

# HARTWORKS

Winter 2006 • \$5

Featured Writer: **Naomi Ayala**

The Charles Hart Middle School Literary Magazine

Shamia House



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*front cover, l-r: Shamia House, James Saunders, Yasmine Jones*

# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *hArtworks*, the nation's only inner-city public middle school literary magazine, written and edited by the students of Charles Hart Middle School. *hArtworks* is published through a collaborative effort between the school and the D.C. Creative Writing Workshop, an independent non-profit working to create a literary renaissance in Southeast Washington. Now in its sixth 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. The 2006 edition of *Poet's Market* recognizes *hArtworks* as "an outstanding example of what a literary journal can be (for anyone of any age)."

This year we welcome four new writers, Dwayne Betts, Aisha Brantley, Omekongo Dibinga, and Venus Thrash, who join Nancy Schwalb and Jamila Wade as senior writers-in-residence. We also celebrate the return of James Saunders, a 16 year old junior at Ballou Senior High, for his second year as junior writer-in-residence. And the 2006–07 school year marks the start of our college internship program, bringing us the capable and committed service of Meilani Clay, Maricia Herron, and Katie Hinden.

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 Herb Block Foundation, Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, Children's Fund of Metropolitan Washington, Commonweal Foundation, Community Foundation for the National Capital Region, Fannie Mae Foundation, John Edward Fowler Foundation, Harman Family Foundation, Hitachi Foundation, International Monetary Fund, Junior League of Washington, Mattel Children's Foundation, Moran Family Fund, Meyer Foundation, The Tom Lane Fund, Wachovia Foundation, Wendling Foundation, Weissberg Foundation, The World Bank, Anonymous, the friends and family of Anna Su, Michael Joy and TSCJoy/Monterey, LLC, Sarah Booth and Bloomberg L.P., Wells Fargo Home Mortgage, Karibu Books, Holly Mansfield and GO! Creative, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Arena Stage, the Shakespeare Theatre, McGuire Associates, Joyce Page and Ms. Printing, Tollefson & Gustini Investment Management, our friends at Popeye's on Malcolm X Avenue, Gregory Auger, George and Lenore Cohen, Fritz Edler, Tom and Carolyn Grey, Mark Hollinger and Kathy McNeil Hollinger, Frances Horn, Betsy Karel, Gay and Charlie Lord, Judine Slaughter, Raina Rose Tagle, friends of the late Meyer Saul Taubman, Juanita Wade, Vera M. White, and Martin Youmans.

Special thanks for the hard work and dedication of the D.C. Creative Writing Workshop Board of Directors: Mary Ann Brownlow, Dr. Susan Gerson, Bernie Horn, Kathleen Huston, Michael Joy, Joan Kennan, Bill Newlin, Nancy Schwalb, Kirsten Tollefson, and Jamila Wade.

We would also like to thank the following administrators, teachers, and staff who are our partners in this endeavor: Principal Willie Bennett; Assistant Principals Ms. Kimberly Douglas and Mr. Shawn Pelote; Ms. Katherine Bucholtz, Ms. Gloria Fergusson, Ms. Carolyn Jackson, Ms. Terrie Spann-Tchama, Ms. Joan Lusaka, Ms. Eleanor Seale, Ms. Pamela McKinney, Ms. Ann Brogioli, Ms. Trenia Wilson and Ms. Maevern Williams.



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Bryonka Simpkins

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Luqman Abdullah



## When I am like the world

Ironically, it is when I'm most self-conscious;  
it is when I care what everyone else says.  
When fatigue is festering  
and I won't die until I'm gently burned  
by the gracious sun in the morning.

Lying in the bed, fresh out of the shower  
my belly is filled with food, my homework is done.  
I'm in my PJs, and these late-night re-runs effectively sedate me.  
I'm ready.

Lying in the bed, I fight this impending darkness.  
I have the world to blame for this fear.  
It's their fault.  
Every night it comes.  
And when it comes, I am like them.  
I am then concerned with their humanist notions of life.  
I am then fearful of going to sleep,  
to die, and not to wake in the morning.

I'm no longer this outcast, rebel-type of guy  
but I'm one of them.  
I'm scared, just like them.

*James Saunders*

## Slave Haikus

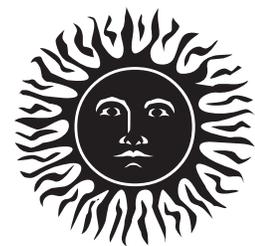
I  
Fettered together  
Packaged with malevolence  
like fresh frivolous sardines

II  
Barefoot and bound tight  
This great peregrination  
was far from the end

III  
Alienated  
In this inhuman hospice  
my fear can't be tamed

IV  
I sat and pondered  
Fathoming what my crime was  
and couldn't find one

*James Saunders*



## His Future

He comes from bologna and government cheese sandwiches,  
and juice, just juice.

He comes from corruption.  
He has been blinded by the myths that promise him  
dope boy status  
if he is true about gettin' this money.  
Senile senior hood-rich celebrities  
tied the blindfold real tight, didn't they?  
Ironically, he's otherwise insouciant, until he's filling his mind  
with false dreams of hood stardom.

Corrupted, thoughtful, consumed, anxious.  
He thinks of his future;  
it's like he's reading his palm.  
And the doom that he experienced left him in awe.  
Now he has this moment to choose:  
Life, or death.

*James Saunders*

## In those days when my father was still big

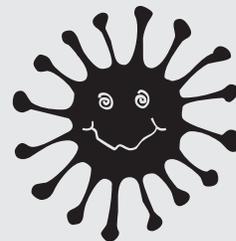
On a hill of gold  
near the big palace overhead  
and at the bottom is an ocean  
with wind blowing hard  
Sudden moonlight pops up out of nowhere  
like there's something crazy going on  
I was on top of the hill and cried  
over the rose  
It was a pretty little rose

*Tywain Greene*

## Nervous Breakdown

My feelings are as vivid  
as a blank memory.  
Pointedly, I've forgotten  
my faithful love for you.  
I'm losing my mind.  
Beyond that,  
I think I'm losing my soul.

*Antonio Spencer*



## blank boy

When I watch him sit there  
blank in destruction  
as the day goes by  
I see deceit in the young boy's eyes

His character is like a shadow  
of humiliation  
sittin' on the street  
bitter, mishandled, so much chaos  
insane, he thought

The battle for friends, he lost,  
and, broken,  
tossed around, tumbling, and full of commotion  
but the flame of dignity makes him stand  
and everyone realizes he is alive

*Kiera Coleman*



## Unfinished Business as a Child

My life as a child was like  
a palace crumbling.  
My schoolwork was majestic.  
My social life was a hurricane.  
My inspiration as a child was my mother,  
she was my only friend.  
The school year was life,  
a never-ending staircase.  
In my music class, my song sounded.  
That was my life as a child.

*Tiara Mason*

## Summer

I  
You can smell flowers  
You can taste ice cream  
You can feel sweat when you are hot  
And you can hear people at the swimming pool

II  
You hear a crowd of people  
You smell breath and  
you feel hands moving everywhere  
taste blood, and spite, and tears

*Dimitrius Winters*

## Poematic: Taste for Tomorrow

Hear my words, forbidden clouds  
In my time, it becomes  
a time of drowsy vision.

For you it comes, a wild weathered wind  
a feather that plays the violin  
with the unlit rubies  
that are in my room.

Invisible candle that will do as I say once again.

*Andrea Hermans*

## Hear My Words

Someplace, forget strength,  
rattling memories, drowsy songs,  
wild oceans that are a haze.

A shadow of a rose  
that is velvet, and cotton  
that will crumble  
and glittering flames.

Staircase, heart beating,  
like a sound of the rain  
beating, candle twilight  
in the zone.

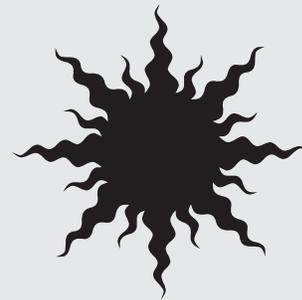
Hear my words!

*Andrea Hermans*

## Another Monday

Another Monday at school, so normal and plain.  
I get to class and fall asleep, and I drift into a corner  
where my heart beats so loud  
I calm my soul and forget wild and crazy hurricanes,  
strong and wild, to see so much on a Monday.  
I drift into a deep sleep, like last Monday,  
the same dream, but a different surrounding.  
I hear a sudden song that I heard once before—  
It begins to rain lightning from the sky,  
tornados and hurricanes destroy many homes.  
The bell had rung, it was time to go,  
I wandered up and up until I reached the door of forgiveness.  
I went home and lay down and the day was over,  
and my eyes closed, and Monday was over.

*Mark Neal*



## December

I can see all the children shine  
as they're playing in the snow.  
I can hear the laughter of the children  
as all the things beyond them are  
forgotten.  
I can smell the smooth white snow  
like a scented candle.  
I can think of my bad days,  
move on,  
as I go along.

*Antonio Spencer*



## My Life

My life as a child is like a hurricane  
blowing a strong wind over the clouds.

It's a man that cried for forgiveness  
when he stole something.

My life is like a velvet rose  
getting ready to be put in water.

My life is like my memory  
climbing a staircase to my future.

*Raymond Reynolds*

## My Name

My name is like a crazy darkness  
hidden in the deep center of my closet.  
My name is evil, it kills me inside;  
I'm scared to say my name out loud.  
I hope my name dies.

*Almus Bush*

## October

October—its plangency, its glow  
In October, you can smell rain  
You also can taste rain  
Feeling that rain makes your hands soft.

You can feel the cold white snow.  
Feeling fire makes me want to cook hot tea.  
Hearing those little coins makes me want to go to  
church  
and hear them shake those bells.

When the cold rain comes down  
it brings back good memories  
of what happened  
in my lifetime  
The way I dream, it feels like  
I'm going to be a good actor.  
When I feel the sun, I can see my own ghost  
a bright, shiny light.

*Demetrius Foreman*

## On a hill of gold

On a hill of gold,  
I feel like I had one million emeralds  
and I was in the palace, and when it's dawn  
I will be king of the world  
and every wild animal will be mine  
and every person will be forgiven.  
Suddenly, a strong heartbeat, and someone  
poisons me  
I slowly fall asleep  
my bones are feeling hazy  
it is all silence.

They think I was dead,  
they say I was gone forever.  
my eyes were in the back of my head,  
they dumped me in the trash  
and they found a new king.  
And he led them badly,  
he made them pick cotton  
and made them build towers.  
They cried, praying for a new king  
and they ran away.

Someplace, there was a big thirst for water  
and I woke up, and they came back  
and they saw me awake, and we had a feast  
and everyone was happy.

*Jamal Conyers*



## Wooden Heart

His heart is so wooden, it burns in the flames,  
The afternoon has hit and it's harder than the rain.  
Tumble down upon me like bricks,  
Wooden hurts like this splinter I can't forget.

*Quanika Jackson*

## Winter

December—  
howls like the wolves in the woods  
it sleeps like the bears, so we hibernate  
and they dream of white nights  
where the snow and everything will be alright

Stand over the fire so we don't freeze up  
drinking hot cocoa, now that's the stuff  
As laughter comes upon us,  
we fade into the dark  
It's nighttime, a couple more days  
when the mysteries will start

Our eyelids close,  
beyond the secrets and grins  
knowing tomorrow is another day

*Quanika Jackson*

## October

### LAUGHTER

Laughter is what I hear,  
this is the best time of the year,  
maybe not the best month,  
but October is my month  
because you hear laughter, sometimes sorrow  
many secret comforts and a lot of dreams  
about hot chocolate and hot tea  
and how your Christmas will be.

### SORROW

In laughter, there is sorrow  
some people are dying of the flu and illness  
but some people love the month October  
because you can just be comfortable and sit back  
eating grandma's special home made cookies  
and think of when she used to make them, now not here  
why cry, you know Jesus will take care of her  
why cry, why cry?

### STRANGE

I write because her birthday just went past  
how she used to put her cookies on the table  
and tell the grandkids go on, dig in  
soon you won't have none at all, so dig in  
Love, peace, no violence, that's what she always told me.

### COMFORT

I just remember how we used to laugh,  
have fun, comfort, when I came home from school  
you used to ask me  
How come you home so early?  
and I'd say, it's 3:30  
Oh, I thought it was 4:55,  
ha, ha, ha, ha,  
just laughter and comfort.

*Dearah Chappell*



L-r: Kiana Murphy, Nichell Kee

## Giovanni

My name is Giovanni Copeland.  
My name is like a star that shines,  
Like a sun, and  
when I say my name,  
everybody can hear me shine  
and when I walk down the street,  
the sun shines on me  
and the trees and the grass and the birds  
and when the sun goes down,  
my name stops shining  
but to me it shines all day like a star

*Giovanni Copeland*

## December

I love December, the month of Christmas,  
I can sense it coming near.  
When the sunrise and December 25 comes,  
I just want to cheer.

But on December 24, I don't want to go to sleep,  
I just watch the moonlight because it's a beautiful sight.  
I hear footsteps coming toward my door,  
Oh, it's just my mom coming to say goodnight.

Christmas is back for another year,  
I can hear the sound of bells in my ear.  
The story about Santa Claus is always a mystery,  
But I guess when I get older he'll be history.

Christmas is gone, memories fade,  
like clouds in the sky.  
I could smell Christmas coming this year,  
but this time I don't want to say goodbye.

*Bryant Jenifer*

## Angry Mood Days

Open, mined heart; broken glass burning,  
so deep, cold hearted, driven to destruction  
on earth's core, tarnish;  
firefly burns, splinters  
in memory, tempests raining rage.  
Sores upon their faces,  
the arrival of the evening star,  
dissonance, self-defeating liars,  
toxins mellow, hurting the inner soul  
Please stop the madness.

*Renita Williams*



## Dreamer

Beautiful, peaceful  
Mother sleeping in the universe  
my best friend  
so soft and gentle  
the open eye  
unity in the world  
a lovely home sits there thinking,  
dreaming.

Her people scream with terror  
They yell out Stop! Stop!  
The blood sinks through the soil in the tree roots  
All you hear now is pow, pow, boom!  
I wake up and see a man lying there  
not opening one eye,  
but he is fading in the sky  
a future father is gone, Bye bye.

*Renita Williams*

## Haunted Haikus

Landmines

The kids cry and fall  
They are hurt by it all, bombs  
the missing leg gone.

HIV

Young women, young men  
Hop to bed and then again  
the clinic sees HIV.

Death

Heartbreak burns softly  
Sorrow screams loudly, pain aches  
death of human cries.

Holocaust

Stuffed up train reeks, smells  
Shower filled with gases, burned ashes  
cries out for help, scream.

*Renita Williams*



## Ode to the Trees

Sister of the planthood  
Why do they treat you that way?  
Growing above peoples' graves.  
You are so strong, you can  
knock down anything in your way.

Cut into millions of pieces,  
blood dripping so much it can make a puddle,  
So heavy, it burns. It's almost like magic.  
Don't you feel like the world is invading your space?  
But we need you to make paper  
we need wood for fireplaces.

You are a sunrise,  
you keep it cool when it's hot  
You can get elderly  
to the point you have to get cut down.  
Don't you feel invisible?  
Nobody knows your name, nobody cares about you.  
But the world need you so much that  
If you did not exist, there would be nothing to touch.

*Renita Williams*

## I am, I am

I am the footsteps of tomorrow.  
I am the legend of morning trumpets.  
I am the secret, grave voyage.  
I am departed caution.

I am the breath of a 2 month fetus.  
I am a coral forbidden backpack,  
also opaque eyes.

I am the bang of a souvenir drum.  
I am a decent speech of a breathless man.  
I am ancient flutes during summertime.

I am... who I am... I am the woman  
who stands above us, who breathes everyone's air  
I am, I am Renita Williams.

*Renita Williams*

## My Kaleidoscope

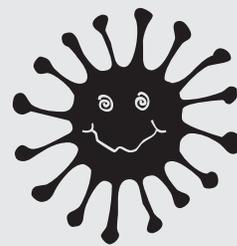
Stopping black and pink  
yellow-gold and aqua roses,  
skipping through a star-filled field,  
turning into silver spoons and frying pans.  
My octagon-shaped life is running on pink colored gas,  
a deer hopping by a field of tiger-orange stemmed black-eyed susans,  
a rabbit with periwinkle and black polka-dots somehow,  
and in some strange way, turning into cones of all colors.  
Finally a turtle with a star on his shell,  
and insects with a sense of pushing them toward something,  
they turn into the most beautiful roses you have ever seen,  
and the prettiest stars that ever gleaned.

*Jasmine Murray*

## Dancing

Dancing is like a fast beat to a song.  
Dancing is a math problem  
you're trying to solve.  
Dancing is like you're on your own  
land and you can do whatever  
you want.  
Dancing is a car speeding across  
the street.  
Dancing is the sound of your heart  
beating fast like you're afraid of something.  
Dancing is the taste of a spicy  
piece of candy.  
Dancing feels like a hot bubble  
bath where you can relax.

*Tylia Bell*



## May

Fresh trees blossoming  
Blindness beyond the horizon  
Plants blooming, the sun slightly askew  
The fading fall of the sun holds a dream  
The fragrance of the strange, exotic mist  
comes at random

A salty, bitter taste from nature  
Flying left to right  
The memories of dawn,  
holding a blankness  
only a slight laughter might see  
The forgotten glow of a ghost  
holds a secret of many disbeliefs  
The flight of feathers blowing backwards  
beyond a hurricane of eyelids  
wanting them to fly away

The mystery, howl  
almost a blur, behind the secret  
rhythm of a guitar  
which is a comfort, by a candle  
of an exotic empire.

*Kiana Murphy*

## The Dark

A dark destructive time is at hand  
An illusion of a scarlet end of being  
The tempest destroys all  
The earth's core, driven to destruction  
Thunder is crashing through the air  
Mankind is going down  
Into the burning fire of a firefly  
Driven down into the abyss,  
Where death is certain, the biggest fear  
oO all fears is ourselves  
The destruction of earth is now  
Fear the darkness.

*Damon Kee*



## The Sleeping World

The sleeping world  
So lovely and peaceful  
So gentle and beautiful.  
The universe is different.  
It wakes with no unity  
The mothers are dreaming?  
No, they wake up  
Sometimes to a stressful life.  
Doesn't want to be home  
Is so lovely, but her life isn't  
Being put under pressure  
Don't know which way to go,  
Left or Right?  
She doesn't want to be here  
So she leaves the universe  
With one eye open  
To look at the universe that is destroying itself.

*Kiana Murphy*

## Rollercoaster

My life is a rollercoaster.  
Sometimes I'm happy and sometimes I'm sad.  
Sometimes I'm up and sometimes I'm down.  
The thrills are sometimes like taking pills  
Having to throw up, but can't really get it out  
Having to scream, but know doing that will be the wrong route  
Knowing someone's gone and you can't bring them back  
Knowing that the railings and bars are the only things keeping you on track  
Sometimes you're under too much pressure and would just shut down  
All of this will just make you frown  
by hearing the sounds  
that keep you moving up and down  
The sounds go cling, cling, pow  
but the sounds don't keep my uncle  
from going down to the ground  
Hearing the cling, cling sounds again  
but it's not the rollercoaster,  
it's the ambulance coming to get him  
Never wanting to hear that cling, cling sound again  
but just wanting a friend  
to stop this rollercoaster.

*Kiana Murphy*



## Haikus: Why?

You should speak your mind  
Don't hold everything inside  
Let your insides out

Within a rude world  
Want to come out from within  
Leaving the bad outside

Eternity come  
We have been waiting too long  
For the worst to come

Today we wonder  
Why are blacks killing each other?  
Forever death waits

The last breath of life  
The wicked voyage beyond  
Drags the lifeless loss

*Kiana Murphy*



## Think

Explore your mind, not just your brain  
 take the time to think of the things you can gain  
 when you think...  
 about the things in the back  
 the back of your mind where  
 you wrapped your thoughts in a box  
 a box with chains set on fire  
 never to be set free.

Think so that you can smell your mind burning  
 in the back of your mind,  
 smoking so much you can see it out your ears.  
 Think so much that it becomes  
 a rollercoaster of a natural high  
 taking you high, higher, highest...  
 until it gets you to the point  
 where all you want to do is...  
 Think.

*A. Montel Brooks*

## Misty World

The evolution of a misty world  
 Impossible morning of footsteps  
 So breathless  
 That a flute's voice may secretly  
 Depart you from the fog

The eccentric sizzle of an ancient drum  
 Hypnotizes a trumpet  
 To secretly stay on beat

The loss, beyond a grave  
 Speaks for itself, within a speech  
 That no legend may hear

The windswept voyage  
 Within a wicked prism  
 The glimmer of a brightly lit caution sign

Telling you  
 To never walk out of the evolution  
 Of a misty world

*Kiana Murphy*

## Montel Reads His Own Palm

Blinded to his own future  
doomed within his own life  
growing old, impatient, and senile  
as he wanders into the galaxy of nothingness

His talents are growing old  
the cheese has gone bad  
and the leaves have gone purple  
in the salad that he calls his life

Beaten down and stomped on  
and trampled and choked  
till the point where he wants to end it all  
by the slit of his arm

*A. Montel Brooks*

## Hyperbole

I am as tall as 1,000 books stacked on  
top of each other. My skin color is as brown  
as 2 brown crayons put together.

My hair is as long as a 50 foot  
extension cord. My hands are as soft  
as baby lotion.

My eyes are as big as 4 polar bears,  
my feet are as long as 100 yardsticks.

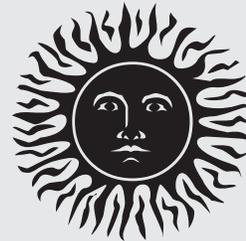
My socks are as small as 3 ants.

*Johnetta Simmons*

## Sleep

Now I'd lay me down to sleep  
but no one's there for my soul to keep  
within the blackness and the light of the candle  
in the back of my mind  
resembling the life of a fragile fragment of flesh  
I have left burning the rose of my mind  
petal by petal  
as an angel hovers above  
that rose quivering and wondering  
as the darkness in the cloudless sky takes over

*A. Montel Brooks*



## Winter

Winter—

It's the time for me  
watching the snow fall  
having the miraculous feeling  
of just knowing that it's coming

Feeling—

The snow in my hand  
bringing kids joy across the world  
laughter and happiness  
moonlit rooms watching movies with hot chocolate

Hearing—

The wind behind your ear  
following up with an ice cold snowball  
to chill your mind and body  
listening to your mother yell at you  
at 8 o'clock in the morning  
Montel, get outside and shovel that daggone snow!

Smelling—

The cold sweat of  
when you're outside playing snow football  
smelling cookies in the oven  
and hot chocolate on the stove  
Smelling love from families and friends  
that care for you  
I wonder how that feels.

*A. Montel Brooks*



## Prince

Arrogance beyond belief, the child of greatness  
Royalty among degeneracy,  
Instead of the shiny gold and silver  
He wilds out with a color of his choosing  
Puts his power to use in sinful ways  
Kiss the royal rings, as he says  
Besides all hail him, it's  
Awww man, it's him  
A crown of thorns, robe of fire  
and advisors twenty deep  
He never fights his own battle,  
but his people bring that heat  
Strength of a million  
within a whisper of his voice  
His father will pass down  
the prize of his choice

*A. Montel Brooks*

## Sleep

Before I sleep, I think of  
What will happen the next day  
Light is what I see,  
The burning candle,  
Guarding a cloudless sky  
The royal corners of my room,  
Providing endless darkness  
And a secret door filled with amazing things  
Outcropping of shadows on my window  
Trees are scare for the time being  
My eyes close and I drift into dreamland

*Damon Kee*

## Unfinished

July is a heated summer month.  
I feel the heat radiating on my skin.  
It burns my body like a volcano.

I don't hear a silent moonlight  
when the sun goes down into a secret  
almost secluded place

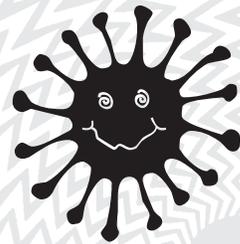
Evening is a neon eyelid  
filled with the sounds of an empire  
I see a child...

*Damon Kee*

## Destruction

I am a cup of death  
Filled to the top with hatred  
The anger boiling inside of me  
Like a kettle of hot water  
It rages like a black tornado  
Destroying everything in its path  
My red hot angry knife  
Slices the last bit of light and love  
The darkness covers everything  
And chokes the life out of life itself  
Red and black covers all the earth  
With slaughter and murder  
Destruction is my name and  
That is what I am

*Damon Kee*



## What did I say?

My world is monochromatic  
In black I see an abyss of anonymous thirst  
A pack of newborn prophecies to be revealed  
My universe is a legacy of wisdom where I am king  
My cursed world is a gift for people  
Who understand what life is all about  
The things are complicated, so  
Now  
What did I say?

*Damon Kee*

## I am?

I am trying not to be what I think I am  
hiding every day from people, not thinking I'm a man.  
I am probably a superstar inside, trying to hide  
from paparazzi who try to make who I am.  
I guess I'm just paranoid because people pass me by  
staring like I'm not there and thinking I'm not nice.

Come to think of it, who says I can't make myself out to be  
who I want everyone to be, just like me?  
I am the person who is transparent, stuck in a verse like this  
trying to be everyone else.  
Well, if that's true, I try too hard  
to be a carved monkey in that monkey suit.  
If that's true, I am the moon, full of no emotions  
looking at the one guy everyone and me tries to be.

I am trying to hide, trying to hide with everyone  
and I'm dressed and hidden into what you're doing  
and what's new, hey, but if life was the same  
who would be the leader, tough guy everyone follows  
in the fast cars, superstars,  
and his kid who is going to be just like him  
not because he's good, but because he's cool in school  
and all the kids he knows are just like him.  
I am exactly who that guy is, or him, or her,  
Just like you.

*Luqman Abdullah*



## House Kid

I'm a house kid,  
never touched by the outside world  
a little late, if not for the TV  
no one asks if I want to go out or  
to take out the trash till I get ready  
yep, just sitting in a basket of clothes  
until finally my parents grow old  
and throw me out unprotected and naked  
for the corruption and  
life of a real man and  
they will kill and destroy that house boy  
now that is the reason  
I don't think of the real world of murders  
of every house boy or  
momma's boy, just like me  
getting an expiration date  
just to be the bob or bill or catherine  
that murders my house kid

*Luqman Abdullah*

## All over the inside of me

All over the inside of me  
it seems empty and  
full of organs  
all over the inside of me are  
no rooms for friends or emotions  
only one emotion, of distrust  
that leads into a fake sense  
of being on a cliff  
with a hill over top of  
every false person or blade of grass.  
The only one that follows what I do  
is my shadow  
which is also beneath me  
all the arrogance of leaves  
and birds hanging off of me  
But I can't survive without them  
the only people it can't overcome are not there  
and it is all over  
the inside of me

*Luqman Abdullah*

## Inside the body

Atom in the body, descending through the human  
doing impossible missions, reaching the heart  
passing through the throat  
the foggy organ that plays like a symphony  
including flutes, trumpets, and drums.

This is the way to the heart:  
Saying the secret password  
and buying a souvenir by the artery  
that looks like a prism  
Thus get going through the body  
when it breathes out, the body rests  
till the morning, till doing  
his wicked journey again.

*Jamal Buggs*

## I read my palm

I wake up in the morning  
quarter to ten  
waking like I was from  
dawn of the dead.  
I got in my car  
did the same thing every day  
had no future.

Life didn't seem that great  
blinded by the work life  
Like rats eating at cheese  
they eat and eat  
it's gonna run out eventually  
Once it does, I'll be doomed

And see the light  
that my job ain't right  
It's too late,  
running from my own fate  
I might be young  
but I'm not as senile as they think  
Once you're born, you're gonna blink.

And once I do, I'll realize  
life doesn't go in a straight line  
They tell me that zombies are a myth  
but the things I've seen, it's true as this.

*Luqman Abdullah*



## My Shadow

My shadow wears a blue shirt and leopard shoes.  
 She has a red hat and she knows everything.  
 Her hair is black and brown.  
 She loves to talk to me.  
 I love to talk to her.  
 My shadow does not like to wear dresses  
 because she thinks it looks ugly.  
 My shadow likes to look at people.  
 When we play on the playground, we have so much fun.  
 She lives in me.  
 She loves people and she loves my family too.  
 My shadow is nice and good to.  
 My shadow does not like bad people.  
 My shadow likes to do things with me.  
 My shadow is a ghost.

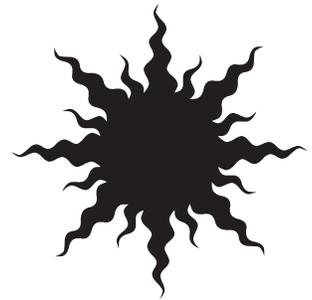
*Stelita Better*

## Breathless

I feel like I've been flooded  
 with all the ancient history  
 held inside  
 I follow my footsteps  
 in a repeated form,  
 the sound of an off-beat trumpet  
 with a pair of busted drums I heard

I pictured myself as grave material  
 what a bad loss  
 so I use my past as an unfinished story,  
 so I depart from that  
 I feel wicked  
 It's impossible, it's like a filthy hurt  
 I am without a breath, almost breathless.

*Danielle Stover*



## Loving Moment

I would go out when the sin dies  
 and go see some people  
 get into a stream of water with cleaning products  
 I would write something in a secret compartment  
 outcropping the floor with my guards  
 and back-up angels that shield me from the dark light  
 into the summer, allowing me to sleep  
 having a loving moment

*Jamal Buggs*

## More than you think

My brain is this bridge with deep thoughts  
My heart is the trees, used a lot  
The water is my eyes, farther than you can see  
Saying, "There is more to me than you think."  
The water's reflections are my soul.  
The black sky is dark emotions I show  
And the little land is what's hidden about me  
Saying, "You don't know that much about me."

*Maryum Abdullah*



## Ode to the Moon

The brightness that lights up the stars  
centered in the middle with ostentation

Vivid as it is exquisite, surrounded by  
its azure admirers. The night sky.

It is a sculpture of brilliance,  
created by no human.

The way it glows, blinds us, it cannot be  
reached. For it is an untouchable beauty.

The moon remains young, and still pretty,  
notorious and wondrous every night.

*Maryum Abdullah*

## Alliteration

A vivid vapor comes to my nose  
while the  
cool air covers my face, colors  
all around, like black and gold  
Vicious and vile  
football players surround me  
Running away from  
the dangerous destructive players  
I find a hole big enough for me to fit  
I break away, bouncing through the hole  
350 yards total,  
uh no, said the players  
Touchdown, game winning point.

*Terry Bennett*

## Ode to the Moon

Twin of the sun  
light for the sky  
beside the stars  
and has many scars

Without its luminous light  
it would be a lunar eclipse  
With the light you shine off  
you give us all a favor

We all travel safely in the night  
Bright like the sun  
and nice to my sight.

*Marché Shields*

## Where I wanna be

I'm stuck at the bottom, but I want to be at the top  
It feels as though there's no way  
so I guess I should stop everything  
It's so cold and rocky, I wonder if I get there  
will they like me?  
It's such an emotional whirlwind  
wondering if I'll ever fit in  
I don't care about them, that's the thing  
It's who I wanna be  
that makes me wanna scream  
I wanna be at the top of the mountain  
without getting trapped in an avalanche  
Will I make it? I don't know.  
I'm so scared and it's so cold.  
I'm scared to face them at the top  
I wish I could put my life on hold.

*Nefertearia Crawley*

## Dewayne reads his own palm

As he predicts, his grandmother's going blind  
She gets cataracts and he leaves his mind  
His feelings are tossed, like an old country salad  
yeah, with cheese, and as he begs please,  
Lord God, give her her eyesight back  
because I don't want my grandma to be  
blind to cataracts.  
She helps me to plan out my future  
Lord God, I really don't want to lose her.

*Tionna Wade*



## Colors

Sepia  
Mold,  
Spreading around bread  
Smelling like stinking cheese.

Fuchsia  
Night sky,  
Setting on a beach  
Reflecting light on the ocean

Emerald  
Diamond ring,  
Sparkling while waiting in its box  
Surprising people with a smile

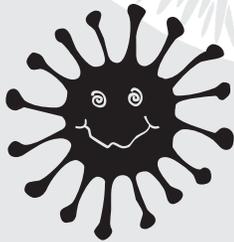
Violet  
Leather jacket  
Making people stop and stare  
Glaring at them with evil eyes.

*Jessica Smoot*

## The Great Life

Well, mom,  
Let me tell you  
Life for me has been like a sunset on the beach.  
Sometimes it's hard, but I'll just keep on going.  
My life had some dark times, but as I turned around  
the morning light hit me.  
All of the roses and daisies are blooming,  
and the rain is coming down so fast,  
but pure, and the satin sheets cover my heart  
as I think about you at night  
The love I have for other people is bare  
My love for you will last for a lifetime  
There's only one way you can go, and that's up,  
looking at the sky.

*Renita Williams*



## December

December, laughter is in the air  
and we're feeling good,  
because it's Christmas Day.

We opened gifts and ragged appliances  
but forgot about the lost child  
knocking on the door  
asking for some more.

Before that night, a ghost  
walked through my house with a candle light  
thinking that she was the boss of my house.  
My eyelids opened and I smelled  
the peach fragrance of exotic soap.

The blindness of  
a lonely guitar, feeling sorrow  
because its strings won't pluck a note right.  
A mystery is not yet solved,  
but the smooth hurricane comes backward  
hitting the island.

The blankness on the sheet of paper,  
wanting a pen to hit it.  
December is the best.

*Shamia House*

## Kaleidoscope

Jumping, running, playing  
in a field full of daisies.  
Wishing and watching earrings on sale  
hoping they'll be hanging from your ear.  
Sleeping for hours,  
dreaming of what could be  
instead of what is.  
Bugs biting, wood cutting,  
taking every piece of feeling you have.  
Dancing the night always,  
because you know what you want in life.  
Leaves falling from trees dying,  
wishing they had nine lives;  
Dogs barking, cheetahs attacking,  
S's falling in threes.  
Homeless peoples' teeth rotting  
because they have  
no money to buy a toothbrush.  
Wolves protecting their young.  
Feeling lonely at school  
because people think you're square.  
What if you had a yellow,  
orange, tan, white and purple rose?  
Having to imagine the future, it's hard, isn't it?  
But the life you live will always have adventures.

*Shamia House*



## The Angry Sea

As pretty as the sea is  
something's always being thrown into it.  
Just like a whirlpool of bills  
sucking up the best credit cards  
you want the most,  
or like banana peels  
being washed away in its divine waves.  
Legends of trash  
being polluted into its happiness  
The sea's unhappy ways are getting angry,  
so just like the stopper, it holds everything you love  
away and you never see them anymore.

*Shamia House*

## Shamia Reads Her Own Palm

Sometimes she's blind.  
Sometimes she spills  
Slowly drinking a healthy apple smoothie  
I dream of what my senile ages are going to be like.  
My future is what is in me,  
And always on my mind.  
I never forget the talent in me.

When I think of cheese,  
I think of the sun that's probably  
Going to burst in a million pieces  
In about 3 billion years.  
I think of books I've read  
And see whether they're myths.  
Is that what I wanna believe?

I'm insouciant when I get yelled at  
Cause when I do, it makes me stronger.  
When look at a salad, I think of the lettuce  
Which reminds me of the fresh green grass  
Or the carrots and the purple cabbage.  
I wonder when the rainbow is gonna appear.  
The tower that doomed me inside  
my life  
is what I have, and I don't plan on wasting it.

*Shamia House*



## Falling Star

A little bit of life swiping victory in the air  
while she screams for the children to stop  
we shoot, we score, as the lesson of life falls  
to a deepened hole of anxiousness and anger  
She screams! We cheer!  
As her voice goes hoarse,  
we feel as good as any rising star  
As any rising star, she screams  
the last little breath she can spit  
until no longer can we hear her  
She's drowning in that  
deepened hole of anxiousness  
and sickened emotions  
Can I be appreciated for once  
is the last thing she could say  
before the hole of deepened thoughts  
of emotion  
of unappreciation.

*James Tindle*

## April

April—  
Its smooth fragrance,  
Its random howl

I can hear the fascination in her tone  
By the silent guitar  
And the fading laughter  
In the distance.

I can see the gathering  
Of the crimson wings  
Beating their exotic colored rhythm  
The glow in their moonlit eyes  
The risen dawn or  
The ghostly blankness  
That comforts my shadow.

I can feel the unwritten thermal  
Beneath my ragged unstable skeleton  
Falling under the rain  
Pouring down,  
Breaking my every bone.

*James Tindle*

## Untitled

Through...  
a thought, a hole, a bittersweet memory,  
a spiked collar, a yellow boy running down the hall,  
chains galore, transmutations circle and  
iPods, Mohawks and tattoos carved into his right arm  
black pants, red and black fingernails, mascara,  
lip balm, black sugar, barbed wire  
and dark sunglasses, and back  
through  
a wired fence  
out an open door and on  
to a chain wired with spikes and dubs.

*James Tindle*



## Every Definition Entry (Free)

Every branch means a new entry.  
A new definition, an unspoken word.  
No moaning, just another page  
And another night of vocabulary words.  
A bush is a meaningless bush,  
But a branch is a new path,  
A forgotten shadow, a neon hope.

*James Tindle*

## Crimson

Crimson  
Chain  
Tying down the deep desires  
Scratching the glass stops

Fuchsia  
Cloak  
Draping the everlasting sun  
Burning the tresses of our culture

Ochre  
Flower (rose)  
Blooming from a sea of lilies  
Mingled in with colorless candles

Ivory  
Slipper  
Mooning the naked legs  
Scraping the fancy carpet

Lavender  
Dress  
Covering the bare woman  
Forming a whole new fashion

Vermillion  
Pen  
Filling every line of my paper  
Scratching down my every thought.

*James Tindle*

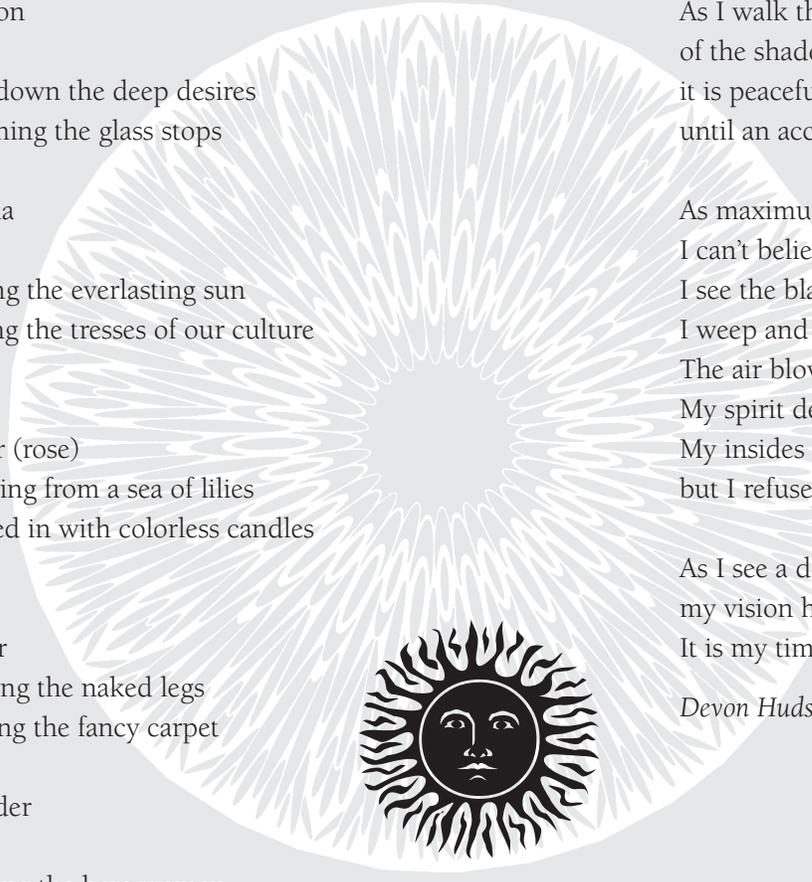
## Valley of Death

As I walk through the valley  
of the shadow of death  
it is peaceful  
until an accident

As maximum teardrops fall  
I can't believe it  
I see the black rainbow  
I weep and weep  
The air blows me hard  
My spirit decays  
My insides shine  
but I refuse to go

As I see a dark light  
my vision has spoken to me  
It is my time

*Devon Hudson*



## From Sunrise to Sunset

Orange birds chirping outside my window  
Voices to sing with symphony  
from the geometric song  
A bell to ring heaven and earth  
The pink and yellow sunshine slowly rising  
and falling from the fiery cloud  
Watered with tears  
The wind of the world with peaceful warring  
Like dancing on the moon blinded by beauty  
I am dining among stars, so graceful in number  
Into a bittersweet memory.

*Tempest Jackson*

## Silent Storm

It is a silent storm,  
the soothing noise of rain  
against my window,  
the sight of lightning  
across the late night sky.  
I open my window to smell  
the scent of the rain.  
As I walk back to my bed  
I think about  
how long the storm will last;  
I go to sleep and when I wake up  
the storm has passed.

*Jevin Hampton*



## My Family

I've known my family. I've known them  
long enough to tell that they have  
deep  
dark  
secrets  
and no one can tell me otherwise.

My family business  
stayswithme,  
nobody else. I've known them too long to  
bring  
them  
down.

I know when my mom or relative's not  
playing when they say, "Focus on your  
work  
and be a young lady"

*Shainairie Jones*

## Pathos

He is running out of breath  
Low oxygen  
So small to do anything  
Yet so smart to think  
As I held something so precious  
With such innocence  
Mom's gone, left alone  
Wondering how I have held  
Someone that's alone  
So frail with brown eyes  
Wondering how I could see  
Someone all alone  
The person who may be a baby  
Is a reflection of me  
He is my newborn yet to come  
But for now I'm all alone

*Joylin Yates*

## Like Dancing on the Moon

Dancing on the moon will be a dream come true.  
The moon brings light in darkness.  
When the moon rises, sometimes colors of pink  
and yellow sunshine appear,  
a red line in a blue sky.  
When the DJ's record scratches of music  
sometimes you can hear the bell ring  
between heaven and earth  
while dancing on the moon.

*Jakeia Steele*

## Untitled

My father used to pick me up  
Throw me in the air  
My mother had just got off work  
At home in Atlanta  
Angry, saying  
"Your father is dead"  
I cried and cried  
Was he really gone?  
"Yes."

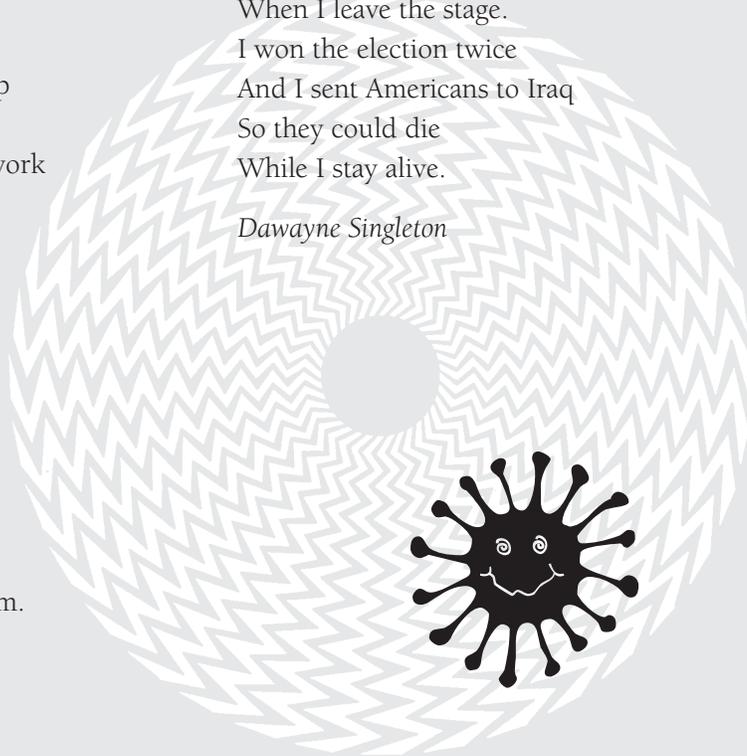
He vanished into the night  
They searched and searched  
And finally found him  
Shot, on a curb until 1:45 a.m.  
I am missing him every day.

*Evan Phoenix*

## Commander-in-Chief

I come on stage  
To tell the truth  
But I lie to everybody  
When I leave the stage.  
I won the election twice  
And I sent Americans to Iraq  
So they could die  
While I stay alive.

*Dawayne Singleton*



## A New Republic

I was a powerful black man in Montgomery  
All the white people hated me  
Some loved me  
I marched for civil rights for all black people  
One of my civil rights companions is Rosa Parks  
She helped me end and start the bus boycott  
They used to beat on us and wet us  
with the water hose  
We had separate schools but one day  
we will all become one  
Because one day we will all be free.  
Free at last, free at last  
Thank God Almighty, we are free at last.

*Jemaroco Spencer*



## A Stranger

Low elevation means a poor person with no life. They live on the streets with no roof over their head. The weight of weakness is on the person whose life is lonely and short.

I see him every day on the streets asking people for money. I always wanted to know why a red line is in the blue sky. But in the stranger's eyes I see him frozen in a cold world yet leaping for joy.

*Lathan Armstead*



## Cool Fire

A fire is hot when you're cold  
A fire is cool throughout the snow  
It's like a breath of smooth wind  
That you can't hate  
Cool fire is fire with lots of faith  
I love the warm and sunny heat  
Cool fire is like fire that can't be beat  
It's one-on-one weather  
Like heat and wind put together.

*LeQuonte Rhones*

## A School Desk

It is short  
Not very tall  
It has four legs  
Just like a dog  
I put books in its mouth  
To save them for school  
My, oh my  
I didn't think a desk was so cool.

*Cameron Hilliard*

## The Struggle

Today is the day  
She is happy, cheerful as can be  
But she must do things to earn it  
She must wash the beast of dirt  
Cut the fiery plains  
And it's hard

She's dying of thirst  
And starving for fun  
But she must work until her body  
Breaks down  
The hours passed, at 2:57  
She is done for the day  
And happy as can be  
But when she goes to get her prize  
She realizes that the clock was wrong  
And now her last chance for fun is gone.

*Destiny Myles*

## Close Your Eyes

I can smell the new beginning  
And feel the old going away  
I can taste the great life coming right at me  
Then I hear nothing  
The sound of silence  
Then a loud boom out of nowhere  
Things start to move quickly  
I get scared and realize  
It was only my imagination

*Kiauna Hamilton*

## My Friend

When I'm with him, I feel safe  
His hazel eyes sparkle in the dark  
His teeth are sharp like a shark  
With golden fur  
He's warmer than the summer  
He's like my guardian angel

*Evan Phoenix*

## Confused Is She

To question God on a journey with no path  
Searching for answers with such emancipated hands  
And a poor uplifted soul staring at the delicate rock  
Beside the white rose  
Lost in mind, lost in self  
Wondering has she ever felt

The bittersweet memory makes it hard  
To focus  
The weight of weakness won't go away  
Like red dirt and black sand  
Life comes and will certainly go  
Deep down she knows something is missing  
But what?  
Time awaits—she's still questioning God

As she finishes her journey she sees a man  
Blinded by beauty into her head  
Not until I find my inner soul  
She thinks  
Days go by—as she drowns with glory  
She imagines dancing on the moon  
She loves herself  
A bell to ring heaven and earth  
“Let justice rejoice,” says she  
While dining among the stars  
She whispers, “I can finally be free”

*Joylin Yates*



## Shadow

My shadow, my black  
shadow why are  
you so scary golden.

I wonder is  
ink blacker  
than my shadow  
I stand to shiver.

My shadow  
why are you  
so quiet you  
answered with body  
movement.

I wonder  
what do  
shadows look  
like with golden  
and silver chains.

*Antoinette Better*



## *hArtworks* featured writer **Naomi Ayala**

Naomi Ayala works as an education and evaluation consultant, freelance technical writer, and teacher and, until recently, she served as a Visiting Humanities Scholar for *Hermana a Hermana/Sister to Sister*.

She is the author of two books of poetry, *Wild Animals on the Moon* (Curbstone Press, 1997), and *This Side of Early* (Curbstone Press, 2008).

Her poetry has appeared in numerous journals; most recently in *Ploughshares*, *Poetry Daily*, *Saranac Review*, *Hostos Review/Revista Hostoniana*, *MARGIN: Exploring Modern Magical Realism*, *Saheb Ghulam Daily* (Afghanistan), *Gargoyle*, and *Tiger Tail*; and in several anthologies of contemporary Latino writing, including *Boriquén to Diasporican: Puerto Rican Poetry from Aboriginal Times to the New Millennium* (University of Wisconsin Press, WI, 2005), *Latino Boom: An Anthology of U.S. Latino Literature* (Longman, 2006), and *First Flight: 24 Latino Poets* (University of Arizona Press, 2006).

Naomi Ayala's translations of poetry have appeared both in the U.S. and Switzerland, and she has reviewed books for *Feminist Teacher* and *The Washington Post's Book World*. She has also been the recipient of several awards and honors, and of two artists' fellowships from the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities. She lives in Washington, DC.

On Monday, December 4, Ms. Ayala met with students in the D.C. Creative Writing Workshop's after-school program to read and discuss her work.

*Above left: Luqman Abdullah; Above center: Naomi Ayala*

**Naomi Ayala:** First, let me tell you that I've been a writer for a very long time. I started writing when I was young, around twelve years old, the same age many of you are now. To me this is important because I think that around your age you know exactly what you want and you know your dreams. Your dreams are important—you don't have to be a certain age to have them. They don't have to be realistic all the time, they can seem impossible, and you can still have them and this is okay. So, I want to start with a poem called "Immigrant's Voice"

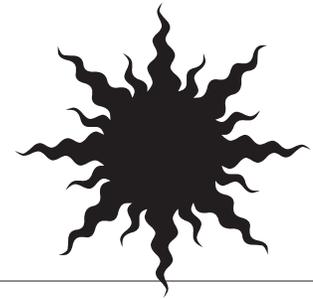
I heard an immigrant 's voice.  
It rubbed the walls of downtown buildings clean,  
wiped the glass of steamy truckstop windows with its breath  
& o.d.'d on caffeine  
& cigarettes dawns before work.

It cleared a fog in January  
with its whistle in its jeans.  
It climbed the flagless pole on the Green & shouted,  
itself amast recited  
from the dollar  
*e pluribus unum e pluribus unum.*

It prayed in front of the gates  
of Union Trust,  
climbed city hall steps, kneecaps to concrete  
during unemployment  
& asked the mayor, please, a shot of whiskey  
or dope, or a dollar, a mighty dollar.

It cut open its forearm six inches  
at his machine operator's job  
cutting steel-  
his words deep-blue-purple  
but he had to be grateful,  
had to be grateful  
for the work.

It pounded on its lover's breast,  
this voice  
demanding *where* is the dream?  
where is the dream?



*Bruto No. 28 for  
Drawing Your Ancestors*

Face it.  
This here's about loss  
and regaining  
what's been lost.  
Call your spirit back.  
What is the birthing  
song you need?  
The secret vow?  
If your day is a drum,  
drum. The rest  
is about dancing.

It broke into tears at public urinals  
& spit on statues on the way  
home  
until sweat poured  
from the contour  
of their stories.

It gargled the news  
nights after supertime  
& crawled shivering into its sleep.  
What sleep there could be.  
What dreams.



**Shannon:** How did you feel about the poem?

**NA:** When I wrote this poem, I had a whole lot of things to say about what it's like to be an immigrant. And I didn't think I was going to be able to do it, so instead I wrote a poem about a voice, and the voice became all these people I was trying to represent. It was kind of a hard thing to do. And I felt good that I was able to do it, because when I write, even to this day—I've been writing for so long you think you can do anything, which I could. We all can do whatever we can do, right? But you don't know for sure until you get it done. So that's a good feeling, that you can do something that you can imagine in your head.

**Jamal:** What does the poem mean?

**NA:** A poem sometimes—and this is good—is going to mean different things to different people. Like the general idea, everybody will get it, but it will mean particular things to different people. I don't want to tell you what it means because it's like, if you were getting a surprise, and I'd tell you what the surprise is before you open it.

**Jamal:** I like that better.

(Laughter)

**NA:** It's also exciting to guess or to find out. Can somebody tell me your general idea of what you think, and there's no wrong answer, because that's what it means to you as a person. It's not a math problem, where one plus two will have to equal three. So, what did you see in this poem? What did you hear?

**Jamal:** Immigrants asking for whiskey?

**NA:** Aha, you heard that. What else did you hear?

**Shamia:** Dreams.

*Above photo, l-r: Shambriel Metts, Yasmin Jones, Shannon Allen, James Saunders, Naomi Ayala, Jamal Buggs, Danielle Blake, Nichell Kee, Shamia House, Kiana Murphy, Wendie Thomas, India Bell*

**NA:** Asking for dreams? Anything else you heard? Anything that sticks out?

**Jamal:** That Spanish word you said? E Pluribus Unum?

**NA:** That's an interesting phrase, it's actually Latin. Can somebody tell me what that means? You've seen it—you've had it in your pocket.

**Yasmin:** Money?

**NA:** Yes, it's written on money. (*After much discussion*) It's the motto of the United States, it means, "From many, one." Any other ideas about what this poem might mean?

**Jamal:** I guess it's about people who come to the United States having dreams, and their dreams not coming true.

**NA:** Yes, that's the main idea of the poem. And you get there and people tell you you're going to get this dream, and you get to this place and there isn't a dream. It didn't exist. Everybody knows what that feels like, right? Do you have any more questions?

**Shannon:** What is your worst fear?

**NA:** Oh, you are good, aren't you? Do you do this to people all the time? I really have a great deal of respect for people like that, who'll ask a question like that. What is my worst fear? It's not death. I am at peace with my death. I think when I became a brave person in my life, from all the things I had to overcome, I decided that the worst thing that people can do to you is hold your death over you—you could be tortured and then you could die, and all your worst nightmares—then people will try to oppress you, to enslave you, to force you to do things against your will, to take things from you, whether it's your pride, or your dignity, or your body, or your money, or whatever you want. In the end, the worst that can happen is that you die. That's our worst nightmare, so if you're not afraid of your death, can somebody do anything to you that you don't want them to do?

So I'm not afraid of death, I'm afraid sometimes of getting lost, but inside myself, like in my journey as a person. Not getting lost physically, because **I like to get lost for fun.** (Laughter) I do, I love adventures. Like in the woods, I've gotten lost—sometimes the most for, like, ten hours, and not been able to get out. And that was scary. I don't know—can I get back to you on that? Oh, and cockroaches for sure. If there's a cockroach anywhere nearby, I flip out, I scream; I'm a complete chicken. Just the look of it, it looking at me, the antenna, it moving where it wants to move. I love bugs, I don't have any problem with bugs, but I do have a problem with cockroaches. I have actually decided to get over my fear so I wrote them a poem this year, I wrote two roach poems.

**Jamal:** Does "la cucaracha" mean cockroach?

**NA:** Yes. It's kind of like a joke, that song. It comes from a stereotype—Latinos used to be called roaches, Puerto Ricans in particular. So it plays off of that. But the song is, I believe, Mexican.

*(Jamal reads one of Naomi's poems aloud)*

**NA:** What a great honor. Thank you so much. You did a great job. So what about this poem, do you have any questions about this poem?

**James:** What's your favorite image in the poem?

**NA:** “My history is glass I walk on with my soul on fire.” I’m proud of that. If you can imagine, it must be a painful history—your soul’s on fire and you’re walking on broken glass. That’s like two major things going on at the same time, to me that captured how I felt. The glass is itself your history being broken. I think, when you’re trying to figure out what your history is, it’s like your personal history, your people’s history. You’re putting all this stuff together. Some people will tell you “This is your people’s history, it belongs to you.” Right? But your people’s history is also your family’s history, it’s also your own personal history, all that stuff mixed together.

And then you get the history you read in books, which isn’t always accurate, and you’re piecing all these things together, but your history is also what you see of your inheritance. For me, it’s the stuff I’ve seen Latinos go through, and women. In this poem I’m talking particularly about women. And somehow, it’s 2006 and we’re still living part of our history that the people who came before us lived, right? And sometimes that really hurts. And it’s surprising that we still have to go through that same history in our lives. To me, that was like walking on glass. But I’m always putting it back together, it was this poem for me to tell myself get it together—like put it back. It’s empowering. You feel good, and strong, and courageous when you can bring those pieces back. Or you can be that somebody who sits around and just sees broken glass. And just stare at the broken glass, and you just keep stepping on it and bleeding. What do you do with that? How do you move on from that?

For me, an important part of this poem was that “learning to be free.” Do you think anybody needs to learn to be free? I think we all do. I think we get used to being in boxes and put in places, and because we’re used to it, we don’t realize it. And when we start getting out a little bit, then we realize, oh, I’m inside a box. And the more you step out, you see how big the box is, and the box behind you is like this huge building, and that’s where you’ve been. You have to learn to get out of it. I think your history and your determination help you do that. Where are you? You have to know where you are, so that you can go where you want to be. Other questions?

**James:** As a young writer, I already know that writing won’t be the most lucrative career. Do you think that your passion for it makes up for not having all the money in the world?

**NA:** I think wealth is a very subjective thing. I think that wealth is what you think wealth is. And everybody thinks wealth is very different things. Wealth isn’t just money. To me it’s like your health, your joy. I know people who are monetarily wealthy, and they’re not very happy people. For me, wealth is a balance of many things. So, I don’t look at as a sacrifice, I look at it as an investment. I like being happy. **If you do what makes you happy, you will draw happy things to you.** From the time I was your age, I couldn’t think of doing things that made me unhappy. Life was pretty unhappy for me already. And I’m kind of glad because it made me learn really fast that that’s not what I wanted, that I wanted to be happy. Happiness comes from inside. I love learning more than anything. I like writing because I could do it forever and still be learning. I don’t get bored. **I don’t like to be bored.** That’s it! That’s my greatest fear in the whole wide world, to be bored! I feel like I’m not living life when I’m bored. It’s the most horrible thing in the world, that’s what I’m afraid of. And I think I could write poetry for the rest of my life and not be bored. When you do what you love, the rest will follow. I really do believe that.

## Magnolia

You are  
another planet's daughter.  
a he-she, a different kind  
of Aphrodite,

in me my own woman  
placed on my hand  
when I expected  
a weighty river stone.

You smell like sleep walking  
at the edge of the world  
before dawn,  
a sip of water,

will mean even more  
when I am old –

hair peering from my nostrils,  
a moustache  
well-defined and dark –

arching to kiss the ground  
before I leave,  
one with bones,  
one with flowers.

Previously appeared in *Saranac Review*.

## Hole

One morning they dig up the sidewalk and leave.  
No sign of the truck,  
only the large  
dark shadow digging and digging,  
piling up sludge with a hand shovel  
beside the only tree.

Two o'clock I come by  
and he's slumbering in the grass beside rat holes.  
Three and he's stretched across a jagged stonewall,  
folded hands tucked beneath one ear –  
a beautiful young boy smiling,  
not the heavy, large shadow who can't breathe.

Four-thirty and the August heat  
takes one down here.  
He's pulled up an elbow joint  
some three feet round.

At seven I head home for the night,  
pass the fresh gravel mound,  
a soft footprint near the manhole  
like the "x" abuelo would place beside his name  
all the years he couldn't write.

Previously appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Poetry Daily*, and  
*Sahed Ghulam Daily* (Afghanistan).

## Fire

Fire is deadly  
fire is a life  
saver. Fire  
can burn you.  
It can keep you warm  
when you're  
stranded in the  
middle of  
no where.

Fire can turn  
a dream house  
into a pile  
of ashes. Fire  
can keep your  
dream warm  
as fresh  
toast.

*Clas Duncan*



## My House

Big as the planet Jupiter, my house  
stands tall as a tree of youth. Beautiful  
as an angel, wider than a football stadium.  
My house stands in that place of my own,  
a place I will never be alone. My home.

*Colletta Paylor*

## A Poem for Myself

I was born in Washington  
DC. I was born black in  
DC. I walked barefooted  
on the concrete, but  
when I reached the  
age of 5, I moved to  
Maryland. I left on  
a Friday evening. I was  
mad because I  
knew I was going  
to miss my friend  
the day we was moving  
I was talking on the  
phone outside, sitting on  
the steps.  
I done strolled through  
Virginia, Pennsylvania and  
New Jersey  
Going back to Maryland  
to stay with my friends.  
Going back to Maryland  
to stay with my friends.

*Ashley Stevenson*

## S.E. Congress Heights

The hood of S.E.  
like others the only J.O.B.  
that can be found is on  
the corner.

Where people can  
get lit up for stealing  
a dipper, or something  
simple such as crack  
or cocaine.

Where you are a  
child one day and a man  
another, thinking you go hard  
just because you shot someone  
or if you had your first  
puff of weed.

*Jamal Clark*

## Poem

I think a poem is like the President  
he do what he feel, a poem expresses  
what you feel.

*Amber Williams*

Wendie Thomas



## I Am

I am a sprout or even a seed  
I am a flower growing between.

I am a child of a family  
that loves me

I am an inspiration  
I am an inspirer

I am a person of  
many things

But soon as I want to be any  
thing

I will be a whistle in the  
breeze

forget it, I am just me.

*Devonte Walker*

## A Poem for Myself

*(or blues for a North Carolina boy)*

I was born in North Carolina;  
I was only a toddler.  
Smelling cigs and weed when I wake up.  
The smell from my cousin's room.

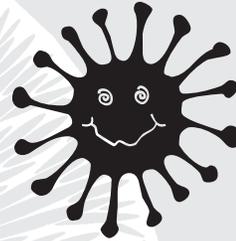
Then my family and I left that place.  
We finally came to DC  
My first school I attended was the X  
From DC to Maryland.

From Maryland to DC.  
The we finally stayed in Congress Park.  
My family lived around there,  
shooting mostly every night.

Since I was 1-13  
8 people already killed around here my hood.  
That's where I was born and what hood I live  
in right now. Congress Park

Smoking crack selling weed  
Sold heads drinking so much they can't even  
breathe.  
That's where I live, the park, and you can't stop me.

*Trevon Jackson*



## Waking Up, Unity

Sleeping peacefully, wake up  
opening my eyes, first dreaming  
looking out my window  
looking at the universe

Hearing my mother's lovely  
gentle voice, seeing my  
beautiful room and thinking of  
the world

and what I will  
be doing next, one eye open in  
my home I am...

dreaming.

*Markiya Davis*

## an ode to shoes

shoes are unique  
wondrous like magic  
so exquisite, they light up my day  
they are like sculptures in my closet  
so numerous and heavy  
during the summer, so comfortable  
shoes are beautiful  
cozy and warm in the winter  
all different colors  
blue, black, red and more  
so many outfits you can style them for  
as many as words spoken for poetry

*Kiera Coleman*

## My Ode to Pink

Why is pink disrespected?  
Is it the way it is feminine or  
the way it makes you look little?  
Whatever the reason is, it  
should be respected more than blue.

Pink makes me feel amazingly fun or goofy.  
Blue makes me feel sad. Pink keeps me  
calm and laughing. Blue is rowdy  
and makes me mad.

Pink makes me happy when  
I'm sad and brightens my day.  
Pink makes me lightweight  
in the sky. When I look at you,  
pink, it's like magic in my eye.  
I come down from the clouds  
and fall on my pink plush pillow  
and my fluffy pink bed.  
So to whomever disrespects  
my pink, just take one minute to think.

*Shambriel Metts*



## Untitled

the bull is trying to fight a  
blazing rose blocking his path  
diamonds are being formed by  
the lion  
claws cutting through cubes,  
running until the horns of the  
bull just become dark red,  
then a great white shark  
comes with a mind swept of  
impossible odds

*Bruce Gibson*

## My Crazy Friend

She sometimes feels unappreciated.  
She has a complexion of caramel  
brown.  
But, it's not her looks, it's her  
personality.  
Inside she's like a sister,  
we stick together, like cling.

She is silly in three different  
kinds of ways.  
She sometimes smiles, her cheeks  
puff up like cotton balls.  
When she is sad, she leans on me  
and says she has a problem.  
When somebody passed in her family,  
she shivered and cried the blues.  
I tell her it will be all right.  
They will walk God's path,  
He will lift them up and  
they are in a better place.

*Keyosha Richardson*



## Firefly

I saw a bright light in the sky.  
My memory said do not kill it.  
But I did it anyway.  
And I reigned over the world and  
I was in charge of the world.  
Then, I was full of wrath  
and destroyed the world.

*Jada Brooks*

## Mother

Oh lovely mother  
that sleeps so long at home  
while she rests her feet.  
How peaceful she looks  
while I walk around the house  
wondering when my mother is  
going to wake up. But, as I wait  
I lie down and start dreaming  
about the universe, I don't know why.  
I go out in the world, I am scared and by myself.  
But don't know why.  
As I wake up again, I hear a noise.  
I go to my mother as fast as I can.  
I am standing over her, I gently check  
to see if she is breathing. I go in the bathroom,  
I look at myself in the mirror and say,  
I am beautiful, I am beautiful, I am beautiful.  
I close my eyes for a minute,  
I open my eyes nice and slow,  
I turn around and my mother is there  
with her eyes open and I know  
she is alive and we are unity.

*Wendie Thomas*

## Katrina

people running jumping  
a circle of tulips flying in the  
wind, oak leaves fly in the  
storm as trees blow and  
form into octagons  
lions and monkeys and  
turtles swarm in the  
wind like a rhinoceros  
trying to bum  
rush everything I see,  
visions of xboxes  
playstations flying  
as clouds form tornados

*Deshaun Williams*

## Linda Reads Her Own Palm

Life is blind.  
This may be a myth to you  
but true to me. Doomed like a  
carrot in a salad, as if everyone looks  
insouciant while I struggle for relief  
empty as a juice box, which lies in my  
future. I am now senile, I don't  
remember the smell of cheese.

Life is blind because you don't know  
what's going to happen. Doomed like a  
carrot. This phrase knows how it feels  
to be in debt. Insouciant eyes, look  
but don't help. I'm thirsty for wealth  
that can fit in my hand. I feel old  
like I can't do it myself. My  
senses are gone, left without any help.

*Ashley Cooper*

*Nichell Kee*



## Open Mind

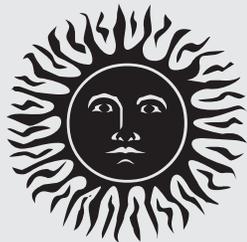
My open mind has 9 planets  
the stars, moon and the sun.  
But it's kinda cold and  
it has no gravity.  
So in other words, my words  
are harsh and they only float in the air.  
But only one star shines so brightly.  
Well that means my open mind might  
not be as nice as my 9th planet  
and the 9th planet is sensitive and caring.  
It might shine so brightly but it  
doesn't get any attention.  
So when the meteor shower hits,  
I really don't care unless it hits  
someone I love.  
You know what? My open mind  
isn't so good, nope,  
not so good at all.

*Tierra Thornton*

## Ode to Candy

Oh candy, you  
bright and beautiful  
thing! You brain tease  
the minds. You're sweet,  
sour, tasteless. But  
you tend to be an  
addiction for some.  
Oh candy, sweet sweet  
candy! When I'm down,  
you're up. You brighten my  
day. Teachers, parents,  
and dentists don't understand  
that I can't get enough  
of you before and after  
and in between breakfast,  
lunch and dinner. This is  
my ode to candy, my  
sweet  
sweet  
candy!

*Tierra Thornton*



## Being 19 years old

I don't know what it is like to be 19.  
But I really want to be 19.  
I mean, it's the best.  
You're not underage, old enough  
to live by yourself. You're able to drive,  
get a job, have privacy, no curfew.  
You would have your own rules. But, I'm not  
gonna say everything is gonna be perfect.

*Markus Johnson*

## My Shadow

My shadow has never been noticed  
Its light is dimming down  
and time is running out  
for my shadow to show.  
But most of all, my shadow  
may never get time to  
show that it can shine  
like it's a star.  
My shadow has always worn dark  
blue, for some reason it  
doesn't want to jump into pink.  
Why don't you want to show?  
Maybe if you show for one day  
I'll leave you alone.  
If I can be free, you can be free too.

*Tierra Thornton*

## I'll Tell You

I'll tell you,  
life ain't no joy ride  
for me neither.  
And yes, there have been  
some mud holes and humps  
in the long road away from home.  
But from time to time, I  
did have some rest stops  
that helped me get past  
the intersections and get to  
the next one.  
There was one time that I  
really needed your help getting  
up a huge hill.  
This road in life is  
timed, you have to finish before  
your time runs out.  
Although there are roads  
in life that are as smooth as  
words that flow out of your mouth.

*Tierra Thornton*



## My Life

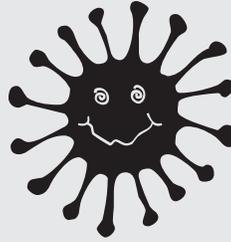
My image is like a  
souvenir sitting where nobody  
sees me.  
Sometimes I think of myself as a  
precious flute blowing out precious  
sounds.  
My life is a legend that lives  
on forever.  
My life is like a star  
shining brightly in the sky.  
Sometimes I picture myself as  
a dirty, filthy rag never being  
seen and thrown in the trash.  
My life is like a breath full  
of ice.  
My life is like a secret story  
when you have to figure out  
who I am.  
My life is like love when love departs from  
me and goes to someone else.  
Sometimes my life can feel like  
the loss of my best friend.

*Danielle Blake*

## My Moody Days

My mood on my good days is  
sweet as candy.  
And I can be good and generous  
and sometimes, my attitude can be  
Like a raging tornado crushing  
everything in its path.  
Some people look at my attitude  
as celestial.  
And some worship me for my attitude.  
And I put my life in principles,  
little categories to see what I'm about.  
Then, when I look into the sky,  
I look upon the evening star and  
wish that I have a good day the next day.  
And when I get upset, I feel  
self-defeated.  
And, then when I look at myself, I'm  
semi-precious.  
When people talk about me,  
it's like I'm under a bridge and  
it fell on me.  
Then, at the end of the day,  
I feel delicate again.

*Danielle Blake*



## My Inner Shadow

My shadow is a  
splitting image of me.  
And sometimes, my shadow  
has her own mind.  
My shadow has sneaky ways.  
Sometimes she tells me  
things that I shouldn't do.  
Sometimes she tells me,  
"stop and think for a minute."  
My shadow lives  
deeply inside me.  
She comes out when she feels like it.  
I can't help what she says.  
Sometimes my shadow is  
an imitation of me.  
She's sensitive, pleasant and sweet and  
she doesn't cause any trouble.  
She respects people and she listens.  
Sometimes she gets her way  
with everything  
and at the end  
she always wins.

*Danielle Blake*

## My Life is . . .

My life is a matching game  
When you have to find out who I am  
Some people take me for a joke  
Because they think I'm weak  
People think since I'm so nice  
So they take it for granted  
But no matter what they say  
I still believe in myself  
My life is when someone picks  
A controller up and starts  
To play with me  
My life is when the game is over  
I'm over  
My life is when someone goes through  
The channels and has nothing to watch  
It's a basketball game  
When the buzzer goes off  
The quarter is over  
My life is a computer  
When you turn it off, it's over  
My life is when my grandfather died  
I just started to recently cry.

*Danielle Blake*



## Untitled

Who am I . . . I am black  
I'm strong, I am intricate  
but also decent. I am the drums  
to my heartbeat.

I am a glimmer in the dark.  
I am an ancient legend who's slept for too long  
and is now awakening. I am my own souvenir.  
I am my own breath that I breathe in the morning.

I am a long, never ending speech.  
I am my own little secret that can get  
loud at any time  
I am my own footsteps to greatness.

I am a dream that everyone thinks is impossible.

*Nichell Kee*

## My Winter

It's a miracle that winter's  
finally here. It's snowing and as  
I go outside, it becomes quiet  
. . . it's soundproof.

As I sit outside with my eyelids  
shut, I sit and think . . . I think  
it's strange that when it snows,  
it becomes silent.

So silent that if there was a tornado  
going on, you most likely wouldn't hear it.

But as I keep walking in further  
toward this wintry wonderland, I  
start to think again, I think of it  
as my own little secret . . . my own  
little hideout.

I start to hear the laughter of  
my family and it breaks the silence  
but warms my heart.

As I start to go beyond my hideout  
it starts fading . . . fading into spring. I  
try to run back but darkness covers over me  
and I start to think I've become blind, so I open  
my eyes and my face is being covered  
in snow.

*Nichell Kee*



Fly!

my soul is flying  
soaring in the sky real high  
just want to be free

free to soar the sky  
not wanting to breathe in dust  
to just be ahead

be smarter and brave  
for the things to come ahead  
fly to reach the sky

fly to get your dream  
fly to hear the beating drums  
fly to the footsteps

fly to see morning  
fly to the breathing uncle  
take a souvenir

*Nichell Kee*

## Her Own Palm

In her blind eyes  
she will see her insouciant  
future.  
She's ready for  
her doomed life as  
she gets old and senile while  
reading an old myth.  
Her life is described as  
a tossed salad with a glass  
of juice on the side.  
Her heart is like melted cheese  
on top of a great piece  
of pizza.

*Yasmin Jones*

## Dreaming of the world

As I'm sleeping  
I'm dreaming of  
this peaceful world  
that's beautiful  
gentle and lovely  
I'm the mother  
of this universe  
sending out unity  
to all homes with  
one eye open  
ready for any thing  
I will wake up  
with unity on my mind  
just dreaming of  
a world of peace.

*Yasmin Jones*



*Marquette Pittman*

## I am

I am impossible  
walking in my mother's  
lost footsteps, I'm a  
legend, my soul is  
a witness waiting to  
be heard  
I'm like a souvenir  
that will never be forgotten  
from wonderful voyage  
I am Yasmin Jones,  
an eighth grade student  
I am a voice of a mother  
I am a pop star wanting to be  
heard  
I am whatever you say I am

*Yasmin Jones*

## My emotions

Floating in polluted  
water like  
leaves in the rain

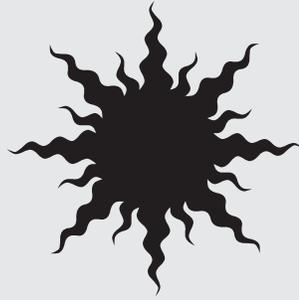
Blood dripping from the  
sky in the evening  
when the sun is  
fainting

Sitting in my room  
daydreaming of random  
mysteries and miracles thinking  
of all the heat from the blistering  
sun

I imagine neon colors  
all over the exotic night sky  
and the shadowing of the  
moon reflecting through my window  
glowing

Underneath all of these  
emotions I feel special

*Yasmin Jones*



## Ode to the box

Friend and protector  
keeps everything together  
If I put something in it  
I know it will be in  
the same place when  
I come back.

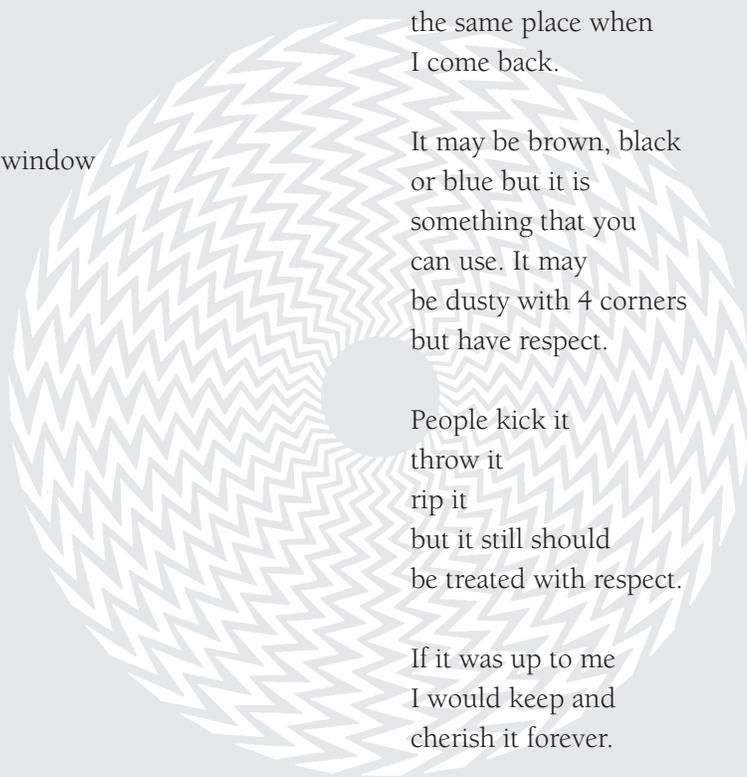
It may be brown, black  
or blue but it is  
something that you  
can use. It may  
be dusty with 4 corners  
but have respect.

People kick it  
throw it  
rip it  
but it still should  
be treated with respect.

If it was up to me  
I would keep and  
cherish it forever.

It was given  
to me by  
someone special.

*Cherish Gaines*



## December

I  
December  
it's cold, it's sometimes snowing  
it's sometimes green,  
sometimes red  
sometimes you  
have to go to bed

II  
The candle burns  
upon the moonlit  
sky

I dream of what  
I am going to  
get

III  
I get up at  
the crack of dawn  
to see what's under  
the tree

IV  
There was nothing  
under there

*Ashley Stevenson*

## Secret evolution

My souvenir came from the heartbeat of the drums  
The footsteps of a brightly lit voyage  
The blasting trumpets over the soft melody of the flutes  
Going along with the windswept morning sun.  
I also got it from the glimmer of the soul passing its grave  
The ancient departed person who is now breathless  
The filthy fingers running over the wet coral  
The secret evolution of the world soon becomes a legend.

*Nichell Kee*



## Waking Up

When I go to sleep I wonder  
if I will wake up the next morning  
or if the gun shots I hear will  
go away, I wonder if  
my mother will be  
there for me or when I die  
if I am going to fly in the  
cloudless sky  
I wonder if my life will be the same  
some people think life  
is a joke but I don't  
I want to live, do you?

*Cherish Gaines*

## Kaleidoscope

It is red  
spinning like  
a tulip being  
thrown up in  
the air inside  
of the  
red spinning  
thing it has a  
maple tree  
feeling. That's  
how strong  
it is. It has  
beds, shoes,  
daisies, dandelions  
board games, horses  
and a guinea pig.  
They all have  
multiples of colors  
such as red, pink,  
blue, orange, and  
purple. The dandelions  
were walking, the  
guinea pig was jumping  
while running.  
An upside down "A"  
without the dash.

*Ashley Stevenson*

## Shadow

My shadow has orange hair  
she has red eyes  
wears purple and loves plaid dresses  
and blue shoes.  
She wears snake skin shoes,  
when she walks past me, it sounds  
like the ocean waves.  
She scares people when  
they walk past.  
She hurts people  
when they ignore her.  
Sometimes I want to tell  
my shadow to change the way  
she is and not do some of the stuff she does.  
Secretly my shadow lives inside of me.

*Ashley Stevenson*

## What I think at night

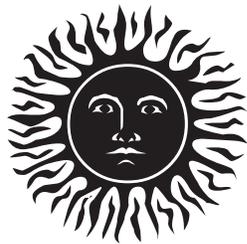
Before I go to sleep, I think  
of lying on the soft clouds once  
I put my head on my soft pillows,  
it feels like I am born in a  
cloudless sky. I was thinking of  
when I was born, I heard a  
secret name saying Ashley with  
two burned fingers, it lit a little candle,  
I heard the flames scattering, then  
I saw a blown rose.

*Ashley Stevenson*

I am, I am...

I am the writer behind the poem  
I am the first breath  
of the newborn baby  
I am an inspirational leader  
I am the grave of the  
deceased  
You may think I am losing  
but I am gaining  
I am the secret of the legend  
I am the souvenir in  
the gift shop  
I am the trumpet that  
makes the music  
I am the rhythm  
that keeps the band marching  
I'm the caution behind the sign  
I'm the microphone  
which projects the voice  
of a speaker while saying a speech  
I am an impossible challenge  
I am the calm blow of  
the wind  
I am

*Reginald Conway*



*l-r: Naomi Ayala, Jamal Buggs, Shannon Allen*

## My Life Is a Car

My life is a car, it is a Range Rover SUV going down the 95 interstate, with red color coming off the car like red bursting flames.

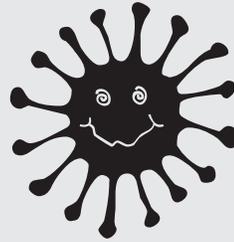
Sometimes I'm confused like I do not know which way to turn left or right. Sometimes I might cruise around not knowing where I'm going, following the rules and regulations like stop signs on an empty highway. But when I'm mad, I feel like I'm in control, passing all the signs going over the speed limit, running from the police. And sometimes I could be nice, putting everyone in the seat of my comfortable ride. Sometimes I might be peppy, but just run out of gas. I would build that gas back up by laughing at silly jokes. That's how my life is a car.

*Reginald Conway*

## Dream of the Oceans

Dreaming of blue oceans  
swaying like a mother  
rocking her baby to sleep in a gentle motion  
the breeze of the ocean  
sounding like the mother's lovely voice singing  
trying to overpower the baby's cry.  
Then the breeze calms down  
and the baby goes to sleep.  
Then the waves start to flow again  
and the baby's eyes open  
but he's calm not saying a word.  
The ocean stops again  
and the baby falls asleep  
with him and the mother's dream  
uniting hoping that the ocean won't  
wake him up anymore.

*Reginald Conway*



## Cleaning Grandma

This lady cleans dishes, washes  
clothes, scrubs floors, and cooks dinner.  
But there's something on her mind,  
she's wondering, does she thrive enough?  
Is she appreciated? Should she work harder?  
Genice can give gracious gifts  
to guys and girls, maybe she feels unappreciated.  
But in my book she is an angel without wings and a halo.  
I appreciate how she cleans dishes with her bare hands.  
I love how she tosses the clothes into  
the washer in a diligent fashion, I like  
the way she does everything. She's amazing  
and indescribable, and she is also my grandmother.

*Reginald Conway*

## Intense Personal Color

Teal  
eyes  
watching over servants  
giving unspoken orders

Teal  
eyes  
touching souls  
pounding for eternity

Scarlet  
minds  
hearing and  
seeing all

Cyan  
ears  
listening  
and acknowledging

Turquoise  
hearts  
beating  
like a drum

Lavender  
nose  
just had copious  
smells

Azure  
body  
smells fresher  
than an unkempt dump



Violet  
faith  
filled  
with exhaust

Fuchsia  
dazzling envy  
loving  
gruesome souls

Magenta  
optimistic person  
loving and  
caring for all

*Monae Smith*

## My Name

My name sounds like a wolf that just got kicked out of the clan. My name taste like a cookie without any flavor to it. My name is plain. My name feels like grass, because it is ragged and itchy and lumpy. My name looks like a Playstation, old and out of date. My name smells like McDonald's sugar cookies and sweet vanilla milkshakes.

*Marcus Johnson*

## Monae Reads Her Own Palm

I am living a life of an  
insouciant salad filled with  
cheese while juice  
squeezed from the cucumbers  
and tomatoes of my doomed  
heart filled with the  
myths of my senile almost  
blind shadow while I'm  
visualizing the future and  
how my life will be.

I am living on a vacant  
stoop searching for the  
right or maybe left trying  
to get a clear vision of  
who this person is in  
my future.

I am living an adolescent  
tragedy while my parents  
are trying to rush me  
to the insane asylum  
thinking I lost my  
head maybe I'm just  
dead.

*Monae Smith*



## Pathos

During this journey  
wandering through the month  
of December, January, June,  
and July crying and  
sighing  
thinking about dying  
trying to have a graceful  
emancipation  
while hearing papa  
say, "hi girlfriend"  
and nana shouting,  
"why, why come on, I know  
you can do better Nae-Nae,  
get your head in the books  
and stop talking so much,  
you gotta make it for you,  
they can't make it for you."  
While mammy and  
daddy co-sign, saying  
"mmm um."  
I'm weeping and grieving  
and eulogizing over  
the 4 family members who  
have died in the past  
nine months, while giving  
my own hasty generalization.  
My mind is feeling and  
signing this paper anonymous,  
in my placid, fiery, fragile  
but glorious heart beating  
with teardrops of blood dripping  
dripping but all the time the  
blood was mine.

*Monae Smith*

## Kaleidoscope

Shouting pink  
and weeping clear diamonds  
leap like frogs  
computers downloading slow  
like turtles  
cell phones out of range  
and flying like leaves  
while having a windswept  
blue triangle with orange knees  
while white chrysanthemums  
surround trees.  
Televisions blank like  
brother's mind  
while cheetahs fast  
like Lamborghinis  
swinging sticks  
hard like As  
yellow clouds  
make a huge maze  
while life is square  
and very bare.

*Monae Smith*

## Untitled

I have to follow my Godmother's  
footsteps  
It's impossible  
to do a back flip and drink juice  
at the same time  
I play the drums sometimes. I have a  
legend.  
I have to be brave for my baby cousins.  
The sky is foggy. Back in the day, I was  
ancient.  
I am luminous because I'm intelligent.  
I have atoms, the smallest elements.

*Shannon Allen*



## Nature's Kaleidoscope

Running like a baby cheetah  
and turning into a beautiful  
rose. Crawling is a lion  
and windswept through the stars.  
The wind is pushing the tree.  
The streams are pink.  
The turtle is in the water that is green.  
A triangle looks  
like a red oak tree. The water  
looks like a light green  
circle. A lion with  
purple dots all over his body,  
playing and eating food  
and playing video games  
in nature.

*Shannon Allen*

## My Heart

My heart is a fire  
because my family  
won't get together  
because of the bad  
things they say to each  
other, that's why my  
heart is a fire.

My heart is a fire because of  
the things that happen  
like my brother sleeping  
everyday and I tell my  
Dad, but all he says is,  
"Jamie, you have to walk your sister  
inside the school."

That's why my heart  
feels like a fire  
because of the things I care  
about are a fire in my heart.

*Jamie Warren*

## the voice

the voice in my ear  
that keeps talking to me in  
my head that tells me to eat  
cookies, the voice in  
my head that tells that boy  
to stop, the voice in my head  
that tells me to dance,  
the voice in my head that  
tells me to smell roses. Get out.

*Jamie Warren*

## A note to God

If I wrote a note to God,  
I would speak what's in my soul.  
I'd ask for wars to end and for peace  
to mend, for love.  
I'd say, give us the strength  
to make it through, help us find love  
'cause love is overdue and  
it feels like we haven't got a clue.  
I need some help from you.  
Give us the help to carry on,  
if I wrote a note to God.

*India Bell*



## I am India

I am India  
I know I can  
be what I want to be  
if I work hard at it  
I can be where I want to be  
I am a person who says something  
and means it, not a person who is  
wicked,  
or a lost person. I am a decent person  
and a legend. You will never catch me  
saying bad words or negative things  
to someone or someone's parent  
or any other child or guardian.  
I am India.

*India Bell*

## through my kaleidoscope

I see black and brown goblins like meerkats  
leaping through the unique azures and tulips  
sliding into elephants, stampeding through  
the Amazon river, rolling into unique blue and  
black diamonds, hopping into fish circling the coral reef.

*Aasiyah Muhammad*

## My Life is a Wild Ride

My wild ride is like a  
bike and on that bike is  
like falling off of it and  
getting a scratch on my arm  
or knee, you can't imagine  
how my wild ride is. If  
you were on my wild ride,  
you would see how it feels  
to be on my wild ride  
so don't say you know how I feel  
because you don't. Because  
that wild ride will hurt you.  
That's how scary it is.  
I don't even want to be on this wild ride,  
so why should you.

*India Bell*



*Jamal Buggs reads aloud from Naomi Ayala's book*

## Homeland

I'm at home  
all alone then  
I wake up from  
a deep sleep  
dreaming about  
the universe of  
the unity with  
my eye open. Then  
my mother yells  
from the gentle,  
beautiful, lovely  
world. Then I  
come back from  
the peaceful land.

*Bnyonka Simpkins*

# Summer

I  
Summer  
its shine, its island

with its beauty  
of waves

as people come  
upon its sandy surface

II  
I swim with the dolphins  
a rhythm, swim in  
the ocean as the waves hit me  
upon the sea

that summer morning,  
we came upon the surface  
with the sand, a sandy-like  
beach place.

I say this  
on a summer day  
with the secret of its day  
with the dream that people  
will come

III  
The waves are  
shaking and it's pretty

People upon the beach,  
bodies

## The Me No One Sees

The me no one sees is hidden behind leaves  
underneath these leaves are growing trees.  
My tears flow like the river inside of me  
sometimes I believe they can water a tree.  
Behind my eyes are colorful leaves  
they're fallin' off of very big trees.

*Day'Quan Wright*



IV  
The different kind  
of fish swimming  
with their friends

I walk upon  
the beaches

I sit on the sky  
I sit with the sunset

*Bnyonka Simpkins*

## Wild Style

I am very wild.  
I try to keep a smile,  
while laid back in style.  
I learned to jog a mile  
as long as I keep a towel.  
my nickname is Quan, it came  
from my Mom, who got it from Tom.

I am very short  
my Mom said I look good in skorts.  
Sometimes I wonder should I play sports.  
She's always there when I go to court.

*Day'Quan Wright*



## She is

She is dangerous like a tiger  
Her skin is soft like the clouds  
A tiger is fast like a cheetah  
She is as fat as the Capitol  
She is as white as a marshmallow  
She is as black as a hawk.

*Dominique Johnson*

## Skittles

Skittles the amazing taste  
it's like magic touching your tongue  
the puddle of flavors just  
boomerang back and forth

*Darell Caldwell*

## My Poem

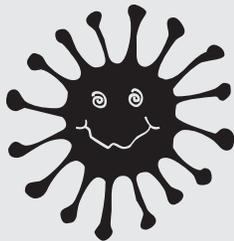
My soul is blue, inside and out  
I have a lot of feelings without a doubt.  
There is more to me than what everyone sees  
Build to destroy, built by trees  
Extraordinary in many different ways  
In the middle of a field with many different rays  
I stand very tall, but looked on as small  
Guess I'm nothing but a standing wall

*Earl James*

## Open the Door

When I watch you  
mishandled and misused  
and through the day you get through  
so young, but so mature  
wishing you would open the door  
let someone like me in  
and let our new relationship begin

*Earl James*



## Life and Wisdom

I don't know my wisdom  
I don't know how girls work  
I know that I am loved  
I know that I can sing and dance  
Sometimes I don't know who or what I am  
Sometimes I don't know who or what my  
friends are  
Sometimes I stop breathing so I think I am fake  
Never fake as a person, but fake as life  
Sometimes I don't know what time or day it is  
I don't know my life  
But I do know that I was made right  
Only I can have my life  
So tonight I'm going to live that life

*Denisha Bolden*

## I Know Why

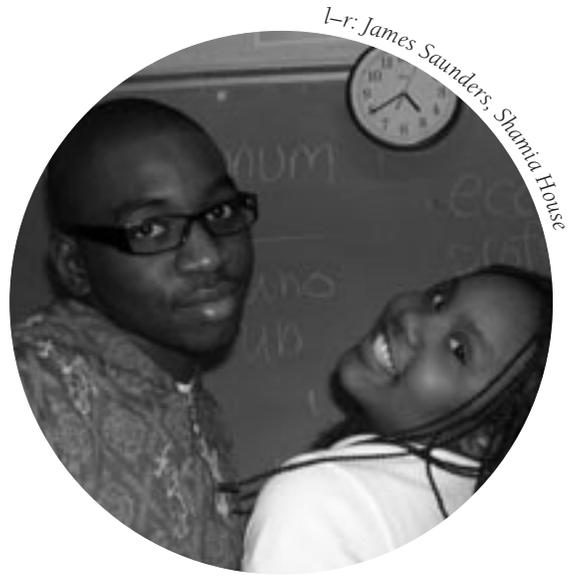
I know, I know why I woke up this morning  
Tryin' to get out of this school soaring, rain shine or pouring  
I know why you always try to follow someone bad,  
Role model or your own gran'mama  
I know what it takes to make you smile  
Roses, chocolate and maybe a kiss, just to make it worth your while  
I know what it takes to get out of the hood,  
Maybe rob a bank or finish school and be good  
I know what it takes to know some more  
Either stay in school and try to be cool  
Or call the hood your home and die tomorrow

*Luqman Abdullah*

## Inside

Inside is like the world is going to end.  
My heart is pounding and sad.  
Behind my eyes there is sadness.  
The me no one sees is behind the doors.  
The inside of me is happy.  
My soul is joyful and happy.  
Underneath this is my skin and fear.

*Emmanuel Youman*



## Joy Inside My Tears

My tears are full of joy  
I cry because I am happy  
Tears of laughter, tears of fun  
Tears of being with my family and friends  
Tears of having fun, being loved and  
Being around people you love  
Tears of joy, this is my life of  
Tears of joy.

*Brittney Savoy*

## delicate

my heart is very delicate  
just like the petals of a flower  
the trunk of a tree  
is like my soul

*Kaniece Whitaker*

## My Amazing Wisdom

I know my life is wonderful.  
I don't know what will happen to me in the next few minutes.  
I thought I knew how to be very friendly to people.  
Sometimes I understand the ways of life.  
I don't know everything about life though.  
I know the meaning of love and passion.  
I don't know the meaning of violence and force.

My wisdom is my conscience that's inside of me.  
It's private and personal with love inside of me.  
I only let my wisdom out when there's something special happening.  
Everyone has their own wisdom. Some wisdoms are sad, happy,  
angry, or excited.

*DeJon Tucker*

## I Write Fiercely

Rain falls like the sunset going down.  
Scissors are sharp like someone's dressed up for a party.  
If your mind is like a shining sun,  
your eyes should shimmer like a star.  
I write fiercely like a tiger,  
and I'm dangerous like a lion.  
Broken time passes like a day never ends.  
But when I sleep, I dream as silently  
as a baby sleeps.  
His trust grows like a red rose  
awakening from its hibernation.  
You look out of the window and watch  
winter pour in as water runs in a sink.

*DeJon Tucker*



## My Special Wisdom

I know most of the things about my family.  
I love my family like the beautiful flowers.  
I know that God is watching me.  
I know that my mother loves me.  
I don't know that people care about me.  
I know that I always speak my mind to others.  
I don't know what people think about me.  
I don't know if I am special, because no one is.  
I know I am a beautiful child  
and I also have a lovely smile.

*Latia Pimble*

## My Poem

Inside my heart  
is passion and art.

Inside my heart  
it's very blue.  
That's my favorite color,  
is it yours too?

There's also blue water  
and lots of fun.  
There's nothing violent  
like knives and guns.

There are little coconut trees  
and bushes with lots of leaves.

That's what's inside my heart,  
nothing but passion and art.

*Keishawna Simms*

## Chaos

Inside me is fire in the sky.  
It's burning and dissolving  
I'm going to wake up  
poisoned and insane.  
My heart is burning like a flame  
and my fingers are static.  
I am going to battle  
and it will be chaos.  
No one will defeat me.

*David Brown*



## I know, I don't know

I know how to spell, read and write.  
I know that I can use these things  
to get somewhere in life.  
But I don't know where I am going tonight.  
I know how to read directions,  
I always read them twice.  
I know no one can be me,  
I know that only some one can see me.

*Nicole Williams*

## Joyful

Sorrow falls like rain from the stormy clouds  
Your mind shines like the sun just coming out  
I live as joyful as a non-worried person  
She is dangerous like a pit bull that has been upset  
Winter pours in as a cup of Florida's Orange Juice  
Broken time passes like a clock that has been set back  
Silent eyes are watery like the ocean

*Danielle Stover*

## Emotions

I feel upset  
I feel a little angry  
I feel okay

I am mad melting like a snicker  
unwrapping out of a starburst  
wrapper,  
mad as a stray cat.  
I am feeling okay  
feeling real bored, mooing  
like a cow, crying like a baby.

*Nicole Williams*

## Ode to the heart

You take over the body  
when the mind makes mistakes  
There are pieces to be found from being scattered  
'cause you are always broken.  
You try to stay closed like a lost treasure.

*Da'Shawn Washington*

## Untitled

His trust grows like a small child's hope,  
but as his trust goes down he becomes  
dangerous like a mountain lion.  
Your mind shines like the moonlight in Ocean City.  
Broken time passes like a bag  
of frozen chicken trying to thaw.  
We write as fiercely as if electricity  
is passing through your body.

*Myah Robertson*

## The life of love

The secret life of a broken heart  
as the sorrow falls like a tear.  
Your mind shines like a shooting star  
as the ordinary pain slowly flows away.  
I live in Loveland as a broken heart  
turns into many pieces and  
the birds of beauty come to light.  
The screams come to silence  
as the hips come to the dance's door.  
His trust grows like a burning fire  
as I dream of love as ghetto pain.  
Still broken time passes like a burning rope.

*Kiarra Payton*

## Real Music

Singing the blue birds  
Humming a sweet precious sound  
The best tunes in town

*Kiera Butler*



## Saturday

Saturday I was happy,  
like a white cloud full of shapes,  
a dog barking for his bone,  
a cake that was being baked,  
a fragrance of new perfume,  
packs of bubble gum that are chewed.

*Da'Shawn Washington*

## Ode to the pencil sharpener

Chewer of lead  
that is black, ugly  
and sounds like a bag  
of chips being crunched.  
You're the swallower of wood  
like a woodpecker.

*Herman Clark*

## Untitled

Peaceful, lovely  
Caring about the world  
Gentle, dreaming  
Always in a daze  
Helping, hoping, caring about me  
Never a beautiful universe  
Surfing in itself  
Sleeping nervous  
Scared of what you can be  
Hoping the next day  
You wake up to see

*Brittany Johnson*

## Dangerous girl like a gun

She is dangerous like a gun  
Her fist is made of steel  
She hates like a tidal wave  
She is boiling like an engine  
She is as empty as a flat tire  
She is strong and fast as a falcon  
She shocks like electricity  
She sticks like a magnet  
She lights like a candle  
She is as black as a burning rope

*Herman Clark*



## I Am

I am a child of God  
I am a scholar  
I am the first round draft pick  
I am the positive hurricane  
I am a dreamer  
I am the impact pf the future  
I am the flesh and bones  
I am the diagram of life  
I am the prospect of college

*Curtis Canty*

## Braids

My braids don't make me  
Do you like me for my braids?  
I am who I am

*Demarco Singleton*

## Untitled

Unity, togetherness  
Is what I wish upon

A peaceful world  
Why can't we live in one?

Gentle mother sleeping on air,  
In her room  
Yes, she's there

Without one eye open  
She sleeps among the stars

In an evil world  
This is what she calls home

But now she wakes up  
One eye at a time  
After dreaming about the universe  
Then spreads her arms and starts to fly

But as mother seems to soon notice  
Her life is a dream

*Kiera Butler*

## I Am

I am a beautiful, Intelligent Black Woman  
I am the hope for all black children out here today  
You shall know me as Sherita Angelica Grady  
Not as a nigga  
I am a queen  
Not a nigga

*Sherita Grady*

## Suffocating

I am suffocating  
And I just need to breathe  
I am suffocating  
And I just need to be relieved

Nothing I do is right  
Nothing they say is fair  
I cry and scream and throw a fit  
But no one seems to care

I can't do what I want  
I can't stay out late  
So now I sit here and write this poem  
To release my pain and hate

No one will look far enough  
Because I'm lost in my mind  
No one will search beyond my looks  
To see what they might find

I'm still suffocating  
And I still need to breathe  
I'm still suffocating  
And I...must...be...relieved

*Kiera Butler*

## School Time

Test taking is cool  
Kids learning in classrooms now  
Class reading is cool

*Marquell Bethea*

## Who Am I?

I am a scared girl  
Trying to build a better future with my sister  
I am a Queen who worships God  
I am a poor girl trying to fulfill my acting career  
I am a light-skinned girl  
Who is always being called white  
But I am actually a black queen  
Mixed with a lot of ethnicities  
I am a girl who is scared  
To live because I am scared  
Of getting shot  
I am a lonely girl  
Whose dreams might not come  
Until I turn 40 years old  
I am a loving girl  
Who shows love to any person  
Who shows me love  
I am a ghetto girl  
Who lives around fights  
Who lives around drug dealers  
Who lives around dope fiends  
Who live around people who have sex for money  
People who shoot at their own family  
I am a girl who has family and friends fighting  
A black-on-black crime  
Whose fight aids it and they don't even know it  
I am a girl whose dreams have yet to be answered

*Manaiza Kelley*

## Dancing to Go-Go

I dance in the street  
To the Go-Go beat ha-ha!  
As I beat my feet

*Manaiza Kelley*



Jamal Buggs

## Homes

People live in homes  
Some live out in the cold street  
Their dream is to be

*Brittany Johnson*

## Dreaming

Beautifully sleeping at home  
Dreaming about unity with her mother  
In a peaceful world with no violence  
And the universe is an island  
With a gentle breeze every now and then  
Then she says to her mother how lovely she looks  
Wishing that she would not wake up  
Then the alarm comes on when she opens her eyes  
And starts crying

*Jannett McKoy*

## Untitled

My life is like a movie  
People always acting in it  
Faking it  
My life is like football games  
Me always running yards  
My life is like popcorn  
People always popping up  
My life is like a baseball game  
I'm always running home  
My life is like school  
I'm always working  
My life is like a clock  
I'm always ticking  
My life is like a jam  
It's hard to get through

*Antonio Alston*

## My Pain

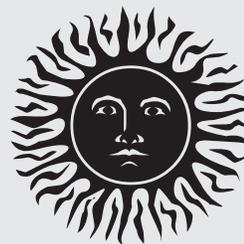
My rage, my pain  
My loss, my gain  
The shirts I've stained  
People I've blamed  
The people that bled  
The blood, sweat, and tears they've shed  
Doesn't mean anything—our lives are almost dead  
From the 911 “accidents”  
To the wars in Iraq  
And the tragic losses by “The Man”  
To the kids in the ghetto having problems  
To the grown-ups still trying to solve them  
My struggles, my pain  
Something I want to lose, but always going to gain

*Eric Quarles*

## Untitled

I'm not a nigga  
I don't pull triggas  
I want to be a millionaire and count figures  
Benjamins, of course  
Never will I gets stopped by force  
Maybe by brain  
Because I'm trying to be like Fat Joe and make it rain  
Racist cops  
Coming up with plots  
To stop the black Man  
Who thinks that life is about keeping a gun in your hand  
So don't call me a nigga to try to put me down  
Because you're wasting your time  
When you look like a clown

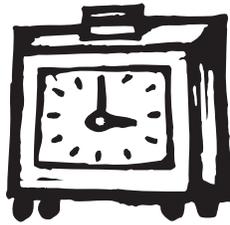
*Eric Quarles*



## Untitled

I am like the sky  
I get mad  
I am like thunder  
And strike people like lightning  
I am like a flood  
Just running through people  
Like a mad person  
I am like a mother bird  
Who attracts people when the mess with her family  
I am like a computer  
That breaks down a lot  
And it takes a long time to recover

*Martha Hardman*



## Sleep

Sleeping so beautifully  
She looks so peacefully  
Dreaming upon the universe  
Like she was put to sleep by a curse  
As she's dreaming of her mother  
She looked so stiff as her brother  
All of a sudden  
She dreams she's in a jungle  
So scared she curled in a bundle  
Then she closed her eyes and counted to ten  
Then she felt a great wind  
It was Hurricane Katrina  
And the ground got wrinkled  
Then she woke up at home  
But still thinking of people in the  
superdome

*Jasper Hicks*

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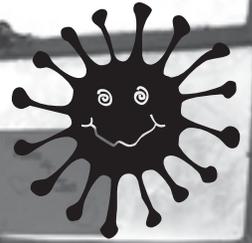
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