thoughts, and values on paper or on the computer. For some reason, my words don't come out and will sound odd if I randomly blurt something out. I feel I get my thoughts across to myself or to my audience if I write them down.

My mother gave me a diary when I was very young. She told me to write down my thoughts if I was happy, upset, or even scared. She promised she would never read my diary and that I should keep it safe. I used it, wrote down everything in my daily journal. No one could take it from me. No one could criticize. I trusted it, and it let me express my thoughts.

My goal is to learn much more than I already know and to become able to express my thoughts more publicly, without hesitation. I already have learned so much on day one of this class! I'm very proud to be a part of the project. Thanks to all. My final thought is to pass the knowledge gained here onto my children and grandchild. I hope this will happen. **(Mary Millon)**



I enjoy writing because it allows me to express and share ideas about myself and my views of the world in general. I do consider myself a writer primarily because I've had the chance to explore writing as an art and tool to convey ideas, thoughts, emotions, and beliefs that have a lasting impact or impression. What I find difficult about writing at times is becoming too emotionally caught up. **(James Morgan)**



I love to write! Am I a writer? No. When you can grasp everyone's attention by writing, then consider yourself a writer. What I find the most threatening

when I write is how someone will grade it or accept it. My main writing goal is to write to be understood.

(LoLita Phillips)



The last time I was in school was in 1993. I miss the years of having homework to do. I was told if you don't use it you will lose it. I am a strong black

woman who believes that education can let you open up your dreams and help you express your feelings and thoughts on paper. I want to be a better writer and a better speller. I will work hard this year to reach my goals. **(Jovenus Price Pierce)**



I consider myself a writer because I am very shy and prefer to express myself in writing rather than talking. My only concerns about writing are the mistakes I

make in spelling words and worrying about hurting people with what I think. Writing makes me feel better because it's the only way I can tell my story, instead of talking in front of people. **(Jovite Rayaisse)**



I think writing is a wonderful gift. I admire people that convey an idea or their thoughts with just a few precise sentences. I think I am not a writer because I

labor so with my writing. The words and sentences don't come easily to me. I have been told by a very good technical writer that I can write, but my spelling and punctuation are terrible. When I have to write,

getting started is the most difficult. I would like to improve my writing and build my confidence.

(Michelle Reams)



I love writing. I used to write when I was young in a journal as a technique for remembering things past. I grew to love it more and noticed it was a way to

escape. I was able to write how I felt, and no one but me knew. I sometimes would write songs, try to write books to bring out emotions, and create different characters. I think I am a writer because I have so many ideas that I love to put on a pad. I always struggled with being myself in front of people, so that was hard in class. I didn't know if what I thought was right. I feared people would not like what I thought or my ideas, so I never used my own words. My goal is to be able to write in different ways and build a better vocabulary for my writings. **(Britney Sinclair)**



I feel that writing is and always has been a challenge for me. Often I allow fear to stop my thought process, not wanting to offend others or sound stupid. I've always

had issues with voicing my opinion, but with practice, I believe I'll become more comfortable with the idea of writing and maybe even embrace it. **(Patrice Smith)**



One of my least favorite subjects is writing. As much as I want to be good at writing, it's something that's really difficult for me. My biggest problem is

writing how I talk, and my vocabulary isn't that strong. I know how to say what I want, but punctuation and vocabulary are what's really hard. I want to build my writing all around this year. **(Amber Turner)**



Writing is a good thing because it helps someone to understand what the other person is talking about. If there is something which needs attention, writing

helps people take care of it. I consider myself a writer because I like to express my feelings by writing it down. When I want to forget about something bad that has happened, I write it somewhere and I am good to go. My goal this year is to write as much as possible so that I can improve in my writing. (**Nancy Wambua**)



I'm really looking forward to becoming a better writer than I think I am already. I look forward to the help from the professors and my fellow

classmates. I have all the thoughts and words in the world to write about, but I get stuck sometimes. My overall goals are to relax more as a writer, stay focused, and learn every inch of what my superiors teach me in this class. Overall I can say that I am a writer at heart. (**Tosumba Welch**)



I've never done a lot of writing. I purposely shied away from it because I thought that I could not understand how to share an idea. Plus I believed

that I did not have an idea to share. I received a lot of red marks on writing assignments. I never understood the explanation of the red marks and began not to care. But I love listening to a poem, story, or play. My goal is to learn how to become a writer, then to become a better writer. (**Munroe Whitlock**)

I do somewhat consider myself a writer. I have a love for poetry and have written several poems since the age of 13. I have written in positive ways, such as



about each of my children, as well as in not so positive ways, meaning anger from some of life's experiences. My goal that is so very important for

myself is to learn to love myself. I have given of myself so much to others that I no longer know how to give to myself. (**Michelle Whitman**)



Writing helps me express my feelings and myself. I express past events, present events, or future events or goals I would like to accomplish. I

consider myself a writer because I enjoy writing fictional stories or true stories people can relate to. My writing experience can be positive or negative. They can be positive because I write about things people either relate to or never knew I have been through. Some experiences have been negative, as when a teacher read my poem and thought I was going to harm someone. My goals for writing would be to become a writer about several things other than my struggles or happy times. (**Brandon Williams**)



I am not a writer because I feel I never had to write anything. I wasn't in school most of the time. When I got my G.E.D. last year, that was the most time I

studied and took out time to try and do something for myself that would help me. I would love to learn how to be a good writer. I want to learn more words and understand what I'm reading. I think that's mostly what's wrong with my reading. I am in this class because I want to become a good reader and writer. Just to understand would make a difference. (**El-Rasheedah Wilson**)

Meet Our Social Work Student: Jacob Hanifl

This year we have a new opportunity: a graduate student from the UW Madison School of Social Work who will be helping out Odyssey students as part of his field placement work. He will be working with us under the supervision of Professor James Campbell. Jacob will be finding ways to help link current students and our graduates to the resources they need to succeed in life in and out of class. That could include mental health challenges, AODA issues, housing troubles, etc. Here is a statement from Jacob describing himself:

I am a single-custodial parent of an 11-year old daughter. Because of the “double-take syndrome” as a result of her various hues, I must say that my daughter is my biological daughter and is of African-American/Black and white racial make-up. Not to be too clichéd, but, she is my inspiration and is likely the most significant variable of how I got to where I am today.

Currently, I am attending the University of Wisconsin–Madison’s School of Social Work, pursuing a Master of Social Work (M.S.W.) degree and in the process of my second year of a four-year Part-Time M.S.W. Program plan. I have a passion for advocacy work; especially when looking at social, economic, racial, and environmental justice. In addition, I myself have gone through much adversity throughout my life.

Like the majority of Odyssey students, I am a non-traditional student. Before getting to this point in my life, I found myself living in relative poverty. I went through a state of mischief and deviance and later ended up a single-custodial parent. I was exposed to a resource in the community to help low-income single-parents go on to higher education as a means to strive towards upward mobility. The name of the program I went through was the Self-Sufficiency Program (SSP), which was run out of the Women’s Studies Department at the University of Wisconsin–La Crosse (UW-L). After enrolling into SSP, I soon was enrolled at UW-L and on my way to a four-year degree. At first I would major in accounting; however, it did not take long before I found out I was

horrible at math and my niche was in sociology and political science. In the end, the path has been very difficult; but it is attainable with the right cast and crew. I did go through some problems during my time at UW-L; fortunately, with the help of my daughter and self analysis, I found where I wanted to go and what I wanted to do. I am still on my own odyssey; after all, it is a process that may take a while. There will be an end in sight and that end will be success. I say to you all, “Hello!” I look forward to this coming year and working with and getting to know all of you.



Meet One of Our Writing Tutors: Sagashus Levingston

Sagashus Levingston is one of several tutors and mentors available to help Odyssey students with reading comprehension, writing, and other skills. She is the cousin of Jesse Hamilton, who graduated from the Odyssey Project in 2012. Here is Sagashus's story in her own words.

I am the mother of five children...and a Ph.D. student. I struggle with balancing these sometimes incompatible responsibilities. Once, a friend of mine looked at my effort and, quoting Talib Kweli, called it "a beautiful struggle." That's what it is. All of my experiences have prepared me for where I am now: the failed relationships, the pregnancies, the boarding-school education, the poverty, the violence, the drug-infested neighborhood, the Catholic school education, the street-smart father...the persistent mother.

Both my personal and professional experiences have set me up to be a scholar of literature who focuses on black love and family, motherhood and rhetoric. If you knew, I mean really knew, how reading and writing literally save my life, then you'd know that it just makes sense for me to be a reading and writing teacher. I bet all of your experiences have prepared you for where you are now. You have a right to be here, and you have something to say. So say it!

One night, while brooding about "my woes," I started listening to T.D. Jakes. In his sermon, he said that "success don't feel like success." And while I do not remember his explanation for this, allow me to insert my own. I think that success does not always feel like success because, at least in my own case, success means new types of work. It means a different brand of struggles: struggling to write new papers, to articulate new ideas. It means adventures to new



Sagashus Levingston (left) with Edwina Robinson '11

conferences, meeting new kinds of people. It means leaving my community and family behind and venturing out to some place strange to me. It means modifying old traditions, and establishing new ones so that my children will not be left with the burden of having to do so. It means creating habits that are consistent with my life's goals. Like all of you, I am on my own Odyssey, call it a "hero's quest." Along the way, while balancing babies and books--and sometimes bullets--I have managed to pick up some reading and writing skills, some abilities to manage family and work. And if you allow me to share some of my talents with you, you will be one more reason why this journey has been worth it. In return, I look forward to what you have to share with me. Hero to hero, let's explore together

Don't Quit!

by Joe Robinson '04

My advice to the new Odyssey class is don't quit. No matter how hard it gets, don't quit.

When you get off work at 5:30, and you only have 30 minutes to get the kids situated and get to class, don't quit.

When you get stuck in the middle of writing a paper or doing a project, don't quit.

When you find out that your father has cancer and has to have surgery and treatment, don't quit.

When you have circumstances that occur that make you miss a class and you get behind on your work, don't quit.

When you feel as if you're not getting anything out of a particular subject, don't quit. When people tell you you are wasting your time, don't quit. When your car breaks down, and it's twenty below outside, and the only way to get here is on the city bus, don't quit. When your spouse is complaining that your five children are driving her crazy every Wednesday night, don't quit. When one of your

classmates makes you feel stupid for voicing your opinion, don't quit. When your boyfriend or girlfriend accuses you of cheating on them because you had to turn your cell phone off during class, don't quit.

And if you get to the point where you just can't find any more motivation to force yourself to keep coming to this class, my advice is to call Emily, and I guarantee you that she won't let you quit! There were many times that I wanted to just give up, but Emily would not let me. She believed in us more than some of us believed in ourselves.

Finally, I would like to say that, the first couple of weeks, I was in class trying to figure out, what is the catch? Why are these people offering us this course for free? There must be a catch. I found out what the catch was. Each one of the teachers was trying to trick us into believing that our lives would somehow be better if we completed this Odyssey class and then go on to graduate from college. I guess I must be a little naïve, because I fell for it, hook, line, and sinker.



Joe Robinson with classmate Tineisha Scott '04. Tineisha Scott now is working on her Master's Degree at Edgewood College.



Joe Robinson with his family