

ODYSSEY



ORACLE

EMBARKING ON AN ODYSSEY



Contents

Embarking on an Odyssey.....	2
Connecting With The Circuit	7
Moved by Malcolm X.....	10
Oracle Ovations.....	16
Letter From Jasmine Miller	25
Meet Gela!	27
Creative Corner	28

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EMBARKING ON AN ODYSSEY

odyssey (ä-də-sē) *n.* an extended adventurous wandering; named after Odyssey, the second epic of Homer, a Greek poet of the 8th or 9th century B.C. who recounted the ten-year wanderings and adventures of Odysseus.



I think the Odyssey Project's name reflects its students' past journeys and future endeavors. Odyssey defines a sense of wandering and change of fortune in one's life. In our first class, we heard

stories of self-loathing that turned to self-love. Past alumni shared their stories of hopelessness that brought current comrades to tears yet made us feel hope. Each speaker painted a picture of their journey. The Odyssey Project is made of stories and gives its students a chance to change their fortune and an opportunity to wander towards a better future.

Since before class started, I have been in disbelief of my acceptance to the Odyssey Project. I went from being completely confident that I'd get accepted, to feeling hopeless while waiting for the news. After being accepted, all I could picture is me standing next to my son and family in a graduation gown. I am not confident in my writing, and I

haven't been in school for more than ten years, but I have a voice and clear image of my dreams. The class is part of my odyssey to persevere, learn, and become a better version of myself. **(Angelica Alvarez Valencia)**



It is called Odyssey because it changes many people's lives for the better. This class will make me take my education more seriously. I say I need a degree all the time, so I'm finally acting on it. **(Kyianna Baker)**



I believe it's called Odyssey Project because we are going on a journey, and it can take us however long it needs to take to get to our goals. I have done so much, but most of the time I feel like it's not enough.

So this class is an Odyssey for me because it is a part of my life's project and an obstacle that I'm taking, that I know will be great for my future. **(Tiffany Brenston)**



It's called Odyssey Project because I am on an adventure. Odyssey for me is a challenge, an experience, a journey of success and obstacles. **(Quanna Caffey)**



Everyone in this program is looking for many changes and fortune in our life. This class is an Odyssey for me because I feel I have been in the same spot in my life, and this program is putting the heat in my kitchen to have many changes and fortune for me and my family. **(Eleanor Ceaser)**





Having many obstacles that can cause a setback, I will not be defeated. I will press towards the mark of my calling that leads to success. I know that this journey is new to me and that it's a bit scary not knowing where this road leads, but I'm willing to take the leap of faith forward to see this through. **(Tim Comer)**



Everyone participating in this course has chosen to embark back on this journey of education, and at times it will seem a little scary or uncertain. But as the semester/year continues on and as we encounter the "many changes of fortune," the more we will learn to trust the Odyssey, both within education and within ourselves.

I feel like this course will be an Odyssey for me because I have felt the urge to get back into education and challenge myself academically, and I feel like this program provides the perfect platform to do so. Also, on a personal level, I'm excited for the way some assignments will make me take a deep dive inward in trying to understand myself as well as the world around me. Both on an academic and personal level, I know that this will be an ongoing process, and one of the keys is to just have faith in that process. The journey is the destination. **(Dillon Dahlk)**



I think this course is called the Odyssey Project because it is a part of a path to help others towards success.

The class might be an odyssey for me because it's a course in a journey that I am taking to reach my goal of becoming successful. **(Gela Docks)**



An Odyssey consists of a long journey resulting in some kind of positive resolution. Though the Odyssey Project is an adventure, I believe the starting point is us: The situations each student has individually been through is the journey and the Odyssey project is the sanctuary/fortunate landing.

Being accepted into the program is the second Odyssey. The first, like I said previously, is life and its struggles. Odyssey was the break of luck I needed. Finishing the program and moving on beyond to a solid foundation is the second. **(Brianna Español)**



This course is called the Odyssey Project due to it being named after the work by Homer, *The Odyssey*, because it aims to break the cycle of generational poverty through education. This class is going to be an Odyssey to me. This is a new adventure for me that will be filled with hardship and notable experiences. I will overcome any and all hardships that may come my way during this amazing course. I will have testimony filled with notable experiences that I will hopefully be able to share with others. **(Adrienne Farrow)**





It's the growth of a person, turning nothing into something, overcoming boundaries, with drive and dedication, along, extended trip full of

adventure. I see myself starting from the bottom headed to the top. The people in the class are different colors of paint that help bring together one masterpiece that I see myself a part of. **(Jamal Jackson)**



It's called Odyssey because I believe the program was created to help people jumpstart their journey and to help restore opportunities for different communities of people. The experience was a leap of faith for

me, and every day I show up is me moving further in my odyssey. **(Aaniyah Jefferson)**



I think it's called the Odyssey Project because it's the start of something new, and through the adventures of the class you get to experience finding yourself or finding your career. The class is a steppingstone for me, and I believe

it will help me excel in my nursing career. **(Mariya Lucas)**



The course is called the Odyssey Project because it will take us on an adventurous journey of learning with different forms of teaching. We will take this journey with a wonderful team and learn on this long eventful adventure

with different learning material. This will be an odyssey for me because this opportunity itself is already an adventure for me hearing some of the amazing stories and the journeys that people have been through the Odyssey Project. I feel that the Odyssey Project can teach me preparation, adaptability, perseverance, and the necessity of humility resulting in an adventurous journey. **(Gloria Knight)**

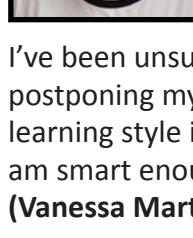


The course is called Odyssey because of its positively life changing tendency; it changes people to be better and more responsible in society. Given the many lives the course has impacted, I know it will be an

odyssey for me due to the prospects of me becoming a better and more responsible person. **(Alfusainey Manjang)**



For me, the class is called Odyssey because we will have nine long months of class. I will live, laugh, and learn new things with new people in a class we will learn and grow from. **(Crystal Lee)**



I believe it's called "The Odyssey Project" because it is a journey of self-discovery and self-talent by all that take this course. Each is on their own journey in life. I believe I will understand myself better and what I want to do in my life.

I've been unsure for so long and indecisive, always postponing my decisions. I think that because my learning style is "different" I always question if I am smart enough or capable of better for myself. **(Vanessa Martinez)**



I think this course is called the Odyssey Project because it offers the tools and resources to create a rewarding and positive change within each of the individuals enrolled. Each student faces some type of barrier or hardship when it comes to pursuing a higher education. The Odyssey Project eliminates common struggles to ensure that the only outcome is a rewarding future. This class is eye opening, and I couldn't be happier to go through the different trials and tribulations among people who actually genuinely care and support me as well as my children. **(Alexis McClain)**



I tend to be a visual artist. When I hear Odyssey, I envision a map. a magical one of course. Day by day as we write, the ink from our pen also bleeds into the magical maps that depict not only our individual journeys but also our collective journey as well.

In my twenty-six years of life, I have held onto experiences that allowed me to gauge how finite life is, and paradoxically the infinite potential of a moment. The next direction to be taken of the said imagined map only appears as we begin creating. Each word is a new line—mind mapping the story told through our shared cartography.

I am fascinated by the details that can be found on a good map. I hope to depict through art

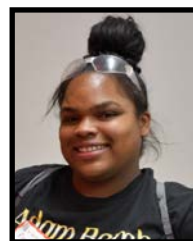
what I learn from the Odyssey Project with time, dedication, and attention to detail. I think the Odyssey Project is a beautiful name for something we all share yet still individually make our own. **(Mickey Mestiza)**



I think this course is called the Odyssey Project because after looking up the meaning and going over all the letters to us from the last class on top of all the things that are offered to us upon taking this course, I feel like this will be a life changing road and journey to success, and education. I'm pretty sure there will be hiccups and obstacles in the road that will try to keep me from greatness. I think this course is called Odyssey because everything is right here in this course. You just have to reach out and grab it. It may be different, may be challenging, and we may even experience hardships (adventures). **(Valvree Mosley)**



Odyssey supports minorities to get ahead with education. The hardships that people face would otherwise prevent them from furthering their education, but the Odyssey is there to assist and guide them through the journey which other institutions might not have thought would be possible. By giving people chances, it opens doors to greatness being the beginning for many people's Odyssey. **(Daija Pigram)**



The course is called the Odyssey Project because there is a poem reference and because there will be many changes. **(Lailaini Reed)**



It will be a big change to life and maybe a new fortune to my life. I think it's called Odyssey because it will be an experience of a lifetime. **(Tiana Richmond-Lee)**



I think this course is called the Odyssey Project because it acknowledges the trials and tribulations one may have had in the past but also shows that with hard work and dedication you can be successful and achieve

everything you desire. This class may be an Odyssey for me because this is my third time attempting to get an education beyond high school and after numerous jobs. Some jobs were great but starting over is not something I want to do over and over in the future as well as being financially unstable, working inconsistent schedules, and not having a healthy work/life balance. This class will open a new chapter in my life, giving me a sense of restoration and determination to make it to where I want to be in life. **(Ashli Smith)**



I believe the program was named Odyssey to define that going through the program will be and is made to be a beautiful journey. After completing Odyssey, we still will be a part of the family and will be locked in. For me, the program

will for sure be eventful and adventurous. I will be doing many things I've never done before. I believe it will be a fun challenge with a lot of help and beautiful moments along the way. **(Janessa Weichmann)**



I think this course is called the Odyssey Project because this class is an adventure, and you never know what could happen. This class might be an odyssey for me because I believe it will help me come out of my shell and find my

voice. **(Abigail Wilson)**



I feel this course is called the Odyssey because it is going to be a huge journey for each and every one of us and a new journey for you all with our class of 2025. I feel the class will be an Odyssey for me because this is one I have not been on yet. I feel

this will help me open my mind and help me more to focus on where I really want to go in life. I feel this will be amazing for me. **(Corrie Thomas)**



I think it's called the Odyssey Project because life is a journey, and another word of Odyssey is journey. I believe the class is going to be the beginning of my school Odyssey. **(Ladella Wilson)**



I think there is a correlation between the program's goals and the theme of "The Odyssey." Odysseus was able to overcome the trials and tribulations to essentially restore his home. That idea can be reflected to represent our growth as

individuals who have made the choice to restore their home despite the trials we've had to overcome to get to this point. One could say that the overarching themes of "return, wandering, friendship, testing, and omens" could be found in both the epic poem and the Odyssey Program. While sticking to the narrative of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, I would like to compare myself to Odysseus in the aspect that the events of the Trojan War have passed; through resilience and the aid of those who want to help me on my journey. I will be able to reclaim my home with Penelope. **(Dan Thomas)**



I have been very nervous when it comes to learning all over again. I feel like I'm not smart enough to keep up. Just being in the class the first night listening to the alumni tell their stories gives me courage to want to learn and change my

life. That's how this class can be my Odyssey. **(Sable Wright)**



CONNECTING WITH THE CIRCUIT

My ancestors, mother and mi gente are all Francisco Jimenez. His story is the story of my people. My mother, Maria, came to this country and began working in the corn fields in Wisconsin. She has told me stories that brought me to tears. It was painful hearing her stories of hardship. I can only picture Francisco's little hands covered with blisters all worn out from picking strawberries. Mi familia and the Jimenez family are

immigrants. I have never picked a single strawberry or corn husk from a field in one hundred degree weather like thousands of my people, but I wish to honor the food, family, and pride I carry in mi sangre por mi gente. **(Angelica Alvarez)**

I can learn to be grateful for everything I have. I've always had an education in my life and I think I took it for granted sometimes. **(Kyiana Baker)**

I can relate to being angry not understanding what someone is saying. I love how everything worked out. And he made it through. **(Tiffany Brenston)**

A part I can relate to is moving by myself for the first time and packing up my stuff and moving it by myself. **(Quanna Caffey)**

I relate to the part where the father instills good morals to follow in life that could make or break you, even when life isn't going how you want. **(Eleanor Ceaser)**

The first thing that came to my mind was recently being released from prison and feeling like I'm starting almost every aspect of my life from scratch—or at the beginning of a circuit/cycle. I think my favorite part about this reading is the fact that Mr. Jiménez did not let the circumstances of "the circuit" define his life—earning his Ph.D. from Columbia University. **(Dillon Dahlk)**



Like Jimenez I've moved many times in my life often not staying in a place for more than a year—I remember bringing up the fact we've moved a lot to my mother and asked her if we could count. We got to number 13 and started drifting into technicalities of what counts as a move. I've moved 2 more times since that 13. **(Brianna Español)**

What I took from this story is that if you are finding yourself in trying times and feel like you can't go on,

remembering this story will help you push through anything. The love that this family had for one another is amazing and the gratitude they still showed for the things they had was extremely eye opening. I also related to the story in many ways as well. I know what it's like to move to a new place with your family in order to grow, make more money, or get a better education, etc. Being the new kid in school is never fun, and I could only imagine going to school somewhere where I am unfamiliar with the language. This story really helped me find gratitude in the small things and to really appreciate the things God has blessed me with. **(Adrianne Farrow)**

I related to the moving from place to place, everything in place then it's time to relocate again, helping dad work while mom cooked, chasing the American dream. **(Jamal Jackson)**

The part of the story that I can relate to personally is the having to grow up early and making a way to survive. I did not have it as hard as Francisco, but my parents were having some traumas that they were operating with causing me to have to work to buy my own clothes, get items for laundry, pay school fees, etc. I would have to miss school some days to either babysit or clean houses to make money. However, what I did learn from this is that things could have been worse and to always be grateful. **(Gloria Knight)**

I relate to constantly moving schools and homes, having to start over again, meet new people, and learn a new school. Also, I relate to coming in and being different. My mom chopped my hair off in 5th grade. I was bullied so bad I haven't worn my real hair ever since. The biggest thing I take from the story is to be grateful for what I have now.

(Crystal Lee)

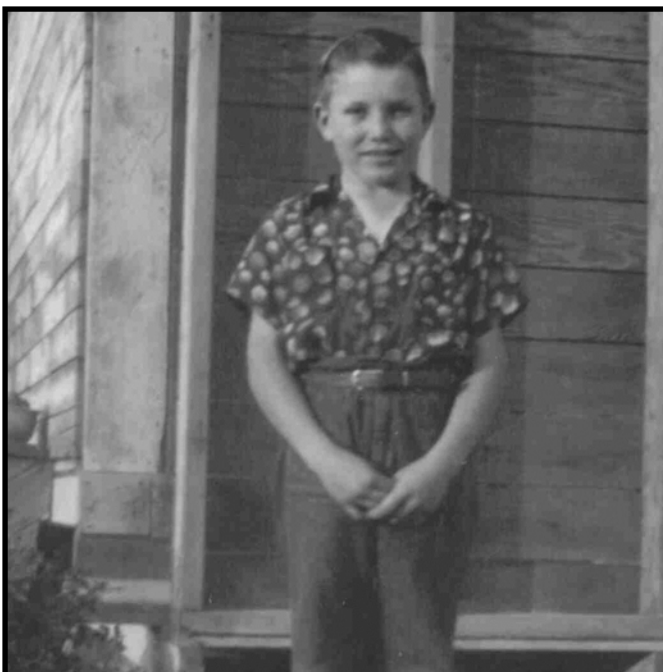
Although I had a lot more stability than Francisco, I didn't grow up very fortunate, as I had a single woman as a mother. We had what we needed but it was never like the others. Reading this made me realize a lot of people had it way worse and you never really know what a person is going through (Be kind to everyone!) **(Mariya Lucas)**

I'm a migrant and our stories are as different as they may be, but the truth is, they're shared.

(Alfusainey Manjang)

Breaking "cycles" means getting a better education and not working low paying, production/customer service jobs and obtaining a higher education and higher pay, getting out of low-income housing, abusive relationships, not being emotionally available for your kids because you're burnt out, and being an active participant in all aspects of life.

(Vanessa Martinez)



I can learn to identify the issue/barriers in my life that are stopping me from breaking the generational cycle. In a way I'm repeating my mother's life. I experienced a bit of the college life, found what I thought love was, had two kids back-to-back, just to end up alone and struggling. My children's father is incarcerated, leaving me and my two boys to figure out life alone. My mom went through the exact same thing except she had two daughters back-to-back. **(Alexus McClain)**

The part of the story that I related to emotionally was the child's sense of longing for connection through language, and the feeling of hope found through music. As the oldest child of first-generation immigrants, it often fell upon me to be responsible for translating on my parents' behalf. I often wished that there was someone who would take me under their wing to teach me about the nuances in the English language. For example, when I went into high school, I had no idea what being a Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, or Senior meant. It was after a few homecoming pep rally shouts that I got the hang of the grade order names and sequence.

Most of my teachers made it clear that they recognized my intelligence and pushed me along the way. As an adult and young queer elder I recognize the importance now more than ever that it matters how we show up for the youth. To clarify, I say that I am a young queer elder to honor the reality that many young trans folx do not make it past their teens. What does it mean to truly connect with youth? I wish I could ask the child if they were able to hold onto the hope after the despair of having to move. Was the teacher's kindness enough?

August of 2023, I completed a workshop through UW-Madison School for Workers in collaboration with Voces de la Frontera and learned more about the living conditions of migrant farm workers in Wisconsin. I had no idea it was so similar to this day. I had the opportunity to share a meal with families and the children of migrant farmworkers. As I was reading the story I had faces, smiles, and giggles to weep for. **(Mickey Mestiza)**

I can relate to the ending of the story where he had fear but was determined to put his best foot forward. I can relate to him being in a place and feeling kind of misplaced or as if you do not belong. I can relate to the part of the story where it seems as though you've come so far, put in so much to elevate, just to come how circuit right back to square one. **(Valvree Mosley)**

I can relate to the dread of moving. When I was in 7th grade my family moved out of state with no real plan or warning on my parents' part. I was upset...we eventually moved back to Madison, but I could tell that our financial status had changed. We never really recovered from it until I eventually moved into my own apartment.

(Daija Pigram)

Be more grateful for what I have and do not complain about the things I don't have because people are less fortunate and have had a harder life. **(Tiana Richmond-Lee)**

This story teaches me the importance of consistency and hard work. It reminds me that I have the power to create the life I want for my family and that it is never too late to accomplish anything. Also, no matter what the situation and circumstances are it is important to keep going and NEVER give up. **(Ashli Smith)**

I feel I can relate to this story in a few ways. I feel I can relate to his mother and father the most as in working non-stop and to always keep going, make the best of the worst in every situation. I am always working just like they were, love to strive and find the best. I also feel I can relate to Francisco himself, as in finding someone you can put trust, love, and comfort into, and they get ripped away. I feel for him needing to start over yet again.

(Corrie Thomas)

I could relate to moving and changing schools often. I've grown used to sudden changes in daily life. Like



Francisco, I would get upset when I was unable to perform. **(Dan Thomas)**

Although I can't relate much, I've always believed stability is very important for children. My mom taught me that. It's sad that this boy has no stability whatsoever. I couldn't imagine. **(Janessa Weichmann)**

I can personally relate to the feeling of getting your hopes up about something in the story. The little boy gets his hopes up about getting to learn English only for it to be crushed for me. I have never gone through something as sad as getting to learn English then being deported, but I have had things I really wanted to do but couldn't because I got sick, or something came up. **(Abigail Wilson)**

I could relate to him being in class and the teacher asking him to read and him being so scared and unsure of himself. I often felt the same way from elementary through high school. I also could relate to going to multiple schools and having to "start over." **(Ladella Wilson)**

I can relate, like when he went to school, and everything feels strange to him. He's never experienced that before and especially he can't speak English. That's how I feel, like school is a different language to me, out of whack. **(Sable Wright)**

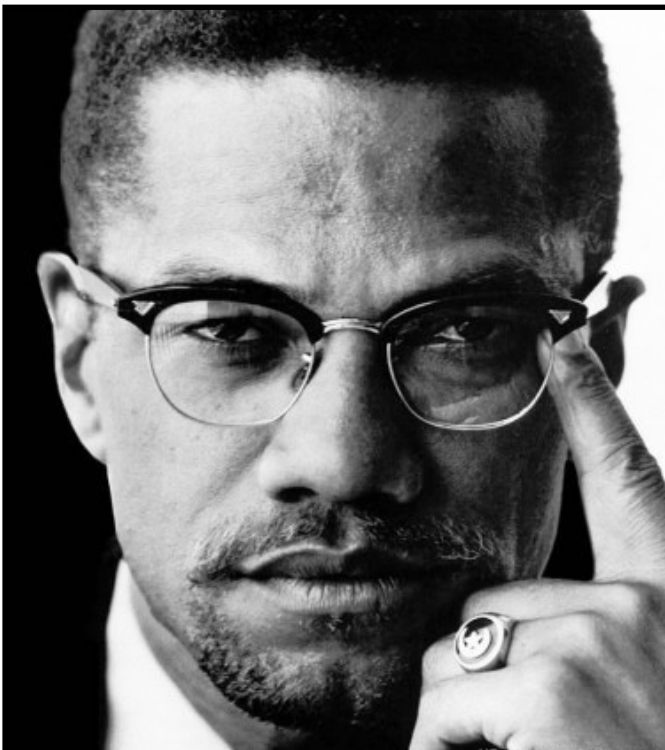
MOVED BY MALCOLM X

"I saw that the best thing I could do was get hold of a dictionary. . . . I knew right there in prison that reading had changed forever the course of my life. As I see it today, my ability to read awoke inside me some long dormant craving to be mentally alive."

—*"Homemade Education" discussion from The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

Malcolm X expressed that his real education came from his "homemade education." His homemade education was his way of taking advantage of the resources that were accessible to him while in the Norfolk Prison School Colony. In prison he began improving his writing skills by copying the dictionary and reading for hours in his cell room till four a.m. at times. In seventh grade Malcom X experienced the lack of black history being taught and very little representation in the classroom, which only covered black history in one paragraph. **(Angelica Alvarez Valenciano)**

He gave himself an education—I feel like it's self-explanatory. He taught himself to read words he didn't understand, fixed his writing, and taught himself about Black history. A lot of Black people have to teach themselves about Black history



because it's not taught in US education. If it is, it's a week on it and a test, then it's over. Him teaching himself gave him an open door that he didn't know he had, and it's amazing! **(Kyiana Baker)**

I really feel like Malcolm was gifted and always smart, so "homemade education" was not exactly so hard for him to do. Opening a dictionary always expands the mind. For Malcolm to have read the book from front to back is very inspiring, something I have yet to do. Prison alone is a sad place to be; I too would have educated myself. As we all know, it's a rehabilitation facility. What I'm taking with me is that reading will forever nourish your mind. **(Tiffany Brenston)**

Homemade education means teaching yourself, trying until you understand, learning how you learn best. Teach yourself how you learn best. Don't give up on yourself. **(Quanna Caffey)**

What does he mean by homemade education? To me, what they are teaching us in school is a way to keep our mind and future in the direction they want it to go. When we can teach ourselves, we learn far more beneficial things that will help us in our living days now. Our history book was written by white people and completely left people of color out. Then in school they taught us that same history that really didn't give us accurate information. It actually dumbed down the greatness that we have brought in this life. He also states how he learned far more reading the dictionary and books of his choice. He got more information and education doing that than in school. Malcolm X learned more when he taught himself reading every day going through the whole dictionary, far more than he did going to school. **(Eleanor Ceaser)**

I think Malcolm X's phrase "homemade education" refers to him literally starting from scratch and off pure desire and determination to further his growth and understanding of the world. It started off pretty simple with him copying and re-reading the words of the dictionary, and then as his understanding grew so did his curiosity and hunger for more knowledge. He got to the point where he was studying philosophy and even said, "You will never catch me with a free fifteen minutes in which I'm not studying something I feel might be able to help the Black man." One part from the reading that I think really illustrates this idea of a "homemade education" is when Malcolm X was asked what his alma mater was, and he replied "Books." It wasn't some fancy college where he got his understanding of the world, but rather pure desire and an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. **(Dillon Dahlk)**

Malcolm X uses the phrase "Homemade Education" to describe the fierce drive of personal curiosity to then take the steps to learn on your own. I personally loved the fact that when he recounts his experience in prison, he makes it clear that teaching yourself is not easy, but on your own you will discover the truth.

He made a point to dive deep and read books from people who were raw and told the more accurate accounts of history. It's no secret that reading in general and fiction or non-fiction is the stairway to that feeling of being "mentally alive" and expanding compassion. I do wish it was an action people and even I made an effort to do—to take advantage of all the free knowledge accessible.

(Brianna Español)

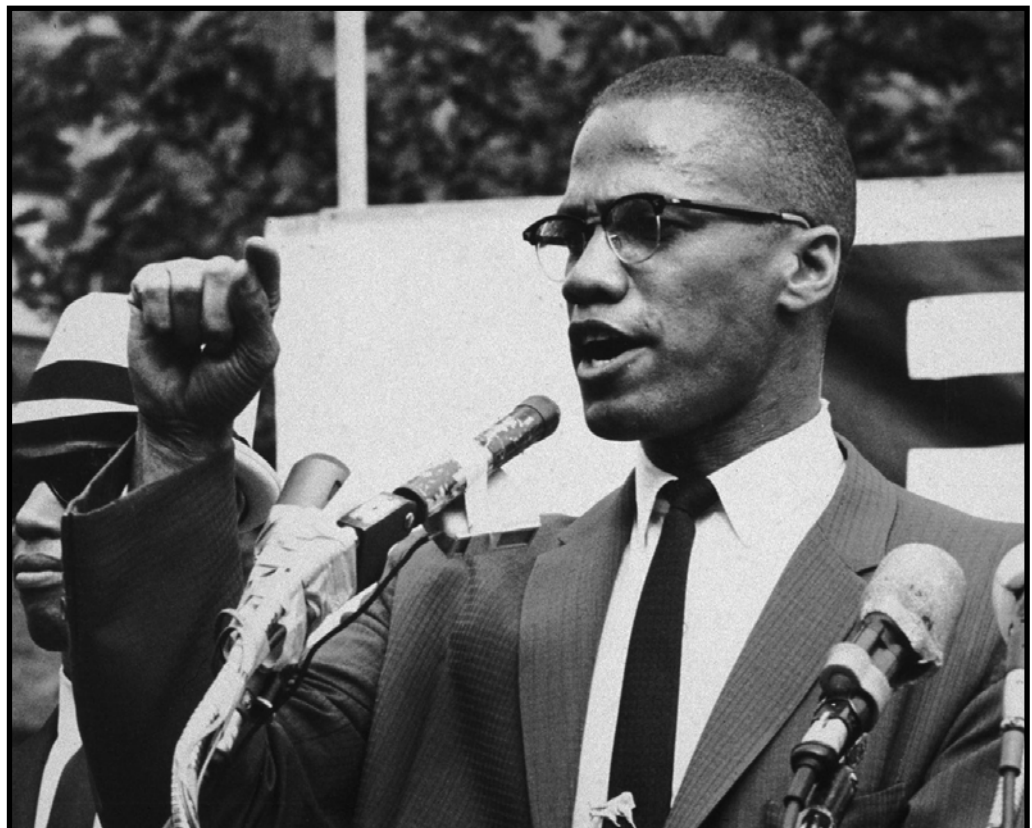
I feel that homemade education means taking the initiative to teach yourself and learn from

the things that are available to you. Make it your main priority to learn and teach yourself something new. Malcolm X showed this by not being stagnant and finding the motivation to find education everywhere around him. By staying dedicated and focused, he was able to open a whole new way of expression. A homemade education to me is being self-taught in some form or fashion. If I were to describe this in new school terms, I would say it's like DIY education or going to YouTube University. Seeing something that gives you knowledge, you take the time to learn that information with your own conviction and knowledge base.

(Adrianne Farrow)

Homemade education is going out to gather all your information yourself, reading book after book, article after article. All the education he needed was in books. First, he had to learn how to read them plus learn what words meant for better understanding. I really like this piece because I was also in prison and taught myself how to read, almost about the same way he did. Sad but true, prison is one of the best places to study.

(Jamal Jackson)

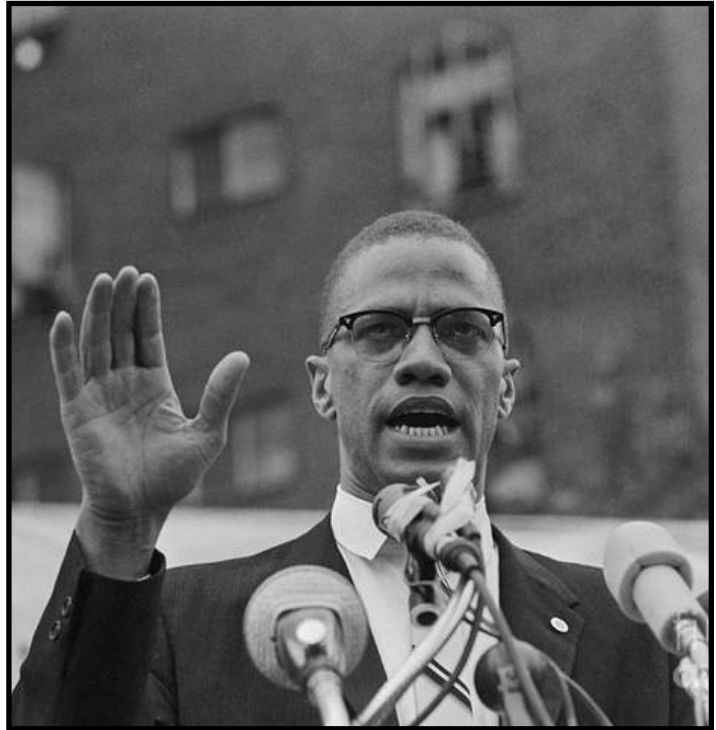


Dictionary answer of homemade education: “made in the home, on the premises, or by one’s own efforts” and “the action of process of educating or being educated.” Malcolm said, “the ability to read awoke inside me some long dormant craving to be mentally alive.” He also said “my homemade education gave me with every additional book that I read a little more sensitivity to the deafness, dumbness, and blindness that was afflicting the black race in America.”

My interpretation of homemade education would be someone like you or me seeking knowledge and finding it wherever it may be—having a want to further your education, having street smarts as well as school smarts, being open minded enough to grow in every mental aspect. I can appreciate his words and his message. It’s like going out of your way to learn what is not regularly provided to you. It’s taking a step outside the box others have put on you and deciding you want more. One thing I love about Malcolm is he never lets others confine him. **(Aaniyah Jefferson)**

Malcolm X called it “homemade education” because he taught himself reading comprehension by making his own plan and executing the plan. It was not a plan that was given to him by a teacher or superior, but one that was thought out by himself with his own strategic learning plan. Humbly, I believe that this is one of the most encouraging articles that I read. It shows how much ambition one person can have with the right level of determination.

His frustration due to lack of reading comprehension made him thrive with knowledge. Reading this piece has given me a whole new outlook on the phrase “Lemons to Lemonade.” This writing provides so much inspiration about his thirst for knowledge and how he went about obtaining it and educating himself; hence the title “Homemade Education.” From reading up on Black history to researching philosophers and sampling their work, I believe that he took his prison situation and was inspired for greatness. **(Gloria Knight)**



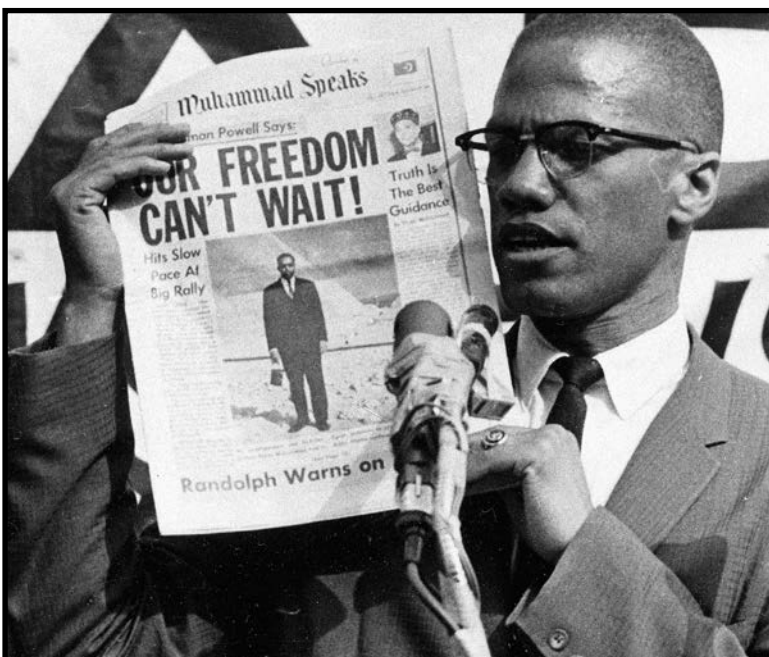
When I hear homemade education, I think about being self-taught. After reading his piece I got that he got so much time to learn things he wouldn’t have on the outside. He was able to study safely and free. He was able to have a dictionary and go page by page, letter by letter. His friend Muhammad was also a great learning opportunity because he saw someone else use his time for knowledge, learning, and teaching. Learning made his time easier. He had no distractions, was all focused and able to use that knowledge in the outside world. Going back to my main focus, a homemade education is what you make out of it—finding your own ways and techniques to learning and improving and learning to use your time wisely. What might work for everyone else may not work for you. **(Crystal Lee)**

Homemade education is self-taught education. He used his time in prison to learn. As a person who could not read or write, he brought it to himself to write down every word in the dictionary and forced himself to read it and put words into sentences. Homemade education also focuses on education strictly that that person wants to learn more about instead of school-based education, where you’re learning the same curriculum as everyone else around you. **(Mariya Lucas)**

Homemade Education springs from the fact that Malcom X was privileged for higher education, he was some form of a self-taught man. He was argumentative but wasn't really in a place to see meaning in writings found in books until his imprisonment. It's in prison and arguing with the white man that he developed himself to the extent of improving his penmanship. That in essence is "Homemade Education." **(Alfusaaney Manjang)**

I believe it means self-educating—reading the dictionary to understand the meaning of words you're not familiar with and putting this knowledge together with the whole sentence to fully understand the whole statement. Self-educating can mean researching things online, reading books on subjects you're interested in, talking to people, and listening to their stories in life or their perspectives on certain issues. **(Vanessa Martinez)**

Malcolm's demeaning experience with Bimbi in prison led Malcolm to use the resources (books) he had to learn what he was oblivious to. Malcolm used repetition to memorize words and their definitions. At one point, Malcolm became so invested in his ability to learn more through dictionaries and books that he spent most of his days/time reading. In my opinion, Malcolm found a sense of freedom through reading while incarcerated, which in a sense helped him escape



his physical reality. "Months passed without my even thinking about being imprisoned. In fact, up to then, I never have been so truly free in my life." **(Alexus McClain)**

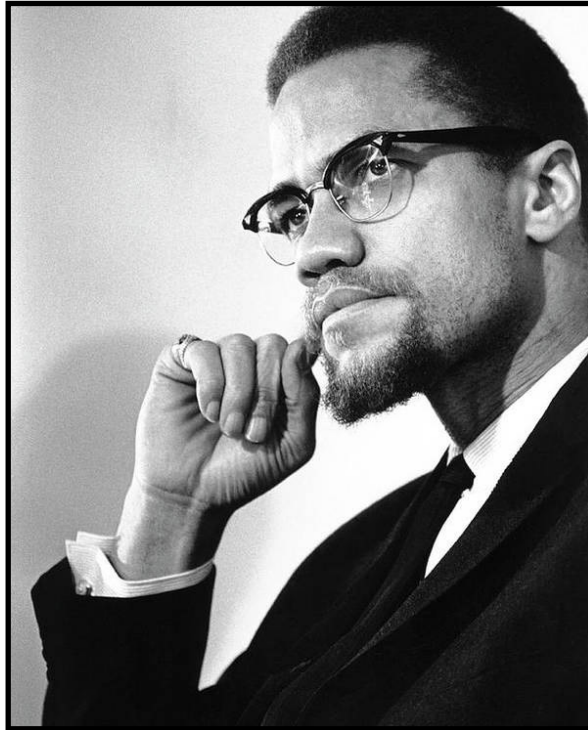
In Malcolm X's "Homemade Education" he illustrates the distractions that come with a college education. Malcolm names time as being a vital tool in learning. I interpret a homemade education as a deliberate choice as to what we choose to do with our curiosity in the time that we have. Taking something oppressive such as time in prison, he leveraged time by using it choosing to seek knowledge.

In high school I subscribed to a narrative that I would not be able to attend college after graduation due to the systemic limitations of my immigration status. Throughout my life as a first-generation immigrant child, I observed my parents being humiliated for not being able to speak "proper English." I resonated deeply with Malcolm expressing frustration in not being able to articulate himself in writing.

I took six English classes in high school and failed my AP literature class because I didn't know how to read for comprehension. However, I knew that if I put myself in the right spaces that I would be able to pick up enough through listening to at least become proficient in speaking the language. If my memory serves it was after 2022 that I decided it was time to challenge myself to return to literature. The choice to return to my most shameful failure (dropping out of AP literature after one semester) was haunting. At the time I had quit my job due to being overwhelmed by being perceived as I began my gender affirming care, separated from a long-term partner, and in the midst of a deep depression. I had failed to unalive myself.

Reaching for knowledge has become a lifeline in times of turbulence and distress. I spent a period unable to work because I failed to renew my DACA permit. In my mind at the time was "dead people don't

need work permits.” While I waited for the government to reprocess my documentation, I began reading and journaling. I started reading books digitally, and after reading a few books I regained passion for life. I started listening to audiobooks once my work permit was renewed, and within that year I read one hundred books. Malcolm X’s Autobiography was one of those books.



Malcolm X’s education did not end at eighth grade when he stopped attending middle school after being discriminated against for the color of his skin. Unfortunately, being a minor, he was charged, putting him in juvenile detention where he started his homemade education. Despite his teachers not thinking he was worthy of learning, he was determined to teach himself what he could as a child with no written knowledge of the English language. Reading was a pastime in prison and before he would understand the words in the books, he would first read to learn them. Reading opened up a world that was taken from him, and he was determined to learn more

Reading this passage now from our course reader has validated that regardless of the circumstances, time spent learning is always time well spent. Last November I dedicated myself to learning about transglobal long history. Recently I have focused my time to seek Chicano studies and remain determined to reconnect with my indigenous roots and uncover and reimagine our Mesoamerican history from a place of love. I am grateful that Odyssey has gifted me the space and tools to research what matters to me in the pursuit of justice—knowledge. **(Mickey Mestiza)**

I believe when Malcolm X made homemade education that he meant manmade teaching himself being devoted to learning and fighting for our culture/race. He meant teaching himself to read and write better and being dedicated to it, determined to do better and know better. I personally feel him teaching himself was better than any education he could have ever received at any university. I can relate to the fact that sometimes it takes messed up things to happen for us to make better decisions and to do better, like it took for him to be in prison to better his life and education. It’s like that saying that if you get lemons make lemonade. **(Valvree Mosley)**

without the repercussion of Black history and what “they” want us to know. **(Daija Pigram)**

Malcolm X didn’t receive much education. He wanted to read and write better so he taught himself. He got a dictionary to teach himself words in books. He also got help with his penmanship. When he tried to look for more information, he felt it was biased and went and learned more on his own. **(Lailaini Reed)**

I believe he meant that he taught himself how to read and write while in prison. He guided himself through his ideas and thoughts until it made sense. He also felt like education was an important thing to him and he didn’t want to give up. **(Tiana Richmond-Lee)**

I got a lot of things out of the “homemade education”—the first being that Malcolm X educated himself through reading and writing which did not come from a college or university and did a great job doing so. He created his own educational plan for how he would learn and begin to make sense of words and begin to be able to understand what he read by simply copying the entire dictionary. He taught himself how to write

legibly and in a straight line by repetition. He took advantage of the prison's library by becoming more familiar with all the different genres and types of books he was able to read and take out.

Although Malcom X was in prison, he didn't allow that to hinder him and was able to better himself by reading and writing immensely, which he didn't believe he would have done being free and attending a college. Most importantly, what I got out of this reading was that dedication can take you far in life. No matter what your background is or where you come from, you have the power to be and do anything you put your mind to. **(Ashli Smith)**

In my eyes Malcolm X's phrase "homemade education" meant the ability for one to teach themselves to read, write, and gain knowledge. I love the thought of not only writing out the words but reading them aloud. I also love that every second of his time he was studying something he felt would help the black man. I am happy he took the good out of prison and found a way to make his time fast, bright, and educational. **(Corrie Thomas)**

I was able to interpret the phrase "homemade education" as the ability to obtain knowledge through one's desire to learn, rather than following the guidelines of a course. It seems to me that while incarcerated, not only did "X" study various subjects, he used his newfound knowledge to "connect the dots." I feel his words come from a place of experience and pain. **(Dan Thomas)**

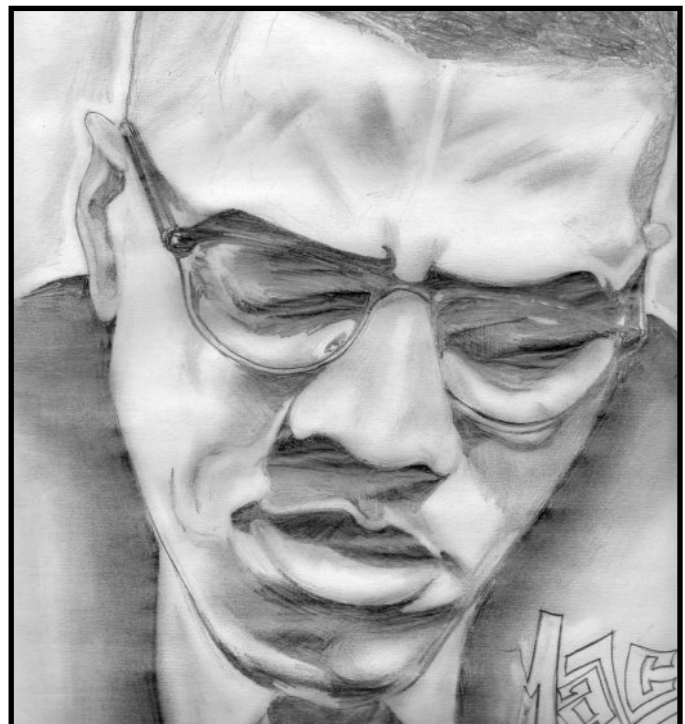
A homemade education means he made it himself. He didn't get an education from school or being taught; he literally had to do it himself alone in that prison. He picked up those books and taught himself how to read and write correctly. He taught himself how to understand things he never knew. My response to this piece is you wouldn't even know how uneducated he was by how deep and smart his words are in the text. It's amazing how he built himself up. **(Janessa Weichmann)**

I think what Malcolm X meant by homemade education was having to gain knowledge and

understanding on his own, making his education in a way that's meaningful to him. It is also about learning self-discipline and being determined to gain knowledge outside of school. **(Abigail Wilson)**

When reading Malcolm X, he says homemade education has been achieved by putting in the effort alone without a school administration's help. Malcolm checked out his own books, read the dictionary, and wrote/improved his penmanship all by himself. I felt inspired when reading about him. I also felt like I could relate in a sense because no one pushed me to further my education with this program, but I am taking charge of my future like Malcolm X did. **(Ladella Wilson)**

What he means is he's a self-taught man who was eager to learn to read and understand so he taught himself how to write. He didn't need any teacher. Reading every day and night opened his whole mind to a new world that he never knew about. He learned a lot about his history and became a strong leader. After his homemade education, he saw how knowledge makes you powerful. I love this piece! It shows how he struggled to educate himself on reading and writing to make a big difference in the world. He left a great legacy just from his homemade education. **(Sable Wright)**



ORACLE OVATIONS

The first night of class, Class of 2025 students received a Welcome Oracle with letters from last year's class, pictures of graduates in caps and gowns, a collage of special moments, and samples of alumni writing.



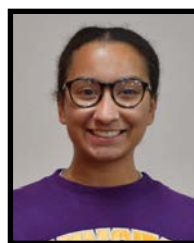
I have attended exactly two class sessions and the words “don’t quit” and “you are not alone” are engraved in my brain and heart. From Ms. Dontaeva to young Anthony Jefferson, each student emphasized the importance

of showing up and committing to the Odyssey program. Passion, pride, frustration, and the freedom of self-expression were transparent in each student’s letter. Lucas Benford was humorous and encouraging with his “F*** anyone who said otherwise and forgive them for their emptiness.” It gave me joy and a well needed laugh. I wish to carry that attitude throughout the course of the program.

The Oracle got me thinking about who I will be after graduation. I often, like Francisco in “The Circuit” story, am scared to ask questions, but unlike him, I rarely like to ask them in fear of being unheard or misunderstood. Mrs. Alice McDaniel’s father and Francisco Jiménez I feel might have felt the same as me at some point. One powerful bond all three of us have is family—family and perseverance along with removing “can’t” from my vocabulary. I feel it will help me shed into a tougher, brighter version of myself.

I was always the quiet one, shy one, stupid one... It has been more than ten years since I’ve been in school, and I have very few good memories of those years. In elementary I was freshly out of Mexico, with no English skills, no

friends, and zero knowledge of my environment and what society in the U.S.A was like. All I really remember is being lonely in school. Now I am happy to say solitude is a close friend of mine and I embrace it fully when days get overwhelming. All the stories of encouragement and hospitality made me feel like the first time I saw the Aurora borealis, magnificent and dumbfounded. I pray to harness each letter and word written by past alumni in my heart and mind so that when my ego tries to diminish my spirit, I am prepared with a machete, ready to strike. **(Angelica Alvarez Valenciano)**



It made me feel motivated. I liked reading everyone’s story. Andrea Evans’ letter is probably the one that stuck out to me the most. She mentioned being a single mom of five and working two jobs and doing her motherly duties—she did all of that and made time to do her homework to have a better future. But all the readings made me feel welcomed and I know I can do it; this is my first step of going back to school fully. I feel like I have questioned myself for who I am my whole life, and after reading the Welcome Oracle I feel like I will discover “who I am.”

“Education is the key to freedom, to advancing your world. Wealth is not only of material and financial means; it is also knowledge.” I didn’t think “We Ate Dog Food” and “The Circuit” related—only in the education part. Alice’s dad couldn’t read--the mom did all the talking. I did enjoy how they couldn’t use the word “can’t.” I always tell my daycare kids, “you can do hard things!” It’s time for me to do hard things I may be scared of. **(Kyianna Baker)**





First of all, I am very proud of the graduates that are before me. I was very impacted by everyone's letters to us from the graduating class of 2024. I loved when Andrea Evans said "this is the beginning

of one of the most important journeys of your life." I deeply feel this because so many times I didn't know what I truly wanted to do with my life and self. But being around the 2025 class already has me excited. That motivated me. I want to reflect on how every letter in the Oracle I read was very touching and I could put my self in each and everyone's shoes. I too have struggled and have had highs and lows. Hearing that they went through what I have gone through gives me hope. I love how Shanigel Goodwan pointed out how lucky we are to be here. I know that I am because I cried like a baby when I found out I was chosen. I want to thrive and become a better writer, a better learner, a better teacher, and a better me. And Tanisha Milligan also made me happy and to feel not sad to be exploring.
(Tiffany Brenston)



Reading what the students say is very empowering and you can tell they grew a lot in what they were saying. Some of them are saying don't let this opportunity pass you by. Other students are saying through the struggle, you have to

keep going. **(Quanna Caffey)**



Reading this made me feel even more excited and more grateful to have been chosen. I'm ready to be speaking out, telling the next class the progress I have made from then to now. Things that stood out to me were "don't give up," "the professors here genuinely want to see us win," and "support, ask questions."

I have learned from reading others' stories if we want to win in this program and we do what needs to be done and have determination, the sky is the



limit! This is truly a once in a lifetime opportunity. Put your phone on DND and focus, give it your all every class. "Grow." I love the fact that everyone is saying that. This will be like a second family, and they will be with us every step of the way. Stay motivated! All resources are here in the program.

(Eleanor Ceaser)



While reading the September 4th Oracle I couldn't help but feel an overwhelming sense of encouragement. Reading the letters from last year's class and how they too were feeling everything from nervousness to

excitement made me more receptive to everything they had to say because they were in our shoes just a year ago. I also really liked how almost everyone didn't shy away from the fact there will be obstacles throughout the semester and that everyday is not going to be a "walk in the park." It made the letters feel 100% genuine and sincere because they were keeping it real and being honest with us. It also gave a sense like they understood us and where we were coming from, which helped it feel authentic. But possibly the biggest thing I took away from the letters is don't let this opportunity pass you by. Despite the obstacles, almost everyone said to give your all to the course and if you do you'll be surprised by the results.

One of the similarities between "We Ate Dog Food" and "The Circuit" was the ability to maintain a positive outlook, which I absolutely loved. Both

Alice McDaniel and Mr. Jiménez were able to overcome very real obstacles while keeping this sense of optimism and positivity. They didn't let their circumstances define them. I'm currently at a place in my life where I'm facing a lot of obstacles, so I really enjoyed reading their stories and how they handled their challenges in life with such grace.

As far as the different stories I have in store for the semester, I really have no idea which direction I'll go. From a kid to an adult, I found math and science always come so much easier and naturally to me than reading and writing, which is one of the main factors for taking this course. I want to grow past the frustration that reading and writing has caused me my whole life and be able to illustrate the thoughts of my chaotic mind. I may not be sure what I want to write about, but with every assignment I plan to lean into my honesty and see where it takes me. **(Dillon Dahlk)**



Reading the Oracle definitely put together my feelings and frustrations that were clearly also felt in past Odyssey students. It puts my own struggles into perspective. I tend to diminish the severity of certain events in my life and work.

I go on auto-pilot drive—just going from A to Z and that's it. I gave up a long time ago on dreams I had of being something memorable, but I am not my past. I may have taken bits of unfortunate things as lessons learned, but I am not those events; my life is no tragedy unless I fall into it. I can choose to push and shove to craft my life into exactly the way I want it—given I put in the work and don't take for granted the tools and people I have now to help me. **(Brianna Espanol)**



Reading this Oracle really gave me motivation. I loved reading the letters to us and also the stories at the end from past students. I felt like they were truly talking to us and helping us navigate this new journey we are on.

My favorite sentence from the Oracle is actually a few. I have to fully convey the thought because I really felt that it was profound. My favorite sentences were written by Lucas Benford. He wrote, "You have come here, across the desert where nobody let you drink when your lips were parched and cracking. You have crawled from deep dark caves where blind white beasts licked their lips and the sun was never allowed to shine. You have swum across choppy waters that chilled your heart and robbed you of your breath. You are here, now. You've made it." I love this because I could see in my mind every aspect of what he was writing. I felt that everything was well written and flowed together well. This was a very creative way of expressing how he felt. This was definitely meant to motivate and that it did.

I would like to start off by saying I loved "We Ate Dog Food." I felt it was so honest and really described her upbringing well. I loved how she still turned what would be seen as a negative situation into a positive. I also admired how proud she was of her family. I feel the same way about mine and felt like I could really relate to this family dynamic. I felt that I could relate to many of the letters of students from last year, from being a single mother all the way to work and life balance.

I learned a lot about The Odyssey Project from reading the Oracle. What really stood out to me is the change that Odyssey made in so many people's lives, over the years. I feel that most of our writings will be about how we perceive and feel about the bodies of work that we will be reading through this course. I also feel that there will be many chances for us to express our creativity and give our classmates and instructors insight into our lives as well as the way we think. **(Adrianne Farrow)**



Reading this Oracle made me feel good, made me feel like I have a chance to succeed. The word that stuck out the most was journey. Most everyone felt at a time they wanted to give up, but Odyssey was way more powerful than that, being pushed by the staff as well as the students. I did relate to most of the letters in the Oracle, such as Ron Watson, saying reading and writing is not one of my strong points so my common sense will play a major part in my role in this class. I learned that in the Odyssey program, it's not about how far you've gotten but how far you're going. Just make sure you do your part, come to class, study hard, and don't be afraid to ask questions.

The stories I would have would be about having patience and what it means to be patient and trust the process. While I was away, I learned to sit still and be patient knowing my day was going to come. The same with Odyssey, I believe if I'm patient I'll get through this. I would also write about putting your heart and soul into what you do, not letting the outside world block your blessings.

(Jamal Jackson)



This Oracle was enlightening to read, with so many perspectives, so many stories. Reading this Oracle has helped change my perspective a little. It makes me want to work harder. It gives me hope and makes me grateful.

Some of the things that caught my ear were:

"Communicate, participate, and reciprocate."
—Carissa A. I will be applying this to my mindset!

"You have crawled from deep dark caves where blind white beasts licked their lips and the sun was never allowed to shine." —Lucas B. The way this was described and worded really touched me. I feel like I've felt this way before and never had the words, but this was executed beautifully.

Something I learned about the Odyssey program is that the impacts and changes it will and can make on my life are beyond my comprehension. But I am hopeful and excited for my odyssey.

(Aaniyah Jefferson)



Reading the letters from Odyssey Project Class of 2024 has heightened my excitement yet has raised my alertness. Reading the letters from the prior class, I read a lot of individuals questioning their reason for being there and

whether the project was a fit for them. While these were some of the questions that they had in the back of their minds, it became apparent from the letters that this was an opportunity that they were happy to have set in front of them. I feel that reading the letters has given more hope and I am anxious to see what is to come. The words of encouragement in these letters let me know that you can have some challenges to arise, but that if you affirm yourself daily, stay focused, and participate, this can be a great and memorable opportunity.

Alice's dad from "We Ate Dog Food" appeared to have had similar obstacles as Francisco Jiménez in "The Circuit" because he too was pulled from school and deprived of a normal childhood because of the economic status. Mom was left to be a single mother and needing to survive, causing the oldest to stay home from learning and school to work to



help mother make ends meet. This is the same thing that happened in “The Circuit” minus the consistent moving and relocating frequently. Her father was forced to work in the field and harvest crops just as Francisco had to do as well.

Overall, after reading these stories I am learning that with Odyssey Project you can gain new family, friends, and endless connections. The stories highlighted the care and compassion of the staff and how they really care and want to help. Odyssey provides endless support and provides a safe place and judgment-free zone. Even though I touched base on the word “Odyssey” meaning a journey, the Oracle only confirms that this will be a journey as this word was highlighted in many of the letters from the prior class.

In turn, I am feeling that from the letters many of last semester students have had life obstacles come in many different forms. The one thing that I am happy to see and will take this in for my own using is never give up—coming to class even when the going gets tough and making the best out of this opportunity. I will take these letters, and they will become my read when life starts to get me down. **(Gloria Knight)**



Taeshia Clark: “Everybody can’t come, not even the old you.” Rodney: “Will not let you give up; trust me.” (I need this). Marcy: “Closed mouth does not get fed.” It made me feel excited and determined. God knew I needed

and deserved this. I related to almost everything, I am grateful but I need genuine support right now in



my life. Odyssey will change my life in the best way, help me start my journey and get out of my comfort zone. This will teach and show me things I never knew I needed. **(Crystal Lee)**



Reading it made me feel more hopeful and confident. Knowing people came to class no matter the circumstances told me that this program really does change and impact lives. Knowing people came here while going through hardships, accidents, addiction, etc. means I have no excuses.

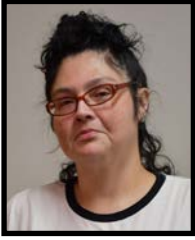
I can relate to Alice’s parents in the story as having a strong mother who made a lot of mistakes but hid them well and also having a father without much knowledge. I know how it feels to be taken care of and still be struggling at the same time. To the graduates of 2024, what pushed you to keep going even after wanting to give up and go through the hardships? **(Mariya Lucas)**



Reading the Oracle makes me feel so motivated and increased my commitment to the Odyssey Project. The testimonies of the alumni are captivating and inspiring me. Thus, I’ve reaffirmed my intentions to never quit no matter what the circumstances, as alumnus Joe Robinson emphasized.

“We Ate Dog Food” lays bare the likely occurrences of not getting a certain degree of education and the imminent dangers attached. Alice posits a story about her parents in regards to not being educated enough. Though the mother was a bit smarter and more attentive to details, the dad is quite the opposite. It further explains how that affected his decision to buy canned food, which was meant for dogs and he fed it to his children. Odyssey was a salvation for Alice, and it’ll be for me too, I am sure.

The stories I’ll write would revolve around the lifetime opportunity Odyssey offered to me, like it has to the alumni and will be to the succeeding class. **(Alfusainey Manjang)**



I can relate to the feelings of hesitancy, feeling unsure, not feeling smart enough, nervousness, everyone wanted better for their families but felt scared and worried they weren't capable of obtaining a higher

education. We are pushing ourselves out of our comfort zones because if you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always gotten. **(Vanessa Martinez)**



While reading the Oracle I had a mix of emotions—hope, curiosity, sadness, and most importantly, happiness. It brought me back to one of the interview questions regarding how I would feel sitting next to someone with different

religious or political views. In none of the 30 statements I read from the class of 2024 did it say this course was easy. A couple mentioned giving up due to difficulties outside the classroom, but they didn't and completed the course in better standing with themselves. I learned that I can appreciate people from all walks of life, and I plan to get to know all 29 of my classmates this semester. Souleymane Nikiema: "to make this program work beautifully and reach its goals, you will have to put in some work—no matter how much help you get, to succeed you need to be committed and work hard to do your part as the last piece of the puzzle." I learned the Odyssey Project is an investment in 30 people's futures, from all walks of life. But for the investment to work, we as the participants need to also put in the work to see the bigger picture. **(Alexus McClain)**



What sentences jumped out at you from the letters from last year's class or from the contributions in the alumni corner?

"There were many times that I wanted to give up, but Emily would not let me."

"No matter how hard it gets, don't quit."

How did Alice's "We Ate Dog Food" remind you of the story "The Circuit" or of anything in your own life?

When my Mama and I came to the United States after being separated from my papa for a year, we came to live in a two-bedroom single family home that held three families. We were poor, but our spirits were rich. We had an old playset in our backyard that maybe other kids would have felt embarrassed by because of how rundown it was, but to me it was a castle.

Did you relate to any of the comments in the letters from last year's class?

I resonated with the comments that highlighted to us the importance of showing up and remembering through hard times that we are here for a reason.

What did you learn about the Odyssey Project from reading the Oracle?

Last summer I called my Tia crying saying that I didn't think I had the capacity to be in the United States anymore. It was too hard. My Tia told me "El que persevera recibe." The one who perseveres receives. I learned to just keep going.

What kind of ideas do you now have for the kinds of stories you might write this year and share in the Oracle? Please write a few paragraphs.

Through practice, I have become a strong writer when it comes to describing or explaining my lived experiences. However, this year during Odyssey I would like to explore more creative writing and get back into poetry/song writing. In the story "The Circuit" the author mentions Corridos. I have learned through independent study that corridos are a powerful method of communication in liberation movements. I would like to learn more about our local, state, and national history to share the knowledge in songs. **(Mickey Mestiza)**



Reading the Oracle made me feel so many different emotions, good emotions though. Reading through the heartfelt letters and looking at the pics gave me mixed emotions—one was sad, a happy sad. Sad because it seems like this

is opening up a door to a new chapter in and for my life, so why did it take so long? Would this time be just like last time? Like a circuit? I felt happy and excited because this is something I need. Seeing so many people like me were once where I'm at in my shoes and to see this was not a circuit for them made me know it shouldn't be one for me. Reading through those letters and hearing that poem from Keena (read in class) gives so much hope, joy, and belief that I can do it too! A phrase that stood out to me from a letter was from Terance Nix. He says, "everybody knows life happens, but so does success." Another saying that stood out was "make friends with yourself and you will never be alone."
(Val Mosley)



After reading the stories, I felt excited and proud to be in this wonderful program. I also felt a sense of proving myself worthy of receiving the blessings the program has to offer. I can tell that Odyssey emphasizes giving its students the confidence we need as adults to try to make it in a corporate world. The Odyssey program is a stepping stone for knowledge resulting in success.



I learned that Odyssey not only helps you in the program, but follows you after graduation as well as aiding your family. The encouragement provided eases any doubt in your mind that you can do whatever your heart desires despite what others might have thought. They see the potential in you even if you do not see it yourself, and they truly want you to win. (Daija Pigram)



This reading made me confident in this class. I learned if we need anything just ask and we can get some help. (Lailaini Reed)



It made me feel good but honestly scared because I know this will be a big challenge for me and I hope I can succeed. Lucas Benford's story stuck out to me the most, how he talks about going through these obstacles to get to where you need

to be in life. (Tiana Richmond-Lee)



Reading this Oracle made me feel good and excited about my future. It gave me a sense of hope that it isn't too late to reach any goals that I set for myself. One of the many sentences that jumped out at me was, "No matter what, show

up for class. I don't care if your hair isn't done, if you've been yelling at the kids all day, it doesn't matter, COME!" I can relate to this because sometimes I may get wrapped up in all of the struggles of what the day has brought and it causes me to sometimes shut down. This has also been one of the reasons for me hesitating to start school again because of the responsibilities of motherhood and having to work full time; taking on school would also be like another full time job. However, I have made a promise to myself that no matter how hard things may get I will NOT give up, I will keep going! This Oracle also reminded me of how grateful and blessed I am to be a part of Odyssey. It has

given me a brand new start, and each day no matter what I am going through I say my prayers and claim that every day that I am given to keep striving will be a GREAT day!

The Alumni Corner section of the Oracle had beautiful poems! Both “Don’t Quit” and “Odyssey Poem” were almost like they were speaking directly to me. I can relate very well with the constant telling myself “Don’t Quit.” Lately I have been not trying to dwell on all of the negative or stressful things happening in my life but more so focusing on what I can do to change the situation and how what I am doing to change things will affect my future. I’ve noticed since I have started to do that, I am more joyful and I am able to get through the day without so many complaints and struggles. It also helps to know that I am not the only one facing hardships and the people who were also dealing with struggles have overcome them and accomplished everything they’ve wanted to or taken the initiative to start. I always try to tell myself that it’s not about where I start, it’s about where I finish. This Oracle has truly given me the motivation that I feel I lost the last two years.

Some of the many things I have learned from reading the Oracle is that Odyssey will change my life! I am a firm believer in that and reading everyone’s stories and words of encouragement spoke that to me as well. I believe that being in Odyssey I will build a lot of great relationships with great people which will help me throughout the semesters to come and hopefully through the rest of life. I felt so happy reading all of the comments from the Class of 24; they were very positive, uplifting, and motivational. Knowing that this program has changed numerous lives and will/is already changing my life is such a beautiful feeling, and I am ready to take on every bit of it! **(Ashli Smith)**



“I believe we are all on this earth for a reason. Although you may not be sure of that reason yet, just keep going; there are no coincidences. You are right where God wanted you to be at this time in your life. Keep the faith and courage and I’m



sure you will succeed.” Reading all of the Oracles made me so excited and ready to start this amazing journey; the Oracles are inspiring me to keep going.

I feel I can relate to “The Circuit” as in always finding new work and trying hard to stay afloat. I have been at the same company working for them for 10 years straight. Three years ago the company I started in closed down and terminated the entire staff! They felt I was an asset and asked for me to stay in the company and transfer over. I loved it, and I felt I found a new home and I felt I could fit in. As of yesterday, I felt someone knocked me down and stepped on my heart, pulled every string I had left that had me holding on. What I am going to do without the only job I know straight out of high school? When I had my stroke, I wanted nothing but to be able to work again. I had to remember my family, learn how to write again. Without my job I feel lost. How am I going to pay rent next month, gas, electricity?

I now have to work around an entire new schedule in my life. I felt I couldn’t do it. How am I going to do this and juggle everything, feeling as if I just lost everything? But I will be there every week, and I promise to keep pushing just as they did in “The Circuit.” **(Corrie Thomas)**



After reading the Oracle and the testimonies of previous students, I felt reassured. The writings and pictures presented helped me to shed that last layer of apprehension. I no longer 'think' I can do this. I

WILL continue and go further than I imagined. When Jasmine likened her UW ID to a rapper receiving their chain, I laughed because I felt the same way when I opened the acceptance letter.

The similarities between "We Ate Dog Food" and "The Circuit" are both families were poor but resilient, and both families stressed the importance of hard work and the need for an education.

This semester I want to refine my writing ability. I want to brush up on my penmanship. I want to learn new writing techniques, a better way to put my ideas on paper. I honestly have no idea what I want to write about, but I'm excited to write and see where things go. I tell myself "cyber-security is my end goal," but I feel the Odyssey program will open new doors for me by helping me find new things I am good at.

(Dan Thomas)



Reading everyone's letters in the Oracle made me emotional but happy all at once. I feel blessed to have come across such a great opportunity with such great people. I know by the end I will be just as happy as

all the people in that Oracle.

I would like to write about things I've gone through that I don't talk about much. I want to find a way to express myself somehow through my writing. I don't know how or if I'm ready to, but maybe I will have the courage to do so and find some peace in my writing. It seems like all the reading for the homework was these people's way of expressing their feelings.

(Janessa Weichmann)



Don't give up and give yourself grace stuck out to me because it's something I struggle with. I always give myself a hard time and I always struggle with letting things go and giving myself time. I think Alice's story reminded me of "The Circuit" because

they both didn't have a lot in life but they had each other; in this story Alice's dad didn't go to school, he went to work in the fields like in "The Circuit" story.

(Abigail Wilson)



Reading the Oracle made me feel like I made the right choice to sign up for the program. It also made me feel emotional because a lot of the worries I had were addressed. To see that so many of the previous students were nervous like I am yet didn't let

fear stop them was amazing.

"We Ate Dog Food" reminded me of "The Circuit" because both families were poor; even though they were poor they remained together as a family. I thought they were also similar because both sons would have to miss going to school in order to provide for their families. Both stories kind of reminded me of my father's upbringing because he would go out and hustle for his mom and he continuously moved from school to school because of being homeless.

I learned from the Oracle that I will have new experiences from the Odyssey program and that the staff truly cares. I learned that if I apply myself, I can go really far! **(Ladella Wilson)**



I felt more excited to dig into the class with everything I got. The thing that stood out the most is don't give up and keep pushing to do my best. Thanks for the encouraging words. I learned that the Odyssey program is a success with a lot of beautiful stories.

When my time comes, I hope to have a whole lot to write about. I am very scared and ashamed because it's been over 40 years since I've been in school. My brain is asleep and needs to be rewoke. **(Sable Wright)**

A LETTER FROM JASMINE MILLER

Note: Due to her need to relocate suddenly to another state to keep herself and her children safe from an abuser, Jasmine made the difficult decision to withdraw from Odyssey. She says getting into Odyssey was the best thing to happen to her besides the birth of her children. She wishes everyone well as they continue on their educational journeys.



To my Odyssey group of 29 classmates and to Odyssey staff,

I appreciate you so much for being understanding. I wish there was a way I could still attend. It was a very hard choice, and it affected me more than the relocating. I know this is what is best for me to keep my family safe.

I am very proud of myself for making a choice this big. It actually felt like clearing a big cloud from over my head being able to walk out to my car without being afraid. I am finally free. I'm free to breathe, talk, smile, grow, learn, and heal. I am still very shaken up because I didn't want my babies to ever see me with another mark or them to experience this, so I had to run.

I tried the resources that I could in town, but we all know little Madison is actually little (HaHa). I did have lots of hugs and kisses for the kids and talks and explained we have a better support system, so with time and support they will be okay and remember their mommy had to make sure we all could be free.

Yes, I made a choice to ask Emily to please share with my class and let you all know I wish you all the best at success. If anyone is in a situation like mine, please find help. Men and women, it is important to be safe.

I tried everything in my power to attend. I even thought about just driving from another state every week and not telling anyone, including Emily, but that felt selfish. You all are important, and I can't put anyone in harm's way if he found the location of our class. All you at Odyssey are important, and I couldn't bear having anyone try to defend me or get in any trouble trying to protect me.



So to keep all of us safe and to give my four kids an abuse-free environment, it feels good to say I am in a safe place now. I also want to share with you all there are so many resources to get help, even if the staff of shelters have to help you escape and you have to leave important people or things. It is okay. Never be embarrassed to save your life. I finally spoke up. As hard as it is to not finish with you 29, I will be staying in touch for updates. I believe in you all and thank you for this experience. One day you will see me in a different Oracle with another group if I am given a chance. It doesn't end here. Go after everything you desire. On the hard days, push or even pray and think about some of my words if that helps anyone.



Thank you all and I'm so happy for you all. When Emily reads this all to you next week, which is my birthday 9/25, I will be expecting a Happy Birthday out loud in the class as if I was there.

Guess what? I also wanted to share a different answer to the question we were asked on the first day of class: are you a writer? I said "No" on my answer, but after writing you all this hard email and Emily another email yesterday, I have to say I need work on formats and run-on sentences but I am a writer. Look at how I just expressed myself and showed you all my story.

So that means we all are actually writers. I am a writer, and I will take that with me on my journey. Happy Wednesday, and Happy writer's birthday to me!

Editor's note:

We applaud Jasmine for her courage in seeking safety and share these resources for others in similar circumstances:

<https://abuseintervention.org/>

Help Line: (608) 251 - 4445

or

Text (608) 420 - 4638

MEET GELA!



When one door closes, another opens, and we are happy to welcome Gela Docks to the Class of 2025. She is working hard to get caught up rapidly with all September homework.

Feelings on learning she was part of Odyssey: I felt very good and inspired.

Three sentences to share: I have a very large family. I love to cook and craft. I am working towards my entrepreneur goals in clothing design.



Are you a writer? No, I am not a writer because I don't write for a living or in my free time.

Do you have a favorite book? One of my favorite books I've read is *Hidden Figures*. I like it because it is uplifting, and it's also a true story of black women in the sciences and space exploration. It gave me a sense of self-love and admiration of smart and intelligent black women.

Describe yourself and your reasons for wanting to be in Odyssey. I am a single parent and working mom. I aspire to create a more stable environment for my children and myself. I want to participate in this program to further my education. It is my understanding that this program will help me with pursuing my goals and to become more involved in my community.

I am a first-generation college student in my family, and I want to also be a role model for my children to see me and know they can also go to college and pursue their dreams and goals.



I lost my parents at an early age. I was a young mother, and I have six beautiful and talented children. I have since worked very hard to be the best mom and best version of myself, to provide for my family and keep us all healthy and motivated to learn more, and to be more productive in life. I have overcome many obstacles in life that may have held me back from pursuing my goals and dreams, but I refuse to give up on myself or on my children.

I want to create a healthy, productive, and rewarding life for my children and myself. I am artsy, positive, diverse, goal-orientated, and determined, and I am motivated to pursue my dreams and goals in life. I have become more interested in owning a healthy and organic business as well. I am excited about having the opportunity and experience to meet, work with, and learn with and from a great, diverse group of people.

CREATIVE CORNER

Unapologetically Me

By Adrianne Farrow

There's a lot that I am
There's a lot that I want to be
This is real life, no pause, no delete
I have failed so that I could learn to succeed
I have been put at the end of the line
So that I could learn to lead
I have learned there's no shame in falling
As long as you get back up and continue daring greatly
But at the end of the day
When the battle is won
And the enemy has accepted defeat
I'll speak aloud about my trials
And sing for you my testimony
So with self-assurance
I'll hold my head high
And speak to the masses with glee
Telling them a story from my past
About a different version of me
How I overdosed and almost died
But a voice inside said open your eyes and breathe
I was humbled, and started trusting
Laying everything at his feet
After countless hours, days, and weeks
I stopped saying and started doing
It's the actions of vulnerability and accountability for me



So now all I see is light
And the source of it is me
Shining brighter than a star for all to see
Now I take pride in my talents
I cater to what Adrianne needs
It's the praying, the coping, the standing
even when I'm weak
It's the focus and my drive
As well as being a mother to my seed
So I look in the mirror
Eyes opened to see
Air in my lungs to breathe
These simple things almost lost to me
I'm here, I'm alive, and unapologetically me.
(An Overdose Awareness Poem)