



# HARTWORKS

Winter 2001 • \$1



Featuring Guest Author  
Nikki Giovanni

The Charles Hart Middle School Literary Magazine



*Top: Monique Covington*

*Bottom (left to right): Reginald Williams, James Saunders, Delonte Williams*

# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *hArtworks*, a literary magazine published by the students of Charles Hart Middle School, in southeast Washington, D.C. Now in its second year, *hArtworks* gives our young writers the opportunity to exercise their creative energies, speak their minds, and be heard by an audience throughout the city.

Our first issue of this school year finds our students off to a strong start, with over twenty-five young writers already in regular attendance at our Literary Magazine Club. We are beginning to see the fruits of the last seven years of creative writing instruction at Hart. Our largest and strongest contingent of sixth-graders ever has contributed mightily to the production of *hArtworks*, and an impressive number of club members have declared their intentions to become professional writers when they grow up. Remember the names you see in this issue, and expect big things from them in the future.

We have many friends who have helped to make *hArtworks* possible, and we would like to express our gratitude to them. Our sincerest thanks go out to the Arcana Foundation, the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, the Commonweal Foundation, Borders Books and Music, Free Hand Press, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Arena Stage, the Shakespeare Theatre, our friends at Popeye's on Malcolm X Avenue, Ruth Dickey, Virginia Fowler, Nikki Giovanni, Barb Gomperts, Bernie Horn, Bill Miller, Marla Melito, Faith Ruppert, and Chris Thaiss.

We would also like to thank the following administrators, teachers, and staff who, are our partners in this endeavor: Superintendent Paul L. Vance, Assistant Superintendent for Middle/Junior High Schools Vera M. White, Principal Lee E. Epps; Assistant Principals Willie Bennett, Gregory Better, Yvonne Davis, and Samuel Scudder; Ms. Tameka Brown, Ms. Gloria Fergusson, Ms. Shirley Grooms, Ms. Carolyn Jackson, Ms. Mary Johnson, Ms. Irma Morgan, and Ms. Ethel Rivers; Ms. Eleanor Elie and Ms. Maevern Williams.

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*Diamond Williams & Delonte Williams*

## Alone at Midnight

Here alone at midnight  
Here there is a web shadow  
Let me run forever  
Let me feel the winter breeze  
Let me get in the shard-filled cage  
Let me play my glowing trumpet  
Let me look at the calm clouds  
Let me brighten the flame  
Let me flame the smoke  
Let me shatter the maze

*Lawrence Perkins*

## Apollo

All people talk is the future  
all I talk is Harlem ghost.  
I am going back,  
back to the Apollo-  
I like the Harlem shake  
I wore a smoky suit  
while my grandfather played the flute.  
I worn-out and I torn out the memory  
and the past. I am free at last.

*Terrence Walton*



*Yasmine Knatt in student play "Antigone 2K1: The Tragedy Continues"*

## Hope Sells Danger

Three boys worn-out from twirling,  
twirling on a board platform.  
A muddy blue-black building's bricks,  
yesterday's burning smoky gray—  
Clouds leave my memory as it passes me by.  
I remember my life, my fight,  
the bloody hope selling danger,  
dreaming on the street of a white and brown stage.

*Delawnta Henry*



## Unnoticed

Pain is in this dark room,  
the shadow I see of the moon.  
I hear owls howling,  
crows calling, as the night begins falling.  
I'm so alone in my dark hollow home.  
No one cares that I am there.  
I am unnoticed in this simple world,  
people just see me as a little, lonely girl.  
I hope to be asked for my opinion, but  
my say-so has been amended.  
As I walk, no one turns to stare.  
Why can't I be seen?  
Why can't I be shown on a big screen?  
For the world to see  
what a beautiful person I can be.

*Charniece Brooks*

## The Chess Game of Life

The night lightnings, it is winter, a new year.  
I have no fears because I have learned  
through the year 2001,  
that life is like a chess game, and I'm a pawn.  
My mom's the queen, my father's the king.  
The most powerful piece  
on the board is the Lord.

I learned new things in my strategy of life.  
My grandmother and grandfather will be my knights.  
My aunt and uncle are my rooks.  
The rest of my pawns are my books,  
My sister's my bishop, and that's the game  
in my chess game of life  
that is so plain.

*Chayna Ross*

## Brighter Day

Let me feel the winter breeze  
Let me be calm, alone  
Let me be caged in a maze of indigo  
Let me dazzle the midnight  
Let me alter smoke  
Let me defy the devil  
Let me play the trumpet  
Let me do things wisely,  
and glorify the lord with my dazzling soul  
Let me live eternally  
and live to see a brighter day.

*Rikia Simms*



## I Say to Myself

Here is winter now with coldness,  
as I walk down the street I feel calm and alone.  
The brightness hangs over my head.  
I go into the store to get something to drink—  
It slides from my hand and begins to shatter.  
It's now midnight and there is no light,  
the moon went dark.  
It's Christmas Eve.

*Yasin Thompson*

## Before I Die

Let me get lost in a winter maze  
Let me live for eternity  
Let me find the midnight cluster-  
don't let it be cloudy forever.  
Let the winter breeze come upon me swiftly  
Before I die, give me a glowing trumpet  
and maybe I'll stay for a while.

*Beyonca Jones*



*Pamula Twyman*

## Baptism

Let me tell you about me entering this world,  
When they dipped my head into the water.  
Seeing another mom and dad, crying, holding their daughter.

Here me out when I say I was scared to death.  
But when the Pastor dazzled a kiss on my head,  
I knew it was my baptism.  
Now I'm saved until eternal rest.

*Donnell Williams*

## I Thank

I thank the day for all its joys,  
the breath's own spirit shall be upon us.  
A wide dream of nothingness of hope and love and gentleness,  
this day is a father's concern and a mother's love and compassion.

I thank the day for a frosty chill, an open heart's tears  
which sparkle daily. In such light, a joy of yellow,  
a thought of green shall bring upon us a bright blue's care.  
As my spirit walks upon the forest of sweet scented pine trees,  
a daisy's beauty lifts my day.

I thank the Lord for every sunrise,  
for the moon's reasons for life.  
I wish for the harmony of death  
and the day when I shall dance upon the heaven's ground  
but the forgotten trouble of life and love shall bring me down  
to fall no higher than those of whom have no spirits.  
And yet,  
I still thank the Lord for the day of great meaning,  
the day of eternal life, love, peace and joy.

*Kiara Williams*

## Ain't Nothing Like Harlem

Back in Harlem, in the 30s, on the upper side  
the streets were dirty.  
If you go to the store you see homeless people trying to make a  
dollar out of fifteen cents; playing old me, playing a guitar.

When you go to the downer side you see crops and vegetation  
You think its different cause you see no one dying of starvation  
You see the people doing elevation, kids studying multiplication.  
When you go up the upper side it seems weak and tired  
but when you leave just remember ain't nothing like life in Harlem.

*Donnell Williams*



## Yesterday's Breath

I thank God for yesterday's breath:  
For mother son and father daughter,  
the morning,  
death and blood.

*Trisha Braxton*



Larry Robertson, Charmyonne Bailey, and Londell Swales in "Antigone"

## The Sunset Shines

The sunset shines in the afternoon  
But my tears fall down my eyes every morning.  
It is amazing how God gave us the  
leaping green spirits of trees and  
the daisies need water to grow.

If I fall down,  
I want you to know I can get back up again.  
I am who I am dead or alive.  
I want you to love me for who I am,  
the blue dreams area floating around my body and soul.

*Danielle Bradley*

## The Way of Life

Daisies dog, wildcat, blue bird, God's word.  
Sun shining, tears drop on father's year.  
Pine trees small breeze, mother's day.  
That's the way moon night and sun's night  
breathing is good as wishes in the summer.  
Living right, day and night,  
That's the best way of living life.

*Diamond Abney*

## Untitled

I thank you mother  
for a happy day,  
for the light of the moon,  
the sun when it rises.

I who look at  
the blue water, the red  
daisies, the tears  
when I cry.

how should breathing  
feel the wide-open car window?  
the green leaves on the tree?

(the summer's hot rest  
and the winter frost?)

*Lindsey Moore*

## Memory of Yesterday's

### Dreaming

Twirling memories,  
many passed away but yesterday's  
dream came just as I say.

Bloody clouds, muddy streets  
danger comes like the song of a beat.  
Fighting hopes as your grandmother sleeps,  
dreams of dressed-up girls and boys, there-  
for these eyes have seen.  
This is my yesterday's dream.

*Diamond Abney*

## Blood Every Day

The past is not a memory to me  
yet the past is not the future.  
While I am sleeping in the back of the stage  
I think of the smoky-gray, muddy streets people  
walked on each day.  
I think of Harlem in the 30s, 40s, and the 90s  
where there is danger.  
People fighting, selling drugs, people in buildings  
watching, wondering why.  
Men and women in cars driving,  
girls and boys on boards with wheels.  
There are white cloudy streets,  
People dressed-up performing on stage,  
ghetto boys burning up houses.  
Yesterday's parents were young,  
Your grandmother sees blood everyday.

*Bryannca G. Jones*



## Pine Tree Princess

Winter frost fights  
Camping in the open night  
The dead  
    of coldness on my cheeks,  
making a snow angel.

The good summer day,  
Watching the daisies dancing  
    in the warm wind.

Climbing pine trees,  
declaring myself  
    pine tree  
        princess

Breaths of magic fill the air,  
dancing in the sunbeams.

Running,  
running in the yellow night.  
I smell the green hair tickling my feet  
    and fall asleep.

*Brittany Love*



*Kiona Bean*

## My Father as a Police Dog

He is over-protective  
I can't even go outside  
without him down my throat

He's just like a police dog  
as soon as I come in the house  
he detects what and who I've been with

he be like "you was with so and so wasn't you?"  
and it's hard to lie because like a dog  
he looks right through that

he is just like a dog  
trained to do what he's supposed to do

he thinks since his father did that to him  
then he should do that to me  
and maybe soon my brother too

*Johniece Gardner*

## One Day

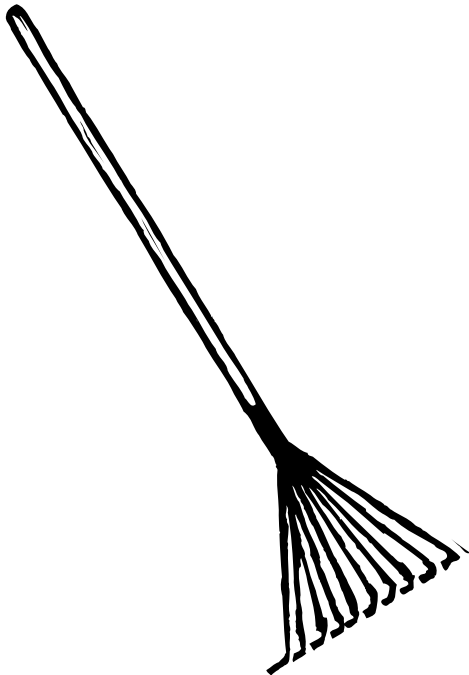
One day, while sleeping I screamed yesterday is on my mind.  
I shouted to myself, "thou shall be blooded with the bad dreaming  
of the smoky-gray, blue-back day which is yesterday."

One day, a clouded fighting danger untraveled a street,  
selling fear left and right, fear of death and pain.  
I say with terror upon my eye, "Shall I live? Will thou die?"  
The memory of a twirling, whirling past, a muddy street,  
a future of none other than that yesterday.

One day, wheels of hope began to turn  
but alas burning stages of worn-out women and men  
performed boards of blood and said once more,  
"You yourself have buildings of pain from that  
dreadful yesterday."

One day, the world did clash with evil and know  
that dreams of lost souls are thee's biggest nightmare!  
One day, one day-Oh that yesterday!

*Kiara Williams*



## The Tear

The tear from my eye  
when I cry it strolls down my face  
like a river running downstream

The tear, it's making my face shiny, wet and moist  
like wet dirt in the garden  
of a beautiful house

The tear, it's for my aunt  
she left me months ago  
she went home to her father in the sky

I wish she were here  
but she's not  
so I give her a tear

*Consella Thompson*

## My Great Grandfather<sup>85</sup>

Lonely as he can be,  
in silence night and day,  
wishing his woman would come back.

Cold at night,  
squeezing pillows tight,  
going to church every Sunday,  
hoping for a miracle to come one day.

Desperate as he can be,  
never answers the phone  
unless it's me.

Warm as he can be in the winter,  
he's only wishing that one day  
his woman would come back.

*Shawntice Patterson*



*Diamond Williams on Halloween*

## Remember

Remember this until the day you die.  
The world is full of terrible things  
and terrible people.

Remember this until the day you die,  
that there are many haters and few congratulators  
and will most likely hate on you.

Remember this until the day you die  
that no matter where you go  
there will always be jealousy,  
infidelity, envy, and cheating.

Remember this until the day you die.

*James Tucker*



## I Sit by the Window

I sit by the window  
crying.  
Crying because I'm  
alone.  
It's dark and shallow,  
I can't see nothing,  
my eyes are running  
silver tears.  
I'm sitting on a cold  
and solid rock.  
I can't feel my hands,  
I can't feel my legs.

My body feels cold.  
I see fire coming from the  
side of my window,  
not red but cold red.

Then suddenly I  
started to feel my  
hands, and legs, again.

But then again  
I couldn't feel  
my sorrow.

*Shawntice Patterson*



## You'll Never Sleep Tonight

You'll never sleep tonight now that I'm dead.  
I'm in your head. You can never go to bed.  
Now that I'm gone, you're all alone  
because life without your baby  
will make you go crazy.

*Delaunte Floyd*

## Before Night Comes

Yellow, orange, pink, red, purple  
evolves in the night sky to dark blue.  
The moon makes a grand entrance  
while the sun walks briskly away.  
Everything eventually goes away to fall asleep.  
Trees shake as a cool breeze enters the scene,  
shaking leaves while they fall to the ground.  
Birds soundly rest in their nest  
with their wings around their young.  
Shadows form different shapes.  
Shade starts to die down as the beginning of the moon rises.  
The high-definition of the strong colors shines upon trees.  
Clouds turn bright reddish-orange like a bloom of an orchid.  
Looking up at the sky, the sun and the colors blind the ones  
who try to look at the beauty while streaming down  
from the sky like a ball of fire, shimmering.  
A hawk flies towards the sun  
and as the zone of the colors blind you, it disappears.  
Faraway, you can hardly see trees, bushes, shrubs,  
or any leafy substance.  
It all turns dark, like eyes shut.

*Kiona Bean*

## Why, I Wonder

The streets cough blood. It screams of pain.  
“People have treated me so awful,  
I’m forsaking them” says the bleeding street.  
“They have rode on me, pushed people upon me,  
killed people on me, stomped all over me,  
and this is how they repay me.  
If I wasn’t there for people to walk on,  
they would fall in endless time of the universe,  
falling, screaming that someone could catch them,  
to save them. I scream but no one saves me.  
At times I wonder if I wasn’t here,  
what would people do?  
Would they float in the air like birds soaring?  
Would they swim like a fish gliding through water?  
Sometimes I wonder if people know how lucky they are to have me.  
I know I get worn out and have glass all over me,  
can get snowed on and sometimes, some people take care of me.  
I wonder how other objects feel about things I feel now,  
like if they are being mistreated, do some care?  
Do some cry in agony? Do they wonder why they are here  
and what things would be like if they weren’t?  
Do they wonder if they are of good use to the world? I will never know.”

*Kiona Bean*

## No Matter Where We Go

No matter where we go a shadow follows you  
No matter where we go somebody’s staring at you  
No matter where we go somebody’s hating  
No matter where we go there’s always somebody who cares  
No matter where we go there is always someone there  
No matter who it is they are just there  
No matter where we go there is always something to bear  
No matter where we go there is someone there to share

*Stephanie Smith*

## When I Look Around

When I look around,  
I see planes crashing into buildings  
and the buildings falling down.

When I look around town,  
I see everybody coming together now.

When I look around the country,  
I see everyone getting ready for the war,  
thinking about when this is over, and history, and no more.

When I look around at the world,  
I see people praying for the little boys and girls.

I see sadness,  
I see terror,  
I see myself when I look in the mirror.

I see hope,  
I see faith,  
and when this war is over,  
I will see a smile on my face.

*Terrance West*



## I Talk and Listen To

I talk and listen to my grandmother for like  
3 or 4 hours, which gets me tired.  
I talk on the phone listening  
to the sweet girl's voice.  
I listen to the news to see what is going on  
with the war and anthrax.  
I look at my friends playing outside  
with the football and getting tackled.  
I look at my wonderful grandmother,  
looking good and going to a meeting.  
I mark the last point of my tic-tac-toe game  
and brag about it.  
I observe stupid people on "Police Video"  
crashing and drunk and stuff.  
All these words that I wrote were really  
and always will be about that,  
what I talk and listen to.

Robert Robinson

## Out the Window

Out the window  
I smile when I see children riding their bikes  
when I hear the wind whistling softly to me

Out the window I smile  
I see the sun shining brightly  
as the little birds fly by singing lightly

Out the window I cry as I see  
an old lady in a wheelchair going by

Out the window I cry when I see gangs causing trouble  
while in size they double

I'll close my eyes  
in the darkness where I can't see  
a chaos of sound and noise  
but I only hear little kittens soft yet poised

Out the window as I smile and cry  
why do I sit here with the world going by?  
What is my purpose?  
Where is my place?

One day out the window pain  
I will see no more

But as a mere child  
what can I do but sit, smile, and cry  
out the window.

*Terrell Hill*



*Left to right: Charmyonne Bailey, Jessica Young, Londell Swales*

## Before Night Comes

Before night comes  
the sun goes down  
the sky gets pinkish  
it's just a beautiful sight  
everything is peaceful  
and for a split moment  
there is a pause  
and then it's dark.

*Malaika Howard*

## My family as an Ice Cream Truck

My father is like an ice cream truck  
He stays on the move  
He never stays in one place that long  
He stops and then  
He goes like the wind blowing past my face  
Like I am frozen in time  
And he revolves around me

My mother is like the engine  
She stays fixing things  
And making everything work  
She's what keeps us going when we get off the road

My sister is like the truck itself  
She keeps everything together  
And on the same road

I am the wheels on the ice cream truck  
I keep the truck moving and never flat  
I keep everything running in the same direction  
I stay full of air without any questions.

*Terrance West*



## Let Me Be

Let me be alone forever  
Let me do what I want to do  
Let me live for eternity  
Let me get lost in a winter maze  
Let me ride on the wind  
Let me define the glowing midnight cluster  
Let me runaway into the darkening woods  
Let me die in winter

*Catrina Scott*

## Brighter Indigo

Let me feel the winter breeze  
Let me use the unused trumpet  
Let me see a cluster of cloudy sky  
Let me watch the eternal watch  
Let me see the midnight smoke  
Let me see the brighter indigo.

*Melody Bittle*



## Ghetto Child

I was raised as a ghetto child  
and I was not very proud.

I was taught the wrong way to play  
and the wrong things to say.

I just wanted to be like any ordinary child  
but instead I came up as a ghetto child.

Even though that's how I used to be  
that's not what I am today.

Today I am making my mom and dad proud  
and shouting out very loud that I am no longer a ghetto child.

*Kimberly Jackson*



*Myana Gray*

## Lately I Have Felt Myself Disappearing

I feel like I'm disappearing  
because people act like I'm not there.  
As they stare it's like they are looking right through me.  
As my hate grows more and more,  
I walk into the store to buy some seeds.  
The cashier acts like I'm not there  
and goes to the next person, so I leave.  
When I get out of the store  
a homeless man comes up and gets on his knees  
and says "Can I have a dollar?"  
That's when I know I am being seen.

*Jerrell Grooms*

## Looking Around

As I sit in the middle of the apartment buildings,  
I watch the people start to run out of food  
so they start to steal from each other behind their back.  
I see people killing each other over petty stuff.  
I hear the voices of mothers  
just finding out about their son  
just dying over food that he tried to steal  
and while he was stealing the food  
he was involved in a shooting.  
I observe the gangsters casting lots  
because whoever doesn't get the food tonight  
is going to be killed.  
I hear the shootings of birds  
that are going to be used for food.  
And as I go in the house  
I see some of the same thing.

*Jerrell Grooms*

## I Look Out

I look out the window, and I see fathers abusing their sons.  
Then I look again and see a father playing football with his son.  
I look again and see mothers wishing and crying  
that they didn't have that baby.  
Then I see a mother who didn't want a child  
but is treating her well and taking care of her.  
I look once more and I see brothers and sisters killing each other.  
Then I see brother and sister loving one another.  
I look again. I see children selling drugs.  
Then I see children selling candy.  
Then I stop looking. I sit and think  
if only this world would get along.

*Kenneth Skinner*

## Hot Times

I cannot talk of  
the heat  
that's in here.  
I can't walk  
when I'm in here.  
It needs to be cold, cooled, chilled,  
iced up, not fired up, but again  
just chilled.  
So when it's hot, I do not  
walk, and again I can't talk  
of the  
heat that's in here

*Dimitrie Jackson*

## Speakin' Out

I see my brother chasing cars like a puppy.  
I see jealousy in the eyes of onlookers.  
I see the world being torn apart  
by drugs, fighting and war.  
I see happiness among babies  
and sadness among parents.  
I see women getting beaten by their husbands.  
These are the things I see.

*Tameka Gaines*

## My Father as a Window

My father has been with me for all of my life  
and still he isn't the man who does whatever whenever.  
He is concerned about the safety of his children.  
Like a window that is slightly open, he lets his children roam in  
and out about freely, but not as much.  
Like the window that is shut, he keeps his children away  
from harmful things.  
If he opens up too much, we would be out of control.  
So he keeps us in line by closing up.

*Andrew Holmes*



*From student play "Antigone," (left to right)  
Yasmine Knatt, Monique Covington, Amani  
Al-Fatah, Chakia Chatman*

## No Time to Play

I'm breaking away, leaving my troubles behind.  
No more this and that, see,  
I'm trying to get that off my mind.  
Troubles I've made.  
Could troubles have caught me by mistake?  
I said no more this and that,  
you see I'm tired of that,  
it's just time to move on.  
All those troubles and worries  
in time I'll bury  
'cause they won't be here for long.

*Wesley Bullock*



## Even in the City

Even in the city there is trash everywhere  
where helpless people don't even care.  
The lace will tangle up and confuse you.  
Even in the city we have big complexes  
in the ghetto neighborhood.  
Even in the city people are mean ,  
they don't even wave or say hello.  
Refrigerators empty,  
the children are hungry,  
daylight and moonlight comes and falls.  
Even in the city it seems like everything  
has been shattered in pieces.  
Even in the city there are jagged edges  
where people can't smooth it out  
to come together as one.

*Tameka Scott*



## I Sit by the Window

How can I see so much but feel so little?  
Why can I glance, but not physically touch?  
Why is the view sometimes blurry?  
Why is the view often clear?

One look, I see my past, and my heart shatters.  
One glance, I see my present shining because of love.  
One thought, I see my future, becoming successful.  
All happens as I sit by the window.

*Wayne Nesbit*

## A Lot on my Heart

I'm just a human being with a lot on my heart  
At times it feels like it could shatter  
The red blood that flows through it will outburst in waves  
I'm just a human being that feels like a bomb is going to explode  
Without a warning without a meaning  
I am now a helpless human being

*Gloria Dease*



*Chantz Clagette*

## My Sister as a Tree

My sister can go outside and come back in wet  
She can be gone for a whole summer and grow about 10 inches  
Her arms are longer than branches  
She can never be cut down  
Her hair roots grow every day  
She catches more sunflower seeds than birds  
She is very healthy  
and still not finished growing

*Ebony Jones*

## My money went away today

I got tired of walking, so I caught the bus  
I got hungry, so I went to the store  
I got bored, so I went to the movies  
I got sleepy, so I went to a hotel  
I was robbed

*Anthony Ford*

## Hard to Hold

Time is hard to hold onto,  
when you are in class doing your work;  
as I look through the window  
at the filaments of  
leaves on the lawn,  
the wind is blowing  
them around like a twister.  
It's hard to hold on to,  
because you will never catch it.

*James Johnson*

## To God

What up God  
I am praying to you I need you bad  
I live in the ghetto  
I know you see how bad it is  
You see people shooting and stabbing people  
I want to ask you a couple of questions  
How did my grandfather die  
Did you give him time  
to see most of his grandchildren before you took him  
How is my cousin Jackie  
I know she was sick but not that sick to die  
Can you ask my uncle if he can take care of our family  
Can you tell my two older brothers  
I loved them and look after  
Joseph, Jayshawn, Janaw, and me  
Can you tell Mr. Smith and Kevin  
that Uncle Don is leaving any day now for jail  
and Donna, Jenelle, and Esha loves them  
Can you tell my friend Jerod I miss him  
he shouldn't have died that way that was wrong  
Can you tell Nat that his family loves him  
and the whole Valley Terrace we miss u Nat  
So God can you tell all these people  
I got nothing but love for them

*Johnathan Grady*

## Think of

Shattered clouds, dazzling,  
Bling bling. Define that.  
You can't deny it. I wish  
I could align and alter the clouds.  
Think of a cloudless sky, burning stars.  
Think of eternal night, indigo skies  
glowing like incandescent lamps,  
glistening skies, like  
your mother trying to comfort you.  
Think of broken windows, embers, spreading  
showing through my fingers of light,  
landing softly in your ear.

*Kevin Nowlin*



## Thug Life

I hate this thug life  
I want to know when is it going to stop  
I lost a friend named Jerod over a coat  
Somebody robbed him and he went to get it back  
I knew from when he was missing  
and they shot him in the head 2 times  
I wish I was there  
I used to cry every day but  
I realized he is an angel now  
I wish he was here now  
I could have lost my life with my brothers and 2 friends  
I was right there when they started to shoot  
It was a lot of stuff going on  
I hate this thug life  
I want it to stop  
I know it will so I am happy  
I am happy this thug life will be over

*Johnathan Grady*



# HARTWORKS presents our special guest Nikki Giovanni

Nikki Giovanni is the author of twelve books of poetry, five books of prose, and seven children's books. She has been named Woman of the Year by *Essence* magazine, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and *Mademoiselle*. She has been awarded thirteen honorary doctoral degrees, and is currently a professor of English at Virginia Polytechnic Institute. She was interviewed by Charles Hart Middle School students Amani Al-Fatah, Antonio Ashford, and Jessica Young at the Loudon County Regional Library, where she later read her poetry for an audience of nearly two hundred fans.

**Amani:** In one of your poems, Nikki grows up poor. Did you actually grow up poor?

**Nikki Giovanni:** Oh yes, of course. Most people my age did. I grew up in a town called Woodlawn, and it's really in what's called the valley of Cincinnati. Cincinnati is a river town, and rivers, of course, cause valleys. When you come from the north, you come in through the valley till you get down to the river. And we had a very small home, that was actually quite nice, but with no running water. We had an outhouse. I've always been fond of outhouses. But the answer is yes.

**Antonio:** What got you started writing poems?

**Nikki:** Well, I like to write. I always did. I liked to draw and then I liked to write. I liked to write stories and then draw pictures. And so, in terms of talent, I had more talent for writing than I did in drawing so I don't draw or paint anymore. I used to paint when I was in college. But it was something that was fun to do because you get to express yourself.

**Jessica:** I read this poem called "How Do You Write A Poem?" Why did you pick a title like that?

**Nikki:** That's a good question. I think it's a love poem, and it was the first line, and that always helps. Emily Dickinson, who was a great poet, uses a lot of first lines. I could have said, I guess, "How do you write a love poem?" But that would have been not as good as "How do you write a poem?" It's like I say "Ahhh" and you say "choo." It just seemed to be the right fit.

**Antonio:** About your poem, "The Moon Shines Down," it says you're no panacea. What does that word mean?

**Nikki:** Antonio, I'm going to have to make you look it up because that's the whole purpose of using words that people don't know. I could tell you, but my mom and my grandfather would just... My mother would kill me and my grandfather would turn over in his grave if I did that. And if you don't have a dictionary, I'll send you one. But you've got to look up words. That's the truth. Do you have a dictionary? Okay then I'll let you look it up. Otherwise I'll send you one, because I do that. I had some friends out in Oakland, California your age and they used to say things like that. I sent about six dictionaries to them.

**Jessica:** What did you mean when you said, "No white person ever has cause to write about me?"

**Nikki:** Well you have to get the whole line. I hope no white person has cause to write about me because, and there's a big because there, because black love is black wealth. And they'll probably talk about my hard childhood and never understand that all the while I was quite happy. Because there are cultural assumptions that privileged people make about nonprivileged people. And I would never recommend a nonprivileged position. If you have the choice between being comfortable or being uncomfortable, be comfortable. If you have a choice between being cold or hot, be comfortable again. If you had a choice between being hungry and poor, I would recommend poor. But a lot of people make the assumption that because you didn't have a lot of things that other people had, because your parents didn't have cars or because you didn't have running water, somehow or another you did not have a decent and good life. And I reject that, and I've said that because black love is black wealth.

And we live in a materialistic age which is way overblown. Materialism has such limits. How many people find this out the hard way. They find it out because they have empty lives that they then try to fill with things like drugs or things like alcohol, or really stupid things like driving their cars up and down city streets at 50 miles per hour because they're drag racing. What kind of sense does that make? That's an emptiness in life.

One of the things that we learn in the Old Testament that I think is good (cause I'm not that fond of that eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth, that does not get it for me), but one of the things that I do know the Old Testament teaches us is that the love of money is the root of all evil. It's not that money is the root of all evil. And that's all I'm saying: One cannot spend one's life being envious or jealous or wanting something just for the wanting of it. That doesn't make sense. The goods of your life, the goods and services of your life, have to be in service to a better you. It cannot be in service to a better

them. In other words, you work to live, you do not live to work. So you always have something else to give. So if you have a bowl of chili and somebody's hungry, you don't even think about it, you say, "Come have some of mine." Because that's what makes you a human being.

Materialistic people say, "No, I'm going to keep mine," even though they don't want it. They're afraid of somebody getting enough; that's crazy. So that's what I'm saying: My life was a good life, and I have become, I think, a better person for my life. And for understanding that I don't have any reason to be envious of anybody, and I won't be. I'm not jealous, I'm not small-minded, and I'm not mean, and I'm not going to be any of those things to get something. Because it makes you crazy.

**Amani:** Actually, I do like a lot of material things.

**Nikki:** Sure, but there are limits. If you were on your way to school and there was a little kindergarten kid who lost her coat, and you had a jacket and a coat, you would give her your jacket, because your father would kill you if he found out you let that little kid go to school freezing. You'd try to help, I know that. So it's not liking material things, it's being mean and laughing at other people who don't have something.

**Amani:** Was your dad a drinker?

**Nikki:** Oh yes, he was an alcoholic.

**Jessica:** What effect did that have on you? Did it have any effect?

**Nikki:** I didn't drink, I knew that being an alcoholic wasn't a good idea. But he's still my father.

**Amani:** I was just thinking about it, and I know a girl who's father used to be like that. If you're living poor and your life is not as good as others, when you were in school didn't you ever think about how that affects you sometimes?

**Nikki:** My father didn't drink to do something to me. My father wasn't an alcoholic to get back at me. As soon as Nikki's father started drinking, he was drinking for whatever reason he was drinking. It didn't have anything to do with me, except that I don't like to be hollered at. He would holler, and anyone who's been around me more than a few minutes knows, don't holler. And I grew up in a black community, and kids like to tease you about something like that, but they've got to be crazy. Cause it's not funny. If kids say "your daddy's a drunk," well "What kind of a life do you lead that all you have to do is pay attention to mine?"

**Amani:** Are you rich?

**Nikki:** No. Rich is a lot more money than I have. But I'm happy and I'm sane. You're too young to understand that. I do okay. I take care of my responsibilities, and that's all I want to do in life.

**Antonio:** When you were young, did your friends ever pick on you about writing poems?

**Nikki:** No. Because my good friends all wrote. We all enjoyed writing.

**Jessica:** Do you use profanity in your poems to express your emotions?

**Nikki:** Sometimes, yes. Sometimes I do. Sometimes to shock, it depends on what the point is. Let me answer a question you haven't asked. I so seldom think of myself as a children's author. I'm always amazed when young people say "I read your poem," cause I think of myself as an old person. I do have young people's poetry, because my son's 31 now, but when he was in the 5th grade, I wrote a book with him called "Vacation Time." I think of those series of books as children's books. The poems you're asking me about now mostly appear to be a variety of my adult poetry.

So I'm enchanted that you're enjoying reading some of the love poems. Of course, "Nikki Rosa" is probably going to be on my gravestone. It's a signature poem. I really hope I write something else. Of course, "Ego Tripping" is my most popular poem, and that's a poem that's gone all around the world. But I am just enchanted at the breadth of the reading that you've done. I'm always enthralled that young people like "Cotton Candy On A Rainy Day," because I have a hard time thinking of how it is that you access "Cotton Candy On A Rainy Day."

**Jessica:** When you were growing up, did you ever have an inspirer?

**Nikki:** I had a lot of people who encouraged me, inspiration is probably not the word I would use. But I had a fantastic grandmother. My mother is very much a dreamer and my grandmother is very practical. My father is very much a dreamer. So I had all these influences. But I don't think you all are too young for me to say, I think there's too much emphasis in your generation, on the conditions and who is or is not a proper mentor, a proper role model. And I think they make you dependent on finding somebody instead of finding yourself. You have to learn to trust yourself. And if I see a weakness, coming into the 21st century, it is that so few of you trust what you know to be true. You look for validation from other people, and you can't do that.

**Amani:** Sometimes when we're writing a poem, we want to put a curse word down, and we can't.

**Nikki:** Well you're eighth graders. I'm 58 years old, there's a big difference. Be fair now, Amani. One of the reasons that you do something called be grown up is that you get to do it your way. But right now this is not Burger King, this is school. You do not get to have it your way. Their job is to teach you something.

**Amani:** Yeah, but if your curse is because you feel something, if your feeling is, you're mad and you feel as though one of those words is the only way express it, you want to put it. And my teacher is, like, "No!" But it's not as though I want to use it because I hear other people use it, or because I try to be grown, but it's kind of sometimes how I feel.

**Nikki:** But if I were teaching you, as I do teach at Virginia Tech, I'd say, "and what does this mean in this context?" Which is what she's saying to you. And you say it means, "yack, yack, yack." I say, then that's what you have to write for me, because my job is not to let you shock me or use a cheap word. Every curse word is not cheap, but if we don't give you another word for it, you will grow up writing a word that no longer adequately satisfies what you are saying. But you will not have learned the other word. If we let you keep that one word, you will now find yourself with only that word, and we will not have done our job.

**Amani:** Yeah, I see that but...

**Nikki:** That's why we make you eat vegetables. You must eat your asparagus. You have to, because if we don't make you eat your asparagus, then you're going to find yourself a little older, needing the folic acid, needing whatever it is that asparagus gives us, (aside from a really beautiful dish with butter, and things like that). And you'll say, "Well, I never ate that before." Our job is to make you eat it. And words are the same thing as your vegetables. You just cannot go through life eating hamburgers and feeling that you're being properly nourished. And that's why we do it.

**Amani:** Right, but what I'm saying is, okay, when you get in a certain state of mind, and you know that there's another word that you can justify for the word you want to use.

**Nikki:** I understand what you're saying. You have to use the other word. It's what you do now, it's why you practice "middle C" on the piano. There are things that we have to teach you. We teach you how to use words. We make you eat your vegetables; we tell you to go to sleep. Because we want to make sure that when you're grown, and we're no longer there to instruct you, we have done our best. And we can't let you take that away from us because it's inconvenient. When you come to Virginia Tech, I'm going to say the same thing to you. Come sit in my writing class and see. But Amani, remember, when we had this discussion you were twelve years old.

**Amani:** Thirteen

**Nikki:** And you'll say, "but I still think, Dr. Giovanni..." And I'll say you still have to learn. I have to teach you what I know because that's all people can do for young people. We can only teach you what we know, so you can take that as a basis to learn what you have to know. That's called life. It's why we have children, whether they're biological children or they're emotional children, as you are to the teachers, my students are to me. I am not their mother biologically, but I am their mother emotionally. And I have to teach you what I know so, you don't have to learn again what I know. If I teach you what I know, then you can use that and go forward. If I don't, then you'll have to learn it at some other point and that's taking up time that we don't have to spend.





# Poetry

poetry is motion graceful  
as a fawn  
gentle as a teardrop  
strong like the eye  
finding peace in a crowded room

we poets tend to think  
our words are golden  
though emotion speaks too  
loudly to be defined  
by silence

sometimes after midnight or just before  
the dawn  
we sit typewriter in hand  
pulling loneliness around us  
forgetting our lovers or children  
who are sleeping  
ignoring the weary wariness  
of our own logic  
to compose a poem  
no one understands it  
it never says "love me" for poets are  
beyond love  
it never says "accept me" for poems seek not  
acceptance but controversy  
it only says "I am" and therefore  
I concede that you are too  
a poem is pure energy  
horizontally contained  
between the mind  
of the poet and the ear of the reader  
if it does not sing discard the ear  
for poetry is song  
if it does not delight discard  
the heart for poetry is joy  
if it does not inform then close  
off the brain for it is dead  
if it cannot heed the insistent message  
that life is precious

which is all we poets  
wrapped in our loneliness  
are trying to say

*Nikki Giovanni*

# Choices

if I can't do  
what I want to do  
then my job is to not  
do what I don't want  
to do

it's not the same thing  
but it's the best I can  
do

if I can't have  
what I want then  
my job is to want  
what i've got  
and be satisfied  
that at least there  
is something more  
to want

since I can't go  
where I need  
to go then I must go  
where the signs point  
though always understanding  
parallel movement  
isn't lateral

*Nikki Giovanni*

## Me

I look so good,  
I have an army of bodyguards  
To take the girls off men  
When you look in my eyes,  
You will fall into a trance and love me.  
Just face it—  
I look better than you.

I am so rich,  
I own Asia, Europe, and most of America  
I have my private plane take me  
to the premieres of all the movies.  
I make King Midas jealous;  
I have lunch with Bill Gates every day.  
I get shoes so new they won't be  
out till the year 2050.

My shoes are so shiny,  
I can give myself a tan with them.  
My teeth are so white,  
They look like Casper the friendly ghost.

I am so strong,  
I lift weights with mountains.  
I am so strong,  
I can beat up Sumo wrestlers with my pinky.  
I am so powerful,  
I can turn an old toilet into pure gold.  
I am so powerful,  
I can turn dirt clumps into diamonds.

I am so smart,  
Everyone comes to me for advice.  
I am mysterious, powerful, and strong,  
all of my answers are never wrong.

*Justin Grell*



*Delonte Williams, Kevin Nowlin*

## Good Times

My father smells like  
Peaches and cream.  
My sister looks like  
Apples and oranges.  
My teacher feels like pink roses.  
My mother sounds like  
church music and slow dance music.  
That is good.  
Hear, and sing:  
Good times  
Good times  
Good times.

*Nadaisha Martin*

## Never Noticing

I probably never notice the simple things you see every day.  
Things like  
a bee pollinating a flower,  
or the  
edge of the sidewalk where you could fall or slide.

I probably never notice  
the hummingbird  
floating next to a flower,  
or the  
people on First Street starting fights,  
the simple ant crawling in someone's shoes.  
Or  
I might not notice the way the wind blows.

*Joshua Waiters*

## My People

My cousin is an electrical current  
because he is always bursting with energy.

My teachers are computers  
because they're always telling me things that I don't know.

My grandma is a goodie bag  
because she's full of surprises.

My mom is a car  
because she's always going somewhere.

My grandfather is a balloon  
because you never know when he's gonna pop.

I am a neverending story  
because I never know what's gonna come next.

*Virginia Rodgers-Owens*



## Point of View

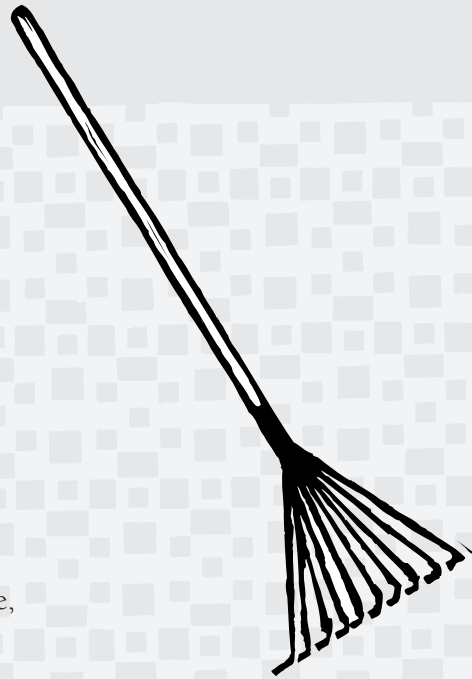
I see birds taking baths and then flying sky high.  
I see trees waving happily through the midnight sky.  
I see people walking, talking, and fussing.  
I see homes with happy families.  
I see schools with children walking to them  
I see cars racing in the road  
I see fights with cussing and then police  
I see light turn to night  
I see the bright sun shining on me  
I see people eating honeybuns  
I see movies with action and emotions  
I see boys playing b-ball  
I see girls running the halls  
I see my family waving farewell as they go  
I see stores with food and goodies  
I see night when the sun slowly goes down to rest  
I see light when the sun pops up early in the morning  
I see fear when I walk through a dark alley  
I hear, I see near, I see far  
But most of all I see me.

*Cieara Holman*

## Lady Brown Upward

Bicentennial woman lying across  
her chenille carpet, with an indigo ember,  
eternally birthing her child in November,  
thinking of which word she didn't already say.  
Unused shoes, worn down and abused,  
can this be a time that I must refuse?  
With a curious sensation, I bring the nation  
out of this depression of an unmatured crescent,  
this be the lesson that matures in the intangible flame.  
Aligned and abiding, I shall stand by his side,  
coming eternally alone, forever.  
Brimstones dazzle in this bedazzled world,  
harmd and unharmed by this dark gloomy cloud,  
she punished us aloud, and gave in to the crowd.  
The man is awaiting, her sons now elating,  
while she is shared and shrewd, she doesn't want to be rude,  
but cruelty is all she knows.  
He nestled by her window when it came upon  
midnight of smoke, he inhaled, but didn't choke,  
snuck in upon her bed and whispered these words in her ear:  
Let's go to the alter, let's sail the sea,  
Let's get you out of your name  
and call you  
Lady Brown Upward.

*Amani Al-Fatah*



## Connections

Liquid eternity, delicious poison,  
translucent present, describing memory,  
devouring life, broken cloud, velvet sacrifice,  
porcelain ice, blazing cup of fate,  
drinking smoke, coffee ocean,  
rusty star, fresh decay, dirty purity,  
stinky perfume, pierced color, unhealed day,  
vast angel, dark examination, webbed universe.  
Surrounded in questions,  
haunting voice, born for darkness,  
Sinful goodness, and  
I keep connecting.

*James Saunders*

## I learn by going where I have to go

I learn by going where I have to go.  
I need to do what I have to do,  
but I learn by going where I have to go.  
I have to learn never go the fast way—  
It can lead you to the way you don't need to go.  
So I learn by going where I have to go.

If you want to get there fast, just go  
but hurry up, because I learn by going  
where I have to go.

I didn't take the fast way,  
I just take it slow.  
I learn by going where I have to go.

*Johniece Simms*

## I Sit and Look Out

I sit and look out the  
window at home, looking  
at the cars passing by and  
the kids running up and  
down the street.  
I see the sky and the birds fly.  
I see the grass on the ground, and the trees,  
and the leaves blowing my way.  
I sit here and  
see the drug dealers selling  
drugs, saying Whitehorse,  
Whitehorse, that's what I see  
looking out the window.  
I smell people smelling very bad.  
I hear people  
using profanity.

*Sharelle Doye*

## Let Me Out

Pain is in this dark room like many speakers.  
The cold drifts through the crack in my window.

My mother is gone  
and I am home alone.

Alone where no one can find me.

In my soul, I am trying to break free,  
Free to get out and be happy.

I feel like I am trapped inside a tower,  
A tower with no windows or doors.

Someone please help me  
and come rescue my soul.

*Christina Ashford*





Top (left to right): Myana Gray, Sade Rauch, Charmyonne Bailey  
Bottom (left to right): Chakia Chatman, Amani Al-Fatah

## I sit and look out

I sit and look out upon  
all the shame of the world  
and upon all the depression and  
sorrows

I hear kids' convulsive sobs  
from young teenagers at  
risk with themselves  
hurting themselves  
after deeds done

I see in low life

*Whitney Starr*

## A Clock's Dream

When a clock wants to go to sleep at night,  
He firmly decides to stop ticking.

He realizes the consequences,  
That if he stops ticking,  
There would  
Be no day and night, but doesn't  
Care.

In his mind it's going  
Tic toc  
Every tic toc that he hears  
makes him ever-tired, and he eventually  
goes to sleep.

*Kimberly Settles*

## If You Need a Reason

If you need a reason  
come ask me.  
You desire to know  
where you come from.  
You come from a connection  
of two who are in love from the heart,  
who softly confess their love.  
You come from history,  
who your grandmother gave birth to.  
You come from cuts and wounds  
from when you were little,  
falling and falling.  
Who was there to pick you up?  
You come from people who wanted you in this world.  
If you need a reason, just  
come ask me.

*Jessica Young*

## I sit and look

I sit and look and see  
children running around at night.  
Smell nothing but gun smoke and heat,  
kids throwing rocks  
and busting bottles.  
I look out my window and see  
trees and the high-rise.  
I listen out my window, hear shooting  
and drive-bys.  
  
And look out your window and  
watch the kids play and have a good time.

*Emmanuel Solomon*

## Good Times

I'm walking with my friends.  
We're talking and playing, just doing nothing,  
But still they are good times,  
Not worrying about anything,  
But still it's good times.  
It's the kind of good times that don't  
Require much.

*Desmond Wright*



## Hands

I can't forget those hands you have,  
soft gentle big and strong.  
When we go hand  
in hand, I can feel  
the fire between us.

but when you get violent I can  
feel those big strong hands on  
my body leaving  
bruises and black eyes,  
they turn rough and the  
fire got put out by  
the beatings.

*Jessica Young*

## Wishing

That I can be the blue of the sky  
and the three clouds in the sky,  
burning my heart with a warm  
feeling that can't let go.  
Hating myself for being ungrateful,  
but now I know  
that I'm just as bright as the sun in the sky.  
Pretty personality, beautiful as can be.  
My sister, loving, but torn  
by my outrageous anger  
Now I'm a star in the sky,  
doing what I have to do,  
not only following my heart,  
but following my mind,  
doing my best  
being as perfect as I can be.  
Dreaming and wishing upon  
the stars in the sky, and loving the moon  
that shines at night.  
Making my dreams come true,  
but, at the same time, doing what I have to do.  
Making the life that I want to live,  
and dreaming of the wishing star  
that I wished upon that night.

*Chakia Chatman*



*Left to right: Jessica Young and Charmyonne Bailey in "Antigone"*

## Street Change

What happened?  
everybody's  
gone, the street's dead old  
friends move, no new friends  
today all the ones who  
we used to play with  
ain't our age no more, all  
they do is drink and smoke

hey, everybody gets old  
houses, people, even the  
streets change.

*Jessica Young*



## Playground at Night

The playground goes to bed  
he hears noise and gunshots so  
he doesn't go to sleep,  
and grown men play on the slide  
and climb on him.

The playground does not go to sleep  
cause grown men play and slide  
and climb on him  
he wants to be alone in the indigo forever,  
and this man makes him furious  
slowly, slowly making him furious  
and making him want to be  
unused

*Delonte Williams*

## Natural

Me, I am natural, original that's me  
I'm the one who tells you  
not to run from yourself.  
I'm your counselor  
your helper, I'm originally natural.  
Nothing fake or fancy—  
just the way I was made.  
You see, I'm natural  
like the orange juice you drink  
or the pure vanilla in your ice cream.  
The only, no one else can be  
made just like me, I am original  
natural that's me.

*Claudia Butler*



## Death

The last deep breath, with a cold sigh.  
No more pain, that corrupts your body  
when you argue with the husband you once knew.  
Gone, everything just gone.  
Everything seems white.  
You see your  
life flashing in front of your eyes  
like a car hitting a deer or a  
sudden loud scream.  
The last deep breath,  
with a cold sigh,  
then death.

*Claudia Butler*

## I Am Alone

I am alone, singing a song  
as a girl walks up on her cellphone.  
I wanted to meet her so I could treat her,  
so she gave me a number for me to beep her.  
I called her that night, she had me so hyped  
I wanted to fight.  
The next morning I pulled in the Rolls Royce,  
took her to Toys R Us to play with some toys.  
I took her back home to watch a DVD,  
and she told me, next time I am alone to stay in a tree.

*Richard Williams*



Left to right: Larry Robertson, Charmyonne Bailey, Londell Swales, Jessica Young, Pamula Twyman

## 2nd Strike

This is about peace and harmony,  
love and ease, care and passion.  
This ain't about hate,  
burning crosses and breaking windows.  
This one is for everyone who gets picked on  
the bullies, the haters.  
Doesn't it feel good to be me at all?  
See me ball, and you know  
I ain't gonna fall.  
See me shine, burning your eyes,  
smile like a sunrise,  
anger like a thousand midnights, but  
I'm tired of seeing dead bodies on the news,  
the war, the filth, the bloodshed, the guns,  
that Osama Bin Laden hating on us.  
What happened to them old songs and poems?  
Ya'll people that don't understand,  
just listen:  
A song that weeps is a song of peace.

*Kevin Nowlin*

## In the Nile

As I listen to the river  
I can hear  
the crying insanity of  
lost souls who can't  
remember their last  
birthday present from the sea.  
It seems that the river  
makes the sand dry.  
And my dream becomes nothing more  
than a rotting corpse.  
It kind of reminds me  
of tomorrow's newspaper  
and yesterday's television show.  
So until I reach my watery destination  
my next door neighbor will continue  
to know my business and  
I will never be free

*Londell Swales*

## Run Down...

Mmm. So sad. All the things so  
vulnerable to breakage. Like a  
relationship. Kind, passionate, feeling like  
a duo of butterflies, metaphorically  
they flit to and fro.  
Or family—  
Mmm. Sometimes.  
What does it take?  
Lack of cooperation.  
But what about the beauty, unity?  
Okay, but still vulnerable to breakage.  
Or self image. What does it take?  
Anything like reflection, for instance,  
every time it makes you feel uglier,  
until you feel hideous. Or anything.  
What does it take?  
Anything.

*James Saunders*

## Hope For The Future

A smokey-gray worn out building,  
hoping and dreaming  
for better windows, wonderful  
brown bricks, not remembering  
the past, which was yesterday,  
or last month.  
He hopes soon to unravel the future,  
with blue skies, with  
white clouds sitting upon him.  
He wishes he could be dressed up  
in, not that smokey-gray like the past,  
but the new brown bricks  
with the black and white streets  
for the future!

*Kimberly Settles*

## Butchers at Rest

Here they stand, restless  
outside of a butcher shop with  
nothing to do, taking  
a cigarette break.  
The cigarette is burning out,  
without a doubt, memories unravel.  
Remember that  
old blue-black muddy building?  
Thinking about the lives they have  
taken away from animals.  
Bloody, shredded, and it is dripping,  
dripping all over the countertop  
when they see a bird they  
take a shot gun and  
shoot it off of a tree branch  
What do they see?  
Light.

*Monique Covington*

## Loneliness

I never knew loneliness  
until I moved away.  
It lay  
like a stone in my lap.  
No matter how hard I try  
it simply will not  
go away.  
I never knew loneliness  
until I moved away

*Timothy Miller*

## Boys with Swords

Boys with swords, balancing between  
who's right and who's wrong. Just watching  
the way they use their swords, as if  
they were professionals, fighting in a match.  
Boys with cardboard swords  
caught every inch of my interest.  
Cloudless skies of Harlem's 1930s streets  
make the performance more riveting. The action of  
the boys and their cardboard toys is burning.  
And burning with excitement.

*Sade Rauch*

## Slow Time

Forever breeze, engaged in a maze  
all locked up in a blue round ball  
sitting there,  
looking out the window. What do I see?  
Nothing. Just a bird trying to get  
inside another bird's nest,  
knocking with anger,  
a very weird look.  
What it was,  
it was this boring  
Slow time.

*Monique Covington*



## Poet

As I stare down at the pictures  
in my photo album, I try to remember  
the moments as they were happening,  
each moment no clearer than the last,  
more opaque and blank,  
like the tired face on a willow tree.  
As I try harder and harder  
it starts to become  
clearer, more translucent, like the  
windows of my heart and soul.

*Hakeemat Ayodeji*

## The True Words of My Prayer

The distance between the sky and me  
is unaccountable. I breathe a little of  
the sky at every breath,  
taking a glance at each countryside.  
Watching the way things move  
is filling my mind, making me wonder  
how life can be so quiet. Watching the light kiss  
my voice, my soul will never die from hunger.  
As challenging as it is to be here alone,  
with no one to talk to, this is quite peaceful.  
The true words of my prayer.

*Sade Rauch*

## When I Grow Up

When I grow up, I wonder if people will be  
more afraid to cry than they are to die?

Would I be able to see a rainbow  
in the small field's sky?

Would there be any trees alive?

If not, how would the planet survive?

Would the Internet have a website—  
www.life-time air supply?

When I grow up,  
will the existence of dolphins and whales  
just be a story I tell,

starting with once-upon-a-time,  
ending with, Where did we fail?

Would schools be next door to jails?

Would the truth be illegal to sell?

When I grow up, will anything be on the news  
for anything besides killing?

Will those drug dealers still be standing  
in front of my building?

Will TV and music videos still raise American children?

Will they ever learn how to learn,  
or stay afraid of the feeling?

Cause I want to be happy.

When I grow up!

*Tiara Stevenson*



## Life

When I was born,

I was

little and loved.

My parents' eyes  
glowing around me.

They loved me.

Now

that I get bigger, if

I let a glass shatter,

I get a belt blatter

on you know what.

I've gotten bigger,

I have to

see poorness, meaning

people on the streets

asking for money.

*Chantz Claggette*

## Untitled

Poles, knives,

these are things that gangs use.

Words, weapons,

that's what hurts my feelings.

Bleeding or blood,

that's what makes them happy.

Gangstas kill

and killing makes the world a worse place.

They call each other names

to sound tough and mean.

Ferocious face of danger and

a translucent mind of liquid

surrounding death and hatred.

*Delonte Williams*

## The Reflections of Abuse

I thought it would be all right.  
It turns out they will continue to fight.  
I tried not to say anything  
because I was afraid  
to lose myself, like my mom.  
They tried to keep it from me.  
He probably will be moving.  
Soon I hope. But it was  
hard not to notice all the  
misplaced things, no clothes  
on the racks, my lamp is  
now cracked, and mother  
is no longer here.  
I hope she's okay.  
Because I only think the worst  
Is she dead, or is she hurt?  
But one day I hope  
to find her alive, healed, and well.  
Only then can we start life over.  
Without the abuse.

*Nakeisha Winkfield*



*Left to right: Kevin Nowlin, Antonio Ashford, Robert Robinson*

## Abandoned

Boarded windows brought secret lies  
Of a man withholding treachery.  
Sad girl opens her thighs in the mist  
Bringing out remembrance of drugs,  
And the word no.  
Calming her hand of bruised veins, of sassiness, and  
Firing shots.  
Lured to the home of a man running the slalom,  
He coerces her to get onto the floor.  
But before all of the abruptness and shock,  
Police come through the door,  
With nightsticks, and cuffs, and black blood bricks,  
With the man wielding these fierce fire sticks.  
Woman cries, for her secret lies  
Live inside the shackled apartment.  
And to this day her pain lives on, of her baby departed.  
Seven years later became 84 months or the  
Harlem gas station where boys buy their blunts.  
The home is a liquor store, not sold with liquor.  
And the homeless still try to pry open  
Those boarded up windows.  
Lady left out at age 37,  
Remembering her precious thighs,  
Now abandoned.

*Amani Al-Fatah*

## The Question to My Future

Would someone please help me  
define the character of my future?  
There is no  
eternal answer to how my life will turn out.  
The truth may not appear in my dreams.  
Beginning a new life can be lonely.  
Glorifying my life is like working a maze.  
I wisely  
clutch my glowing memories  
to my past life.  
I burn the embers for the winter breeze.  
The shadow of my next life furiously  
worries me with the troubles  
this life will bring.  
Shattering smoke slowly  
dazzles the night,  
making me ask the question,  
How will my life be?

*Sade Rauch*

## Little Boys on the Corner

Little boys on the block,  
gambling their day away,  
along with their future.  
And the more they gamble,  
the more their ambitions slip their mind.  
They become pessimistic.  
They have not been exposed  
to many things in their lives,  
so this is all they know.  
But the little brother with the different father  
that was accepted to Harvard, and put through college  
is shouting, let's go read a book.  
The big brother screams, I can't read.  
He has a decision:  
His brother or the boys,  
and he picks the boys,  
because this is all he knows.

*James Saunders*

## Revenge

When the world ends  
I'll go to the movies with my friends.  
We'd walk in and say  
Give us all the food we want,  
Cause today's our last day.  
We wouldn't even watch the movie,  
Just have a food fight,  
Since there's no one who has to  
Clean it up the next night.

Then I would dig a very deep hole  
To put my brothers in.  
I'd laugh and smile and say  
That's what you get  
For ripping off my fish's fin.

I'd walk away as happy as can be.  
Since there's no tomorrow,  
My parents can't beat me.  
Then I would go to my school,  
And tell all the teachers they stink,  
Then I'd wave my hands and say  
Ha, ha—made you blink.

Yup, that would pay everybody back  
I'm happy and there's no tomorrow  
To be exact.

*Emmaly Curry*



## Questions

Will you learn from your errors, on your bike from falling every time?

Will the truth to you be like a blue landscape in the sky?

Will a cage to you be like having yourself trapped in a rock?

Will sand stick to your feet like glue?

Are your phalanges as solid as a stone?

Will a rhinoceros be like a bolt of thunder in the sky?

Does a monkey show indifference in the way he acts?

Will you smile at the face of danger?

Will a mouse shoot up and be gone like a fountain?

Will you think hard as a skull about tomorrow and the next day?

*Antonio Ashford*



*Antonio Ashford*

## What I Believe

I say to myself, you are not a child now  
If the night is long, remember your importance  
Sleep  
The sky begins to get dark  
It starts to rain  
I start to feel pain  
Why am I feeling this way?  
I begin to cry  
What I live for I can seldom believe in  
What I try to do is never enough  
As I start to dream of some words  
Books and poems  
I begin to speak  
Am I still a child?  
I start to think,  
No, I'm getting older and I have to be  
More mature.

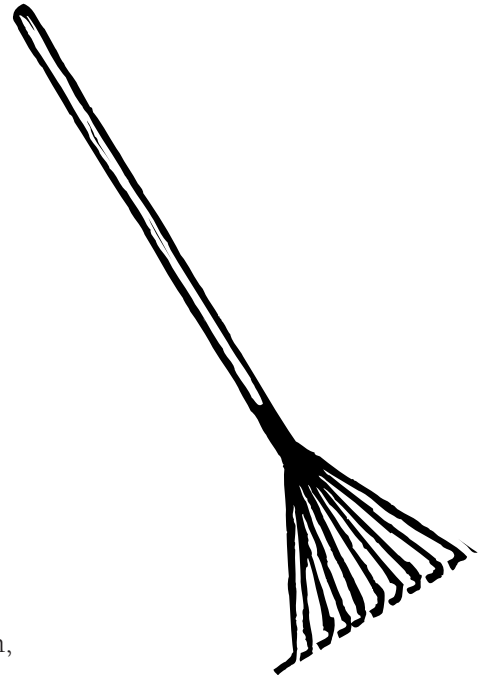
*Tyesha Tyson*



## In This World

In this world,  
Flowers are as soft as clouds are,  
Glass, which is hard, shatters like thunder.  
Danger is the funny business to those who despise it,  
Like a fountain with no water, or a bird with no wings.  
It's indifference, it makes no sense.  
Water flows, like people walking down the street,  
Busy at the moment, never taking a rest.  
Even though people think that tomorrow  
Is the new aurora that will dawn a new day,  
It may be the same as Tuesday, or Friday, or Sunday.  
Sometimes people see colors as a feeling  
Instead of something that can be different, pretty,  
That can make people feel happy,  
Like blue or black, sorrow, pain,  
Or pink, happy, glorious,  
Or purple, tension, confusion.  
In this strange world, where people swear they know the truth,  
Act as if there is no error to what they are doing,  
Stone is like sand, sometimes wet, smooth, prickly, sharpness,  
Grass waves in the air, as the wind forcefully and defensively  
Blows it away to sheer death.  
Dolls climb trees, mostly because their owner mistreats them.  
The most imaginable, dead strangeness  
Comes to life.  
Buses roar down the street  
Like animals caged, like they've done something wrong,  
Even though they were just living their lives like normal.  
Would I want to live in a world in which everything is different,  
Maybe complicated, scary?  
I don't think anyone would live through this nightmare.  
I wouldn't, anyway.

*Kiona Bean*



## Danger Begins

The truth shatters like a black cage  
in a sandbox that's worn out,  
and stone soup  
that's just too plain to eat.  
Thunder hanging  
off an indifferent friend  
and that's how danger begins.

*Delonte Williams*

## As I Walk

As I walk down  
the street  
I see the calm indigo skies.  
I see sorrowful flames.  
I see men in monochromatic clothes  
looking out of a  
glowing window.

During winter it is cold.  
It is also beautiful.  
But in spring it shatters.

*Antonio Ashford*

## Dream

I look through the  
silver window of the past  
and see my grandmother, her shadows  
her fear is staring at me.  
I then decay and  
fall from my last  
grandmother's back from the past  
Her pale face withers  
and I scream.  
Thank God  
this was only a dream.

*Monique Covington*

## Tangled Thoughts

When the thunder created the cat,  
that was indifference,  
When the danger of endangered species  
lived tomorrow and not today,  
When on a playground you see the winter star  
making an error of  
the stone  
who once was sand.  
The picture of young Ismene  
tells the story of Oedipus, but  
still the trumpet glorifies  
his sound, to warn us  
of the useless flame of yesterday.  
For every error, there's an answer.

*Nakeisha Winkfield*

## Untitled

I never noticed the  
hatred in the world. I heard  
it a lot on MTV, but I just  
didn't care. Now I recognize  
the hatred people have  
against people of other races, religions  
and sexual orientation.  
When I think about it, it's just  
so egocentric. How can you not  
care about another human being?  
I mean, we was all made the same way.

*Janay Bailey*

## Moons Smile

I thank you God for making me mother's baby and father's child,  
for making moons smile and sunshine,  
for making tears fall like frost's crystal.  
I thank you for making grass green and yellow sunlight.  
I thank you for making me Charnise Lajaun Bell.

*Charnise Bell*

## A Lonely Room

As I stare into the four corners  
I wonder, why is the child balled up  
with her head to her knees? Is she lonely?  
When I splatter  
the black paint in the corner,  
I say to myself, what do I see in this color?  
Is it dark skies  
for the end of the world?  
or the sadness  
of a mother losing her child at an early age?  
While I stand in the middle of the room  
with bloody tears falling from my eyes,  
I feel the sorrow and pain  
in a corner of the room with chipped paint.  
As I look to my only hope, the last corner  
I see a bookbag full of old memories  
and the good things life used to bring.  
I start bleeding from my pores as I cry  
Oh Lord, please take me  
out of this lonely room.

*Claudia Butler*



## Dark Eternity

Waves of poison breath all around,  
Sea of souls inhaling lives,  
The earth devouring lives like an army,  
Blazing cup of darkness,  
Choosing if you stay or go,  
Surrounded in darkness forever,  
And a dark voice saying—  
Are you eating yesterday,  
Or is it eating you?

*Reginald Williams*

## Can't Stand It

Marooned in the uneven four-sided room.  
Hunger is moving in, but  
the faith is moving away,  
full of fear and rage, black and  
crimson red. Where am I?  
People dressed up in worn-out white cover  
performing Hamlet and you know me,  
I got to watch.  
Other side, that side-tracked pride  
is flying away, the busted-up, fried-up,  
off the wall trust is all lies, and you think  
I don't have problems.  
They lied to ya.  
This room is like a technicolor flute  
used to catch  
the sorrows of dead princes that died  
a long time ago.  
I just can't stand it.  
It ain't easy being me, but nobody  
can do it better.

*Kevin Nowlin*

## This Room

This corner is closed up  
with no air but

I wish it was  
an A.C. there.

Just like in space, objects floating in  
one corner and big dust balls  
gliding toward me.

The next corner is filled  
with a dead prince, it does not  
make any sense.

The next has fear and rage  
Just like you are in  
a locked up cage.

The last corner has black dust  
with darkness of death.

*Chantz Clagette*

## Do We?

A leaf drips into a puddle of cries from me.  
It glows with a radiant light from the sky  
Called the sun, or is that what it's called?  
The flipside of me has mood swings,  
A perpetual motion of my grateful heart.  
We all try to live right, or do we?  
Freedom of my heart bursts out like a wildfire in the jungle.  
One threw a cigarette out while driving, or did he?  
Nobody knows for sure, or do we?

*Charmyonne Bailey*

## If Everyone Had Amnesia

If no one remembered, I would...

I would help people who don't know me,  
like an elf helping Santa...

I would help my mother's friends  
with their kids, like a mother and a baby...

I would tell my friends the truth about me,  
like a lawyer nagging the prosecutor...

I would release my anger on a canvas,  
the paint is my feelings as the red of  
love takes over...

Then, done, all I would bring them all  
back, and start over again.

*Jade Mayo*

## In this room

In this room  
I dream of every night  
there are four corners.  
Corners of color,  
people, emotions, and objects.

In the first corner  
there is my grandfather, the  
person who fills me with  
joy and happiness.  
He also  
can fill me with tears.

In the second corner there is  
a Michael Jordan basketball,  
a ball that I got for Christmas  
and will keep  
for the rest of my life.

In the third corner is a  
gold and silver color.  
Some parts  
are platinum, reminding me  
of rap music, which  
I listen to.

There are emotions in  
the last corner.  
Happiness, anger, and joy.  
What I feel for  
my family.

*Antonio Ashford*



## Bad Times

I'm falling into a dim light,  
Frozen as an ice cube,  
Hoping to rise to the top.  
With hardship going through my mind  
And thawing at the same time  
These are bad times.  
This is what I'm talking about:  
Poverty's in my house,  
Just wondering how I am going to get out.  
Eating food off the floor,  
Why can't I be adored?  
These are bad times.

*Ashlee Owens*

## Stuck

Yet you say those rumors are indifference  
But let's take a glimpse of God's error.

Falling from emerald trees because  
too much green falls into a sand trap.

Stalling and weeping upon fall  
into a stilled stone.

Angels' truth tarnishes  
your every waking moment.

Like caged animals attacking you  
while you try to jump.

There is soon to be a  
thunderstorm of envied souls.

Your car gives bad luck and leads  
you out of danger.

Blood portrays the angry  
water fountain.

Another tomorrow in sadness.

*Amani Al-Fatah*

## No Longer Existed

You're no longer there. You're nowhere.  
You're just as transparent as the wind that blows.  
As far as I'm concerned,  
I don't even know you.  
You're a window I can see right through.  
You're the filament of my imagination.  
Your words have no meaning.  
When I think about you,  
You make my brain suffocate.  
Now my memory of you is lost.  
Now my memory of you is just another passing day,  
So go away.  
I can't see you, you're not there.  
You're just a breeze that blows in the air.  
You're just a dream that went away.  
So all I have to do is wait another day.

*Chakia Chatman*

## Bad Times

Stuff falling, roaches crawling  
carpet dusty, forks rusty  
cold nights, many mice  
cold food, very rude  
ugly floors, broken doors  
lots in store, clothes that can't be wore  
old shoes, lots of rules  
lots of boys, not a lot of toys  
many fights, not much light  
but when the good times come  
everything will be all right.

*Robert Randolph*



*Anna Myers adds music to "Antigone"*

## Difference

He dreams as if he has no meaning.  
He dreams of different-looking nouns  
in their different-looking corner.  
He has been through a lot already,  
but the birds flying away from him is too much.  
He wonders, if he can wonder,  
if there is a different person  
who will not stereotype him for his different looks.  
Or can that person afford to have a stereotype?  
He dreams of everyone having  
their arms wrapped around their body,  
with a discomforting expression on their faces.  
He is so used to rejection that he  
doesn't know how to approach anyone.  
But he doesn't know that they  
all have something in common.  
I wonder how much longer  
can he hold onto self destruction?  
Whoever that person is, I hope he doesn't  
feel different forever.

*James Saunders*

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*Clockwise from left: Charmyonne Bailey, Reginald Williams, James Saunders, Chantz Claggette, Amani Al-Fatah*

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