

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

# Odyssey ORACLE

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## Responses to William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience*

*My mother bore me in the  
southern wild,  
And I am black, but O! my  
soul is white;  
White as an angel is the  
English child,  
But I am black as if  
bereav'd of light. . . .*

"The Little Black Boy"  
demonstrates that racial  
inequality existed in Blake's  
day and still  
remains a  
"silent taboo."

The last  
line—"Then  
*I will be like  
him*"—made  
me cry for  
the injustice  
and inhumane  
treatment just  
because you're *not* white.

(Debby Loftsgordon)



*Tyger! Tyger! burning  
bright  
In the forests of the night  
What immortal hand or  
eye  
Dare frame thy fearful  
symmetry?*

I chose "The Tyger" because I  
remember this poem from an  
elementary school reading book.  
. . . I really thought it was about a  
tiger and the strength of the tiger.  
From reading  
the back of  
the book I see  
that it was a  
companion  
poem for "The  
Lamb" and is  
supposed to be  
about good or  
evil. I know  
I think very  
literally, so it  
is hard for me to catch abstract  
ideas in poetry.  
(Mandisa Hayes)



***Little lamb, who made thee?  
Dost thou know who made thee?***

Blake gave voice to the voiceless and continues to do so two hundred years later. [In “The Lamb”] an animal can also be a symbol of innocence. We live in a society where the innocent are left to be slaughtered and the strong must provide a voice.

**(Ivonne Ramos)**

***‘Twas on a Holy Thursday, their  
innocent faces clean,  
The children walking two & two,  
in red & blue & green,  
Grey-headed beadles walk’d  
before, with wands as white  
as snow,  
Till into the high dome of Paul’s  
they like Thames’ waters  
flow.***

I was extremely disturbed by the picture I got from this poem [“Holy Thursday” in *Songs of Innocence*]. . . . Old white men . . . piously congratulating each other for the generosity they were showing in allowing these slave children [the charity children of the church] to



entertain them is an abomination. . . . To use children in this way leaves me bereaved and without words.

**(Kevin Schoen)**

***Is this a holy thing to see  
In a rich and fruitful land,  
Babes reduc’d to misery,  
Fed with cold and usurous  
hand? . . .  
It is a land of poverty!***

I can relate to this poem, “Holy Thursday” from *Songs of Experience*, personally because of many things that I’ve witnessed or been through myself. How can a world or country that is very rich . . . be so poor as well and not care or make things more accessible to people and children in need?

**(Socorro Gonzalez)**



***Can I see another’s woe,  
And not be in sorrow too?  
Can I see another’s grief,  
And not seek for kind relief?***

“On Another’s Sorrow” spoke largely to who I am in terms of how I internalize and feel for people. I love how he captured my attention first by making

me relate to the basic instinct to care and help carry another’s pain and sorrow. . . . Then he takes me onward and prepares me for understanding how God (“*He who smiles on all*”) must share that same emotion for those he’s made. This poem comforts me.

**(Ozanne Anderson)**

***‘Such, such were the joys  
When we all, girls & boys,  
In our youth time were seen  
On the Ecchoing Green.’***

As I read the poem “The Ecchoing Green,” I wanted to go back to those childhood days and seize all the opportunities that I had let get away from me—to just run free or ride my bike.

**(Valerie Williams)**

***I went to the Garden of Love  
And saw what I never had seen  
A Chapel was built in the midst  
Where I used to play on the  
green. . . .***

“The Garden of Love” confused me because Blake speaks of the Chapel (church), which is a place of peace and love. However, he then goes on to say there



are “*tomb-stones where flowers should be.*” The title gives the impression of happiness, but to me it ends with sadness and blackness saying, “*And binding with briars my joys & desires.*” The poem just ends so suddenly full of pain, yet it starts happy and full of joy. Why?

**(Jeffery McCarroll)**

*Pity would be no more*

*If we did not make somebody Poor;*

*And Mercy no more could be  
If all were as happy as we.*

“The Human Abstract” seems a lot like the world we live in today. People who are well off have a way of making people who are less

fortunate feel less than and even humiliated.

**(Jack Crawford)**

*My mother groan’d! my father wept.*

*Into the dangerous world I leapt;*

“Infant Sorrow” moved me because it described both pleasure and pain that went through my thoughts when I

first became a mother. When my first baby came exploding from my womb and cried out after birth “*helpless, naked, piping loud,*” I felt great sorrow for him entering into the earth to face endless woes of a black male species of life and great joy for him entering into the earth to face infinite endowment as a black male species of life.

**(Sherri Bester)**

*‘No, no, let us play’ . . .*

*The little ones leaped & shouted & laugh’d*

*And all the hills echoed.*

In “The Nurse’s Song” the children just wanted to play, sing, shout, have fun, and live their childhood. They wanted to spend the whole day playing with other children.

**(Naomi Kharrazihassani)**



## Comments to William Blake:

I wish I had some of your courage in self expression.  
**(Maria Torres)**

Had you been alive in another century, perhaps another country, you would have been a social leader and probably a celebrity.

**(Tara Wilhelmi)**

Blake, you are a genius because you raise questions about things people tried to sweep under the rug. I admire your curiosity and confidence in your work, yourself, and your visions of our world.

**(Josephine Lorya)**

Wouldn’t it have been better to use the system to your advantage? . . . You were so angry you failed to make a difference during [your own] time. **(René Robinson)**

Many of your poems seem to almost be written in code. . . Did you intend on hiding your point from your enemies, or were you just giving us mind benders to do?  
**(Kevin Schoen)**

I like the fact that you were unwilling to change your ideas, art, and beliefs and for the sake of money. I like that you made your own work and never copied somebody else’s work.

**(Nosihle Lukhele)**



# How Will the Class Be an Odyssey?

Sharing  
and reading  
together, we  
will evolve not  
just as one but  
as a project or  
whole.

**(Severn Anderson)**



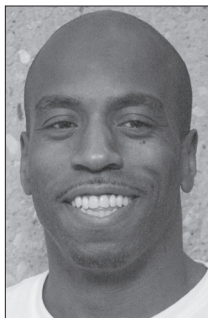
All of the people in the program  
are about  
to embark  
on possible  
the greatest  
journey in their  
life after life  
told them that  
they wouldn't.

**(Charrod Miller)**



I've spent a large part of life  
just wandering  
from place to  
place without  
solid direction  
of where  
I'm going.  
Hopefully my  
new extended  
journey will  
lead to a  
college degree.

**(Dwayne Blue)**



This class is taking me on  
a preliminary journey and  
discovery into the world of art  
history and English literature.  
This is to me a life altering  
change.

**(Jack Crawford)**

Like Odysseus  
wandered  
to get back  
home, all of  
us in this class  
have wandered  
some way or  
another to get  
back in school.  
This class is  
an odyssey  
for me because, like an extended  
journey, it is the beginning of a  
long haul to continue and finish  
my education.

**(Ronnie Jones)**

The Odyssey is a journey  
throughout  
uncharted and  
unfamiliar  
territory. . .  
. . . Imagine  
climbing  
the most  
enormous  
skyscraper,  
reaching  
the top, and  
noticing there's yet another  
skyscraper even taller and  
more beautiful than the one  
before. This journey allows  
me to envision and grasp such  
skyscrapers with strength,  
humility, and gratitude.

**(RJ Knight)**



We all come  
from different  
backgrounds,  
but this project  
unites us all.

. . . I will  
take every  
opportunity  
I get to grow  
as a person  
while on this  
odyssey. I have confidence in the  
staff to push me to work hard so I  
can complete my goal to become  
a nurse.

**(Josephine Lorya)**



All of our minds will be on a  
journey of  
learning. . . .  
It's going to  
be something  
that I never  
imagined I  
would have  
the chance  
to do. I am  
someone who  
really enjoys  
reading, but to  
be perfectly honest I haven't read  
or heard about the majority of  
the authors and philosophers that  
I will be learning about in class.  
So I will be on an odyssey of  
my own . . . being brave enough  
to go on this trip of evolving  
and becoming a "new me" with  
several other people there to  
witness.

**(Sheriah Quartey)**



The class [coming back to the  
UW-Madison after a traumatic  
experience in the 1980s] will  
be an odyssey for me like sex  
to a young, innocent, foolish  
raped virgin girl who returns to  
complete her extended journey

Life as I know it may change for  
the better due to the education  
I will receive. Also I will have  
the opportunity to share my life  
and this journey with thirty-one  
others.

**(Jeffery McCarroll)**

to make love as an older, wiser, knowledgeable, experienced woman, eager, bold, and passionate.  
(**Sherri Bester**)

The class is called Odyssey because it is about to take me on an educational journey that is far too long overdue. I am about to venture off into unknown territories . . .  
(**Brenda Tompkins**)

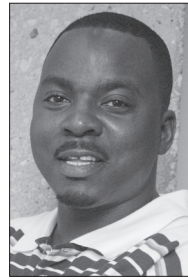
Each one of us will be starting a new journey that will forever shape the way we think and feel . . . an enlightenment.  
(**John Shields**)



This will be an odyssey of education, discussions, writing, reading, relationships, and friendships.  
(**Albert Watson**)

The Odyssey Project will navigate and steer me to *new* and *higher* horizons, intellectually, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. (**Debby Loftsgordon**)

On our own extended journey . . . I may first help myself, then be able to help somebody else.  
(**Rockameem**)



I guess it is called the Odyssey Project because you the organizers hope . . . the program will help jumpstart or arm us to go through . . . and gain the joy of learning.  
(**Haroun Omar**)



Excerpt from  
"Plumbing for Inspiration"  
by Kevin Schoen

When you turn on a faucet there's two drops then three. Like writing, in an instant ideas run free.

Don't think your stare can cause water to run. Turn on your faucet and let your thoughts come.





## History as a Mosaic: A Challenge

Last week Craig Werner described history as a “mosaic.” Ivonne Ramos expanded on the idea this way: “[I] understand his use of the word ‘mosaic’ as a blend of different pieces to create an image. The image is more than visual. It is feeling, sense, or mood that is communicated to the viewer.”

No voice of dissent?  
No one wrote to disagree with the metaphor, so Marshall Cook poses these challenges for extra-credit:

In what way(s) is the metaphor of history as mosaic inaccurate or inapplicable?

Or

What metaphor do you think would more aptly represent history?

## I Love Dialogue By Tillman Morris

I love the art of dialoguing. Through dialogue we strengthen our views, solidify our commitments, make new mental connections, learn to understand each other, reach clarity of understanding, and most of all bond one to the other. A dialogue is a time for critical thinking, intellectual growth, and bonding. In the dynamics of group dialogue, our guiding principles should be love and understanding, as well as clarity of understanding.

If the collective experience of group dialogue is a time for intellectual growth, clarity, and bonding, then we should always be mindful of each other’s feelings. None of us wants our viewpoint trivialized, crushed, snubbed, or treated in a dismissive way. Browbeating is a technique that is harmful and can destroy a person’s motivation or scare a person off from participating.

This is the genius of the Greek philosophers and poets. They used allegories and stories to open up dialogue and analysis about human conditions. In a nutshell, my understanding of the Socratic method is that

it was a non-confrontational way of arriving at the truth. In other words it constantly nudges individuals towards self-examining what they themselves have said and allows them to hear what others have said.

People’s character and humanity often comes out in the way they dialogue. Without clarity, there can be no growth or forward motion for either the individual or the collective. Dialogue is the only way to grow forward. Without love, we risk doing more harm than good. We should always aim our criticism at the principle instead of the person. We don’t want to do damage to any soul—not a single one. Dialogue has to include love.

*Tillman Morris is a graduate of the 2006-2007 Odyssey Project.*

