

ODYSSEY ORACLE

CONQUERING CAMPUS



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CONQUERING CAMPUS

On September 18, 2024, the Odyssey Class of 2025 ate subs together and traveled by bus from South Madison to Union South to get their UW ID cards. Then they boarded the bus again to visit the Chazen Museum of Art with Art History Professor Gene Phillips. In class the next week, they were asked to describe their campus trip.

When we went to Union South, I felt like I was reminded of how the Odyssey Program would be changing my life for the better. I felt like I was a part of something important again. It was a fresh start to one of the best journeys in my life. Looking at my ID was like looking at a new beginning. I felt as though any past failures didn't matter because I am going to make this time count.



Going to the Chazen Museum opened my eyes to the perspectives of others and the times they may have lived in. I felt enlightened looking at all the different pictures of baby Jesus and how different they were because of the place and era the different artists were in. I felt very peaceful looking at the artworks downstairs that were made of flowers in such a unique and bold way. It was a great experience! **(Ashli Smith)**

Most notably, I felt like a Frijole (bean) in a pot of rice. The only comfort I took was my fellow classmates and their diverse faces. I could not shake off the same feeling I felt in high school. The hospitality was lovely and encouraging, but it felt like a stranger's home where I needed to take off my shoes to come in. **(Angelica Alvarez Valenciano)**



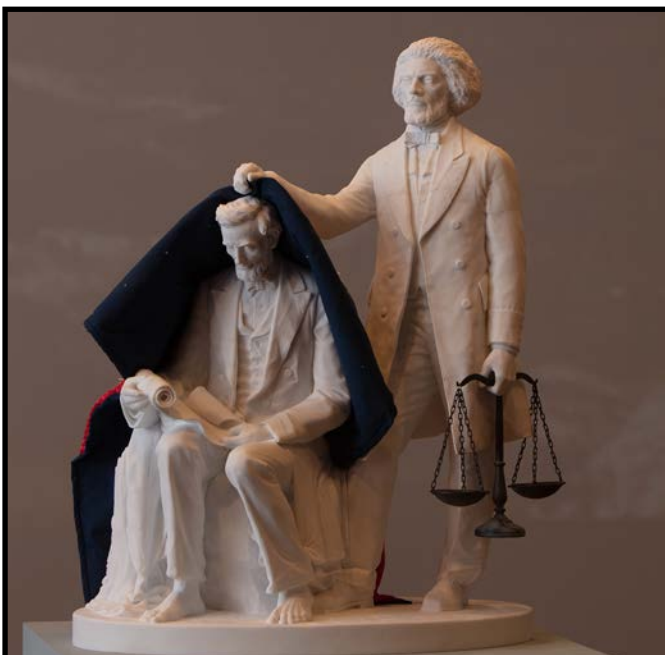
I will remember laughing with my classmates about some of the *peculiar* works of art and falling while getting on the bus. The field trip was very fun. I love being surrounded by art. **(Aaniyah Jefferson)**

I enjoyed talking to our classmates more. I was so happy to be receiving my WisCard. It made me feel completely happy. The images and art I saw were amazing, some confusing, and some powerful looking--kinda like my life. **(Tiffany Brenston)**

The most memorable moment from our field trip was walking into the University of Wisconsin-Madison Union South and getting our ID badges. It made it really slap me in the face like, “you go girl, this is a huge blessing, do not mess it up.” Seeing all the smiling faces on my classmates was very exciting. It was like you could feel the happiness in the room. Also, that was the best bus ride I have been on before. I never knew the Badger Bus was that nice. Thank you for that experience.

My most favorite part of the Museum was the five stars of the naked family. That was very realistic. I could not stop looking at that. Whoever did that is very, very talented. I would love to ask questions about the image. I was very amused. I will be bringing my son to the museum! **(Eleanor Ceaser)**

My most memorable moment on the 18th would definitely be the Chazen Museum of Art, seeing all of the history and pieces and just being able to learn about all of the beautiful history. One piece that really stood out to me was the piece by Sanford Biggers lifting the veil of ignorance, 2023. I loved how the piece was made of marble. I love how they referred to the open book on his lap as a sense of knowledge and power through literacy. And I can’t forget being able to smile big for my very own UW ID. Thank you, Odyssey. **(Corrie Thomas)**



One memorable moment from our class trip was that it made me feel like we got luxury treatment with the Coach bus, when we could have gotten on a school bus. So much excitement and joy going to campus, getting a school ID. Lots of emotions. I would love to have this feeling again attending UW.

Another memorable moment was being able to see so much different art, from sculptures to paintings to something that kind of looked like bottle tops or scraps to art. I loved the fact that the museum is open to us and our families free of charge. **(Valvree Mosley)**



I had an amazing time last week on our field trip. I was so happy to get my ID and see how beautiful my picture came out. My favorite part of the field trip was the museum. I loved seeing the African art. These art pieces really spoke to me. That experience helped me feel a lot closer to my cultural background. I loved all the exhibits, and I loved seeing all the bright colors and beautiful creativity.

(Adrienne Farrow)

Aw, man! That was an awesome night. Starting down at Union South there was a great energy in the air. Then, when we got our student ID cards it made everything feel super official. I must have showed at least 10 friends my new student ID haha. And to top it all off, the museum was great! It was neat seeing different art styles from different parts of the world. **(Dillon Dahlk)**

Getting our ID cards and talking with most of my classmates about their pictures and how it made them feel felt so refreshing. Everyone seemed so happy and had a feeling of the greatness.

The Chazen art museum was great! I am not an art person, but what I loved most is how I was drawn to one art piece. I can't remember the name, but I remember it was dark colors with so many textures. **(Gloria Knight)**



Once we were all on the charter bus, I couldn't help but start singing "the wheels on the bus." There was a playful energy in the air. I was long awaiting being on campus with our class. To see us all together reinforced a sense of belonging. Maybe we are all unlikely characters. Outside of Odyssey, what are the odds that we would all be on campus together? What a privilege to be seen beside my classmates. I couldn't help but smile. I couldn't help but say "cheese." My body twirled and danced at the thought of being seen. There I was, there we were. On campus with our class was one of my favorite days in the world. Thirty strangers becoming friends was a beautiful thing.

(Mickey Mestiza)

Traveling to Union South was very special to me.

Knowing that I am part of UW Madison, which is something I've always wanted, really hits differently for me. Standing in line, I couldn't stop the smile on my face, which I noticed on others. It was definitely a special moment for Odyssey's Class of 2025.

The Chazen Museum of Art was very different for me. I've never really paid attention to field trips I went on to art museums before, but this one stood out to me. The paintings were very vibrant and colorful. So many different pieces and stories behind them. Someday I would like to learn more about the meaning behind most art pieces. **(Tiana Richmond-Lee)**



Getting my ID was where it all felt real-- I'm in school, I'm continuing my education, I'm actually trying to become a DVM [Doctor of Veterinary Medicine]. The nerve of it has definitely settled and I'm rolling with the waves, but they still thrash occasionally.

Walking through the Chazen was absolutely wondrous! The paintings and sculptures were simply beautiful, and the thought that someone had put their mind's eye on a canvas or detailed each curve made of mixes of materials for a single sculpture is just beautiful. There's no other word-- especially when it came to the paintings with religious imagery. It definitely makes you feel the faith these artists must've had to feel so strongly about something like God to paint a large scale depiction of their higher power. **(Brianna Espanol)**

The art was beautiful. I love how it showed artworks from different times and different cultures. The one art piece that stood out to me was this giant painting in the middle of the museum that had three different pictures of



spooky things and crosses in the middle. The picture in the middle was a picture of Pinocchio looking bizarre and scary. I'm not sure why this stood out to me out of everything, but I really enjoyed that art piece. **(Mariya Lucas)**

I walked into class and saw Brian, Abby, Krista, and Sable. Sable was sitting at the table so I sat with her, and then Brian came over and we started talking about the debate from the other night. I mentioned to Brian about how I wanted to look at going to school and working full time. We ate our food while everyone else was coming in.



We all got on the bus and headed over to campus. Everyone got their own seats besides Em and Sarah. Abby and I were talking while we were on the way, and Sable and Eleanor chimed in. I forgot we were taking our ID pictures, so I was a little angry that I was looking crusty. Mariya and I were in line together. After my picture I was playing with Quanna's baby boy.

We all finished up and got back on the bus to go to the museum. Gene was talking about the art and asked us questions before letting us go look around ourselves. Jamal was making comments about the art. It was fun looking at the different pieces. **(Kyiana Baker)**

The trip was everything. It's been a while since I've been to a museum. It took me to other places I have never been. Just visiting the campus was nice, and I never thought I'd be on the UW campus, let alone get an ID from there. I look forward to spending more time there plus getting to know people. **(Jamal Jackson)**

Getting the ID was surreal. I felt so grown and accomplished getting a UW ID, something I never thought I would do. All of the pictures we take, I love that. I love to create memories of my accomplishments.

I loved the museum and actually plan on taking my daughter. Everything was beautiful. Some things made me so confused, but there was a story for everything. 10/10: I would go back to get deeper into the art. **(Crystal Lee)**



I curled my hair for picture day. In my student IDs in the past, I look like I was the one taking the picture.

I hand over my driver's license from when I was 18, I am nervous all over again.

As I approach the photo desk, I hear laughter and many voices in the distance. But none of that matters because I curled my hair for picture day. As

My hair sweated out. My lips dried up like raisins (even though I made sure to pack two different lip glosses). As I stand against the backdrop to officially become a UW-Madison student, impulsive thoughts roam throughout my head. What if I yell 'the sky is blue'? What if my grandma forgot to feed her dogs? And from there, you can guess how my picture turned out. **(Alexus McClain)**



Getting our student IDs was exciting for me. I actually felt like a "real student" of the UW, and a part of the school.

I liked the short tour of various paintings. I enjoyed the religious paintings, I happened upon a particular sculpture of a beautiful lady surrounded by white candles and pearls for hair, all white. There was other beautiful art in that particular display: two chandelier type sculptures and a wall of black, white and red roses. I believe it was a display about "love." **(Vanessa Martinez)**

I would say the most memorable moment at the museum was when we were all standing in a circle looking at the rabbit art piece because a lot of us had some good point of views on why it was made the way it was. The piece of art was beautiful and like nothing I had seen before. I really appreciated the shading that the sculpture seemed to have to it. **(Ladella Wilson)**



Though we were not there for a long time, I plan on going to see the rest with my son. I was very intrigued by the sculptures, and the rabbit was my favorite one. My mother's side of the family is very artistic, though we don't really use our talent (my grandfather was an architect). We are all really

On this trip I really enjoyed looking at the art, especially this really colorful piece that popped out of the wall. I also enjoyed looking at the sexy bunny; it was really cool. **(Abigail Wilson)**

good at drawing portraits. My aunt went to school for digital design but never finished. My son loves everything about art, especially making 3D things with his hands. He would appreciate going. **(Daija Pigram)**

I was very excited to hear about our field trip to the art museum. I went when I was young but I don't recall much of it. I have been roaring to go but was unaware there was one right in my hometown and for free. I have seen a few social media posts about art museums, thinking it would be a change of scenery and something to do. I had a great time looking at the different art pieces and not going alone as I probably would have had I gone on my own time.

I remember getting to class and eating my delicious Milio's box. I was happy my favorite chips were inside. We got on the Charter bus, and the driver had a hard time getting out of the parking lot. I remember feeling nervous about taking my picture while standing in line. I didn't think I would like my photo. The museum was beautiful. I liked

Gene's speech and the questions he asked about the differences in the paintings. **(Janessa Weichmann)**



It was fun. The museum was the most memorable moment learning about some of the paintings and the statues. I can't wait to learn more about history of all nationalities from all over the world. I am so excited to relearn history. **(Sable Wright)**

I will remember walking across the yellow clear bridge to get to the art and looking at the different paintings and the different texture of the paint. Some looked soft and there were many different frames. **(Quanna Caffey)**

On September 18th, we as a class took a trip to the Chazen Museum of Art. We were introduced to a lot of art from all over the world and throughout time. I enjoyed everything, honestly, but there were a few exhibits that stood out to me. I am a big fan of art from Japan's Sengoku period. I loved the religious art. Hindu statues, statues of Siddhartha and Amitabha Buddha. **(Dan Thomas)**

Our campus trip to Union South was quite an exciting one for me. The visit offered me my first art museum visit, something I've never done in my life. It was fascinating seeing the paintings and the artwork in there, with the pictures they created in my head and the meanings that they held. Earlier, we were given our IDs, making us all students of the UW officially. **(Alfusainey Manjang)**

The trip on September 18th was very nice. I think the most memorable part was getting my ID card for the first time. I looked like I should have been in a Tyler Perry movie. I'm a CNA and a landscaper. That day I was landscaping and working pretty hard. I was cleaning gutters and planting trees, and I had on a wig and a hat and you could clearly tell I forgot that it was picture day as I stayed working late. My face looked exhausted. I also asked the lady who took the picture if my picture was cute and she said "Yes!" Then I said, "Girl," and she laughed.



I also loved all the art. It was beautiful. But my picture was more memorable for me. **(Lailaini Reed)**

I wasn't with the class at that time. I joined the class late so I missed the trip. I was able to take my own trip to Union South to get my ID card and I've also visited the Chazen Museum of Art with my children before, it was a great experience.

My trip to Union South was interesting. The building was full of people/students. I was able to get my ID pretty fast. The most memorable moment for me was the smell of food. I couldn't resist and stopped for Chinese food before leaving. **(Gela Docks)**



LOVING THE AUERBACH LOVE STORY

Students read two stories Emily Auerbach published in the Wisconsin State Journal about her parents' journey out of poverty, long-lived marriage, survival of adversity, and generosity towards the Odyssey Project.

Loved these stories!! I feel like I understand you and your drive behind the Odyssey Project a little better after getting some of your family's backstory. Right off the bat, reading about your parents made me think of my grandparents who also have strong German heritage and are within a couple years in age. They also had a significant house fire (in Verona, though), and my grandmother also demanded equality (many viewed her as the head of the household).

One of my favorite themes from the stories was your parents' love for one another. Unfortunately, I feel like that type of love and commitment is becoming rarer and rarer in today's age. Both your parents offer one heck of a perspective that I feel lives through you and your vision for the Odyssey Project. **(Dillon Dahlk)**

I can relate to being discriminated against on multiple levels. I am Black and I am a woman. I am often discriminated against in the health field. When I go into the health care setting, my pain is often looked at as not real or downplayed. I believe that values play a crucial role in shaping an individual's perspective on various aspects of life, including experiences of discrimination. Discrimination, unfortunately, remains prevalent in society based on factors such as race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and more. I pride myself on upholding values such as empathy, respect, and equality to fight against discrimination.



Reading "Passing It On" helped me see that Bob and I have similar views. He did not let his trauma and the discrimination against him and his family make him bitter. He focused his energy to aid in making the world a better place. I admire and can relate to this, as I am the same way. In today's society, it often becomes difficult to stay with certain values in a world so cold. **(Gloria Knight)**

The best love stories come from nothing and build their own legacy and generational wealth. Bob is so giving to others and wants to see others do well, so he helps by donating, motivating, and sharing his music. I appreciate Odyssey and how it gives struggling people and families a chance to change our lives and start a new journey. I plan to take this opportunity to the highest level I can and start school because I never thought I could. Now I know I have the strength to get up and make it to class even when my life is falling apart. This is my chance to piece it back together. **(Crystal Lee)**

After reading both articles, I hope I can have a relationship like your parents did. I hope that I can have a relationship built on love and respect, but you never know with this day and age. **(Abigail Wilson)**

Bob's story is to some extent relatable to my story as a migrant in the United States of America. In my case, my fervent intention is to find true and lasting love. Bob's a German Jew, and I am an African Muslim; I'm black and he's white; but we both found love in America. He's Inspirational, and I am hoping fondly to enjoy the privilege of the blessed life he has. **(Alfusainey Manjang)**

I am a hopeless romantic! It may have been the countless Novellas (Latino soap operas) or the Bridgerton romance series that recently came out on Netflix, but I am a sucker for a juicy love story. I felt deeply moved by Wanda and Bob Auerbach's beautiful love story. Their love withstood life's hardships and embraced the nature of life's upheavals.

The "magic" you felt, I can only recollect one true and honest memory of my parents with such "magic." I was standing in the middle of them while they embraced each other with glistening love and intense tenderness. Tragically the love he held her with was a dreadful lie, the love he gave was tinted, and I later found out that my younger brother and I were a product of his infidelity to his lawful wife. To this day, I hold a drop of anger and a regrettable disappointment towards my father, Francisco Alvarez. My mother and father loved one another, I am sure; unfortunately, the love they shared did not stand the sands of time or the grueling face of poverty and hate we faced as his hidden family.



Love was my home, and my home was my family. In our household, love was present and embraced yet empty. I cannot recollect my early years in Madison, but I remember the feeling and sounds. The way my brothers laughed on Christmas day, playing La Loteria game with my family, the countless delicious meals my mother cooked. Love was expected to be known not voiced in my household. With every fight and scream, my mother, Maria Luisa, demanded and held us responsible for reconsolidating with one another. Love was home and a cage for my family in challenging times. My mother expressed the purest form of love I have felt in my entire life. My mother teaches, shows, and embodies love. My mother, Maria, imprinted the blueprint for love in my family.



Maria Luisa is a woman of few words, especially when it comes to love. My six siblings and I, regardless of where we are, can all agree our mother is an exceptionally loving, caring, and honorable woman. She never eats first at dinner; everyone must be seated first before she sits down. Maria is the first to stand up when tortillas are running low. My mother does not think of touching a chocolate until she knows no one else wants it. No role model, superhero, or international peacemaker can compare to my mother's self-taught love. Maria Luisa Valenciano Gonzalez is what you can call a first generation "gentle parenting" example. **(Angelica Alvarez Valenciano)**

I like the fact that he remained a positive person after unpleasant life experience. Bob had found the kind of love that I hope to have one day. I find myself relating to him a little bit after he lost his wife; it's amazing to me that he was so giving and so positive after he lost the love of his life. I relate to him because after I lost my mother, I was able to find peace and find positive things to do and influence people in a positive way. Grief didn't turn me into a hostile person like it does to other people. I admire Bob because I know it can be hard being the backbone of the family. **(Mariya Lucas)**



Reading the Auerbach stories made me have a different outlook on life, love, and marriage. How genuine and pure their love was. How everything was equal in the marriage but still one whole. How you do not see this around too often in families. How education changed their lives. After reading their stories, it makes me feel as long as that person brings out the best for you and in you, forget what society thinks. That person just may be the person you spend over six decades with. **(Valvree Mosley)**

This story relates to me a lot because I believe you can't help who you fall in love with no matter where they come from. Everyone deserves true happiness, no matter what. **(Tiana Richmond-Lee)**

I do have to say I admire Bob Auerbach for his honesty about losing someone you love. Other people can say all they want that it will get better and maybe for some it does, but for others it doesn't. Yes, life goes on, but sometimes you want nothing more than to tell that one person about your day, good or bad. Also, the strength he has with going through the discrimination he did, his persistence to live and do good in his life is truly unreal. Bob Auerbach could've quite easily given up on himself. But he formed love, built a life for himself, and still continues to give back. **(Brianna Espanol)**

This is truly a great love story, two people from different parts of the world beating the odds. Bob and Wanda let love fuel and control their lives. The meaning of true love is it didn't matter that they had different backgrounds, they were one.

I wish love was still like this, but the world is very different. A good relationship doesn't last longer than six months. I believe social media is the blame for most of it. Hearts are not as pure as they used to be when Bob and Wanda hit it off. From reading the passage, you can tell that their love was real and is very rare these days. **(Jamal Jackson)**

This story is very inspiring me and makes me realize why I'm single. I'm afraid of being cheated on and lied to. People can be hating on your marriage especially if you both are from different races and religions, but you can't help who you love. **(Sable Wright)**



Bob is a great man. He has also been through many ups and downs. I really was hoping to meet his wife; it was sad to read that she passed away. The thing is Bob's love for her never died. I wish to find love and happiness like they had. What he endured through life is truly something I will never forget. Bob inspires me to be great. I loved how he constantly gives back to the Odyssey Project because without him and others donating and being kind I wouldn't be here. Bob will forever have a space in my heart. **(Tiffany Brenston)**

Reading this showed me how much opposites do attract if you let them. Don't let anyone else's opinions affect how you live or care for another. When all the odds were against them, they still came out on top. **(Eleanor Ceaser)**

Mr. and Mrs. Auerbach were so in love. I love love—I'm so glad they got to experience life together. If I ever get married, I want my partner to be devoted to me as much as I am to them. Love is a beautiful thing to experience. Marriage is a very hard thing, just like dating is hard as well.

My parents were never married so dating has always been hard for them. I never have gone for guys that treat me as I should be. I like the thought of absolute equality and respect in a marriage. Just like your father (parents), I've faced discrimination from as far as I can remember to present day. I've had people ask my mom if I'm really her child to "where are you actually from?" White women clenching their purses when I'm around or crossing the sidewalk so they don't have to be near me, or being followed around in a store. I have so many different examples—I choose [like Bob Auerbach] to still be a kind person every day and help others in any way I can. **(Kyiana Baker)**

I loved the story because they didn't care who didn't want them together because of their differences. I value that and I also believe you should be able to love and be with whoever makes you happy. I was shocked by 62 years of marriage; that is a long time. I wonder if being with someone that long is hard or still enjoyable after some point. Him thinking and always saying they

were equal was nice. It's hard for people to look at couples like that, so I love that he always wanted people to know they were equal and he wasn't better because of taking care of the house or his profession. **(Janessa Weichmann)**

This is a love story for the ages. I loved reading how in love these two are and were. When I read this, it makes me think of my parents and grandparents. My parents have been together 31 years, and my grandparents have been together 48, so long relationships are what I'm accustomed to seeing. Sometimes seeing that is hard as I am a single mom. On the other hand, it gives me hope that there is someone out there for me.

I was extremely inspired by how both people came from such different backgrounds but showed so much love, understanding, and similarities. It's amazing reading such a profound story about people so close to home. I admire Bob for how he honored his wife and kept living for himself and the memories of her. **(Adrianne Farrow)**



After reading the two stories, I have gained an insight on how generous and kind Mr. Auerbach is. I see that education is something he appreciates, and I see that he feels it's important to help others achieve their life hopes and dreams through obtaining an education. I feel his own personal struggles as well as his wife's have given him sincere empathy for others in difficult life situations. I respect the volunteer work he does and the generous gift to help start the Odyssey program. **(Vanessa Martinez)**

After reading about Bob and Wanda's life, it makes me further believe that nothing can stop true love. It also makes me think about how crazy it is that what Bob went through with almost being deported, people still face similar struggles till this day. When thinking about Bob and Wanda not having much money but still having a wedding with a budget of \$500 because, regardless of their financial situation, they loved each other so much makes me think of my husband and me.

I believe that if the love is strong enough and with trust and determination one can make it through anything. The fact that Bob invested so much into Odyssey is such a beautiful thing. The fact that when his friends and colleagues ask what he would like for his special day he invites them to put into the Odyssey Program shows how selfless of a man he is. **(Ladella Wilson)**



These stories relate to my values and ideas about love, marriage, and discrimination because I too hope to have a magical love and marriage as Bob and Wanda did. One full of love, understanding, equality, respect, and longevity.

Discrimination is something I as a Black woman in the United States face every day. Racial discrimination creates a barrier in almost everything—in excelling and achieving almost anything. These experiences are as small as being accused of stealing from a grocery store or as big as being sick in a hospital and fighting for your rights as a human being.

There's a collective of people who work together to keep Black people from getting ahead. These people are in high places and in low places, the grocery store, court house, workplace, doctor's office, schools, housing, etc. This person can be an average Joe on the street, "a good samaritan." I, like Bob and Wanda, have never doubted myself in who I am and that I would never let these barriers stop me in pursuing happiness, peace, and achievement in my life. I too plan to leave my legacy and to also contribute to people, places, and organizations I am passionate about. **(Gela Docks)**

After reading the two stories, I have to admit that I'm in tears. One story gives us a glance into the past in Bob and Wanda Auerbach's life; and later on into their commencement of life together. Both stories dissect what it's like to overcome various struggles and hardships. The two stories give insight on what marriage and love really are about. Bob and Wanda Auerbach, who came from completely different backgrounds and miles away, made something out of nothing—an education, family, and memorable moments.

I want to someday experience genuine love; someone to look past my flaws, material, spiritual beliefs just like the Auerbachs. A quote from Emily Auerbach that couldn't be any more real is "the next 50 years would bring my parents their share of joy and sorrow. What lives are free of losses, illnesses, and troubles? But I have never met a couple more devoted to each other." **(Alexus McClain)**

I felt a deep sense of gratitude while reading these two stories. I am someone who believes in the deep, transformative power of love, although I have few examples of true love to reference from my own lived experiences.

I am in awe and found these readings opening my heart to experiencing love that can transform the lives of many. I believe that marriage is a complicated thing in the society that we live in. This story is a testament to love. I have my own experience with marriage and wonder what it would be like to experience a relationship where people are devoted to loving each other. I believe that as time goes on, we evolve and become different versions of ourselves. I think the love that Bob and Wanda had embodies their passion for discovery. Their passions for learning, sharing, and collaborating refract the depth that their hearts held for one another. **(Mickey Mestiza)**

Love is sacrifice, love is struggle, love is growth, love is a deep connection no one understands but the two of you. Marriage is a best friend, not just a piece of paper. It is making an oath that no matter what you will be there for one another. They have gone through everything together.

I have been in a relationship for ten years now and feel we also have gone through so much together since we met. I want nothing more than an amazing, thriving, loving, long marriage like Bob and Wanda's, strong until the end. **(Corrie Thomas)**



I would first like to thank Bob, for everything. The Odyssey Program has been the breath of fresh air I so desperately needed, as I waded through the miasma that is self-doubt. I feel good. I am happy. Not only that, but I have you and all the staff of the Odyssey Project to thank for the encouragement.

I honestly could write an entire dissertation on my views of love, marriage, and all that falls in between. I am proud to call myself a helpless romantic. Furthermore, I feel that what you and Wanda share is absolutely beautiful. To me, love like a page from your favorite love story would simply be a dream come true. I would like to share a personal fear of mine. I am afraid of aging, whilst not having anything to show for it. I so desperately wish to carve my legacy in the pillars of time. With a hammer forged from perseverance and prestige, my chisel fashioned by nobility and altruism, I will give meaning to my name. Yet, I feel not only have I wasted time, but I'm exhausting such a treasured resource. Do you have but a few words of wisdom you may bestow upon a young man that may quell his anxious heart? **(Daniel Thomas)**

These were some of the most beautiful stories I have read! Bob and Wanda's marriage is proof that no matter who or what may try to come between true love that it will not work! I wholeheartedly believe that discrimination means nothing and affects nothing when you truly love someone. I value the longevity and perseverance that Bob and Wanda had throughout their lives together! This reminds me that when someone is truly for you that you would never be "too much" for them and that they will always have your best interest at heart. **(Ashli Smith)**

COMMENTS ON CONVERGENCE

On Thursday, October 10th, Odyssey students may attend “Convergence,” a Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra concert featuring the works of different generations of Black composers. In class, students wrote about how the term “convergence” might apply to their own lives.

Convergence: when two or more things come together to form a new whole, like the convergence of plum and apricot genes in the pluot. From the prefix *con*, meaning *together*, and the verb *verge*, meaning *turn towards*. Convergence can describe the coming together of roads or rivers or a mixture of styles, like hip hop and ballet.

Adulthood, motherhood, and womanhood converged in a single life. Adulthood gave me challenges, motherhood gave me even more, and womanhood in itself is a ravenous warrior! I embrace the three coming together and molding me. **(Angelica Alvarez Valenciano)**

My mother is white, and my father is black—my mom is mostly German and my father is Ghanaian/Nigerian. My life is a whole mixture—I have many different friend groups that make me one. I finally found more friends of color. I like that I can be with my culture more and learn with my friends. **(Kyiana Baker)**

My parents met to create me!! Fun fact, but I bet you knew that already. Joining this class made me feel like the definition of convergence. It was all about my life—how I came together moving forward to be a part of our journey with my classmates. This all-in-one feeling I have is awesome. We all came from different walks of life, and now we are here together for the graduating class of 2025. **(Tiffany Brensten)**

I put out my ideas to come together. I get an idea in my head and put it together with my actions and come out with an amazing outlook. **(Quanna Caffey)**



Convergence has had a positive impact on me and my son's life by converging the Odyssey into our life, meeting new people, and having more reasons to feel good about being a single mother. My son is more reserved/shy. I am more outspoken, so with us coming together with the Odyssey program, I am seeing he is very excited to go. He asks about it and even wants to come on Monday nights as well. **(Eleanor Ceaser)**

Being the oldest child of my mother and father and the only child by my father with my mother, it was interesting having siblings from my father's marriage to another woman. Being the eldest of both siblings' side was intriguing at that. I enjoyed being the oldest. I was built for the challenges. Alternating between the two parents between Christmas and summer vacation was an awesome experience. Parents on both sides didn't believe in saying half-brother or half-sister, so that gave it much more meaning. **(Timothy Comer)**

I instantly thought about my core group of friends when asked this question. There are so many similarities, shared interests, etc., to the point where we act as a band of brothers and view each other as family. What's funny, though, is that our crew has diverse nationalities and races. From Colombian, to black, to Cuban, to Puerto Rican, to Native, to Dominican, to Indian, to Chinese, to white, every person brings a little something different from their family culture and heritage. But we've been friends for so long and are so close-knit that we've all rubbed off on each other a bit and simply see each other as brothers. **(Dillon Dahlk)**

At my work, we actually just had a gathering yesterday called "Convergence 2024." I work with a non-profit organization on a mission to combat climate change with a focus on equity. The main office is located on Madison's west side, and there's another office located in downtown Chicago. The Madison office and the Chicago office got together to meet and network. We had morning staff meetings and played games, went on tours, and had a dinner party at the Brink on E. Wash. I had the opportunity to meet the CEO of the organization, a black woman who's a Chicago native like myself. I was able to introduce myself to others I had not met and learn new things about the organization. It was an overall great experience. **(Gela Docks)**

My mother was born in El Salvador. When she came here, she wanted nothing more than to just be like everyone else in the sense she wanted the white picket fence, a two-car garage, and a white face. She met my stepfather when I was one, and he was Italian. My mother would make pasta and chicken cutlets, but when I'd go to my grandma's house, we ate leftover frijoles from the country crock container and tortillas hot and fresh from the comal. She never used a spatula—she'd always grab the steaming tortilla with her hand.



My grandma and mother never did teach me the language, which made me feel not Latina or Hispanic enough growing up, but what my grandma gave me was culture. I definitely made it a mission to give myself as much credit as I can trying to learn traditional recipes and the history of my heritage. Now can I make a mean chicken parmigiana? Yes. Can I make the best pupusas you've ever had? Absolutely. With this abundance of culture in my life, it definitely has influenced the ability to be open to learning about other traditions not of just the Hispanic or Italian variety but from anywhere from anyone willing to teach. **(Brianna Espanol)**

I am a convergence of my parents. My mom's from the southside of Chicago, and my dad's from the west. **(Adrianne Farrow)**

My boss is Korean. We have a great relationship; we have been working together for 13 years. We share food, ideas, and a bathroom. **(Jamal Jackson)**

A form of convergence in my personal life would be my mom and stepdad coming together, despite my biological father, and raising me with the common goal of my well-being. Now I have three younger siblings. My family is in a whole new era now than when it was just my mom, dad, and I. **(Aaniyah Jefferson)**

I often make rasta pasta, which is a combination of Jamaican and Italian food. I love this dish because I love Jamaica's culture but love the taste of Italian food. I believe that you can have different characteristic styles. I believe that I am an ethnic professional, meaning I am Black and some of my things that are in my culture would be frowned upon at my place of business. When I am at work, I conduct myself in a professional manner, but around my loved ones, I embrace my culture.

(Gloria Knight)

In a form of convergence in my personal life, my child's father and I co-parent and come together to care for Nevaeh. Another form of convergence is my mom and I. My mom helps as much and as best as she can with my kids and my life in general! **(Crystal Lee)**

My life includes convergence because of my race. My mother is white, and my father is Black and Puerto Rican. The holidays were always different when I went to my mom's side of the family versus my father's side. **(Mariya Lucas)**

I'm an African [from the Gambia] that came to the USA for a "greener pasture," to be better and do better. I am from a deep-rooted Mandingo cultural background of a predominantly Muslim society. In this great country, I met my beautiful wife, who also brought a delicate balance of African American culture and spiritual values that consolidated my innate personal traits. This is how our two lives converged to form a lasting loving bond. **(Alfusainey Manjang)**

Right now in my life, I would say it has a lot of stressful, traumatic, uphill battles, but while my significant other and I are going through the literal trenches, we still find joy in each other's company. We cook and laugh together and find moments of "joy" within each other's company, sometimes even though we feel like the only two people in the world. It's also "a me and him against the world" mentality with us. **(Vanessa Martinez)**



My mother is Mexican and my father is African American. My mother believes in some type of God, whereas my father is not spiritual.

(Alexis McClain)

I was born in Neza, Mexico, and I grew up in the 'burbs. I think the experience made me bi-cultural. I am true to my *razies* [roots], and I know how to be understood in white spaces. Learning to love and live in both cultures makes for a convergence of two worlds. Here and there, I am always in between. **(Mickey Mestiza)**

I come from a single-parent house and now I have kids. It makes me wonder if I would be a statistic too. **(Valvree Mosley)**

My life is converging from a young adult into an upstanding confident black woman living in Wisconsin still trying to figure it out. I am becoming a role model and being intentional with my daily activities to be where I want to be financially, spiritually, mentally, and physically. Manifesting my dreams of freedom from a paycheck-to-paycheck lifestyle to a place where self-love is intertwined in my life, nothing can give me self-doubt or shamefulness. I can be well rested and support my family and not be stressed about things I cannot control. And overall, I can become a better version of myself for myself. **(Daija Pigram)**

I'm Native American and Jamaican and African American. I eat really diverse food, and I have different cultural beliefs. Music is also diverse for my family and so is art, like with home décor. **(Lailaini Reed)**

I grew up in a small family raised by a strong, Black single woman. This type of convergence has held an opinion on me over my head and my parenting as a Black woman. **(Tiana Richmond-Lee)**

My parents grew up from very different families and backgrounds. My father's side of the family is filled with educators, healthcare workers, and successful people. My mother's side also has very hardworking people, but the majority like to party and "have fun." This has allowed me to start to make decisions as an adult on how I want to live my life and where I want to be. **(Ashli Smith)**

I feel my life has convergence in the sense of having to often play a role as a mother to my kids, guiding them and encouraging them, wanting them to strive, wanting them to see what I see in them. I am there for my siblings, loving them, encouraging them, also wanting all of my siblings to strive, and in that way, I feel a sense of convergence. **(Corrie Thomas)**

Convergence: my love for music. I love when artists take a chance to blend genres. For me, it allows me to see what I've come to love in a different light. **(Daniel Thomas)**

My mother is white. She's actually mixed with Greek and Irish. My father is Black, so I am mixed. My dad is really dark, so a lot of times when I meet people, they don't guess that my mother is white. I consider myself 50% white and 50% black. My children's fathers are Black, but I still consider my children mixed and let them know they are 25% white. **(Janessa Weichmann)**

My life includes a convergence because I am trying to raise my children somewhat how my father raised me. When I think of how my dad raised me, I think of the words "strict, demanding, tough"—and all of those things helped shape me and made me strong. I, on the other hand, want to show my kids all of these things but I want to also exhibit love, softness, and understanding. With the blend of my dad's ways and my own, I believe the convergence will have a good impact on my kids. They will be tough and sweet. **(Ladella Wilson)**

I am bi-racial. I am black and white and have learned to live with both sides of the family. **(Abby Wilson)**

Gospel and hip-hop come together to make new sounds in music. This makes for amazing new gospel. I also love to cook, making potato salad and adding a lot of ingredients to make it become a dish with everything in it to make one dish of potato salad. The impact that it has on me is being creative when I mix different kinds of seasoning to come out with one big hug of flavor. **(Sable Wright)**



MOVED BY MUSIC

While listening to Bob Auerbach on the piano, students wrote about what music means to them in their lives.



Music is the existence of life to me. Music has history and stories. Music is comfort to my mind, body, and soul. I listen to music to sing with joy to my son Noah. Music relieves the tension in my body after a tiring day. With every word, tune, and melody, music has moved either my lips, hips, or thoughts.

From reggae to cumbia to merengue to middle school jams like “Kiss Me Thru the Phone” by Soulja Boy, the most impactful form of music to me hands down has been rap. Rap in Spanish by artist Los Aldreanos talks of life struggles and the unheard voices of their country. Rap in English with artist Immortal Technique gives immense power to the people by expressing his feelings, speaking his opinion about the tragic state of the marginalization of colored people. “Caught in the Hustle” speaks of pain, perseverance, and the power of the human spirit.

Music gave me a voice in my mind and a shift in consciousness. I feel that without music, life would cease to exist. When listening to music, one does not need to speak or move; the simple truth of existing is enough. **(Angelica Alvarez Valenciano)**



Music is a way for me to get away. I get to shut off my mind and listen to every note, beat, rhythm – every sound. I listen to music while reading, cleaning, walking, working, doing homework. My mind is happy when music is playing.

I listen to all types of music: jazz/blues, pop, alt, indie, country, rap, rock – I like all music that my head nods to and my foot is tapping to or my hand is patting to.



Music lets me bring my emotions alive. I grew up in a household where you weren't able to express your feelings. I push mine down and sometimes they turn dark. Music allows me to wake up my emotions and lets me feel calm, sad, happy, angry, and lowkey.

(Kyiana Baker)



Music means so much to me. It's a huge part of my childhood, adolescence, and adult life. When I was a child, my mom and dad would sing nursery rhyme songs to my sister and me. Then while at church, I had to sing in a choir even though I couldn't sing. I also enjoyed listening to music while I did my house chores. It made the task not so difficult. I also incorporated dance, too.

Then, later in life, it helped me fill voids like if I was sad, happy, anxious, or just wanting to sleep and hear a nice melody. I honestly don't know what life without music would have been. I love all genres of music: hip hop, jazz, the blues, rap, country, folk, and pop. It helps me through the day. **(Tiffany Benston)**



The music makes me happy and makes me feel warm, like I can fantasize being in a ballroom or at an elegant event, or at a show that is about to begin.

The music gives me a feeling of life because the tunes are going up and down, and in life there are good days, bad days, sad days, and happy days.

I can think of a river flowing and music playing in the background. **(Quanna Caffey)**



Music is really a stress reliever for me. Listening to music changes my mood from being sad to more relaxed and calmer. I like hip hop and R&B, slow jams, and I like the music from the 90s more than the hip hop

music that is out now. I learned that if you listen to the words more than just sing it, you will be surprised what words are really being sung out of our mouths and our children's mouths. Music plays a huge role in my stress relieving and is calming and soothing to my mind. Depending on what mood I'm in, that decides what type of music I want to play. **(Eleanor Ceaser)**



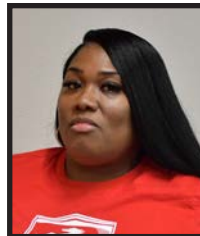
Music to me is excitement to its core. I have loved music all of my life. When I was very young, I was asked to take over playing records for my grandparents once they had done quite their share of drinking. I always played the right songs. Yes, I kept the party going. I remember throwing in an eight track of oldies but goodies while I read black style type novels. Donald Goines and Iceberg Slim went well with the music. Music set the scene. Let's just say my novels had soundtracks. **(Timothy Comer)**



Music has been an influential part of my life since at least early middle school, but probably sooner. I remember loving being able to hang out with my older cousins because they always had music playing and that's where I was usually

introduced to what the "cool older teenagers" were listening to. They would listen to a whole bunch of different genres so I got to experience many types. But as I grew a little, I began to develop a love for hip hop/rap (especially Southern).

There's something I love about the hard-hitting beats mixed with Southern lyrics, often times about struggle. I often use music as an escape to just clear my mind. **(Dillon Dahlk)**



I love music! I listen to music almost every day. I like R&B, rap, jazz, blues, country, and other types of music I may not know the names of.

Music can help me when I'm sad; it uplifts me when I'm going through hard times. It helps me relax when I'm taking a long bath and drinking a bottle of wine. Music makes me happy. I like to listen to music when I'm cleaning – it keeps me in a good mood.

Music can make or break a party, social gathering, BBQ, etc. If the music is not right, I cannot enjoy myself. When good music is playing, it's always a good time for me. Ever since I can remember, music has always been a part of my life. **(Gela Docks)**



Music is something to me that nothing else could ever possibly be, for every emotion in life. Music is something that helps me figure anything that needs further understanding or when you need to just feel the pain or happiness a little deeper- music is that rock to sleep.

I'm open to all genres but I mostly listen to older Alternative Rock, your classic 90s and 2000s bands like Soundgarden, Helmet, Alice in Chains, and Tapping the Vein; then there's where it began in the 70s and 80s with bands like The Cult, Dio, Warrant, and of course Black Sabbath. Also, I love making playlists, so if anyone needs new music, run my way! **(Brianna Espanol)**



I love all music, from rock to R&B. I listen to music all of the time, while I drive, clean, or when I'm in a bad mood. The music I listen to really depends on my mood. I love to sing to my favorite songs. Making my own songs has helped

me learn to express myself. Music definitely has a big effect on me. Music can change my mood, make me cry, and make me happy. Music helps me clear my mind. Music can sometimes become my safe space and help me feel free. I love listening to music very loud because it's almost like I can feel every beat. Listening to music loudly helps me drown out any outside distractions. Music is such a big part of my life. I couldn't imagine not hearing music ever again. **(Adrienne Farrow)**



Music means the world to me. It's my escape from reality. It fills my soul and erases any ill feelings I may have. I listen to all kinds of music, doesn't matter. There is always a different message. Music helps me block out nonsense,

people, and other sounds that I don't want to tolerate. My household is full of music no matter if I'm cleaning up the house or playing cards with friends or simply just listening to gospel on a Sunday. I have a small radio or boom box that I keep on blast or my Walkman on the bus headed to school. **(Jamal Jackson)**



What does music mean to me? It is like magic. It lights up your soul and a lot of times lets you know you aren't alone. The sounds and vibrations move my mind to another place as if being transcended. It helps give my life a

story, or it can be an outlet for any given emotion. Music to me is art. It is the workings of humans fulfilling their purpose, which is to create music. Music is beautiful. I enjoy all sounds and genres of music in a way because it tells a story. I love to listen. I specifically enjoy R&B as well as Indie, rock, and lyricist-focused rap. My father creates music, and I'm glad I have that personal link to music. It makes it that much more enjoyable.

(Aaniyah Jefferson)



Music is my peace in the midst of a storm, my hell in the middle of traffic, and my mood balancer. Music has always been a part of my soul. I love all kinds of music, including R&B, hip hop, country, and even a little rock and roll. I listen to certain genres depending on my mood. Music is a mood enhancer. If you are sad and you listen to sad music, it heightens your sadness. If you're happy and you hear something upbeat, it adds to the happiness.

Music makes me feel good and it often resonates with my current mood at that time. R&B puts me in the mood for love, hip hop puts me in the mood to get through traffic, rock makes me feel pumped, and country helps me cope after a breakup. Music is a huge part of my life and helps me get through many obstacles. **(Gloria Knight)**

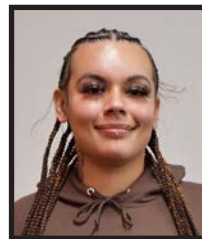


Music will always be a mood for me. I really feel music; if it's sad, I will definitely cry because I am so sensitive and music understands and doesn't talk back, LOL. I like happy, fast-paced music because I will also get up and dance. There

was a song played at my granny's funeral that I can't listen to because I will burst into tears. I love listening to gospel music even though I cry. It gives me faith and understanding. I don't think I could really describe how music makes me feel overall,



but I know I love it. I depend on it, and there is a song that relates to everything I have going on. I am happy to get to explore and I'm happy music understands me! It's my coping skill. **(Crystal Lee)**



Music is my therapy! I love all kinds of music. R&B is my favorite out of them all, but if it's good, I will listen to any genre. When I'm in the gym, I listen to anything that gets me pumped up and going. When I'm sad, I listen to uplifting and motivational music and sometimes gospel. I truly love music and the way it can change your whole entire mood. I love that music is poetry. When the words relate to you and you just want to keep replaying that part of the song and screaming your heart out to it, how isn't that therapy?

(Mariya Lucas)



Reggae music means more than just music to me because of the reflections I would have upon listening to it. They are always far reaching because of my connections to the Caribbean people and what slavery has done to them. Music, they say, gives wings to the mind, and listening to reggae flies me back in time, to the plantations of the slave masters. This, for me, holds great meaning for our shared origin. But all in all, music is calming and relaxing for me. But first, it is educative. **(Alfusainey Manjang)**



I listen to a wide variety of music. What I listen to depends on my mood. If I'm cooking or washing dishes, I listen to something more upbeat. If I'm doing other housework or driving, I'll maybe listen to some more sad or

emotional music. We just began being able to wear headphones and listen to music while we work at Amazon, and the difference in my quality of work and peace is significant. I can let my mind wander and go deep in thought and into my own world. I have time to process feelings that I may not have had the time to sort out.

Music is a big part of my life, from when I was a little girl and remember my mother singing "you are my sunshine" to me at bedtime, which I, in turn, used to sing to all four of my own children. I feel I cannot cook a proper meal without my speaker belting out whatever tunes I choose. Long car rides with my children always include us belting out and dancing in the car, giving fellow drivers a ridiculous "show." My oldest daughter, Alanna, would love to blast "Uptown Girl" by Billy Joel because she remembered her grandparents playing it at their house while wildly dancing and singing along at the top of her voice. **(Vanessa Martinez)**



Music is art. It's an expression. It's universal. The way certain tones can "set the mood" or leave goosebumps and raise hairs I forgot to shave is mind blowing to me. I listen to a variety of genres,

but my go-to ones consist of old school R&B, hip hop, country, and jazz. Music can make a person fall asleep, bring up flashbacks and old memories, or make a person happy, sad, or lit/excited. When I don't want to be in my physical reality, I listen to music. In the shower, I become Beyonce or I shapeshift into Queen and break out into a full concert of "We are the Champions." **(Alexis McClain)**



When I was a teenager, I remember my Pa telling me to take my headphones out of my ears every once in a while. Music allows me to swim in the emotions of what I am not always able to express outwardly. Now I am

finding the courage to play my music out loud. My friends say I have great taste in music. I make playlists for my loved ones as a way to connect. I like to think of how my loved ones might be feeling and then share songs that make them feel seen/heard. My Spotify said I am a music explorer because of how many different genres I listened to. I like to feel what others feel through music. I hope to make music that also makes others feel.

(Mickey Mestiza)



I like to listen to all types of music, such as R&B, hip hop, rap, blues, jazz, gospel, and sometimes even a little pop and rock. Music means a lot to me because different music can set a different tone. I swear you would think Pandora knows you or

can hear what goes on because, for some reason, they seem to know the mood or mode I'm in. They seem to always play the right songs. Music can sometimes cheer you up, and sometimes it can help clear your mind and relax. Music can amp you up and have you rockin' and rollin' or stepping or just nodding your head. Some music you relate to. Some songs can have you laughing or crying or it can have you singing your heart out. **(Valvree Mosley)**





I rarely listen to music, but when I do, it's usually to get myself in a better mood or to prepare for something like going out or working out to pump myself up. Music has a very impactful mood switch. I am actually having a friend make me a playlist so I can listen more often because I drive in silence. Most of the music I have on my phone is old/trendy radio music. R&B is my favorite genre.

The most I listen to music is when I am sad and I need to get through the feeling. I'll play sad or relatable songs. I want my son to listen to more music because I don't play anything in the house, but I don't want him to pick up on the habit. When I was younger, I would memorize songs just for fun. **(Daija Pigram)**



I listen to R&B and hip hop. Music is very important to me. It is my go-to for stress or when I am upset. Music indeed affects me a lot. I usually always have an AirPods in and am listening to something. It keeps me going every day and focused. Without music, I feel like life would maybe be difficult for me. **(Tiana Richmond-Lee)**



Music actually means a lot to me without me knowing. I listen to music every day. It is a part of my commute to work, my morning routine, and mini concerts in the car or shower. Music has been there when I am happy or sad and all alone. It can affect my mood negatively or positively depending on the day.

I listen to all kinds of music! My favorite kind of music is R&B and gospel, but I also like rap music. I tend to play music based off my mood or how I am feeling at the moment. Sometimes, I play the same song four times in a row and other times I find myself skipping a whole playlist. If I had to choose, I would say gospel is number one on my list. It is very uplifting and comforting and has gotten me through some of my hardest and happiest times in life. **(Ashli Smith)**



I listen to all music. I love jazz, country, rap, R&B, and reggae. You play it, I'll listen. Music has a special place in my heart. Music has helped me grow, learn, cope, and believe. Music can make me cry faster than an onion if you play the right song or the right tune. Through music, I feel I can express myself off of the song I would choose to play. For example, if I were to play "If Only I Had a Heart" from the Wizard of Oz, to "Oh Happy Day" by Edwin Hawkins, they would set two totally different moods. I love music. **(Corrie Thomas)**



To me, music is everything. I'm a melophile. I love everything about music! The science, the art, the philosophy. Music has the ability to change the tides of war. It can heal the sick and weary. Music will be here when it's all been said and done. Music will record our history. Music will tell our stories. Stories of when we were on top. Music will be there to explain our fated fall from grace. Music will tell the stories of when we struggled to exist. Music will usher us to our grave. Needless to say, sound waves may be the building blocks of life. Notes can be the backbone that gives society its posture. Time signatures will be the traffic light that keeps us all moving in an orderly fashion. Music defines us. Music unites us. Music unifies us. At least that's how I see things. Music is my voice when I have no words. Music is my eyes when I'm without vision. Music is my cradle and crutch.

(Daniel Thomas)



The music is very calming. It makes me feel like cuddling with my baby and rubbing my fingers through his hair until we both fall asleep. It almost makes me think of lullaby music.

I love R&B music mostly from the 90s. I love how much meaning and love was in the music from those times. There was also a lot of heartbreak in the 90s music I can relate to. I do also like hip hop music, but I don't listen to it as much as I do old school music. I love music more than anything – I always have music on. When I cook, when I clean, when I take a shower, or if I'm doing laundry, I have to have my



music on. I think it keeps me calm and focused on what I'm doing at the time. **(Janessa Weichmann)**



Music means a lot to me because when I'm in a bad mood, it can make me smile. When I'm happy and I'm listening to good music, it puts a smile on my face. With all of the types of music in the world, I can find a song to go with any

mood I am in.

I love to listen to gospel music; it makes my soul happy and makes me feel close to my Lord. I also love R&B music because it has so much emotion behind it. 90s R&B is often about love, and I'm a sucker for hearing about love. **(Ladella Wilson)**



Music is my happy place and the thing I turn to to make me feel at peace, to energize me, to calm my anxiety, and to chill out. It makes me feel at home and is something to fill the silence and to get rid of thoughts that say I can't do this

or that. Music can bring people together or break people apart. Music can build a person up; it can tell a woman that she can do anything as long as she believes in herself. Music can also break people down and "cancel them." Music is a magical thing that should be used to bring people together. I listen to a lot of genres of music but I mainly listen to pop. I have been listening to a bit of violin and no-lyrics study music, but mainly pop and rap, specifically a group called Beatpella House, which is acapella beatboxing. **(Abby Wilson)**



The music that is playing sounds like contemporary music and more like opera music in a romantic movie, like a love song.

I listen to gospel and R&B music. It lifts my spirit and calms my soul and makes me feel better. It helps me get into myself and my mood and my special place in my head. It makes me reflect back on the good and bad times. It depends on the mood, whether it be sad or happy music or just relaxing music. **(Sable Wright)**

ALUMNI CORNER

MEET HEZOUWE WALADA

In this article entitled “Student’s remarkable journey to starting his undergraduate degree at age 28, living his dream” for UW News on September 9, 2020, Lisa Bauer tells the story of Odyssey graduate Hezouwe Walada. Hezouwe graduated from UW in May 2023, is currently in graduate school for a master’s in public health, and is planning to apply to medical school..



In his village of Koumea in Togo, Africa, 8-year-old Hezouwe Walada watched nearly half of his community—including three of his young cousins—die of malaria in early 2000. He decided then and there he wanted to become a doctor.

But his dream seemed unattainable—his family was poor, the nearest school was far from his village and he didn’t even have shoes.

After 20 years, nearly 6,000 miles and a host of trials and tribulations, Walada started at the University of Wisconsin–Madison as a first-year student majoring in biochemistry this fall, with plans to eventually go to medical school.

“Everything is possible if you are willing to work hard and sacrifice,” says Walada, a graduate of both the UW Odyssey Project and Badger Ready. “All you have to do is believe and keep asking questions.”

From Togo to Madison

As a young child, when Walada made up his mind that he wanted to someday study medicine, he asked his father if he could attend school. He could, his father said, but not before he did morning chores. So Walada woke up 3 a.m., worked on the farm for three hours, walked 15 miles to school then walked 15 miles home at the end of the day.

“When I finished my chores, I started running to school,” he says. “I just really wanted to be a doctor and help people in my village and around the world.”

Walada studied hard and got admitted to one of the best high schools in Togo. He moved away from home and all he ever knew.

“I felt different because all my classmates had nice clothes, nice shoes and money,” he says. “I came there with two shirts, three shorts and one pair of shoes. Even though I was at the top of the class, I felt like I didn’t belong there. I was always sad because I didn’t have anything.”

But Walada persevered and eventually won a visa to go to the U.S. At age 17, he left his country for the first time, alone.

“I was terrified, but I kept reminding myself of my dream,” he says. “I knew people needed me to become a doctor. I will never forget the suffering I saw in my village. I still have flashbacks today.”

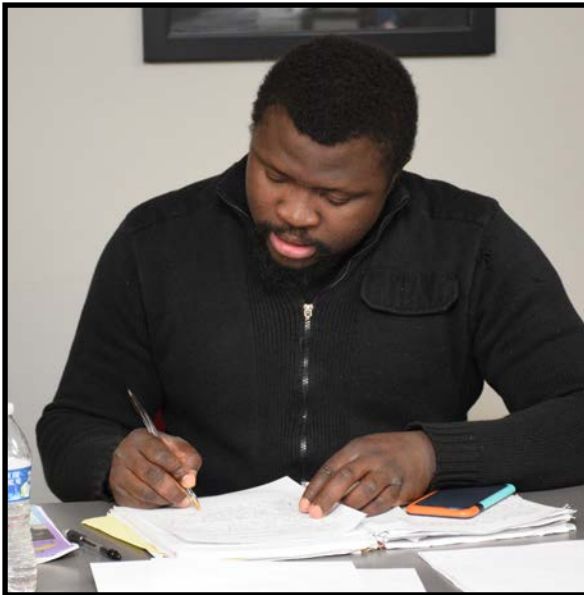
In 2009, Walada made it to Madison. Years before, he’d heard a teacher say that the University of Wisconsin–Madison was a prestigious institution. He did research online and decided to set his sights on becoming a Badger.

But his dream was delayed 10 more years.

Lacking resources and knowing very little English, Walada struggled in Wisconsin. He enrolled at Madison College, but without a stable home or sometimes even food to eat, his education stalled. He started “working like crazy”—mainly as a caregiver—to earn and save money. He met his wife, settled down and they had a daughter.



Walada began to wonder if he could ever return to his dream of becoming a physician, but he refused to give up. Then, someone told him about the Odyssey Project.



Continuing his odyssey

In 2017, Walada applied to the UW Odyssey Project, a six-credit English literature course that helps low-income adults get a jump start at earning college degrees. Odyssey became Walada’s reentry into living his dream.

“When I learned that I got into Odyssey, I was so happy,” he says. “Odyssey gave me friends, taught me how to be confident and showed me I can defy the odds and make my dream come true. I needed Odyssey to become the person that I am today.”

Through reading, writing about and engaging in lively discussions of Emily Dickinson, Martin Luther King Jr, Walt Whitman, Shakespeare, Lorraine Hansberry and more,

Walada found his own voice and found another family in his fellow Odyssey classmates. He heard stories that sounded similar to his own, learned more about slavery and was inspired to fight against injustice and for equality in the U.S. He shared stories from his culture and home country.

“Odyssey was my family, not just school. Everyone was so welcoming, and I felt that I wasn’t alone anymore,” he says. “Odyssey really taught me about life, about ambition and about how to gain confidence to be what I want to be.”

Walada then found another opportunity to keep making progress toward his dream: the Badger Ready program.

Getting Badger ready

In 2019, Walada entered the Badger Ready program, which helps adult students make the transition to college by supporting them through tailored UW–Madison coursework. As a University Special student, and scholarship recipient, Walada, who speaks seven languages, immersed himself in an English 100 class first semester.

“I was so excited that I was finally here, I went to the classroom the night before class and picked out where I wanted to sit,” he says. “I sat there alone in the classroom and thanked God for this opportunity and this journey.”

Second semester as a Badger Ready student, Walada took Biology 130. He was devastated when he got a 50 percent on his first exam. But his Badger Ready advisor encouraged him to ask questions and visit the professor during office hours. He did—after every lecture—and came out of the class with an A.

Walada successfully completed his program requirements in three semesters and was ready to apply as a transfer student to UW–Madison for fall 2020.

“I’m on a mission here in the U.S.,” he says, adding that he does see the injustice in America and vows to work against it. “This is a great country, and if I have an opportunity, I will take it. I want to give something back to this country, to Africa, to the world.”

Closer to a dream come true

As a newly admitted transfer student amid an unstable time, Walada is now an undergraduate majoring in biochemistry with a pre-health focus.

“I am ready,” he says, adding that he’s been studying all summer to prepare for the classes he is taking this fall. “I can’t believe this dream is coming true.”

After his undergraduate studies, Walada wants to attend UW–Madison’ School of Medicine and Public Health to study cardiology.

Where does he see himself in another 20 years? His dreams remain big and judging by his path so far, anything is possible: “I hope to help my country make changes to the medical system, maybe I would help other communities around the world, too, through Doctors without Borders.”

In the meantime, Walada plans to enjoy his time at UW–Madison, getting involved in a pre-health group, social justice organizations and with the Black community. He wants to relish his achievements, continue to work hard and pay it forward.

“You cannot understand how thrilled that I am to be a student here,” he says. “My advice to people fighting for their dreams is believe in yourself. Seize opportunities. Fight for your moment because it is going to come for you.”

