

## The Odyssey Project Graduation Speech

Good Afternoon, my name is Sheila, but I'm more affectionately known as She-She. The 2006 Graduating Class of the Bridge Course Odyssey Project welcomes you. It is indeed my sincere pleasure to be standing here as a representative of this class.

A little less than two years ago, I walked into the Southside Odyssey Project with quite a few mixed emotions. Having not attended school in quite a few years, I didn't know exactly what to expect. While I had no idea what was in store for me, I could not have imagined it would be something of this magnitude.

When thinking of what I wanted to say today, so many thoughts crossed my mind. It's not always easy to put into words the emotions you feel when trying to describe an experience such as this. One thing I can say for sure is that I will never look at the world in the same light again.

Education through the Humanities has given me the ability and confidence to escape the limitations of education by which society has taught us. While this course through the humanities has given us the opportunity to explore Philosophy, Literature, World History, Art History and Critical Writing and Thinking, it has also given me so much more. It has given me the energy to be a more positive force in this world and to encourage my children as well as anyone else that will listen to constantly thirst for

knowledge and to never let that thirst be quenched. It also solidified what I knew in my heart was possible ---- that I do have what it takes to succeed in a higher learning institution. And this was done with the encouragement of some Wonderful Professors.....and let me tell you, they ARE truly wonderful! Not only are they extraordinary instructors, they are very caring individuals. They have led us on a journey that is unlike anything I've ever encountered. On behalf of the 2006 Odyssey Project graduates, we sincerely thank you from the very depths of our hearts.

To all the graduates – both of the first year and the bridge course, you deserve to give yourselves a pat on the back. You've overcome insurmountable odds, and the very fact that you are here today is quite an accomplishment.

To the Illinois Humanities Council and to Bard College, I would like to thank you all for caring enough to have given both myself and my fellow classmates the opportunity to take this incredible journey. A very special thank you goes to someone, who by the way, is by far one of the most devoted, caring and inspirational individuals I have ever met, .....Amy Thomas Elder, Director of the Odyssey Project.

I must take a moment to thank our families and friends. For without your support, your patience and your understanding, many of us would not have gotten to this day.

If someone were to ask me “She-She, what can YOU say about the Odyssey Project?” My response would be simple ----I’d say: I would hope that this program continues for many years to come, and that individuals from all walks of life have the opportunity to open their world to this amazing experience and gain the knowledge that will allow them to live a better life and become a better person.

Thank you