

odyssey oracle

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The Odyssey Begins

It is a step toward my long awaited degree after a few life crises. This is for sure a long journey for me. **(Takeyla Benton)**

It is the beginning of a journey for all of us. This class will help me continue my education and move forward. With dedication and hard work, I can change my lifestyle to fulfill my educational goals. This is my journey to my new career, life, and future. I'm scared. **(Michelle Bozeman)**

The objective of the class is to send the students on a journey of enlightenment and higher

education. This class is definitely the beginning of an Odyssey for me. My plan or long-term goal is to get my degree in elementary education. Because of the fact I must work and take care of my family, I know it may take a little longer, but I am ready to go the distance to achieve this goal, not only for myself but for my family. **(Morgan Chichester)**

This course is called Odyssey because we are on a journey to better our lives. This is the beginning of a long journey of my education. It is a start of an open door for me and my family. **(Tracy Cunnigan)**



odyssey.wisc.edu



The Odyssey Project is a nine-month journey to success. This class is for me because I can learn new things I never thought I would learn. **(Kian Cunningham)**

The Odyssey Project is a new beginning to get somewhere you wouldn't imagine. It's a wonderful opportunity to begin a journey to success. This class can be an Odyssey for me in many ways such as strengthening me in areas where I need help and most of all giving me a solid backbone to endure my education, which means a lot to me. **(Dwayne Ellis)**

I think the Odyssey Project gets its name from the definition: any extended journey. Education is a journey that you can extend to your heart and mind's desire. The prospect of broadening my horizon, stimulating my mind, and furthering my education is awesome. **(Eleita Florence)**

Some consider the Odyssey Project poetry in motion and a journey. It can be an Odyssey to



me by opening my mind to travel into many new experiences and by educating me with the use of many books. **(Bonita Greer)**

The class will take you on an extended journey from a down point to a point where you can better yourself. I think the class will be an odyssey for me by being my hero and saving me from the scum of the earth. **(Kiara Hill)**



It is an odyssey for me because it spells a new beginning, a fresh start to the second phase of my life. It spells progress. Educational accomplishments and a degree or two are on the way, something that I can be proud of because I worked hard at it. This is something I always wanted to do but didn't get to do. It's a journey for sure. **(Marie Hill)**

This is an educational adventure, a journey to succeed in life through learning about the humanities. This is a whole new world for me, an exciting and interesting way to learn creative knowledge. It is going beyond what I am used to and asking of me the willingness to learn, grow, and change myself. **(Ray 'Migizi' Hopp)**

Odyssey seems like it is designed to take you through an adventure that never ends. There seems to be a good future promised to us through the adventure of Odyssey. This whole college world has been an adventure. I'm in for the ride. "Ride or die!" **(Kathann Jackson)**

It is not just a two-semester course, but the skills we will learn and lessons that will be taught are life-using essentials. To be in college is a wonderful experience, and to finish it will be great in itself, but I think my Odyssey in the class will be life changing. **(Trendell Johnson)**

I think this class is called the Odyssey Project because it gives people a chance to succeed when maybe they haven't been given many chances to do that well. It gives us the feeling that we are an "odyssey" or an "epic" class ready to excel. This class is an odyssey for me because I've been waiting for so long to show who I am. After I failed

so many times, I finally have that chance to show who Leah Danielle LaBarre is! This class is giving me the chance to become a part of something truly inspiring and amazing. **(Leah LaBarre)**

Odyssey is a great goal you are striving to achieve. Odyssey will bring me through a lot of things I am going through now and will help me succeed also. **(Precious LaShore)**

Now in its eighth year, the Odyssey Project is a never-ending journey. For me, it's an odyssey because I'm hoping to extend my schooling past Odyssey. **(Pam Lee)**

An odyssey is indeed a continuation, a continuation of my dream of life. It seems to have no ending. **(Dennis Listenbee)**

We who are joining the program are wandering after the fall of Troy. We who have been on any extended journeys are on the Odyssey. We who have extraordinary talents need the Odyssey Project's help to get us there. **(Diance Lor)**

This is a journey to a better way of being or a better living. Either way, it's a journey from where we've come from to where we are at. **(Michael Lozano)**

It will be like a poem because it flows. It will be able to help us, and we will be relaxed while taking this class. It will all flow together with the different sections we take. **(Nikyra McCann)**

I think it's called the Odyssey Project because it's a poetic journey to help unlock one's mind to learn and achieve knowledge that will help one go on to become successful and make a difference in one's



life. This is going to be a remarkable journey for me. It will help me become rich in knowledge, give me more self confidence and a voice that I never thought I had. It will quiet all the critics and doubters who told me that I won't succeed. The Odyssey is only going to help me overcome such obstacles and strengthen my skills and passion for writing even more. **(Marseills McKenzie)**

One reason this course is called the Odyssey Project is because with all the different courses being taught in each of their individual ways, it will be an extended journey of learning new things. This class will be an odyssey for me because of all the new and exciting things I will learn. **(Catina McAlister)**

The Odyssey Project is a course in the humanities which we will take as a journey through literature and the arts, with stops to listen to music and all its rich culture. The Odyssey Project is not just about English literature, art, and music; it's much, much more. I call it a "social experience." A "birth" is taking place, a nine-month journey into an abyss of finding me! I enjoy my instructors as well as my classmates. I felt that immediately. It felt like I was home with a big extended family! This will be a journey I will enjoy every time we meet! I am still excited! **(Helen Montgomery)**

This can be the next step in our journeys, or the class itself can be a journey. **(Dalonte Nobles)**

I can imagine this class is called the Odyssey because when you graduate you are a different person than when you started. When starting any kind of schooling, it will take you on a journey, and it may not always be so easy. This class could be an odyssey for me because I'll have a new experience. **(Shardetra Ofori-Anim)**

I think this course is named the Odyssey Project because its creators wanted to have their students embark on a journey through a liberal arts education and discover, as Odysseus did, that we have within ourselves the

ability to change and grow into something great. **(Stephanie Pamperin)**

The Odyssey Project opens up doors that might have been closed to others. I will be able to shine and learn from those around me. Having a chance to be a part of this class will take me on a trip that will open other doors. **(Marvin Pratt)**

This class will help us develop more about ourselves and the humanities. This will be a great journey for me to broaden my mind. **(Edwina Robinson)**

I believe this course is rightfully named the Odyssey Project because it is the beginning of an extended journey on the road to our educational futures. This class is an odyssey for me because it inspires me to continue developing my capacity for learning, which in turn leads to making better choices that determine my future under the sky. I consider this class as a stepping stone, a building block to my success. Being surrounded by people who are of like minds and have similar goals will help me to feel I am on a very adventurous odyssey. **(Eric Rodgers)**

The process of education is a life long journey. The Odyssey Project for me is the structure I need to start this journey. I have had this craving for knowledge but could not figure out where to start. **(Danielle Rosales)**



Oracle Call and Response



in Birmingham, Alabama.” That let me know I’m going to learn a lot if my mind is ready to explore.
(Tracy Cunnigan)



A sentence that jumped out at me was “If you ever feel like quitting, call Emily!” I learned from the Oracle that the Odyssey Project is a safe place to be. I learned the Odyssey Project is for everyone of all ages. You’re never too old to learn.
(Kian Cunningham)



What I have learned from the first issue of the Oracle is all the appreciation the past graduates have for the project. They all did a very good job letting us know the expectations and the hard work that we would have to put in, as well as congratulating us and

wishing us luck. Behind all of that, I see their excitement and the appreciation from each graduate. Beautiful! Tamir Smith and Stacey Morris both talked about how Odyssey will change your life. Change is good, and that is exactly what I’m here for . . . a positive change. (Michelle Bozeman)



I learned that if I show up and give my all, I can benefit a great deal from the odyssey. A couple of sentences by Tineisha Scott jumped out at me: “The Odyssey Project is not just a class you take or credits you earn. It’s much more than that: It’s inspiring, powerful, joyful; a place where you can be safe and not judged; it’s where you feel like you belong.”
(Dwayne Ellis)



I learned from reading the Oracle that if I come to class and do what is asked of me, I will succeed. I need to keep up with assignments, even though it may seem like a lot to bear, because then I will graduate. The particular line that stood out was by Jesse Woodard. He

wrote, “Your journey will take you into ancient Athens, Greece, and will deposit you into a jail cell



Some words that jumped out at me were Opportunity, Experience, Journey, Adventure, Stay focused, Be ready to work, Hard work, overwhelming, family (referring to classmates), connection, don’t give up, you’ll love every teacher, Emily does not accept failure, and congratulations (for my acceptance into Odyssey). After the first day of class I felt like



many doors in my mind had opened and my vision was becoming clear as to what the future holds for me. My response was to inform all of my loved ones that this program is vital to the cultivation of my future. Excitedly I exclaimed to them there will be no excuses for me missing class. I will be there for every class, and their support is required. **(Bonita Greer)**

“Ask for help” really jumped out at me and also “don’t give up.” It’s going to be hard, but we will get help from staff. We can do it! **(Marie Hill)**

It stood out to me when Stacey Morris commented, “What did I get myself into!” I have thought that same thought when looking at the homework, but I am very determined to succeed in whatever I put my mind to. It also stood out to me with Kegan Carter how she was once homeless with children and how similar her situation is to my own. **(Precious LaShore)**

What stood out to me was something Liliana Peleck wrote about. She came from an abusive relationship with her ex-husband and employers, yet she managed to stay on task and made it through these few obstacles. **(Catina McAlister)**

I particularly liked Tamir Smith’s line, “Be

prepared to learn from others, and don’t be afraid to teach.” I’m always open to learn from others. . . . I still need to work on that confidence thing. **(Dalonte Nobles)**

The Oracle made me smile because it is confirmation of what I knew when I first filled out the online application. There are no victims in this classroom. **(Stephanie Pamperin)**

Brenda Carmona de Jimenez wrote “What the heck have I gotten myself into?” That was truly the way I felt Wednesday, as if I am not good enough. But today I think if others can do it, so can I. **(Edwina Robinson)**

This is a learning journey, to change yourself, to be educated, to get help, and to give help to others. **(Ray ‘Migizi’ Hopp)**

The Oracle . . . let us know we’re in good hands leading to success. **(Diance Lor)**

Reading the Oracle gave me the strength to make it! **(Nikyra McCann)**

How deep an ocean of knowledge you will learn. Our God-given talents will be nurtured. **(Marseills McKenzie)**



My Odyssey by Denise Maddox, Class of 2004

published in both Illumination Magazine and Wisconsin People and Ideas

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, Toni 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 had Emily Auerbach, Professor of English, 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 [later Odyssey classes to meet on Wednesday nights ever since]. Graduates of the UW Odyssey Project receive six credits in Integrated Liberal Studies [now English].

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 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, said, "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, a model for the Odyssey Project, explained in his book *Riches for the Poor*, "I like watching people having a second birth." His statement is true—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.



Denise and her son Chester, who graduated from Odyssey in 2006. Chester remarks, "My mother going back to school in the Odyssey Project is the reason I went back to school to get my G.E.D., making me the first male in our family to graduate from high school in 30 years."

Responding to William Blake

Nurse's Song

*When the voices of children are heard on the green,
And laughing is heard on the hill,
My heart is at rest within my breast,
And everything else is still.*

*"Then come home, my children, the sun is gone down,
And the dews of night arise;
Come, come, leave off play, and let us away,
Till the morning appears in the skies."*

*"No, no, let us play, for it is yet day,
And we cannot go to sleep;
Besides, in the sky the little birds fly,
And the hills are all cover'd with sheep."*

*"Well, well, go & play till the light fades away,
And then go home to bed."
The little ones leaped, & shouted, & laugh'd,
And all the hills echoed.*

"The Nurse's Song" from *Songs of Innocence* kind of reminds me of when I was a kid outside playing with my friend on late summer afternoons. After dinner when it started to get late, my grandma would tell us to come in. We would beg and plead to her to let us stay out a little longer and she would. (Michelle Bozeman)

I fell in love with this poem the moment I finished reading it. I think it's coming from a nursemaid's point of view, someone who nurses and watches the kids. I think that she wants the children to come back in from playing, but they're not ready to stop playing. She realizes that the innocent children don't have much more time, so she lets them continue to "leap, shout, and laugh."
(Leah LaBarre)

On Another's Sorrow

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

*Can I see a falling tear,
And not feel my sorrow's share?
Can a father see his child
Weep, nor be with sorrow fill'd?*

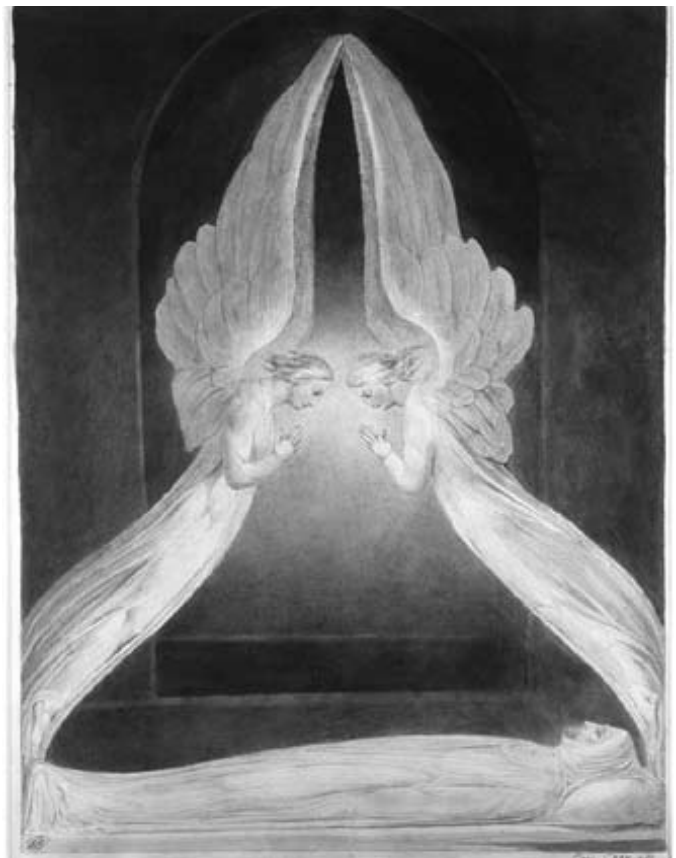
*Can a mother sit and hear
An infant groan, an infant fear?
No, no! never can it be!
Never, never can it be!*

*And can he who smiles on all
Hear the wren with sorrows small,
Hear the small bird's grief & care,
Hear the woes that infants bear,*

*And not sit beside the nest,
Pouring pity in their breast,
And not sit the cradle near,
Weeping tear on infant's tear?*

*And not sit both night & day,
Wiping all our tears away?
Oh no! never can it be!
Never, never can it be!*

*He doth give his joy to all:
He becomes an infant small;
He becomes a man of woe;
He doth feel the sorrow too.*



Christ in the Sepulchre, Guarded by Angels

*Think not thou canst sigh a sigh,
And thy maker is not by;
Think not thou canst weep a tear,
And thy maker is not near.*

*O! he gives to us his joy
That our grief He may destroy;
Till our grief is fled & gone
He doth sit by us and moan.*



“On Another’s Sorrow” touched me because it was about being kind and empathetic, something I do believe our society is lacking. It should be difficult for us as a people to see others in pain and in need and be OK with it. (Morgan Chichester)



“On Another’s Sorrow” moved me. It made me think of my Higher Power, whom I choose to call God. I felt the poem was speaking of him and how he sees and hears and feels all. He can’t sit idly by while his people need or hurt. It spoke to me saying

God knows me and will be there for me. He won’t let me be in my misery for long, and he feels when I am there. (Eleita Florence)

The Garden of Love

*I laid me down upon a bank,
Where Love lay sleeping;
I heard among the rushes dank
Weeping, weeping.*

*Then I went to the heath and the wild,
To the thistles and thorns of the waste;
And they told me how they were beguiled,
Driven out, and compelled to the chaste.*

*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.*

*And the gates of this Chapel were shut
And “Thou shalt not,” writ over the door;
So I turned to the Garden of Love
That so many sweet flowers bore.*

*And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tombstones where flowers should be;
And priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars my joys and desires.*

This poem represents institutions restricting the natural world. To me it represented our need to assert ourselves over nature. . . . I remember a certain park in my hometown that was demolished to open up a new shopping mall. On another level this represents the rules placed on things that are usually there for everyone to enjoy, restricting its usage and access. (Dalonte Nobles)

The Little Vagabond

*Dear mother, dear mother, the church is cold,
But the ale-house is healthy and pleasant and warm;
Besides I can tell where I am used well,
Such usage in Heaven will never do well.*

*But if at the church they would give us some ale,
And a pleasant fire our souls to regale,
We’d sing and we’d pray all the live-long day,
Nor ever once wish from the church to stray.*

*Then the parson might preach, and drink, and sing,
And we’d be as happy as birds in the spring;
And modest Dame Lurch, who is always at church,
Would not have bandy children, nor fasting, nor birch.*

*And God, like a father rejoicing to see
His children as pleasant and happy as he,
Would have no more quarrel with the Devil or the
barrel,
But kiss him, and give him both drink and apparel.*

“The Little Vagabond” from *Songs of Experience* was not on our reading list but is the piece that continually resonates with me. I have a strong faith and believe very deeply in Christ. However, when Blake writes: “Dear Mother, dear Mother, the Church is cold,/ But the Ale-house is healthy & pleasant & warm;

/ Besides I can tell where I am used well,” I can totally relate, especially to the last line. Many of my personal experiences with Church and church folk have not been positive. I believe a lot of the difficulty I have with this particular group of people has to do with the fact that I have Cerebral Palsy. It is ironic to me that Christianity was built on compassion, but today one is more apt to find compassion outside of the Church walls. (Stephanie Pamperin)

Earth’s Answer

*Earth raised up her head
From the darkness dread and drear,
Her light fled,
Stony, dread,
And her locks covered with grey despair.*

*“Prisoned on watery shore,
Starry jealousy does keep my den
Cold and hoar;
Weeping o’er,
I hear the father of the ancient men.*

*“Selfish father of men!
Cruel, jealous, selfish fear!
Can delight,
Chained in night,
The virgins of youth and morning bear?*

*“Does spring hide its joy,
When buds and blossoms grow?
Does the sower
Sow by night,
Or the plowman in darkness plough?*

*“Break this heavy chain,
That does freeze my bones around!
Selfish, vain,
Eternal bane,
That free love with bondage bound.”*

“Earth’s Answer” is the poem of Blake’s that caught my attention the most. What I got out of it was Blake wishing for the “mental revolution” that he knew would one day come about. He’s calling for a changing of our ways. He’s teaching us to learn



The Good and Evil Angels Struggling for Possession of a Child

from mistakes made in the past and to ultimately let love be the deciding factor, the overriding cause, when dealing amongst ourselves. (Eric Rodgers)

The School Boy

*I love to rise in a summer morn,
When the birds sing on every tree;
The distant huntsman winds his horn,
And the sky-lark sings with me.
O! what sweet company...*

*Ah! then at times I drooping sit,
And spend many an anxious hour,
Nor in my book can I take delight,
Nor sit in learning's bower,
Worn thro' with the dreary shower.*

*How can the bird that is born for joy
Sit in a cage and sing?
How can a child, when fears annoy
But droop his tender wing,
And forget his youthful spring?*



The Ancient of Days

*O! father & mother, if buds are nip'd
And blossoms blown away,
And if the tender plants are strip'd
Of their joy in the springing day,
By sorrow and care's dismay,*

*How shall the summer arise in joy,
Or the summer fruits appear?
Or how shall we gather what griefs destroy,
Or bless the mellowing year,
When the blasts of winter appear?*

I picked this poem because it reminds me of my own son. I have so much love for him and fear that when he starts school he will be misunderstood and that his innocence will be lost. (Danielle Rosales)

A Letter to William Blake

Dear Mr. William Blake,

Were you considered a "lunatic" simply because your political and religious beliefs and views on slavery (or human rights) differed from the mainstream of what others "thought"?

My comment to you, Mr. William Blake, is I myself found it a sheer delight, even an honor, to have read your biography as well as some of your works of poetry and to have seen the wonderful piece of art "The Ancient of Days." I was drawn to your intellectual response to religion! . . .

I liked how you stood up for your political rights in the poems "The French Revolution" and "America," exposing the hypocrites who claimed the freedom and rights of all Americans but could keep certain ones in bondage! How outlandish is that?

William Blake, I don't think of you as a lunatic but as a man who was "misunderstood." You were way before your time. It's been an honor.

*Sincerely,
Helen Montgomery*

