

What Odyssey Means to Me, by Nate Beine

Ever since I began attending Odyssey, I have been asked the same question: What is Odyssey? Is it a private school? Is it a middle school? Is it part of Spokane Public Schools? I have always been able to answer these questions. It is a magnet school for gifted and talented students. It is a public school. It is grades 5 through 8, and it is part of Spokane Public Schools. However if you ask me now, what is Odyssey, you will find that my answer has changed. Why is that, you may ask. Is it no longer a gifted school? Have the grade levels changed? Is the teaching style different? Well, the answer is no; all of that is the same. The difference is that I have experienced Odyssey.

When I hear outsiders talk about Odyssey, their descriptions are similar to my original one. If you ask parents, they'll tell you that it's a school for gifted students. If you ask students from other schools, they'll say it's the school for the smart kids, or week-long Tessera. But if you ask me, or one of the other 8th graders, we will tell you that it's so much more than that. I often face difficulty describing Odyssey to people, because Odyssey is something that you can only relate to once you've experienced it. It is truly a special place, and the time that I've spent here has been one of the best times of my life.

One of the things that makes Odyssey so special is the staff. The teachers here are truly invested in the students, and they work so hard to help everyone succeed, in both the academic and non-academic areas of life. At many Jr. Highs, and even sometimes at elementary schools, the teachers don't always do the work to help every student succeed, and have to choose which students to help, and which to give up on. Well at Odyssey, no matter who you are or how difficult you are to work with, all of the teachers work their hardest to make sure that you succeed. There have been points in my academic career when I have struggled, and felt the urge to give up and admit defeat, but my teachers at Odyssey have helped me push through and succeed. So, at Odyssey I have not only been gifted with a superior education, but have also learned how to work hard through the challenges of life.

This description is still not complete. The teachers are amazing, and the education is superb, but there's still more than that to Odyssey. Over the four years I've been here, Odyssey has really become my home, and the teachers and students have become as close as family. That is why Odyssey is so hard to describe to someone who hasn't experienced it. For most people, middle school is a time of insecurity, of bullying, of harassment, and of competition. But at Odyssey, middle school for me has been a time of acceptance, of friendship, and of me discovering who I truly am. A good example of this is the fact that even though I have missed the spring portion of Odyssey each year except for this one, I have been able to form deep friendships. In my 5th, 6th and 7th grade years, I traveled with my family to the country of Nepal from the end of January through June, to do missions work. I have missed about half of the school year every year except for this one, but still I have been able to make friends. At any other middle school, I would be an outcast, immediately forgotten the moment that I left, and ignored when I returned. But at Odyssey, I felt included and welcomed into the community, and I made many friends.

So the reason that my definition of Odyssey has changed, is because Odyssey is not defined by the program itself, but by the people that are part of it. In my time here, I have come to realize that it is the teachers and students that make Odyssey what it is. Unfortunately, just as the teachers and former Odyssey students warned me would happen, the time has flown by, and now it's the end of the year. We're finishing a journey that is unlike any other. I feel very grateful to have had the opportunity to be a part of this school, and hope that I can convey to younger students the amazing opportunity they have, how much fun they're going to have, and most of all, to cherish the time that they have here. Someday it's going to end, and they and their friends will have to go their separate ways. Though the ending of our time at this wonderful school will be hard, I can be comforted by the fact that I will be able to look back on my middle school years fondly, and remember the remarkable people that make up this amazing place, called Odyssey.