

YEAR 24, ISSUE 1

SEPTEMBER 2, 2026

ODYSSEY



ORACLE

WELCOME, CLASS OF 2027!



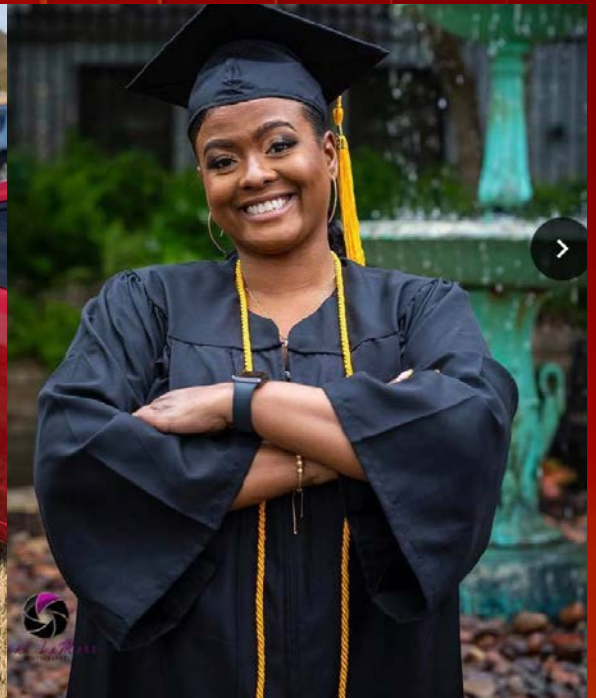
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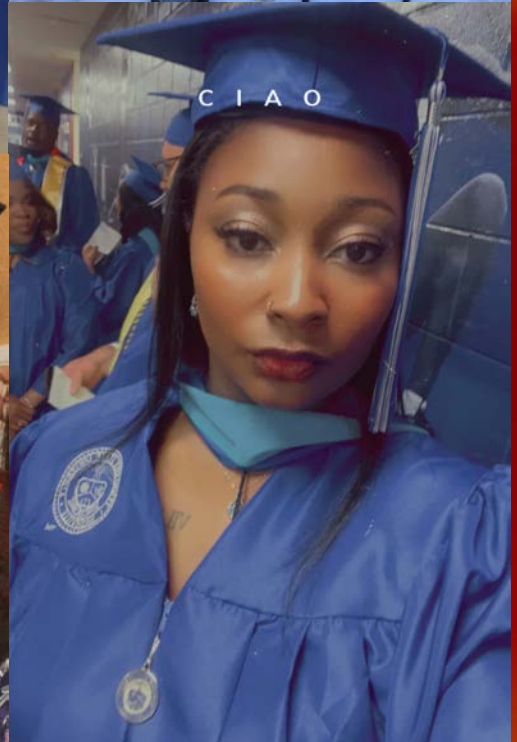
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Emily Auerbach, Executive Director/Co-Founder
Kevin Mullen, Director of Adult Education
Emily Azad, Program Manager; Photographer
Katie Arredondo, Coordinator; Oracle Assistant
Sarah Lensmire, Assistant Program Manager; Photographer
Beth Auerbach, Oracle Designer

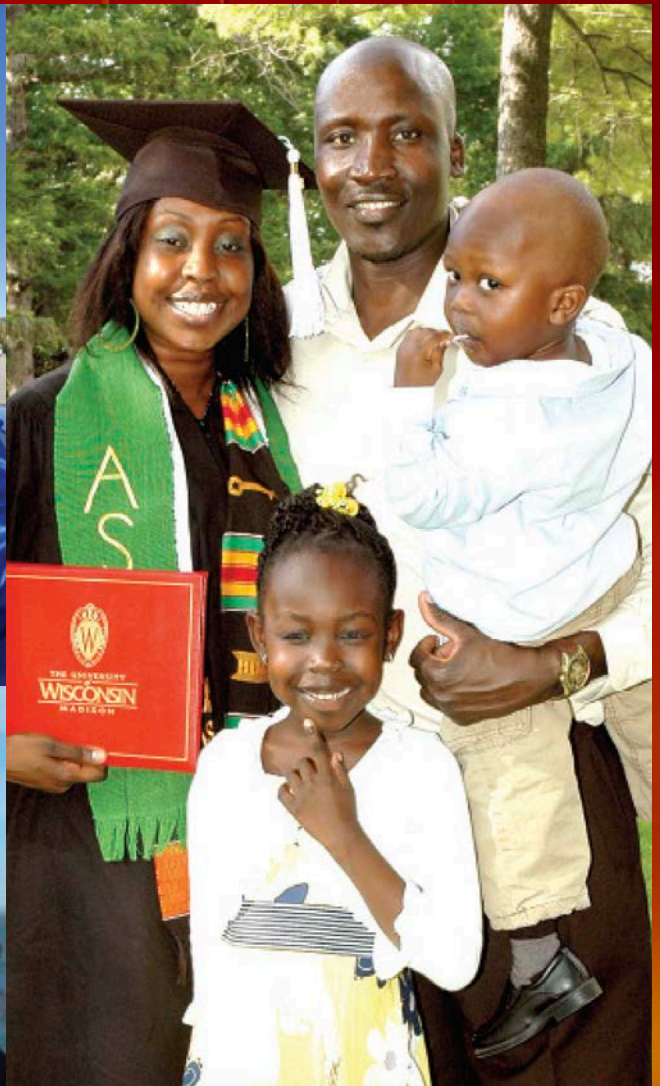
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Pictured on pp. 1-8 are some of our many Odyssey graduates who have earned associate's, bachelor's, master's, doctoral, and law degrees from Madison College, UW-Madison, Edgewood, and other schools: Shaimaa Ahmed '16; Zeynab Ahmed '14; Sherreallyum Allen '05; Keena Atkinson '10; Brian Benford '07; Sherri Bester '08; Michelle Bozeman '11; Char Braxton '06; Lavern Brown '09; Michelle Brown '05; Kegan Carter '04; Luci Chikowero '14; Dominique Christian '09; China Moon Crowell '13; Yolanda Cunningham '12; Cameron Daniels '07; Jelissa Edwards '16; Jayvonna Fleming '16; Tom Gardner '08; Juan Gatica, Odyssey Junior; Otis Harris '09; Molinda Henry '07; Kiara Hill '11; Tiffany Hite '04; James Horton '08; Yasmin Horton '08; Cierra Jackson '24; Jessica Jacobs '21; Rhonda Johnson '09; Shaquida Johnson '12; Milli Lau '14; Shanita Lawrence '09; Joanna Lopez '05; Josephine Lorya '08; Michael Lozano '11; Ricardo Marroquin '19; Tasha McKenzie '10; Krista Mellott '20; Adrian Molitor '18; Kenya Moses '12; Ahmad Nahas '17; Shirley Norman '04; Moriah Parker '20; Nicole Barnett Pecku '09; Lolita Phillips '13; Jaleah Price, Odyssey Junior; Edwina Robinson '11; Sahira Rocillo '15; Simone Rogers '17; Mustafa Saed '16; Umaina Saed '16; Corey Saffold '06; Cherri Sorrells '17; Robert Taliaferro, Beyond Bars '19; Kala Taylor '16; Marisela Tellez-Giron '16; Mai Neng Thao '16; Dauntrea Vance, Odyssey Junior; Hezouwe Walada '19; Sunni Walker '21; Anthony Ward '04; Mary Wells '07; Sarah Wells, Senior '24; Jayda Woods, Odyssey Junior; Sandra Zintzun '19



LETTERS TO THE CLASS OF 2027

Dear Class of 2027,



Congratulations and welcome to the beginning of the rest of your life. Believe the hype: Odyssey is everything they say it is and more! Show up, make it a priority, and give it your all. If I can do it, you are more than capable. We all have big things going on in our lives, but I promise you, Odyssey can be your safe space if you let it. It was my break from the world every Wednesday! Believe in yourself! You were CHOSEN out of over 100 applicants. You were meant to be here. This is your calling and the fuel to your fire you needed!
(Laura Bass)



CONGRATULATIONS! You've made it into the Odyssey class of 2027! This is a time to feel honored and proud because out of over 100 applicants, you were chosen. I know you may feel a mix of emotions. When

I was in your seat, I felt excited, anxious, and somewhat afraid of failing. However, I'm telling you there's no need to have any fear of failing because Emily, Kevin, and the rest of the Odyssey staff are dedicated to seeing you succeed. This program is life changing, so be sure to soak up all the knowledge you can. Good luck—you've got this! Love to you. **(Serene Boyd)**



I'm sure you're sitting here with awkward stares, uncomfortable silence, and uncertainty lingering. Trust me when I tell you those feelings won't last long. The strangers you're sitting with will soon become family. I challenge you all to open your mind and hearts to the Odyssey Project and let it work its magic. You will be challenged, but with that comes encouragement and support. Mrs. Emily, Kevin, and the entire staff only want to see you succeed. Try your best to not let self-doubt, adversities, or others deter you from achieving your dreams, goals, and aspirations.



This journey is eye opening and one to make your own. There's not one right way to do it. From English Lit, Philosophy, History, Art, and more, you will find something new in each class.

As I close, I say welcome to the Odyssey Family! Let your guard down and pour into your futures! I promise you won't regret it. **(Lisa Brown)**



My words to you are be prepared! Be present! I would also say as a heads up: be yourself!

Coming into Odyssey, expect to be challenged. This will be something I'm sure you will enjoy.

I say this because coming into the class, I started out nervous about if I even had what it takes to be in the class or if I would finish. I knew it was a lot of what I didn't know, but all my teachers supported me like crazy, and I came out with a lot learned. You will find yourself reading more, thinking more critically, and craving more knowledge.

I fell behind a lot with my homework, but thanks to the childcare Odyssey provided me with and the tutoring sessions they had every Monday, I was able to sometimes catch up more than I probably would have without. Don't worry: once you feel overwhelmed, your teachers and classmates are there and will help, support, and guide you through. All you have to do is ask for help or talk to one another. After the first class I knew I would love Odyssey, but as of now, one month from graduation, I can surely say the expectation I had for Odyssey was majorly surpassed.

Don't give up! Don't quit!

You will make it if that's what you want. You will soon find out all your teachers will want you to make it just as much as yourself. Besides the work I learned from while doing homework and school work in class, I also learned to speak up and use my voice outside of Odyssey. I was taught to speak up, be loud, and be heard. Read the policy! That's a joke that basically means do your homework. Get it? Laughing out loud! I had to use that at work. All and all, good or bad, whatever you may go through during your time with Odyssey, it's going to be

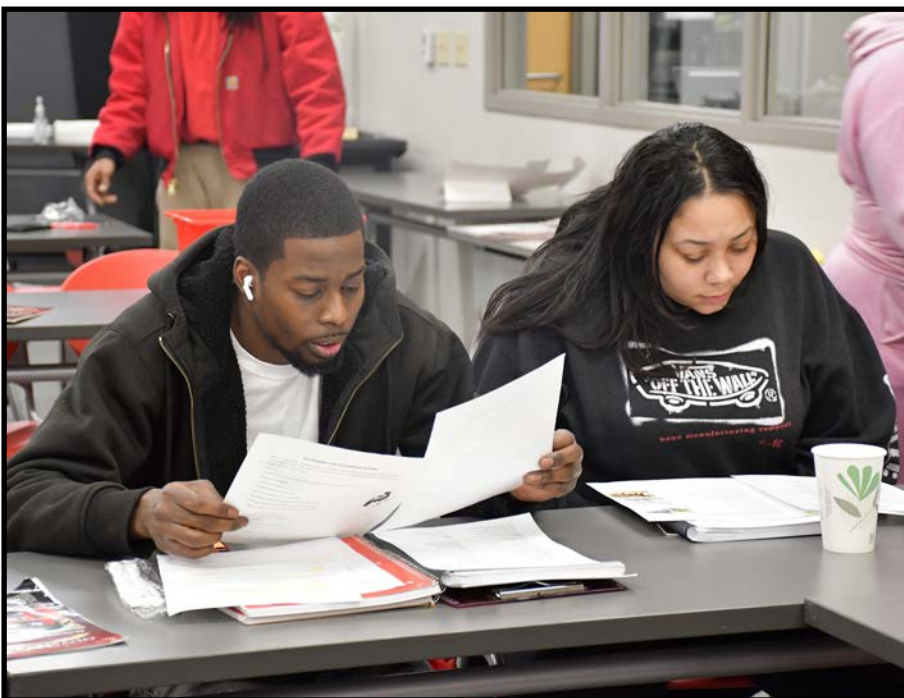
a great learning experience for you. You will enjoy your time there, and there will be much to learn and to do. I'm rooting for all of you to do great. Stay ready and you might not have to get ready. I'm proud of you in advance! **(Richard Butler)**

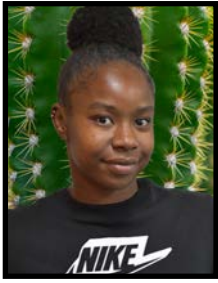


I truly believe everything happens for a reason. I had the opportunity to continue my education through the Odyssey program, which I only learned about from a colleague at my job. At first, the thought of loading my plate with two jobs and the

pressure of becoming a single mom felt extremely discouraging. But as I always say, "you never know until you try." Well, here I am, two semesters later and closer to my goal. The Odyssey program has helped me in unimaginable ways, such as the extremely resourceful, educational, and emotional help. I was able to open up to strangers (my classmates) who had similar stories to me. I've never felt so comfortable and welcomed in a space where we all strive to become our best.

I deeply encourage you to load your plate and push yourself beyond your limits because at Odyssey, there is always a way! **(Stacy Castillo)**





I want to start off by saying I was all of you on my first day: quiet, nervous, and scared. I didn't know what to expect. I want to congratulate you all for making it and getting accepted into Odyssey. They take 30 out of 100, and you got accepted:

look at God already working his ways for you. I believe in you. I didn't have the courage, but look at me now. You will graduate, you will succeed, you will complete, you will overcome your scares, and you will accomplish everything you want in life. Congratulations, my 2027 Odyssey family.

(Cquemiah Clark-Richmond)



When I applied for the Odyssey Project for the second time after being denied, I was filled with nerves – unsure if I was smart enough, unsure if I belonged. But when we took the field trip to campus to get our IDs, being on campus and feeling that energy, something shifted. I saw a future I never dared to imagine. Now I'm on this path – enrolled in college, pursuing my dreams at a HBCU – and I feel stronger every day.

Remember as you walk this journey to take your time and give yourself grace. Take care of yourself. Self-love is just as vital as ambition. I can't wait to see all that you accomplish; this is just the beginning.

Welcome to the Class of 2027. The hard part is over; you've come this far! Remember nothing is more powerful than you. And I'm with you.

(Valencia Collins)



WELCOME into your new adventure...an Odyssey, if you will. I hope that coming in you guys are prepared to learn new things, join a new community, and have fun while doing it all. Coming into this program I was so nervous and didn't know what

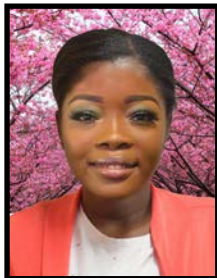
to expect. Being here with Emily, Kevin, Christine, and ALL the staff has been amazing. They helped every step of the way. I mean every step of the way. Whether it was helping with homework, kids, food, or even just being a listening ear, they were amazing.

I know each of you is walking in with your own life issues. Let this be a safe space for you, and let Odyssey and the staff help you and guide you like it did us and the ones before us. I am very grateful to have been a part of this journey. I want to thank all the staff for making sure that we got all of the resources that we needed to succeed—to watching our babies, to just being that listening ear. This class made me so proud to be a part of because even on days when we didn't want to show up because life was kicking our butts, we did. We showed up and contributed even through all the trials and tribulations. We all took that first step to becoming a better us, and that all started with Odyssey. This became a part of my life, and I will miss coming here religiously every Wednesday.

I also want to take the time to say, PLEASE GO TO TUTORING ON MONDAYS! Kevin and his team of tutors are great! Free food and childcare are something you can't beat! It helped so much in getting my work done and also getting caught up when I fell behind.

To this next class I want to wish you all the best! I hope you all enjoy being here as much as I did. I hope Odyssey pushes you to do the things you have been wanting to do but haven't done. I hope it gives you the confidence to get back into school and chase your dreams! Congratulations on being here!

(Paola Damiani)



Dear Class of 2027, make sure you give it your absolute best. There's no way one could fail a class with all the support system it comes with. Take advantage of all the resources Odyssey has to offer, and the two semester classes will go by fast with the

best grades possible. Make sure to come to class on time and actually do the work. If you are stuck, Emily's always got your back. But be sure to ask for help when you need it, don't stay quiet, and please ask anyone on the staff for help. They are all here for you, and they are all here to make sure you succeed. **(Tida Drammeh)**



Welcome to CHANGE ... I say change because indeed your life is about to change, for the better!

When I applied, I didn't know it was me against 100+ other applicants all trying to win a

spot in a life changing opportunity. Now look at you!!! You are in my shoes: you were chosen. Emily chose you. Scream, cry, clap, express every emotion because, tie your shoes, this isn't a walk in the park, but I promise you'll walk that stage with a reborn version of yourself and with resilience and strength in your walk. 2027 is your year!!! Congratulations, everyone!! **(Destiny Drone)**



In this program, you will find your love for learning, you will hear captivating stories, and you will be challenged to think intellectually. It is such a blessing to be chosen for this program, so consider yourself blessed even if you never have before!

Emily and Kevin care so deeply about you and your success, so take this opportunity seriously and take everything you can learn from it! This is just the beginning! You will come out of the program feeling so proud of yourself. You can do this! I believe in you, too! Welcome to Odyssey! **(Kiana Galloway)**



Welcome to your new beginning. You may be feeling nervous, scared, and a little out of place, but this space is going to become something so familiar. It will be a place you will miss once the countdown starts to take place.

For the first month I barely opened my mouth. Towards the end I was volunteering to read and act parts out loud to the class. I pray that this time in this class opens up your mind and confidence and inspires you to continue on and accomplish goals.

You may feel overwhelmed, but push through, ask for help, and stay determined. **(Tikoya Gilmer)**



Welcome, Class of 2027!

You chose Odyssey because you believe that you're ready to change. You have a plan, and most importantly you're willing to learn. This program is for you. There is a lot of excitement and

fun. I hope by joining the Odyssey Project this brings you peace and much success. **(Larry Grant)**



Welcome to Odyssey!

You did not arrive here by accident.

Something within you is ready to grow, to learn, and to rise.

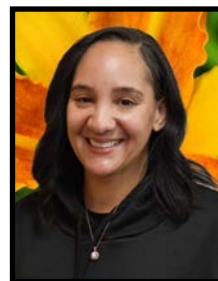
Trust the path ahead, even when it challenges you.

Within you already live the strength, the courage, and the wisdom needed for this journey.

Step forward with an open mind and willing heart.

Support one another and believe in yourself. Also remember that every step you're taking is shaping the person you are becoming.

This is your NEW beginning. **(Antejah Greer)**



Hey, y'all, heyyy! Shataya here. Welcome to Odyssey.

Let me just say how happy I am for you for being chosen to be part of the Odyssey Project. Trust me when I say: you are going to love it. Mark my words.

During the first few weeks you might have thoughts like, "This is stupid," or "This isn't going to make a difference in my life," or even, "This isn't for me." Some of you might even think, "I'm not coming back next week." If that happens, just give it a few more weeks. Stay, keep showing up. I PROMISE you, you'll change your mind.

Let me tell you a little about the people here.

Emily is amazing—she is super cool, a little savage (in the best way possible). Kevin, ohh Kevin, he is soo funny. Em and Sarah, them and that camera: they are going to get those pictures of you, so just go with it, lol. For real, you're going to love every teacher here, but more importantly, they're going to love and support you.

If you've ever felt like nobody was cheering for you, that is not the case here. The teachers here at Odyssey are your biggest cheerleaders; they are here for you and they believe in you. When I say



they truly want you to succeed, I mean that with every bone in my body.

Here's a little advice from someone who's been where you are sitting right now:

When Emily asks for volunteers to read a passage or a part in a play... DO IT. Even if you think you're not a good reader, or big words make you nervous like they did for me, Emily will simply help you with the word and you'll keep going. You will get better, and that is how. The first time might feel scary, the second time might feel awkward, but by the third time— you'll realize it's not so bad.

And when you get the chance to go on field trips—to plays, museums, or anywhere new—GO. Say yes to the experience, step outside your comfort zone, and try something you might never have done before. Some of the best memories come from moments you almost said no to.

My last piece of advice is this: speak up and use your voice. Your thoughts matter in this room and so do your ideas. In this class, there's no such thing as a wrong question or a wrong answer; there's only learning, growing, and discovering things about the world—AND about YOURSELF.

So welcome to Odyssey! Trust this process, and enjoy this journey. I promise, it's going to be worth it. **(Shataya Hall)**



Future Odyssey students, Welcome to the Odyssey program! As someone who has been where you are about to begin, I want you to know that this experience can truly change you in ways you may not expect.

When I first started, I did not realize how much this program would mean to me. Life was already heavy for me. I was going through a divorce, grieving the loss of my father and my brother, and trying to stay strong for my daughters while still finishing school. Some days it felt like everything around me was a storm. But coming to Odyssey on Monday and Wednesday nights became a place where I could breathe.

The staff here are more than instructors. They are encouragers. They listen, they care, and they truly want to see you succeed. During some of the hardest moments in my life, they showed compassion and patience, and that meant more to me than they probably know.

My classmates also became something very special to me. What started as a group of strangers slowly turned into something that felt like family. We supported each other, laughed together, and reminded one another that none of us were walking this journey alone.

Odyssey opened my mind, strengthened my confidence, and reminded me that it is never too late to grow, learn, and start a new chapter.

If I could give you one piece of advice, it would be this: stay committed, stay open, and lean on the people around you. There will be moments when the work feels challenging, but the growth you gain from it is worth every step.

Before you know it, you will be the ones writing a letter like this, looking back and realizing how far you have come. I wish you the very best on your journey.

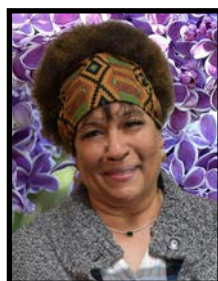
(Jacqueline Hawkins)





When I first started, things were very overwhelming, I questioned if I could balance school, work, class, and being

a mother while also bringing a new baby into the world. The Odyssey Program made it easier for me with the love and support they provided. Lean on your teachers, classmates, and the resources they provide. Keep pushing forward even on the days it feels hard. Never forget where you started! You are capable of more than you think. Keep going! **(Brittany Hughes)**



Welcome to The Odyssey Project—a journey that will change how you see yourself and the world around you! When I first walked into that bright room on a September evening, I saw faces as nervous and hopeful as my own. The walls were lined

with stories, photos of graduates smiling with pride, words from those who came before us urging us to keep going. Those words lit a spark in me, and I hope this letter does the same for you.

You'll soon discover that Odyssey isn't just about books and lectures. It's about rediscovering your voice. It's the moment when a poem cracks open your heart, when a classmate's story reminds you that you are not alone, and when you realize your experience has power and value. You'll laugh, cry, question, and grow in ways that books alone can't teach!

There will be long nights and strong emotions. Life won't stop while you're in this program, but through it all, remember this: you belong here! Every essay, every conversation, every shared meal is part of building something bigger than yourself.

Let curiosity be your compass and the instructors be your anchor.

By the end of your Odyssey, you'll look back and see not just how far you've come but also how much more of yourself has awakened. This is your time--walk boldly and confidently into it, with faith in your journey. **(Angel Maria Moore)**



Firstly, be proud of yourself for making the first step towards your future. You simply being here, that's the first step accomplished, and now open yourself to the many possibilities which stand before you. Look around at your classmates: there

will be people who will become an important part of your community moving forward. You are all here for the same thing, to better your lives and the lives of your family.

Secondly, don't doubt yourself: Emily has the ability to see potential in people who don't even see it in themselves. The fact that you are here means she sees something in you, so show her. The seat you are sitting in was meant for you, so own it. **(Viwe Mpurwana)**



First off, I would like to say welcome to the Odyssey program, where you take the journey to learn yourself. It challenges you to go out of your comfort zone and forces you to build fundamental skills. It will challenge you at your most challenging moments in life. And this is how you are forced to persevere and surpass your limits throughout the class year.

I encourage you to get to know your classmates because you might form some new unbreakable bonds. Make sure you work with the staff; they will be your beacons of light in your times of need. Each of them has their own lanes of resources for you to utilize. They try to make sure you and your children feel as comfortable as possible. By providing daycare, dinner, and transportation, they shocked me with their dedication to ensure we make it to school and graduate. And every week of class brings something different. We might head to the museum to study art. Or we might have a guest speaker talk about their ups and downs until they reached success.

One of my most enjoyable moments was when we read *A Raisin in the Sun* and then acted out the play. Soon you will start to awaken dormant skills that you thought that you never had. So my best advice I can give you is don't take the program for granted. Use it for what it is: a stepping stool to reach another level in life. Now I encourage you to complete the voyage and always be better than you were yesterday. In this world you only can go not as far as you can see but really how far as you can think. I wish you the best of luck, Class of 2027, and I hope you all strive for greatness.
(Shelton Murphy)



Welcome to Odyssey!! You guys are in for a ride!! A blessing in disguise!! I never expected to be where I am, sitting in these classrooms learning what I am experiencing. Please take advantage of this beautiful opportunity!!

Welcome to Odyssey! **(Roché Palmer)**



You might feel like everyone is watching you, huh? Take a deep breath ... I promise you, most people are probably feeling the exact same way. In reality, this is going to be amazing. It might even end up being one of the best experiences you could ever

imagine.

Try not to think negatively. I know life issues and reality can make meeting new people feel uneasy or even frightening. I know that feeling because I was that student. I came in with a horrible start. I honestly didn't know how I was even going to make it to class.

But instead of giving up and letting the day crumble, my teachers gave me hope. They uplifted



me and reminded me that I have a story to tell. I have kids to provide for. I have little eyes watching me. Because of that, I knew I had to show up despite everything I was going through in life.



I told myself I'd figure the rest out later because right now I had the opportunity to be part of an amazing program.

Don't let fear be the reason you get in the way of becoming a better version of yourself.

The best thing you can do is listen, observe, and take in what the people around you are saying. Ease your way into becoming comfortable enough to speak your own truth without feeling judged. When I opened up, that's exactly what I found, a judgment-free zone. A village. A family. Everyone in this program welcomed me with open arms and a listening ear.

So never feel like you're alone. Once you get comfortable, you'll feel relieved and honored to share your story and let people know who you are.

Keep going. Life can really be life-ing; if you know, you know lol. But seriously, don't give up. Keep pushing. I don't care if tomorrow you feel like everything is falling apart, maybe you're homeless, maybe your car breaks down, maybe you're angry at the world. Take that anger and turn it into motivation. Use it to push forward and still show up to class.

Not only will you figure it out, but your village, your people here at Odyssey, will help you figure it out too. And I'm not just saying this because I love the program. I'm saying this because I lived it.

My car got repossessed on the first day of school. I have three daughters. I had to worry about how to get back to work, how to take them to school,

how I was going to get to school, and everything else in between.

So, I'm a witness and a testimony! Whatever you put your mind to, you can do it. Just stay consistent and stay focused.

Oh, and do your homework, lol. That's the biggest part.

Express yourself. Don't hold back. This is you versus you. It's not you versus your classmates, and it's not a race.

This journey is about patience, understanding, and learning. And don't ever be afraid to ask questions; they love questions.

One day you'll be the person writing a letter like this to the next class, telling them how you made it through. So, start your journey strong, stay focused, and never forget that you were chosen for a reason.

Overall, welcome to the start of a new class and the beginning of your new journey. Congratulations on being selected. I'm so proud of you. And you got this. **(Roncal Riley)**



Take a deep breath ... now exhale the worry, the doubts, and the unease. Allow yourself to feel what you're feeling. It's ok to cry, laugh, or stay quiet. Accept every raw emotion you're feeling with an open mind to listen and an appetite to learn. Be proud

of yourself and hold your head high because you have taken the first steps on your journey to your success. Simply being here, you have shown up for yourself, so don't give up because success looks good on you! **(Lilibeth Sobrevilla)**

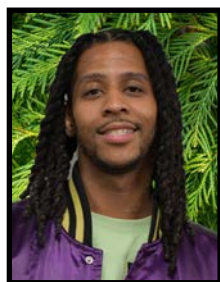


Hey, Class of 2027, I know all of you are joining this class to better yourselves and your futures. Well, you already started your journey with the hardest part: signing up and being accepted. Welcome to Odyssey where you can shape and write your future.

The sky is the limit! You guys are going to be just fine.

I was in your shoes a year ago, scared of the unknown, thinking can I really do this? Don't worry: even if you doubt yourselves, now you just became a part of the Odyssey family and Emily is not gonna let you fail lol. She's going to get you right out of that mindset. The teachers here are going to encourage you and will believe in you even when you feel like you can't do it. With their support and encouragement, you will succeed, so relax and get ready for a journey!

Odyssey isn't just a program; it's a transformative journey where you'll discover your strengths, face challenges, and grow in ways you never expected. This is the beginning of an adventure that will shape not just your knowledge but also who you become. **(JuJu Stallworth)**



Hello, future Odyssey students. My time at the Odyssey program was a great experience

for me. They are here to help every student in the program to be successful. Every teacher here is hands on for you. I was nervous at first, even scared, but once you get in the groove, it's a wonderful experience. I wasn't really a writer in the beginning, but over time I learned writing is another way to express yourself.

Being here was great. My kids loved it at Odyssey Junior and made new friends. My experience made me feel welcomed like a family. This is something that you can have for your future.

I faced a few obstacles in my everyday life, but every teacher here helped me to try to even make my life a little better with not as much stress. So, to all the new students, make the best of this experience for not only you but your family as well. Strive to be a better you. **(George G. Sydnor)**



Today is the first day of the rest of your life. You chose to spend it in a space and with a community of people who promote compassion, dedication, accountability, learning, and transformation. There will be ups and downs, highs and lows,

good times and bad times, etc. Know that this will not be a road that you travel alone. You are here for a reason, so always come back to that reason when you feel overwhelmed or burnt out. You have a bigger purpose. Allow this program to create the road for your dreams, and be ready to drive yourself to your destination. **(Shaneece Taylor)**





Get ready to enjoy every Wednesday of fall 2026 and spring 2027. This class will bring laughter, positive energy, and a bucket of love and support. The 29 classmates you have seem shy now, but by week five or six, you will feel more comfortable than

you feel now. Be ready to express yourself and step out of your comfort zone. Odyssey is a safe space. Everyone has a story to tell ... What's your story?

(Joseph Thigpen Jr.)



Welcome to Odyssey. Today you begin an opportunity to challenge yourself to embrace your diversity in the face of adversity. In this space you will reflect, grow, nurture, be vulnerable, and learn in many ways.

When our class entered, the world was trying to navigate humanity in crisis, as were we. This program became a safe haven for some. You can enter this space with more relaxed hypervigilance. Odyssey becomes so much more than just a class. I encourage you to be open and ask for help. Every one of the people there is invested in your success and will do their best to help you get there. The support doesn't just stop with you "getting

through" the class. This project was created by people that, much like you, have faced many challenges. This class is full of people who are next to you fighting an uphill battle. Your peers will become a family. Be open to new experiences. Take the opportunity to step outside the box and comfort zones.

If you don't have community, here's an opportunity to build family. Most of all, I want to tell you congratulations on taking this step toward a brighter future. With love I tell you to embrace this with an open mind. **(Kharmen Thomas)**



First, I want to say welcome and congrats on earning a spot in the Odyssey program. This journey you're about to begin is truly life changing. Get ready to explore parts of yourself you didn't even know existed. Right now, you might be sitting in your seat

feeling nervous, unsure of what's ahead. That's okay. In fact, that might be the first and last time you sit in your seat feeling that way. The next time you take your seat you will feel different. It will light a fire in you – the kind that pushes you to get up, go further, dream bigger, and believe in yourself in ways you never have before.



The staff will become the village you didn't know you needed. They will challenge you, support you, and remind you of your strength even on the days when you forget it yourself. Take a look around the room. Yes, the people sitting beside you: they're strangers today but will soon be family. They are the people who will witness your growth, celebrate your victories, and walk beside you through hard times during this season of life. I'm excited for what's ahead of you. Take everything in—every lesson—and give the program your all, no short cuts, no AI (in my Emily voice). Let the real you shine. The one with dreams, purpose, and light is exactly what the world needs. Trust the process! **(Shakila Woods)**

ALUMNI CORNER

DON'T QUIT

BY JOE ROBINSON '04

My advice to the new Odyssey class is don't quit. No matter how hard it gets, don't quit.

When you get off work at 5:30, and you only have 30 minutes to get the kids situated and get to class, don't quit.

When you get stuck in the middle of writing a paper or doing a project, don't quit.

When you find out that your father has cancer and has to have surgery and treatment, don't quit.

When you have circumstances that occur that make you miss a class and you get behind on your work, don't quit.

When you feel as if you're not getting anything out of a particular subject, don't quit. When people tell you you are wasting your time, don't quit. When your car breaks down, and it's twenty below outside, and the only way to get here is on the city bus, don't quit. When your spouse is complaining that your five children are driving her crazy every Wednesday night, don't quit. When one of your classmates makes you feel stupid for voicing your opinion, don't quit. When your boyfriend or girlfriend accuses you of cheating on them because you had to turn your cell phone off during class, don't quit.

And if you get to the point where you just can't find any more motivation to force yourself to keep coming to this class, my advice is to call Emily, and I guarantee you that she won't let you quit! There were many times that I wanted to just give up, but Emily would not let me. She believed in us more than some of us believed in ourselves.

Finally, I would like to say that, the first couple of weeks, I was in class trying to figure out, what is the catch? Why are these people offering us this course for free? There must be a catch. I found out what the catch was. Each one of the teachers was trying to trick us into believing that our lives would somehow be better if we completed this Odyssey class and then go on to graduate from college. I guess I must be a little naïve, because I fell for it, hook, line, and sinker.



Joe Robinson with classmate Tineisha Scott, who earned her Master's Degree at Edgewood College



Joe Robinson with his family

WE ATE DOG FOOD

BY ALICE MCDANIEL '09

WRITTEN FOR KEVIN MULLEN'S
ODYSSEY ALUMNI COMPOSITION CLASS



... You can only write about what you feel and know really. I know that my mom was not a high school graduate, but no one else would have known that unless she told you herself. She was a very well-versed, super-intelligent, beautiful, spiritual, and loving woman.

My dad, on the other hand, could hardly read or write. He has lived most of his life with those limitations. He is a very funny, kind-hearted, spiritual, and good-looking man.

While in the care of my dad, my four other siblings and I ate dog food. That is what we were told some years later, and our mom confirmed that story. You are probably wondering how that happened. Well, I will tell you what we have been told.

My dad went to the grocery store. He was in the canned goods section, or so he thought. He looked at the picture on the can of some corn beef hash. "Ha, ha!" he said and grabbed it.

When my mom arrived home from work, she asked him if we had eaten yet. His reply was "Yes." My mom asked him, "What did you feed the children?" He said, "some hash." For those of you who have never eaten it and never want to, hash, according to Webster's Dictionary, comes from the French *hacher*, to chop, and means "to chop up meat and vegetables for cooking; usually a baked mixture, a muddled mess." She asked him again, "What did you say you fed them?" My dad replied again, "Hash. The cans are in the trash can."

My mom went to the trash can. As she lifted each of the cans out, she screamed at my dad, "You fool! You gave my children dog food, with your 'no reading' ass!" It goes without saying that he was not asked to go shopping for groceries again.

***We ate dog food,
but we were rich.***

My parents didn't have the opportunity to complete their education due to obstacles. My dad was from the small town of Stamps, Arkansas. By the age of four, his mom was now a single parent. His father had left them. As the oldest of her two sons, he was now the man of the house. He went to school on a regular basis only up to the third grade. He had to work in the fields, either having to stay home or be pulled from his class at school whenever it was time for crops to be harvest.

Mother was from a large family of eleven and also from Arkansas. She got to go to school every day until she met my dad. With her parents' permission, they got married a year later.

They moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin several years later along with their two daughters. During their marriage they had some economic struggles. It was not for lack of ambition and determination and drive. Both of them would work—Dad as a laborer and Mom as a waitress or maid. I remember she would wear a black and white uniform when she rode the bus to the eastside of the city where the rich people lived. . . .

Both of my parents instilled in their children that we should do our best at whatever we chose to do in life. “‘Can’t’ is not a word,” my mother would say. We could not use it at all as an excuse or reason not to go for things in life, like getting an education. . . .

Education is the key to freedom, to advancing your world. Wealth is not only of material and financial means; it is also knowledge.

We ate dog food, but we were rich.

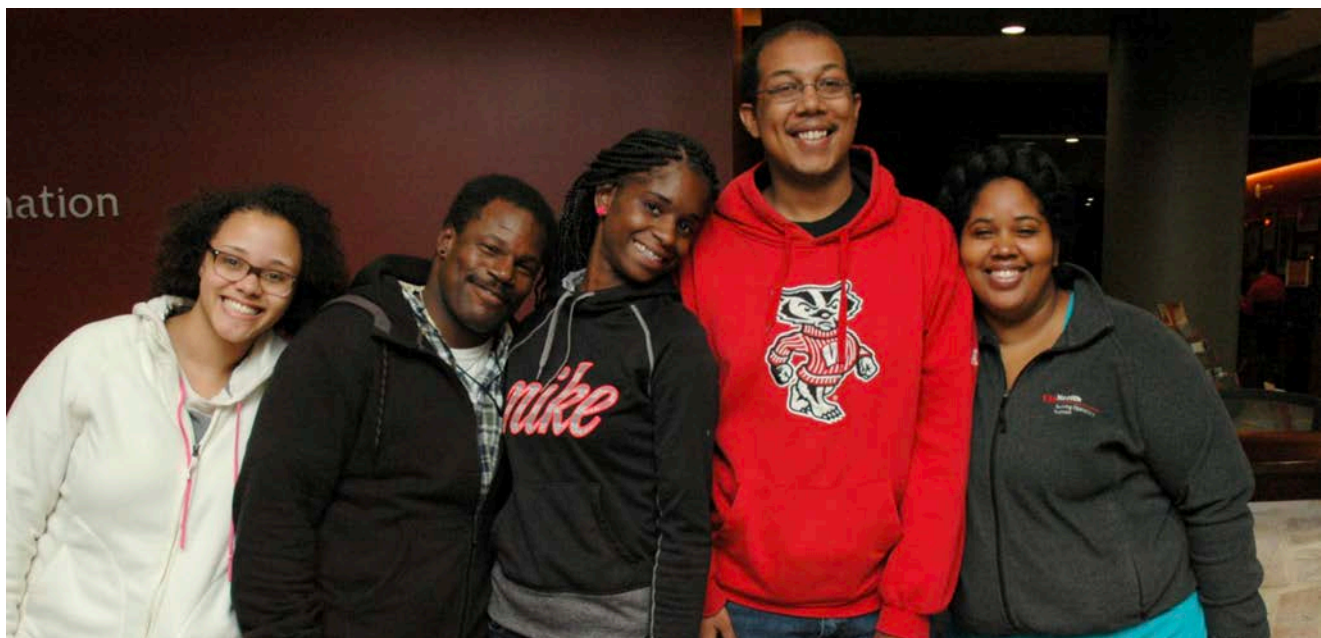
ODYSSEY POEM

BY ANTHONY JEFFERSON ‘17

Odyssey is the pencil of life with which we can erase past regrets and rewrite our future.

Every “word” formed solidifies our resolve, those periods at the end a proud stamp of success.

Sentence by sentence, we forge a new tale.



SPECIAL ODYSSEY MOMENTS



UW Chancellor Mnookin at Odyssey's 20th anniversary celebration; Jasmine Banks '13, Keena Atkinson '10, Josephine Lorya '08, and Hedi Rudd '12 received YWCA Women of Distinction Awards; Stanley Sallay '07 and Tosumba Welch '13 meet *Just Mercy* author Bryan Stevenson; Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway pronounces April 20, 2023 "Odyssey Day" citywide; Brian Benford '07 emceed Concerts on the Square.



TV personality Tavis Smiley and scholar Cornel West taking Odyssey students out to dinner during their Poverty Tour; Senator Tammy Baldwin meets Brian Benford '07, Char Braxton '06, and Dominique Christian '09; scholar Henry Louis Gates with Kegan Carter '04 and Josephine Lorya '08; Yolanda King (daughter of the late Martin Luther King, Jr.) with Emily Auerbach, Juanita Wilson '07, Pamela Holmes '04, and Denise Maddox '04; author Jelissa Edwards '16 on cover of BRAVA Magazine.