

CELEBRATING 15 YEARS OF THE UW ODYSSEY PROJECT

Article by Emily Auerbach | Photos by Colleen Johnson



Dr. Baron Kelly works with Shakespeare actors, Bruce Moore and Tyjeana Galloway



Odyssey is a family affair: Alexis Law with her mother Ngina Ali (Odyssey 2017) and Alexis' son

Iwant to learn more, I want to listen more, I want to grow more,” writes Bruce Moore as he completes this year’s two-semester Odyssey Project.

“Class is a judge-free zone that has re-opened my mind and made me think outside of the box,” adds Maya Rasheed-Bracey, calling Odyssey “truly life changing.”

Ameshia Turner refers to Odyssey as her “new family” and says, “I have gained the idea that knowledge is power and the key.”

Bruce, Maya, Ameshia, and two dozen other students will graduate from Odyssey on May 2 on the UW-Madison campus.

Now in its 15th year, the UW Odyssey Project provides a transformational humanities course in South Madison to adults facing financial barriers to higher education. As students discuss Socrates, Frederick Douglass, and Emily Dickinson, visit the art museum, act out Shakespeare, Lorraine Hansberry, and August Wilson, and write their own creative pieces, they not only earn six UW-Madison credits but also find a voice and new sense of power.

Graduates of the program have overcome homelessness, incarceration, domestic abuse, and other obstacles, and have gone on after Odyssey to win awards, publish their writing, and earn two-year, four-year, and master’s degrees.

Odyssey classes are offered free to students thanks to funding from UW’s Division of Continuing Studies and numerous individual and organizational donors. “We’ve always had free childcare as part of our program,” notes Odyssey Director Emily Auerbach, “but since 2015 we’ve expanded our two-generational impact by creating an enrichment program for children ages 2 to 18 called Odyssey Junior.” The Odyssey Junior program recently won a prestigious grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

“My daughter and I are both very proud and happy that we are in the UW family now,” comments Tyjeana Galloway, whose daughter attends Odyssey Junior.

Sch’Royce Brown has a preschooler in the program and notes, “I can show my son that giving up is not an option.” Whole families go home excited about learning.

A recent evaluation of the program shows that graduates of Odyssey read more to their children, feel they are better parents, have more hope for the future, and are more likely to vote, do community work, and continue in college.

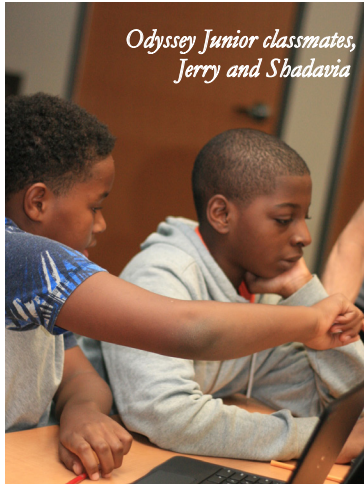
On May 2 from 6:30-8pm, each graduating student will take to the stage at Memorial Union’s Great Hall with personal comments about their Odyssey experience.



Tandalaya Taylor and Victor Rojas



Keziah Bester, Tandalaya Taylor, Associate Director Kevin Mullen, Ta'Tiana Clacks, Tori Armour



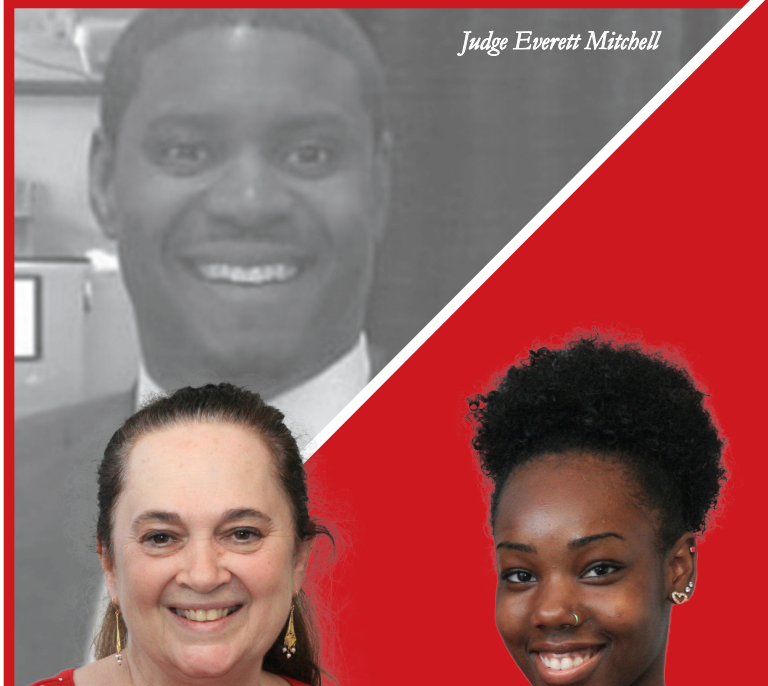
Odyssey Junior classmates, Jerry and Shadavia



Odyssey Junior participants



Odyssey students showing off UW Madison ID student cards: (Back row) Keziah Bester, Ta'Tiana Clacks, Victor Rojas; (front row) Charnice Anderson, James Davis, Maya Rasheed-Bracey, Selena Munoz



Judge Everett Mitchell

Judge Everett Mitchell will make congratulatory remarks. The joyous ceremony is free and open to the public and will include refreshments and music.



Lisa Simmons, Dr. Emily Auerbach, Founder and Director of Odyssey; and Ariona Jones