

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire” William Butler Yeats

This quote sums up what Odyssey means to me. I have been blessed to attend three different schools so far in my educational journey. I have met lots of different kids and have had the best teachers one could ask for. Each school has taught me something different, but it wasn't until I attended Odyssey that I began to see learning in a different light. In my younger years, I believed I was getting smarter with every new fact I memorized. I have a gift for memorization, so learning scripture, multiplication facts and even the entire Gettysburg address was not difficult. I received praise and positive reinforcement for this gift. I was even told that I was brilliant.

When I started Odyssey in the fifth grade, I quickly learned that I was not unique. There were many others who read at advanced levels and were able to memorize boring facts found in all sorts of boring books. We were all very skilled at “filling our pails” with knowledge. Ms. Wilson and Mrs. Mai were my fifth and sixth grade teachers, and I can tell you that neither one were very impressed with how much information I could cram into my brain. It seemed like they had seen this act before. They consistently asked questions like why, how, and what if, forcing me to take the next step and apply my knowledge. Ms. Wilson was always quick to let her students know why we were learning something and how it would help us in the real world. We were encouraged to not just sit at our desks and learn from books. In math, we learned about different angles by measuring our shadows. In science, we learned about planets by imitating the movements of the solar system with our bodies. We learned about pollination by actually pollinating plants with a dead bee on a stick. In English, we wrote our own books. In Social Studies, we practiced writing in hieroglyphics. The list goes on and on.

At Odyssey students are often encouraged to work in groups. This is something that drove me crazy as a younger student. I saw this as a setback, something that would just delay the project and where I would have to do the majority of the work. I now realize that the lesson being taught went way beyond the actual project and was invaluable to my growth not only as a student but as a person. This has taught me not only to be patient, a good citizen, and a team player, but it actually taught me that there

were other ways to see the world and other ways to learn that were different than my own. As I said, I had become very skilled at memorization and up until now this had worked very well for me. At Odyssey I found that there were all sorts of smart kids who learned very differently than I did. Some learned at a slower pace, some needed constant stimulation, some hated to read, but loved to listen, and others couldn't sit still and had to share their newfound knowledge with everyone around. One thing I noticed that we all had in common was a love of learning. With every different and unique person I have worked with, I have soaked up a small piece of this love.

I believe the foundation that was set in the fifth and sixth grade was similar to a flower that is starting to grow. These years are when the stem is reaching for the sun, growing taller and stronger each day, but the years spent in the seventh and eighth grade is when the flower really begins to blossom. The experiences stated above set the stage perfectly to really ignite my love of learning. By the end of the sixth grade, I had gotten used to answering the why, how and what if questions. I had experienced different kids and different learning styles and I was learning to be a bit of a chameleon, adapting to the style that fit for the situation. I believe I really started to blossom and trust myself and my contributions during the last two years. I believe that any Odyssey student who has had the blessing of being in Mike's class when he teaches poetry, has listened to Mr. Piper drone on about quadratic functions or has seen the joy in Mr. Bone's face when he explains -well, *everything*- can tell you that those are the moments they felt something stir inside of them. I know this was the case for me. You can't help but be as excited about these subjects as your teachers are. I have literally fed off of the fire they have created and this has ignited a love of learning that I know will last a lifetime.

Many people may believe that this type of experience is typical of most middle schools in America. They may believe that any good teacher doing their job would create such an atmosphere for their students. I will forever believe that what we have at Odyssey is special. At Odyssey we realize that all kids are smart and capable. We have teachers who are passionate about creating the next generation of leaders and we have parents who all rightfully believe their child is the smartest and invest so much of

themselves in our success. All of these things together create the perfect storm for lighting a fire that I hope not only never burns out, but continues to spread with every future endeavor we make. This is what Odyssey means to me and for this I will be forever grateful for the time I have spent here.