Year 2, Issue 3

November 11, 2024

Odyssey Beyond Wars Oracle

Honoring Veterans Day

Erin Cellelo, Director, Instructor, and Oracle Editor, Odyssey Beyond Wars
Emily Auerbach, Executive Director, UW Odyssey Project
Em Azad, Program Manager
Sarah Lensmire, Assistant Program Manager
Photography: Erin Cellelo, Nicole Hanson, Sarah Lensmire
Beth Auerbach, Oracle Designer

www.odyssey.wisc.edu

The Things *We* Carried

We read and discussed Tim O'Brien's short story "The Things They Carried." After, students created lists of things they've carried on their own journeys through military service and after. What follows is the weaving together of many of the items on those lists into a collective essay.

Some of us carried radios and batteries, maps and GPS units, calling in artillery and naval gunfire. We carried Copenhagen snuff and Bic lighters, German binoculars and poncho liners and night vision goggles, the tools of war alongside toilet paper and soap. We carried pictures of fathers and sisters, bracelets from loved ones, and stuffed bears scented with our family perfume. We carried nicknames given by sergeants and identities forged in the unrelenting demands of military service.

We carried new responsibilities, pride in our companies and regiments and squadrons, and the moral ambiguity of missions that left us questioning our purpose. We carried the weight of being tools for powers greater than ourselves, and the burden of realizing that sometimes democracy comes at the end of a gun.

After, we carried ourselves back out into the world. Some of us carried stints in prison and solitary confinement and attempts at ending our life, dark nights when faith was our only connection to hope. Some of us still carry a medic bag wherever we go. We carry the memories of superior officers who built us up and peers who gave us respect or became our best friends, alongside the unwelcome memories of those who took advantage of our vulnerability or judged us based on nothing more than the color of our skin.

We carry guilt, too, perhaps the heaviest of our burdens – born from high-pressure decisions and missed moments with children and loved ones. Birthdays and holidays that we can never get back. We carry our personal insecurities, the anxiety of always needing to be at our best for those around us, and the pain, both physical and emotional, that's so closely tied to our service. We carry depression that whispers we can't handle it anymore, and the defiance that proves those whispers wrong.

We carry our failures alongside the “can-do” attitude that pushes us forward. We carry the support of husbands and children, mothers and friends who feel more like family, and the versions of ourselves that we’re finally learning to believe in. We carry the pride of proving naysayers wrong, and the freeing feeling of taking leaps into the unknown.

We carry the understanding that while school might be hard, we are not stupid – we are smart, we are capable, and we are strong.

And most importantly, we carry hope – hope that transforms our past obstacles into future possibilities. Hope that reminds us we are more than the sum of the past mistakes we’ve made.

Into this classroom, we carry all of these things, as well as the determination to find our voices, to live our lives on our own terms. To learn. To dream. To forge new bonds and share our stories. We carry even the uncertainty about what comes next, wearing it not like a burden or source of shame, but as a badge of courage. We are veterans and students. We are painters and poets. We carry ourselves forward, together, ready for whatever comes next.

Letters Across Time

After students read Wilfred Owen's WWI poem, "Dulce Et Decorum Est" and ancient Roman poet Horace's Ode (III.2.13) to which the title refers, they were asked to write a letter to either or both men about the experience of being a veteran today or write their own ode about an aspect of military service that civilians might not understand or appreciate.

Before, I thought it would be exciting and easy! I wanted to sign up for 20 years. During it was painful, scary, dangerous, and endless. Afterwards, I have a great respect for all military. Honor and pride! (**Angie)**

Dear Horace and Owen,

I write to you as a fellow Air Force veteran who served as a proud Latina. I'm not sure if in your existence you would have seen this as normal but it continues to be somewhat rare.

Many immigrant products, like myself, joined because we didn't know what our path would lead to. Many also joined because we felt we had something to uphold because our parents sacrificed so much for us to live the American dream. The American dream I'm sure is different compared to yours. I am struggling to understand what it is. I had pride in serving my country as a young immigrant product, but not as a woman. I feel ashamed because it feels dishonest. How could I serve for a country that won't even value or protect my rights as a woman, much less a product of immigrants? Your stories feel a bit foreign to me in the sense that I struggle to feel the pride you write about.

Maybe pride is a term that can be molded to one's own. Nonetheless, your art brings many thoughts and ideas to me that I hadn't realized before. (**Pricilla**)

The military has really changed since you both were in. Women can actually do all the same jobs/positions only men could do for many years. When it first started and women were able to enlist, they were operators, nurses, mail sorters, and secretaries. It's still hard for women and will be until there are more women in charge or what we are hoping for is a woman President of the United States of America. Wish us luck that we continue to have as strong a military under a woman as with all these men I feel have started to let us down. (**Carolyn)**

Ode to Sand in the Middle East

My eyes are now a stream of tears from the Middle East!
I could not sleep and was awake all night; it was as
if my eyes daily are rubbed with grit.
I watched the stars in the dark, thought it was my
task to watch now; I watched from a distance.
I will protect my comrades in a fight or match for those
Who fight struggle today.
I use my eye drops to clarify my vision to enjoy my
Sight, but feels some days like blindness.
Important is that moment of closing your eyelids as a
fire in the oil burn pits breaks out.
Here and there life exists only to be watched
from a distance.
(**Tammy)**

Ode to the Female Soldier
She is a fighter buried underneath,
Heavy is the anger and yet she wears
it on her chest as if it is a heavy
anvil and hammer
So much strength in her heart.
Frustration races daily in her mind.
Inside deep is determination.
Compassion in her eyes and soul.
So much strength beneath, buried.
Searching for ways to survive deep
Within her body.
So much courage needed
So much confidence not to fall or fail.
She is you
A Female soldier
A Fighter
A Mess to correct.
(**Tammy)**

Ode to Breathe Normal Again

When the world is making promises
that it can't keep again,

When the road you're on is longer than
You ever thought you'd go,

You're always on the mend,
Breathe out, breathe in, breathe out again.

The weight on my shoulders is worse
As you get older with time,

The lines that you've drawn wear thin.

All that's inside you is screaming for calmness.
Breathe out normal again.

When the life you live is falling short
of what you want.

But you are giving all you got.

Breathe out, breath in, breath out again.

When the world is making promises
that it can't keep again.
(**Tammy)**

Around the gnomon we convene

Guardians of grasslands green
The shadow turns and points at us

We hang our heads inglorious

Around the gnomon we convene

Champions of life unseen
We police the world and choke the skies

What force responds when Mother cries?

Around the gnomon we convene

We all want waters pure and clean
We train and die for oil and gold
As our biosphere suffers hundred-fold

Around the gnomon make a stand

Return all forces to this land
Defend the atmosphere and Native rights

Infrastructure, ancient sites

Let's greet the shadow with our aid

Not recon, ambush, and grenade

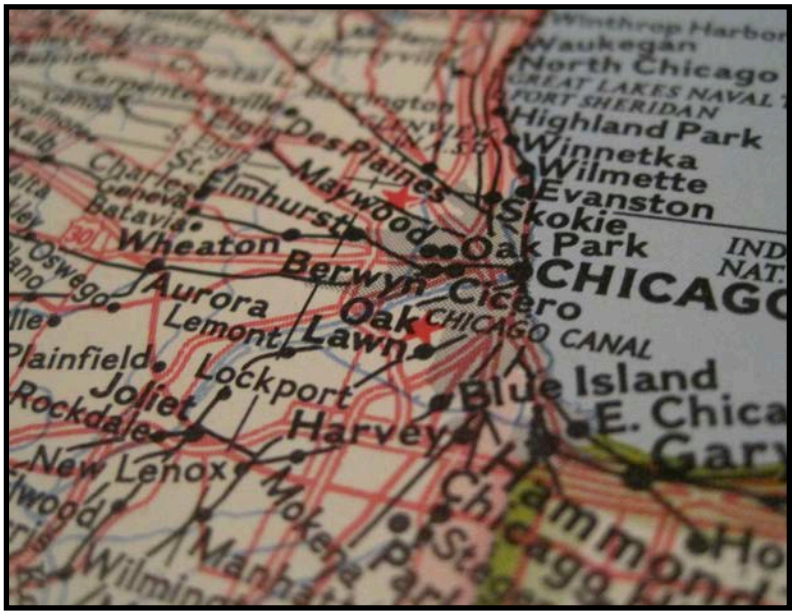
But justice, food, and homes for all

Then every soldier will stand tall.
(Joshua Rowe)

** A gnomon (/ˈnoʊˌmɒn, -mən/; from Ancient Greek γνώμων (gnṓmōn) 'one that knows or examines')[1][2] is the part of a sundial that casts a shadow. The term is used for a variety of purposes in mathematics and other fields.*

PLATO'S CAVE TODAY

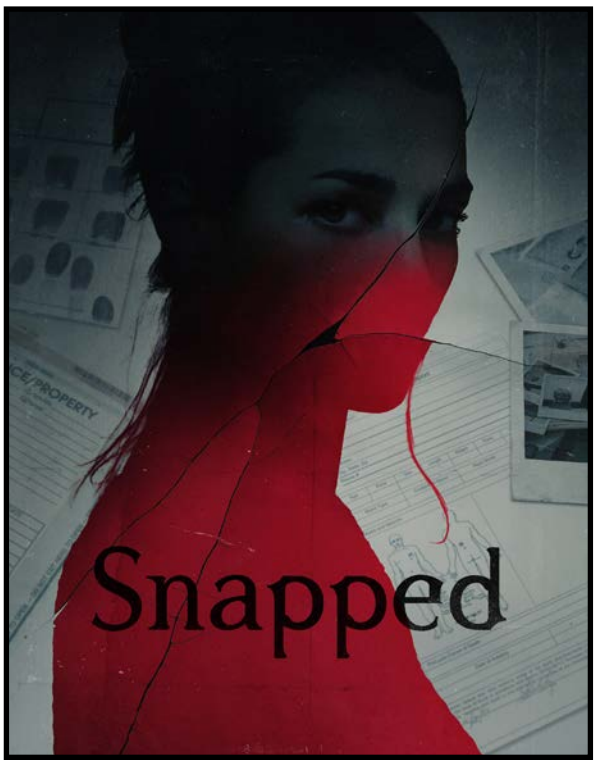
After reading Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" from The Republic, students wrote about times in their own lives when they have been trapped in caves that kept—or are still keeping—them or others they know from seeing the truth about the world around them.



Growing up in the ghetto of Chicago can be likened to the "Allegory of the Cave." Being raised in these neighborhoods kids often find themselves in metaphorical caves, surrounded by systemic poverty, violence, and limited access to quality education and resources. Their immediate environment shapes their understanding of life — akin to the shadows on the wall-where harsh realities may dim aspirations.

As they get older, some individuals begin to seek knowledge beyond their immediate surroundings. They may encounter mentors or educational opportunities that play a crucial role in illuminating paths previously obscured by social constraints. This process mirrors the escape from the cave; it involves confronting uncomfortable truths about their circumstances while striving for a broader understanding of life beyond my community.

The journey out of this metaphorical cave is not without challenges. It requires immense resilience against stereotypes and barriers that attempt to pull some back into ignorance. However, those who succeed in breaking free often become advocates for change within their communities, illuminating paths for others still trapped in darkness. Growing up in the ghetto of Chicago reflects both the struggle against oppressive circumstances and the potential for enlightenment through education and self-discovery — a powerful testament to human resilience like Plato's philosophical exploration. (**Hakeem)**



I look back on my life where I felt I was living in a cave when I was in one of my depressive seasons of my life. I've had many. One in particular is now realizing when I was in a very toxic relationship. I think just to be in a relationship. I look back now and I can't believe I finally crawled out as unscathed as I did. It could have been much worse. I tell people I am a free woman now to this day because of a TV show called "Snapped." Believe me, that saved my life and some others. (**Carolyn**)

Looking back on my life so far, I do feel like I was in a cave in a sense when I chose to stay ignorant about the world we live in. I think I very much embraced the saying “Ignorance is bliss.” I didn’t necessarily find comfort in it, but I think I embraced it because it was easier and less scary than knowing the reality of many others’ day to day lifestyle. It was easier to ignore others’ struggles because “it didn’t affect me.” Even though it was a short lived time when I did embrace this narrative, I don’t find pride in it. The reality was that it did affect me. It wasn’t okay for me to live in a world only thinking selfishly. For what? What is the benefit of it? There is so much more strength in a community than to do it all on your own or to only find ways to benefit yourself. A sense of community is important to my existence because it feeds the human connection that we have the privilege to embrace.

Life is so much more than chasing materialistic dreams. It’s even better when the people around you have the same hope.

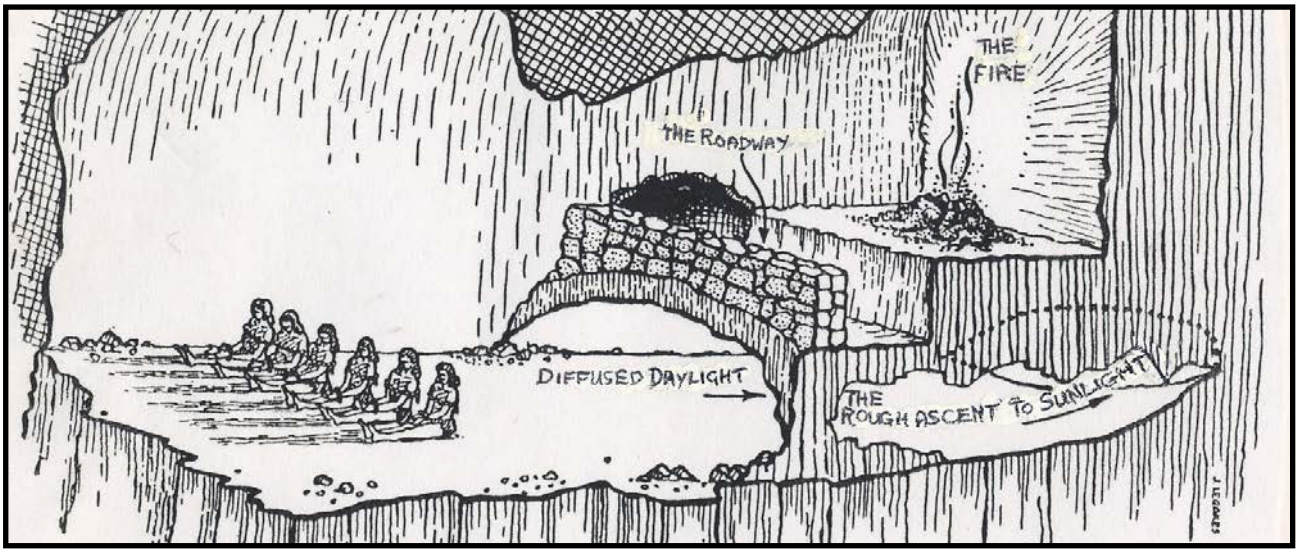
Some caves I observe around me today are the same ones I chose to embrace while I was younger. Many choose not to educate themselves because of an ignorant mindset. It doesn’t do good for the better of everyone, but if their moral standards are to think selfishly, It’s hard to uphold them to the standard that they should think about the greater society. I look at my sister and only picture how I can set up a better world for her than the one I came into. Why is it so hard for others to do the same? **(Pricilla)**

A locking box for human bodies shocks a soul with fear.
What if those who have the keys forget that I am here?
If my punishment ever ends, I’ll tell them in a voice that’s clear:
Others may be innocent, most had a public defender
All fell before a narrative that forced them to surrender.

The unconverted sleep in peace, jackboots in the hall benign
Those been labeled wake in fright, those who label say it’s my design
You who shake the shadows know, this is not reality
Performing “truths” for those you serve
Is a bow to their modality.

Someday it will come to pass, that once was truth is greed.
And you will answer for the rod, and the conscience you won’t heed.
Why are the poor and powerless imprisoned,
while the W.O.R.M. (White Old Rich Men)
Runs for President?
This is the lesson that Plato envisioned
See through what is evident.
(**Joshua)**

Run away, run far away, if you can't speak honestly.
Turn the page on a world that you don't need.
Wide awake and you're scared that you won't come home.
Didn't I tell you you were gonna break down?
Didn't I warn you? Didn't I warn you?
Take it easy. Try to find a way out.
Better start believing in yourself.
Build it up, tear it down.
Leave our pieces on the ground.
See no end, we don't know the way out.
All lost and we're fading away.
Hold on to me.
You're all I have, all I have.
Once in a while there's a light in the dark
Feel around and you will see where your heart went.
Heavy weight in the air but you can't see. Didn't you see me break down?
Tell me what you're needing, give in to the bleeding.
Never any feeling for yourself.
Build it up, tear it down.
Better take it easy, find a way out
Start believing in yourself.
All lost and we're falling and fading.
Hold onto me.
You're all I have. Hold onto me.
Can you hold onto me?
Run away, run away if you can't Speak
Don't want to fight no more.
Don't want to hide no more.
Don't want to cry no more.
Need you to hold me closer now. Come back.
Cause I need you to see me.
Hold me while you wait,
Run away, run far away if you can't speak honestly. (**Tammy**)



Becoming Metaphors

After noticing the rich figurative language Tim O'Brien used in The Things They Carried, *students tried their hand at their own metaphors about themselves.*

I am a rough diamond, born of carbon and intense pressure.
A ray of sunshine that makes people smile.

I wear my heart on my sleeve with many emotions, caring for those who might not see.

I feel like my identity is lost, wandering like a colorful kaleidoscope.
Each turn is reset and never in the final state.

I reflect in the here and now position, but pieces of my past shift to the surface.

Its structure is filled with broken bits and pieces, somehow someday you can look through them.
You still will see something beautiful, and all will change.

I am spinning and shifting and changing. **(Tammy)**

I am the melody in a song where some listen and feel empowered, while others feel sadness.
The rift that hits the right note and can make you feel something or nothing at all.
There is a lot of life and beauty in the tune, if you could just listen...It's there.
It sounds loud when valued and intimidating when ignored.
But if you just listen, It's so much more. **(Pricilla)**

I used to be a blank canvas!
Dry brushes warm water and blobs of acrylic.
A piece waiting to be worked,
Complicated mixtures, obnoxious brush strokes
painting a mix of difficult events.
A piece of work in progress.
Weathered storms and conquered fears show as art starts to form.
She's a real piece of work.
Radical acceptance, grace and silver linings.
I'm not starting from scratch. I'm starting from experience.
Now, I'm a piece of work! **(Angie)**

I am a chopstick
used and discarded on the dirty sidewalk,
Someone could see no further
Use for me (ignore the bacteria, germs and disease
I'm wood and I'm
Sharpened, I could hold up a weakened plant.
I could be cut into pieces
to join 2 pieces of wood
used and discarded, but
Valuable to Whom?
Valuable to you?
To someone. (**Joshua**)

I used to be a rock –
a strong rock
compressed and free –
but now I find I am in a place
Where I can't seem to see,
Who I used to be. **(Carolyn)**