

*Odyssey: a long series of wanderings or adventures, especially when filled with notable experiences, hardships, etc.*

Dictionary.com gives you a precise and accurate definition of the word odyssey. A word that by chance, is the same one used to title my school. And the definition that dictionary.com gives for this word, is also by chance a definition that perfectly describes my experience at Odyssey. A long series of adventures filled with notable experiences and hardships, indeed.

Before I came to Odyssey, my life was pretty dull, although I didn't think it at the time. The same way that a baby who spends all day in his cradle is satisfied, not knowing how much more there is to the world. I used to find life black and white. Filled with people who succeeded and those who didn't. My definition of success was simple as well. Either you made lots of money or you just made enough to pay your rent. I had expected to stroll through life passing tests, becoming a doctor, earning loads of money, and retiring. I still plan to do so, but my time at this place opened my eyes to the reality that there is much more to life than that, and things aren't as dichromatic as I had thought.

The first teacher I had at Odyssey was F. Michael Cantlon, a brilliant teacher who is part of what makes this place so great.

Preceding Odyssey, I drew a lot. I was also pretty dang good at it. I mainly used my skills as a parlor trick to impress my classmates. At Odyssey, I continued my habit of doodling. I particularly enjoyed sketching comics, which I tended to do in my leisure time, or during boring class lectures. Mr. Cantlon, who often looked over our shoulders as an important father figure, noticed my talents, and confronted me about putting them to use in a way that would serve me better than just amusing me when we were going over worksheets. For our independent project (a project where we research and present any topic of our choice) in sixth grade, Mr. Cantlon wanted me to grow my talents and turn in an educational comic book for my project.

Sure enough, I didn't let him down, and to my surprise, after having turned it in, he came to me several months later with my comic book, and a letter from the owner of Eagle Eye Editing and Writing, advising me to get my book published. She even took the courtesy of suggesting a publisher to me that might take me seriously despite my still being in middle school.

I was surprised that a hobby could take you so far along the path to success. Mr. Cantlon still remains on my list of favorite teachers. He helps you recognize your own talents, even, or especially, when you can't recognize them yourself.

It's not to say that my experience at Odyssey was smooth sailing with accomplishments throwing themselves into my net along the way. I've had my fair share of struggles. I had come to Odyssey expecting it to be just as easy as my old school. Boy was I wrong. I have to thank Mr. Bone for that. I don't mean to put this in a negative connotation however. He challenged me and helped me grow as a person. What about his teaching style that was so hard on me was his unconventional ways of making us learn. So long pen and paper tests, from then on it was all socratic seminars and simulations. I did horrible on these at first, to tell you the truth. My grades dropped from straight A's to B's. A pretty dramatic drop.

Despite my initial misgivings, in the end, I think that his method of teaching was the best out of any other teacher's methods that I had experienced. It made you think outside the box. Something that I wasn't used to doing.

The other teacher that I found really impactful was Mr. Meredith, the band teacher at Odyssey. He told us about how he had quit a well paying job as a stockbroker, to become a music teacher. When asked the question 'why?' he responded that he didn't enjoy the job. He didn't find any happiness in it. It was just day after day of the same drudgework.

In telling us this little anecdote, he told me one of the biggest lessons of my life. Sure, it's great to have a well paying job and all, but it's just as important to work towards getting a job that you enjoy. And if that job ends with you making lots of money, all the better.

Speaking of which, this is likely a bit of a stretch, but a job that I think that Mr. Meredith might also enjoy is working as a comedian.

Mr. Meredith's sense of humor is the best. He's willing to laugh at himself, and let us laugh at him as well. You have to roll with the blows, and make it so that the blows hit you forward and not backwards. A staple of the band room was Mr. Meredith trading insults with the brass section.

He instructed us that it was important to be part of the band ensemble, and to listen to each other and play so that our sound complemented the sound of the people around us to create a musical

masterpiece. Which leads me to the next thing.

Not only the teachers at Odyssey are great, but the students, my fellow school friends. This is a huge understatement, but my classmates are great. It might sound cheesy and fake, but it really feels like a family. A quarrelsome and dysfunctional family, but a family nonetheless.

Every single Odyssey student is thoughtful (That's why they call us gifted, isn't it?), even those that on the outside seem to be devoid of any deep thinkings. You just have to dig a bit. And each one of them is a good time. We joke around that being gifted means being messed up in the head. But is being messed up in the head necessarily a bad thing?

After knowing each other for four years, and joining together to meet the challenges school presented to us daily, it felt like we were all destined to go through life together. Maybe it's ignoring the inevitable, but I don't want to think about June, when we'll all be split up to go to different high schools.

You ask me what my time at Odyssey meant to me. I'm not sure if that's a question that can be answered within the constraints of no more than three pages. I tried my best though. I think I did well.