

# Odyssey Oracle

Created for and by the students of the U.W. Madison Odyssey Project

Volume 3, No.2 September 13, 2006

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[www.odyssey.wisc.edu](http://www.odyssey.wisc.edu)

## Are You a Writer?

### Odyssey Class of 2007 has mixed feelings

Do students in the new Odyssey Class of 2007 consider themselves to be writers. Yes! And no.

Fifteen of you said "yes," while 10 said "no."

Then there was the undecided vote. Other answers included "sometimes," "not sure," "yes, but not a *good* writer," "don't know," and "yes and no."

All 30 of those answers were written down.

Here are a few of your thoughts from those who embraced the title "writer."

#### **Yes, I am a writer**

"I consider myself a writer sometimes when I am deep in thought and I have passion about the topic I am writing about, such as a good book, family, or just my imagination."-**Curtis Williams**

"I am a writer because I can write and understand writing. However, I am not a good writer. I think that with hard work and practice I can become a great writer. I also believe that better writing will

make me a better reader."- **Dwayne Bland**

"I'm no Shakespeare. I would consider myself a decent writer though."- **Erica Garcia**

"I have pride in my thoughts and faith in my words."- **Kathleen Brown**

"I can tell you what I mean, and I can bring you close to my thoughts and feelings with the words I choose."- **Molinda Henry**

"I am not good at grammar or punctuation, but I still enjoy writing. It is a way of releasing my feelings."-**Katy Farrens**

"Yes, yes, yes! I have been writing since I was a very young child. ...In Mrs. Castile's first grade class, I learned to read and write. I wrote about the life that I lived—at home, at school, at church—my family, my neighbors, myself. I began keeping a journal before I was even aware of the concept."- **Oroki Rice**

# Education Must Trump Prison Time

By Corey Saffold, Class of 2006

Wisconsin State Journal  
Opinion Article

Saturday, April 22, 2006

Frederick Douglass said in a 1886 speech, "Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe." In 2006, does the criminal justice system have an organized conspiracy against black men?

Everything from prison scandals to racial profiling proves that the criminal justice system is one of the most corrupt and unfair forms of government in our country. According to the Department of

Social Justice, blacks account for only 28 percent of all violent crimes committed, yet they make up 34 percent of those convicted of those crimes.

Justice is not blind, as the symbols of Lady Justice suggest. She hands out verdicts of guilt to the poor while receiving bribes to free the rich. She disproportionately locks up blacks while simply giving white criminals a slap on the wrist.

Look at the so-called war on drugs. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, whites are 76 percent of current users, while blacks are 13.5 percent and Latinos are 9.2 percent of current users.

Latinos and blacks together make up less than 23 percent of all drug users, but over the past several years they have come to represent most of the people sent to jail or prison for drug possession charges. Why does

Lady Justice wear that meaningless blindfold when she can clearly see race?

In light of the ever-increasing incarceration rate among black men in Wisconsin, it is imperative for black men to graduate from high school. According to the National Center for Education, black students who do not graduate from high school are significantly more likely to end up in prison.

Why not pay more attention to educating our youth in order to prevent the likelihood of prison? Our country spends more of its time, money and resources figuring out ways to contain and lock up people of color than on investing in families and the homes they come from.

In this state alone, blacks are 13 times more likely to be incarcerated than whites. Why is Wisconsin ranked number one in locking up black men and nearly last in graduating them from high school? Can you see the connection? It seems as if there's a systematic plan in place for blacks, especially black men, to fail rather than succeed.

How can Wisconsin take pride in being progressive while having such high  
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# Writer Spotlight

## J. K. Rowling

J.K. (Joanne Kathleen) Rowling needed welfare to survive while writing her first Harry Potter book. Now six books into the series, with one more to go, she has sold more books—and gotten more kids into reading—than most folks could even dream about.

Rowling was born on the outskirts of Bristol, England on July 31, 1966. In school, she often entertained the other children at lunch by telling stories in which all of her friends performed heroic and daring deeds. Her parents encouraged her to study French in college so that she could get a job as a bilingual secretary, but she hated secretarial work. Instead of taking notes in the meetings, she daydreamed and wrote possible names for fictional characters in the margins of her notebooks.

Rowling was in her mid-twenties when she took a four-hour train trip across England. The train was stopped somewhere between Manchester and London when Rowling looked out at a field of cows and suddenly got the idea for a story about a boy who goes to a school for wizardry. She later said, “Harry Potter just strolled into my head fully formed” [The Writer’s Almanac].

By the time the train ride was finished, she had already invented most of the major characters that would appear in the Harry Potter books.

The series features the young wizard Harry Potter, his best friends Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, his teachers Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape, and his archrival classmate Draco Malfoy.

She worked on the first Harry Potter book for about four years, during which time she got married, had a

daughter, and then got divorced. She was living in Scotland as a single mother, and her apartment was unheated, so she would go to the local café and write, while her daughter slept in the baby carriage. She eventually quit her job and lived on public assistance to finish the book.

She finally got an agent in 1995. He told her that he might be able to sell her book, but he advised her to try to write something for adults instead. He told her she’d never be able to make a living writing for children.

After the publication of her first book, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (1998), Rowling became one of the best-selling authors of all time. She has more than 300 million books in print. Her last few books have been among the fastest-selling novels of all time. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, which came out in 2005, sold 5.8 million copies in a single week.

Sources  
Keillor, Garrison, The Writer’s Almanac for July 31  
Rowling, J.K., *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*  
Rowling, J.K., *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, [www.jkrowling.com](http://www.jkrowling.com) (one of the coolest author websites in history, by the way).

### *Excerpt from Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*

Yet Harry Potter was still there, asleep at the moment, but not for long. His Aunt Petunia was awake and it was her shrill voice that made the first noise of the day.

“Up! Get up! Now!”

Harry woke with a start. His aunt rapped on the door again.

“Up!” she screeched. Harry heard her walking toward the kitchen and then the sound of the frying pan being put on the stove. He rolled onto his back and tried to remember the dream he had been having. It had been a good one.

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rates of teen incarceration, black incarceration and black male high school dropouts? This problem affects everyone in Wisconsin, not just blacks, so everyone should bear the responsibility of bringing about change. It's time to make Wisconsin a state where everyone progresses.

Saffold is a student in the UW-Madison Odyssey project and a music director at a local church.

*Editor's note: Corey Saffold's original article was slightly altered by the Wisconsin State Journal prior to print. The original is available from Emily upon request.*

*Rowling, Continued from page 3*

There had been a flying motorcycle in it. He had a funny feeling he'd had the same dream before.

His aunt was back outside the door.

"Are you up yet?" she demanded.

"Nearly," said Harry.

"Well, get a move on, I want you to look after the bacon. And don't you dare let it burn, I want everything perfect on Duddy's birthday."

Harry groaned.

"What did you say?" his aunt snapped through the door.

"Nothing, nothing . . ."

Dudley's birthday — how could he have forgotten? Harry got slowly out of bed and started looking for socks. He found a pair under his bed and, after pulling a spider off one of them, put them on. Harry was used to spiders, because the cupboard under the stairs was full of them, and that was where he slept.

When he was dressed he went down the hall into the kitchen. The table was almost hidden beneath all Dudley's birthday presents. It looked as though Dudley had gotten the new computer he wanted, not to mention the second television and the racing bike.

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# My Odyssey

**By Denise Maddox**

Published in *Illumination: The Undergraduate Journal of Humanities* Spring 2005 issue

My name is Denise Maddox, and I am one of twenty-four people who were the first graduates of the UW Odyssey Project, Class of 2003-2004. I would never have thought that classes in the humanities would change my life forever. I mean "forever" without exaggeration because Writing, Art History, American History, Literature, and Philosophy transported me

into a new world, where written words came alive and made magic inside my heart.

An odyssey is a life-altering journey of discovery. Like Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*, I too started out on a life-changing journey.



The boat was our classroom at the Harambee Center in South Madison, and the reading materials (books by Shakespeare, Plato, Thoreau, Emily Dickinson, Langston Hughes, Toni Morrison, and so many more) were the rough seas we had to travel through. In each and every port we landed were wonderful lessons to learn. The Odyssey crew consisted of the UW professors and staff members who gave us supplies to maintain this one-year exploration of learning. The teachers were the compasses that directed us through these rough seas and guided us safely to our destination.

Just months after starting their journey, members of the new Odyssey Class 2004-2005 showed signs that a transformation had started.

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# Don't quit!

**By Joe Robinson**

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.

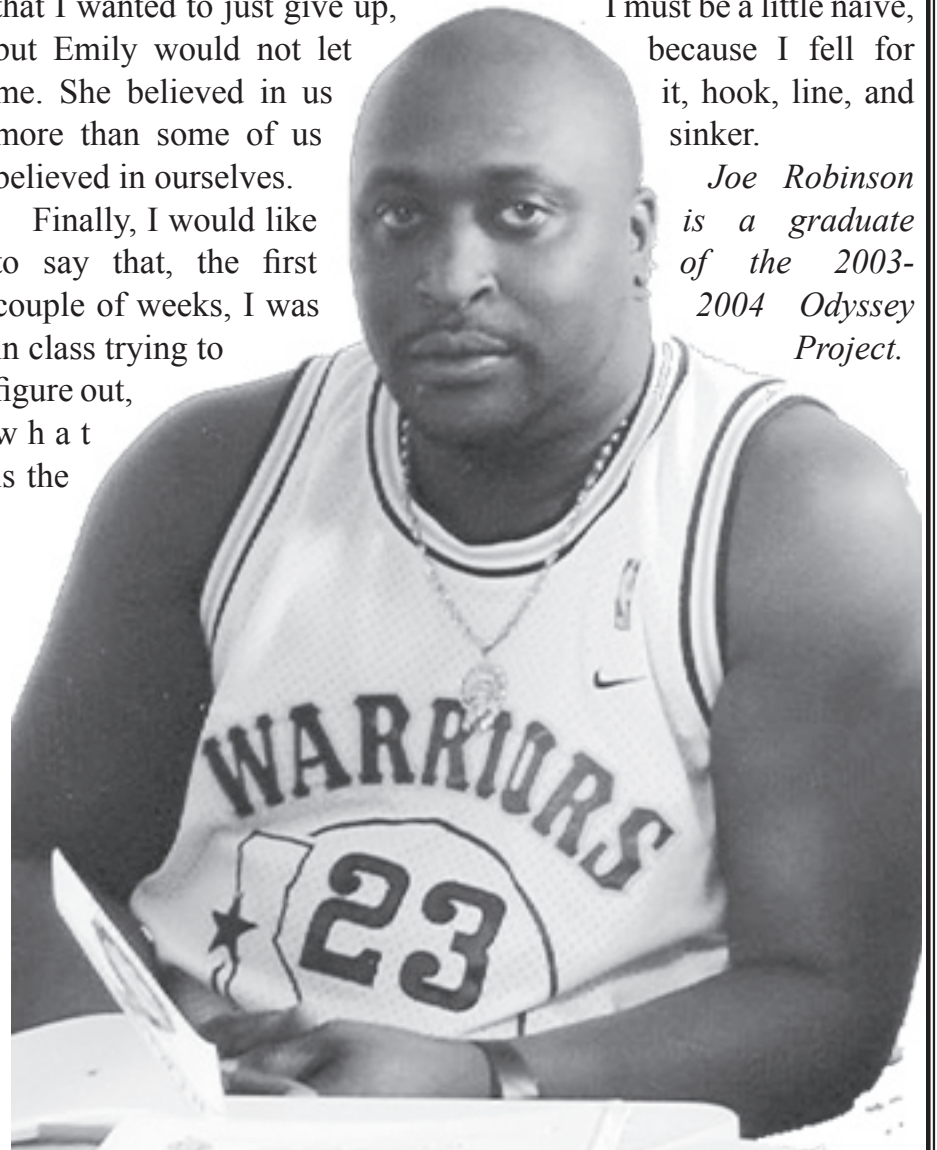
And if you get to the point where you just can't find any more motivation to force yourself to keep coming to this class, my advice is to call Emily, and I guarantee you that she won't let you quit! There were many times that I wanted to just give up, but Emily would not let me. She believed in us more 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 is a graduate of the 2003-2004 Odyssey Project.*



*My Odyssey, Continued from page 4*

Several students wrote about the emotional experiences they went through during the first weeks of the course. Terry Fox reported, "This class is thought-provoking. It increases your awareness of the history of man along with the origins of many current systems we use as well as language. This class teaches me to look farther, to read about and most importantly develop my own thoughts and opinions."

James Robinson, whose brother Joe graduated from the Odyssey Class 2003-2004, said, "I feel different because I did not know that I would look forward to coming to class. I enjoy this time in class because it is an escape for me, an escape for a few hours that lets me explore my mind." Other classmates report similarly enriching experiences.

Earl Shorris, who founded the original Clemente Course in the Humanities, a model for the Odyssey Project, explained in his book *Riches for the Poor*, "I like watching people having a second birth." His statement is true-I am one of the examples of his words. "Rebirth" is the perfect word to describe what happened to me. I was like a caterpillar eating everything in sight, yet I was never full until I found focused learning in the Odyssey Project a year ago. The knowledge I received helped me finally transform into a multicolored butterfly. I spread my wings into the air to dry, and now I'm flying. I am pursuing a degree at MATC and I am on the Dean's List. I hope eventually to transfer to the UW-Madison and earn a degree in writing and literature. The world might still see me as being poor, with little money and material wealth, but I am rich with knowledge and wisdom.

# Words Have Power!

Hello!

My name is Denise Maddox, and I had the privilege of being one of the 24 graduates of the 2003-2004 Odyssey class. I remember walking into the classroom and seeing my fellow classmates and teachers for the first time. I was scared and nervous. My hands were clammy, and my heart was racing in my chest. I was about to leave, but a friendly voice said, "Come in and take a seat." That voice was Professor Emily Auerbach. The other teachers were standing up along the back wall.

Professor Emily did something that made us feel welcome. She looked at each individual, smiled, and said his or her name from memory. We were amazed! This helped break the silence in the classroom. Soon after, the other professors introduced themselves to the class.

We started with 30 students, eager and hungry for knowledge. On that first day we talked about William Blake, author of *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*. Professor Emily read to us the "Chimney Sweeper." The poem was about a little boy whose parents sold him to be a chimney sweeper. As she read the poem, my eyes became watery, and I felt sadness. This is when I found out the words became alive. Words can help a person express emotions, such as fear, happiness, sadness, excitement and joy. Even a person who can't speak out can shout their voice loud and clear by telling his or her story on paper. I learned that day words

have power if they are written down the right way.

What helped me to better understand the assignments were:

1. Reading all the material the teachers gave for homework.

Also, some of the books we read were on audio or video tapes. Listening to the assignments out loud helped me to comprehend the lesson better. Also pronouncing the words I couldn't understand helped improve my vocabulary and spelling.

2. Asking the librarians for help and asking the professor for help when I didn't understand the assignments. Use the people from the writing center, located in the library, or call them for appointments.

3. Keeping up with all the pass-outs in class and taking legible notes; forming study groups with classmates and exchanging phone numbers.

4. If you plan to go to college next year, have your financial aid forms filled out in January or February, so you can have the money available in the start of the fall school year. Talk to an advisor about what classes you should take or are transferable to a four-year college.

*Denise Maddox is currently a MATC student. She is a member of Phi Theta Kappa, an honors society for two-year colleges. She is also on the Dean's List.*