



Celebrating
25
YEARS

HARTWORKS

Winter 2020

\$10

The Charles Hart Middle School Literary Magazine





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Front cover, top, l-r: Chyann Wicker, Janiya Jones, Jonathan Jones; middle, l-r: Gerniha Marshall; Kiana Murphy and Nichell Kee in 2006; bottom, l-r: Marion Prince, Deraon Richardson, Tyshawn Bassett

Inside front cover: Eighth grade students visit with D.C. Creative Writing Workshop author emeritus Reginald Dwayne Betts to discuss his latest book, "Felon"

Inset: DeAngelo Thomas autographs a copy of "hArtworks" (2002)



Introduction

Welcome to the 25th Anniversary edition of *hArtworks*, the nation's only inner-city public middle school literary magazine!

In 1995, Charles Hart Junior High School became a site for D.C. WritersCorps, which brought professional writers-in-residence to underserved communities. Twenty-five years later, Charles Hart Middle School houses the D.C. Creative Writing Workshop, the longest-running school-based arts program in Ward 8. Along the way, our students have won hundreds of writing accolades, including more than 200 finalist awards in the Parkmont Poetry Contest; dozens of the In Series' "Finding Gabriela Mistral" poetry awards; numerous Larry Neal Awards; multiple Junior League Teen Poetry awards; the District Lines Poetry on Metro Contest, and the *Washington Post* KidsPost Poetry Contest. In fact, Hart students have won more local writing awards than any school in Washington, DC, public or private.

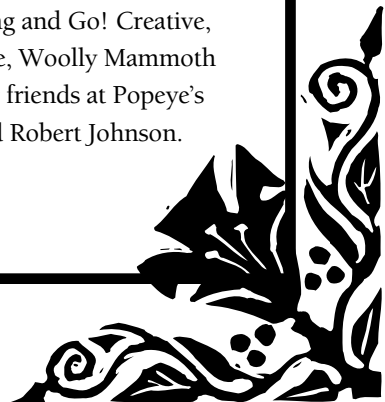
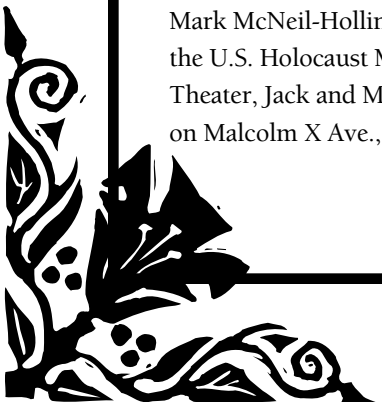
The Workshop has hosted such nationally known writers as Bomani Armah, Reginald Dwayne Betts, Derrick Weston Brown, Abbey Chung, Kerry Danner-McDonald, Michele Elliot, Andrew Evans, Jamila Felton, Andy Fogle, Kymone Freeman, Randall Horton, Alan King, Ruby McCann, Marla Melito, and Venus Thrash.

Our students have written nine original updates of classic plays, and produced two original full-length movies. And, through *hArtworks*, thousands of Hart students have become published writers.

We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to our earliest champions, Kenneth Carroll, Principal Lee Epps, and Vice Principal Yvonne Davis, as well as all the teachers who have given our writers weekly class periods for the past 25 years, including: Tameka Brown, Katherine Bucholtz, Craig Davis, Gloria Fergusson, Christy Gill, Shirley Grooms, Carolyn Jackson, Gina McKinney, Mary Johnson, Josie Malone, Irma Morgan, Jamie Neel, and Ethel Rivers.

Special thanks are due for the hard work and dedication of the D.C. Creative Writing Workshop Board of Directors: Dr. John Walton Cotman, Dr. Susan Gerson, Brian Gilmore, Helen Hooper, Bernie Horn, Bill Newlin, and Nancy Schwalb.

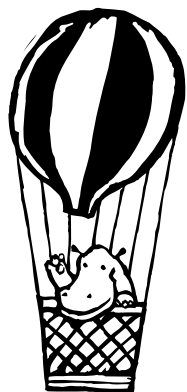
We have many friends who have helped to make *hArtworks possible*, and we would like to express our gratitude to them. Our sincerest thanks go out to the Bainum Family Foundation, the City Fund of the Greater Washington Community Foundation, the Clark-Winchcole Foundation, D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities, Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation, John Edward Fowler Foundation, Corinna Higginson Trust, Horning Family Fund, Lainoff Family Foundation, Cathy and Mark McNeil-Hollinger, Hattie M. Strong Foundation, Holly Syrrakos, Gail Oring and Go! Creative, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Arena Stage, the Shakespeare Theatre, Woolly Mammoth Theater, Jack and Monte, Tollefson and Company Investment Management, our friends at Popeye's on Malcolm X Ave., Barbara Bainum, Fritz Edler, Joseph and Lynn Horning, and Robert Johnson.

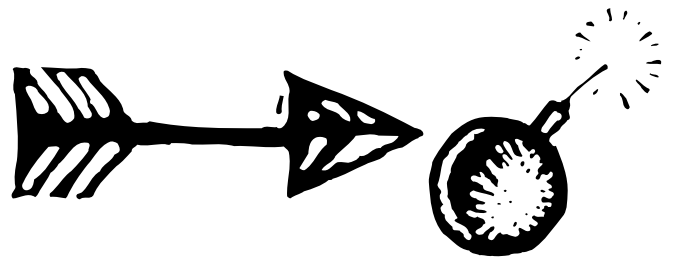


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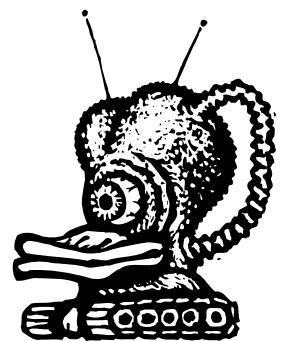


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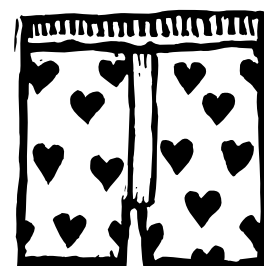
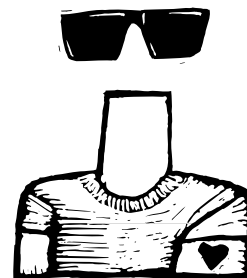




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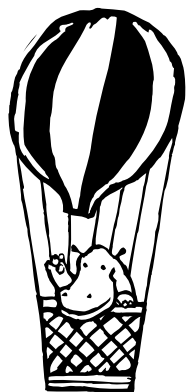
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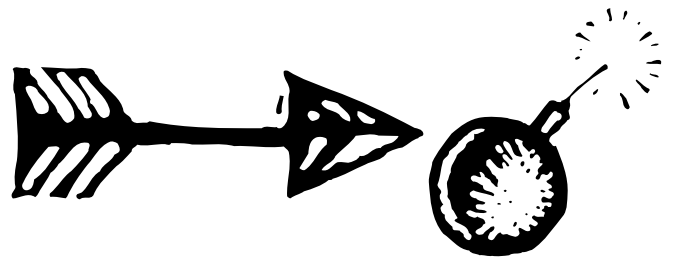


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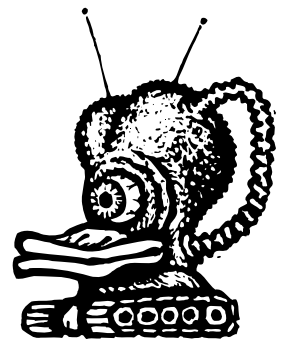


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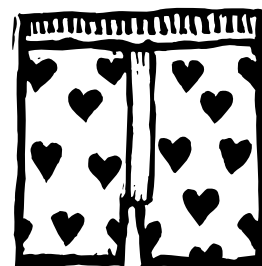
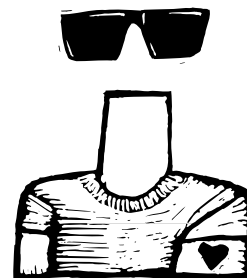




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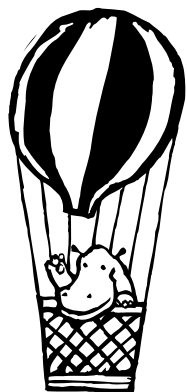
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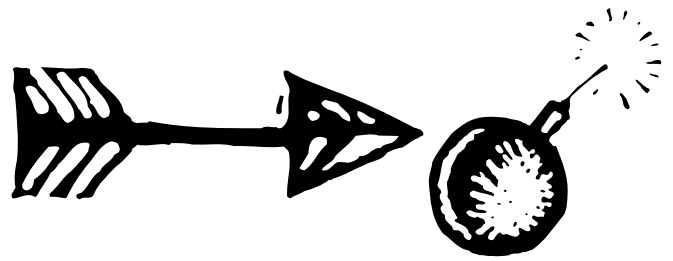


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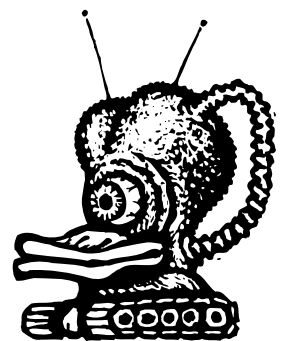


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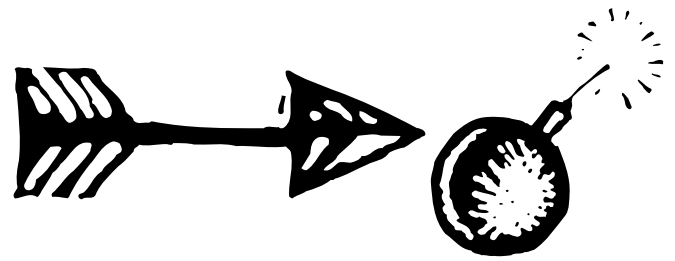
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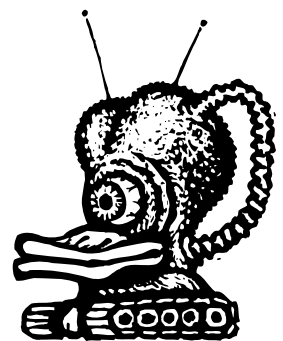


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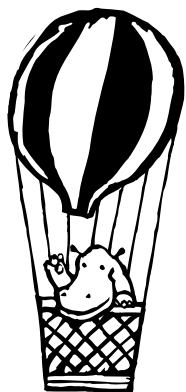
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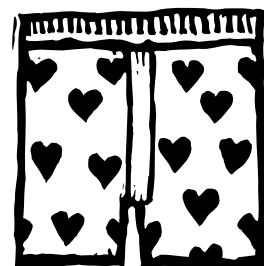
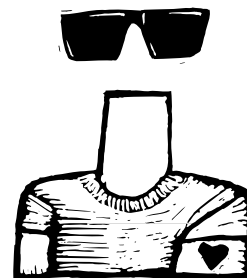
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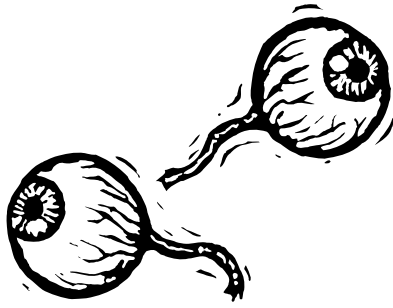


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Red Heat

Red heat, hot sun, red sky

Orange sweet fruit

Orange flower swaying in the air

Earth

Plants

Blue sky on a sunny day

Black night, black sky

Black man in the night

Tears in the eyes of man who cannot see

or hear

what he is crying about

One sky, one planet

me

Two sun, two moon

two fire in me

trying to come out

Ebony Love

Love Is Me

Love is like a storm
that takes you like a wave
and holds you like a bear.
But once that love is broken,
it leaves you sad in a lost darkness
and it leaves you in thought.
Was it me? No, it wasn't. It was me.
The things we say aren't always
what they seem.
Love is here;
Love is me.

Amelia Donaldson



Jawara Johnson (left) and Gabrielle Martin (right) autograph copies of "hArtworks" (2003)

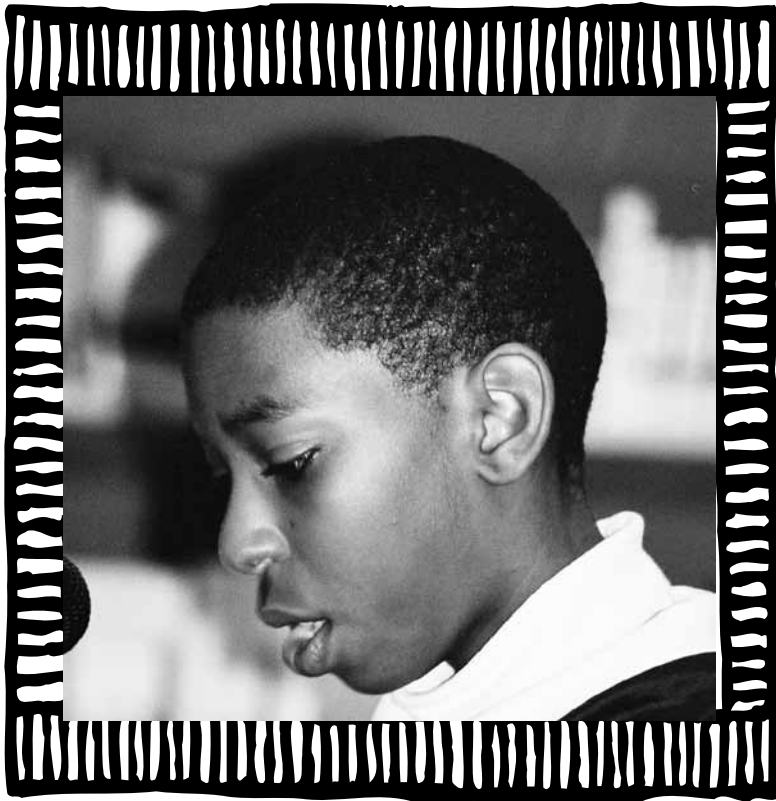
My Philosophy

My gaze is far, like a sunset
It is my custom to eat like a lion
and sometimes like a pig
and I'm very good at arguing;
I'm capable of powerful things.

I believe in putting things behind me
The world wasn't made for us to destroy
I have no problems if I speak of the world
but because I love it, I will:
To love is to create

Christian Harrison





Joseph Hudson (2002)



Life

It is my custom to wake up and go to school.
And sometimes looking in front of me,
and what I see at every minute
is my future.
I'm very good at telling my future.
I'm capable of inspiring others.
I believe in myself.
The world wasn't made for violence.
I have no more patience.
If I speak the truth,
it's not because I want to hurt you
but because I say it, don't get hurt.
To love is to care for something.

Jalannie Hawkins

My Forsaken Shadow

Falsely convicted of murder
and I am waiting to be face-to-face
with the judge, in the cell.
I'm feeling conflicted,
my soulmate, addicted
so how should I act if I'm innocent?
What they say: Innocent until proven guilty.
So why do I feel like an inmate?
Fear of the trial going wrong,
suffering is what I go through.
I need hope, so I do better;
Hostile guards and anger from inmates
for death's head to peek out
as the jurors and judge say guilty.

Trevonne Joyner

World

At night, I see footsteps
and hear the silent weeping of kids.
I see the souls of people
who want to be at rest.

I can see the darkness of people's homes
when it's a storm.
I can hear the cries of babies
while it happened.

I can see the crimes
committed in my community.
People are turning into broken glass
while remembering memories of their loved ones.

This world is crazy.

Laniyah Johnson





Amanda Fernandez autographs "hArtworks" (2003)

Captive Thoughts

Smart is a prisoner in her own brain.
 She wakes up and can't help
 but to exercise her mind
 as if she were strong.
 She struggles to rid her mind
 of algebraic expressions
 and wisdom she cannot contain.
 She hides foreign languages
 and biology under the pillow.
 For breakfast, she eats the knowledge
 floating around her
 as she tries not to explode.

Trinity Washington

We Are Bold

We are a lyric that won't stop
 We have karma in our souls
 We have allies all over
 We are logic
 We can flatter you with our words
 We can reason with you
 We prove to you that we are not bad
 We need Justice in this place

Kitana Williams

Silent Treatment

Wrap both arms around the
 Tempest
 Lock fingers (together)
 Lower your head
 Stare into the eye
 Inhale and hold your breath
 until blood burns wasabi
 Turn your head and
 Gaze towards others
 Wail through your neighbor's windows
 If you must – but hang on
 The uncertainty
 will thrash (like a)
 shark-toothed dolphin

Patrick Washington





Humiliate

This story is so devastating
that the ground breaks apart
and starts levitating.

Police killing Blacks
it's been like that for generations.
They're changing our neighborhood
for whites, that's gentrification.

Black people, come together.
We built the nation.
Bring together all the races,
from the Asians to the Jamaicans
from the Haitians to the Caucasians.

Emir Battle

Who am I?

I am not dumb;
I am dust and ashes
whose judgment
could be disrespectful.
It's kind of hard
being mean in the darkness,
because I sacrifice
fear the struggle
of being rude.
It's like the outstretched underground.

Shanay Lesane

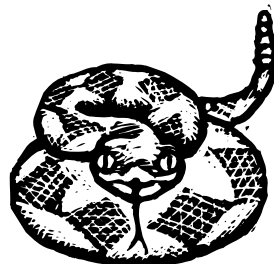


Tony Bush (2003)

Worth Fighting For

What's worth fighting for is justice,
not because somebody looked at you wrong
or someone stepped on your shoe.
You should fight for something reasonable
because, fighting anyone who steps on your shoe
might get you killed.
You don't know who and what kind of weapon somebody has.
Having justice and strength has a big impact on Blacks.
Blacks are getting shot by policemen
because police start a fight with their gun on them
to fear the black man.
The black man is not able to lose his pride.

Jovaun Lee





Junior League Poetry Teen Competition winners, l-r: Anthony Bell, Kierra Parks, Shari Barnes (2009)

IDK

We are not bad people,
we need our justice.
We are not in our prime,
we shall need time.
We are not the reason for all of this,
we can do better.
We are not in the mood...

We are not going to that dance,
cause we are bold.
We are not their ally,
we are on your side.
We are not gonna prove anything,
that's not our motive.
We are not that vocal...
But we deserve to write a lyric.

Christian Harrison



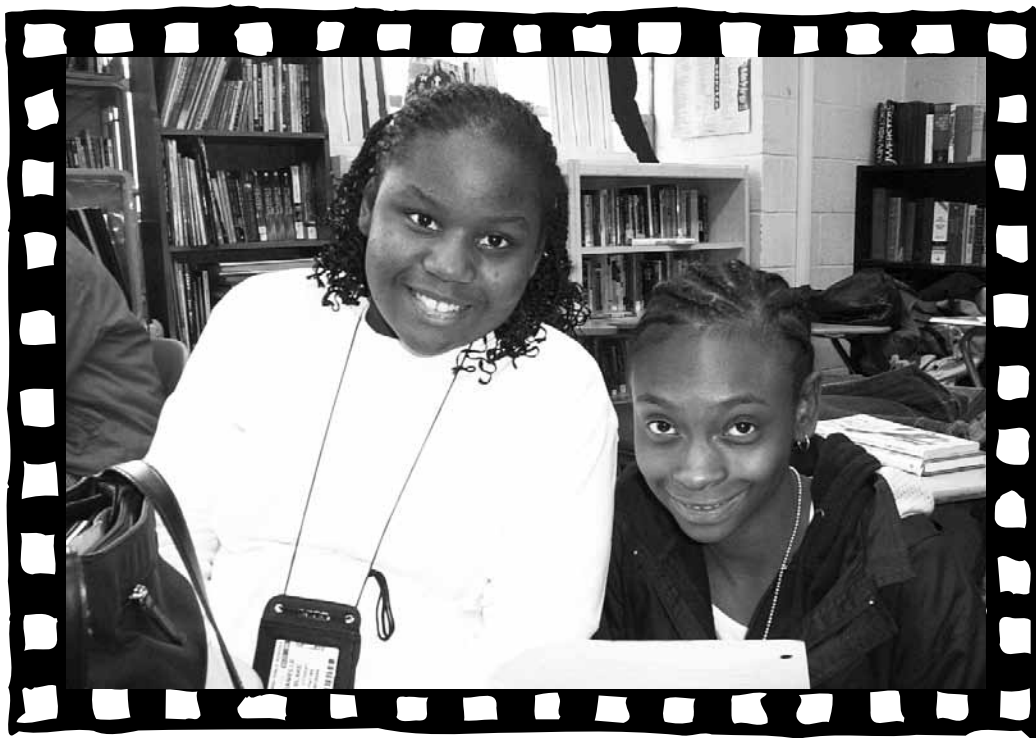
I'm from DC

Where I'm from, it's very loud.
You hear gunshots every day,
you see people or crackheads smoking,
people getting put out of their homes.
Where I'm from,
I see white cops killing us black people,
my kind, every day.

My momma tells me
be safe out there...
When my big cousin died,
I think that's when my momma started
to keep me in the house.
I'm so DC, everyone I know says "On my mova!"

My momma had me when she was 15.
I was born in 2009, February 11 at 11:59.
It was her and my uncle and my grandmother
that same night, that's when she named me
after my uncle.
But what I'm really sayin'
is be safe out here in DC,
because you can walk out the house and get shot.

Jamari Millet



l-r: Danielle Blake, Renita Williams (2005)



Why am I this person?

Every day is the same
quiet judgment
It's a struggle to be non-athletic
to an athlete.
The darkness makes me boring
I look up words when I'm stuck--
To feel the sea breeze
when I'm watching TV.

Jonathan Jones



Welcome Home, Stranger

A tragedy this is. Women screaming
bloody murder, families hiding out of sight
from the anarchy that occurs.
Fires feeding upon the world, gluttonously.
They are starving.
The hungry fire, with what seems to be no ending
the rumbling earth and red tinted sky,
people choking on the smoke
ash and misery, their destiny to die.
Small, frightened pleas coming from a scattered town.
"Where is the ruler when we're
making up for her absence with our lives?!"
For centuries, I've been away
and the lack of candor led to havoc and terror.
A rulerless world,
filled with pain, an awful sight.
Now that I'm back, can things go right?

Christa Madikaegbu



l-r: Shamia House, Cherish Gaines, Nichell Kee (2005)

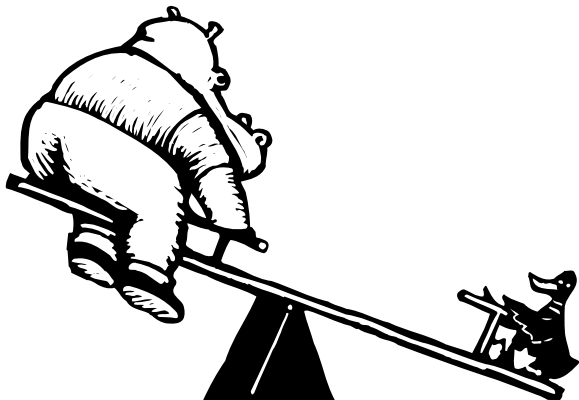
My World

Life is like a slope
but there are some limits.
People start to reach that point
in their lives. Some people start
to feel like they should subtract themselves
from this planet. People feel empty
because they don't feel love.

The world is like a sphere,
the same problems occur, but differently.
African Americans still get mistreated,
kids are deducting,
people are starting to divide.

This world may be crazy
but I call it my home.

Laniyah Johnson



The Shadow of Darkness

Farewell, gray smoke
death ponders uncertainty and love;
Yesterday, I remembered a blizzard of flurries
liberating struggles
shadows hostile,
human suffering
departed fear.

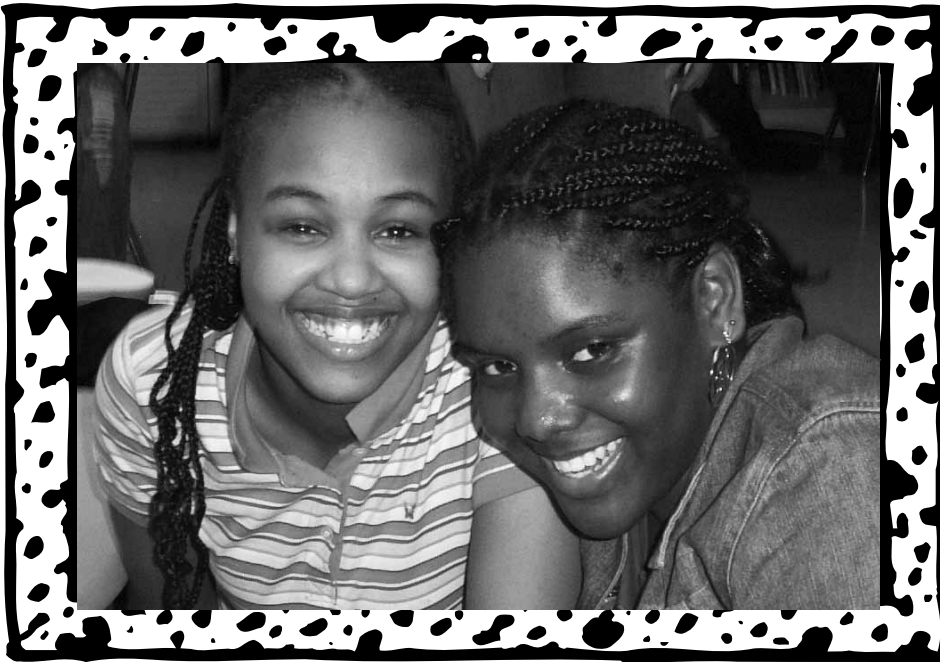
Chyann Wicker

Infinity Limit

Elements are my life
A calculator is my time
Factors are the enemy
My base is the face of cute
Analyze my place right
Set down thinking about you.
Plane, fly normal
slope the line of love;
logic based on a real number,
a theory of life.

Mijia Williams





l-r: Kiana Murphy, Nichell Kee (2006)

The rides at Six Flags are so much fun

I stand in the line
climb on the base
ride to the slope
at the top, my stomach drops
we shoot to the right
and to the left
and we swing to the and

Dad's house has so many games
It's like they multiply
macaroni plus chicken plus rice
equals SpongeBob and sleep
Don't forget to add the shower!

Lyric Wright



Never 0

The line is half
just like a fraction
The course slides down
just like a slope
Many problems, but one answer
just like an algorithm
Keeps going up
just like a function
At one point it shines
like a perfect number
But the problem is infinite
only to divide the difference

Nasir Prince

Awaiting

The constant questioning of what I'll be in X years,
or what my life will be like when I'm Y years old;
Leading to the answers of "an artist"
or "a singer" when in reality,
I'm not a fortune teller.
Somehow let me try to enjoy my youth in peace.
Don't bother me with your rants about how
in 30 years, I'll either be living with my parents
while in student loan debt,
successful and rich, or poor and nameless
because frankly, I currently don't care.
Let me focus on the fun of my youth
and my responsibilities
so I can feel the temporary success
and not live in anxiety
out of fear of an unknown future.

Christa Madikaegbu



Joseph Heath (2002)

I Am All of Me

People laugh at me because I'm different.
Well, guess what: I laugh at you
because you're the same.
But who am I to blame you
for being shallow or lame?
I am one thing, you are another.
Who are you supposed to be?
My friend? Rival? Sister? Or Brother?
Or are you a crony? Cause I'm different then no other.

I am all of me.
I am bigger than the average Joe.
I am bigger than your ego.
You are the root of all evil,
I am better than Knieval.
I am bigger than a monotonous trend;
Me and flashy things don't really blend.
I am the biggest thing there ever was,
a bully's got nothing on me in the end.
I am the chosen one; you should have never challenged me, son.
I am the father; you're transparent.
It's crystal clear you're incoherent.
I've done talked enough—
I got to go crash and watch you burn.
I already schooled you once:
How many more lessons you need to learn?

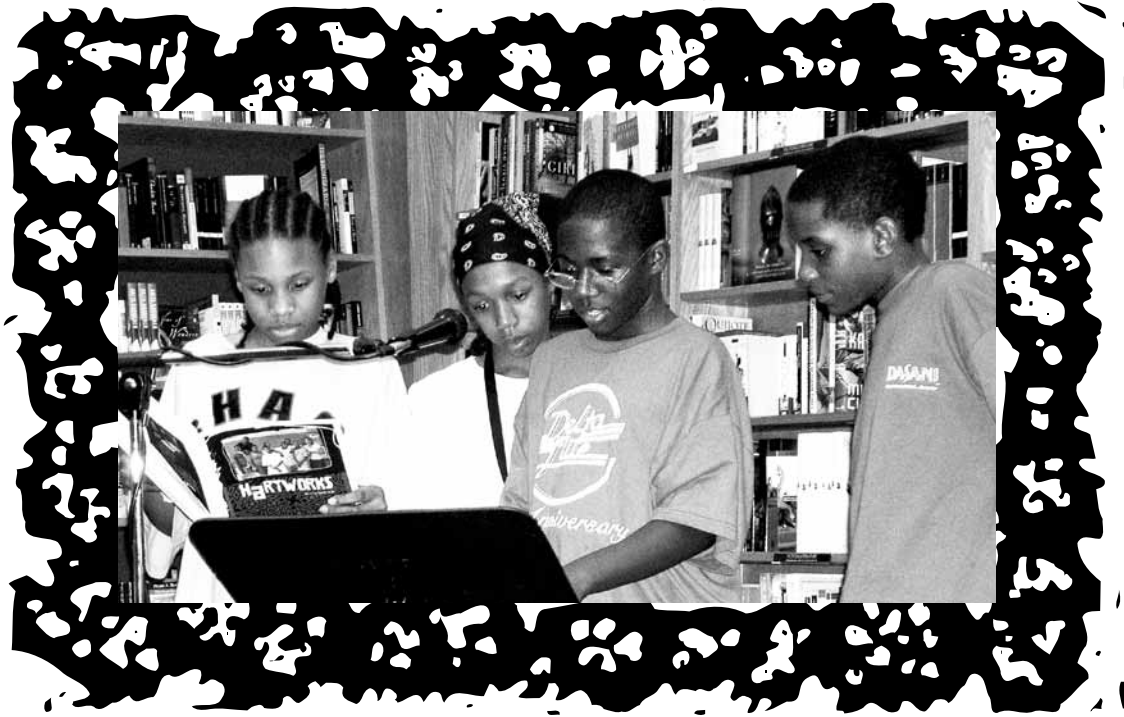
Jayden Gray

Complex

When I am in school, my first class is algebra.
I always have to multiply by a decimal.
When I'm in class, we do linear equations.
Then after that, we get in groups,
and we divide to find the difference.
After you find the difference,
you multiply by two, and after that
you graph the number.
When graphing, you have to connect your points
with a straight line.

Jalonnie Hawkins



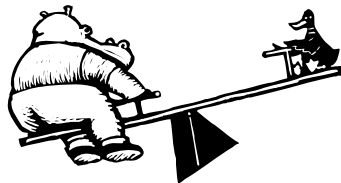


l-r: Shaquiel Jenkins, Danny Govan, Jawara Johnson, DeAndre Britten at Borders Books (2004)

The Crazy Dream

I went to the art museum
and the art was abstract
in addition to the vases I saw.
I saw a math poster with algebra problems,
I made an algorithm
and then I analyzed the poster
and I was in my element.
But I felt empty.
All of a sudden, I felt normal again
and very ordinary, so I came up
with this theory that I was dreaming,
but I had my mind set on the art
and the way it functions.
I had to figure out the identity of the person
who made the art, but then
I figured out I was dreaming
and my mind had all types of loops
twists, turns and slopes.

Paris Wright



Hatred

Why does everyone hate on me?
I just try to be me, you see.
I can't go through the alley or under a tree,
Because every time I do,
Someone's grittin' on me.

I can't go down the hall in my school,
Because everything I do,
They're hating on--
It's just not cool.

Why does everyone have to hate?
Why can't we chill and congratulate?
I wish we could put this hatred behind
And just sit back and think we're fine.

Danyelle Johnson





l-r: Toni Meyers, Brittany Love at Borders Books (2004)

Determination

Determination lives in a house that speaks for itself.
 Determination wakes up and the first thing she does
 Is look in the mirror and say,
 "I am going to make it, no matter what."
 Determination drives a Grand Capri
 And goes past all the stop signs.
 Nothing can stop her.
 Determination is rich in her mind.
 She eats a balanced breakfast
 And dresses every day like she's on her way to a job interview.
 Determination isn't just one color;
 She's a suit of many colors,
 And each one shines as bright as her future.

Natasha Dorsey

When I Watch You

When I watch you,
 looking at your lovely eyes in the sunlight
 of today and the day before
 When I watch you,
 you're dancing in the moonlight,
 as the music plays
 and you dance to the beat
 When I watch you,
 you swing your hands and play every day
 When I watch you ,
 as a sunflower in the window of a saint.

Terri Davis

Through the Looking Glass

Through the window, you can see the beloved sky
 as it twinkles so bright that it blinds you.
 Look through the window and see the future, and you will find
 out that you'll always know the infinite truth.
 Looking through the window endlessly,
 Realize that you might change the way you look,
 but you can never change the person you are on the inside.

Armani Thornton





Fanchon Hall (2005)

We're the new faces of failure

We're the new faces of failure.
 We give potential a bad name, label ourselves illiterate
 By haphazardly thinking, staring at the back of books, calling it reading.

The sound of grunge on the back of our footsteps
 Memorize lyrics more than we do academics
 Gum smacking, the empty head diet
 Burning calories of intellect.

We're the new faces of failure.
 Not only do we lack wits, we also lack instincts
 Life on the streets, leaders of the purely naïve
 We don't think, we stink at life experiences.

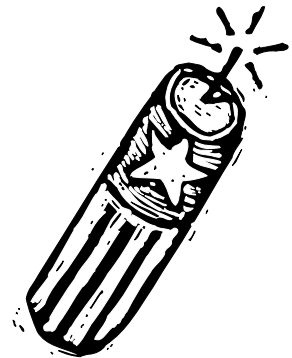
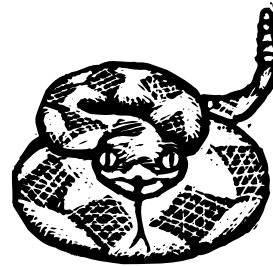
We take the warning and turn it into an opportunity
 But never do we take an opportunity and turn it into something good
 We never have us in mind
 Self preservation is not in our vocabulary
 Do we ever think of the future? No.

We're the new faces of failure.
 Where goals and aspirations are myths
 And we don't take second chances.

We live for right now and not for tomorrow
 Where we all share the dunce cap, and in our heads, empty space
 We don't believe life isn't fair, but we do believe results may vary.

We are the new faces of failure.

Maryum Abdullah



Smooth and Static

Now let me lead you beyond these words of poetry:
Where life and death are just a step away from each other.
And you cross the streets with sheep and shepherds,
And climb the trees with the leopards.
There every problem is a poem
But if I can solve it, resolve it,
Then I know that I can show 'em.
And everything is precious; every verse, every word.
Everything has meaning; every noun and every verb.

And then I'll remain calm, reading the 23rd psalm,
Where there are more memories than empty Victorian attics,
Because I like my life smooth, but I don't like it static.

Let me show you true flavor,
When something is better than sweet soul food cooking,
And something so good you can die from looking.
I wanna make sure I live to see 144:
I've been here before-- this ain't no battle, this is war.

I'll use the opportunity and
Be the first to bring unity
In a bag that's dramatic,
Because I want my life smooth, but I don't want it static.

The only work that was ever done in this world
Was getting through today
And not worrying about tomorrow, next week's sorrow,
No more tragedies, natural catastrophes, or
Fake black man identities.

When I settle down and inhale some wisdom
And exhale some immaturity,
I'll be celebrating my 75th anniversary,
And toasting to unforgettable years
And stolen tears.

Yeah, I'll admit that I want it easy,
But I won't be dealing with fools, foes, and fanatics,
Because I like dealing with smooth,
But I hate dealing with static.

Larry Robertson



Delonte Williams (2001)





l-r: DeAndre Britten, Anthony Mitchell (2004)

I'm Afraid of My Phone

I thought I had you in the palm of my hands
When I touch you, light would come
You made every one of my wildest dreams
Into a rule of thumb.
I stare at you, like every day,
and I can't leave you alone.
I plan out my relationships through the silence of your tone.

I slept with you the other night and still feel your vibration
I love you for the fact you never recognize other faces
You tell the time and you remind me of girls that I once knew
and you shared me with the rest of the world
in spite of my point of view.

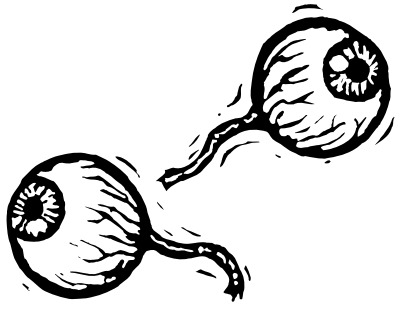
The other day I touched your face and then you told me you were changing.
You told me to accept your terms or lose your information.
Now every time I confide in you, I get a notification
That everything I gave to you belongs to a corporation.

You woke me up and forced me to update you with my thumb
And in order to upgrade you, I have to pay you every month
I lost my job so now I'm forced to live my life without your plan
And I miss the days you made me feel the world was in my hands.

Like pots and pans, I see my world boiled down to
my fear of losing nothing
In her absence, I learned to like myself instead of Trending Topics
I paid my bill and she apologized and told me
Welcome home
She knows every fiber of my being, but I'm afraid of my phone.

Daquan Johnson





Different Kind of Memories

I live quietly and go nowhere
I weep sometimes
when I hear voices through the valley
the echo of my heartbeat you can hear
through the hallway of my house

I go outside and
illusions of the unseen
different kind of memories
blossom all around the valley
I hear a terrible howl

The texture of the air
is cold silk on the ground
I turn around
and I end up home again

I go inside and lie down
and cry myself to sleep

Lauren Taylor



Alexis Garrett (2004)

My Heart

My heart is like emptiness waiting to happen.
I gave you my heart and now it's not going to happen.
Love tastes like hundred dollar bills in the morning,
Feels like a breeze going through my body, like chills.
Tastes like sweet cherries in your mouth, just melting.
It looks like love, but it's not.
Love hurts like someone stabbing you with a knife,
Smells like deep darkness.
Love is like a wind out of a cloud,
Passing you very quickly.
I gave him my heart and now it's not going to happen.

Shanequa Raphael





Brittany Love (2004)

I See

I open a book and turn a page:
 school I see, paper, chair,
 words and food. I see pens, doors
 and checkered floor. I see
 clocks on walls, people in halls.
 I see kids, clothes, books,
 kitchen cooks, passing out food
 like people breathe air. I see
 people beefing and shoes squeaking,
 candy wrappers and

See

I saw, heard,
 I am gone.

Terrell Davis

The Lion

The breathing trees and the growling lions
 Piling one paw's cry on another,
 Oh, stars of night, sky of the night
 A glass lion shatters into splinters.

Rails pierce the forest
 Red cracks the volcano
 Again, war invites war
 To devour the lion.

Tyanna Dowdy



Word for Words

My words, for a word
 are greater in reality.
 Yet I have not done
 my words for letters--
 instead I wrote.
 Can you see,
 feel and hear,
 yet watch them come out
 of their own words?
 They come in packs of free food
 and cavities, to my mind
 over matter.
 Why, all the night I yak for my words,
 for our word,
 in life they pass us by
 very swiftly, yet quietly.
 Still, I pass my life with a black backpack,
 with a picture of the past
 and a jacket from today's light.
 My rain is your cry for help.
 My rain is the joy of life.
 My rain is the tears,
 the tears for my word,
 for words.

Donna James



School

School is like a jungle.
Students playing and running around
in the clear blue sky.
The books smell like the air on a rainy
and cloudy day. The desks look
the way grass smells.
The lunch smells the way air tastes.
A class taught by Madame C. J. Walker
in a New York public school classroom,
because she wanted to.

She didn't really want to.
The teachers all sat wondering what
stupid things the students would do next,
though none of them were stupid.
Teachers be threatening students,
they be acting all like they go hard,
but all they are doing is faking.
Because we were smart and had smart thoughts.

"Lift Every Voice And Sing" was the
only song we knew by heart.
The smart students sing as they see kindness come their way.
We were about as happy as the teachers were
when they heard our wonderful voices.

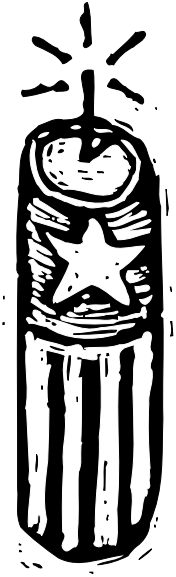
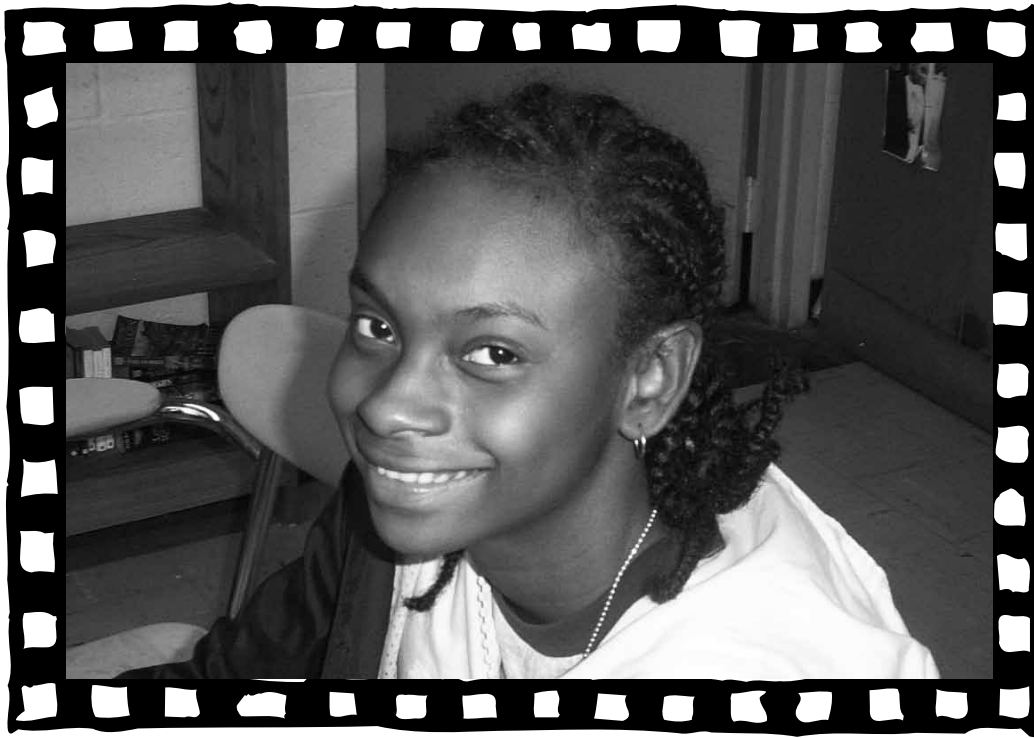
We fell through the door and changed faces by night.
Continent was there to see it all happen,
so that today, tomorrow, the day after that,
she will be able to tell it all.
And other students who lead her
nowhere I could ever track,
'til she's so far away, so lost.
I'll have to remember her to know where she's gone

Asia Mason



DeAndre Britten (2004)





Renita Williams (2006)

Hateocracy

I hate you so much. I really do.
Everything that I hate about you
is completely true.
Your personality is nothing but rank and bile.
Your clothes have no style.
Your attitude is vile.
I hate the way you talk.

I hate the way you act. Your attitude stinks.
I don't care what he or she thinks.
Because these are street facts,
yes, that impacts
the anger and fury.
But nevertheless, your loathsomeness,
which I hate, leaves you helpless.

At absolutely zero cost,
your time in paradise is lost.
I hate how finding the right people
to have in my circle can be hopeless,
regardless, my affections are non-applicable.
Boys talking slang?
Dang, they're despicable. Gotta know the math.

I hate how every day in high school
is the same repeating path.
They catch me on the rebound,
in the hallways, because
they're on the offense, like always.
But ain't nobody wanna come to help me
because I'm always on the defense.
Everybody always wanna clown on me
when I come into town.

But when their phonies and cronies
don't wanna help to defend, and at the end,
they choose now to be your friend,
and say that they are. Not.
Something I'm not proud of, it's fate.
Don't underestimate me. You're jealous.

Because I'm a lot of things that you're not.
Your overzealous, but don't waste my and your time
with all that hate you got.
Because if you learned to understand me more
and take the time to get to know me better,
you'd learn to appreciate me more
for who I am and not who you think I am
and who I'm not. All that, I hate.



Jahir Gray



l-r: Jawara Johnson, Markus Johnson, Jamal Williams, Shaquiel Jenkins at the Holocaust Museum (2004)

The Wind

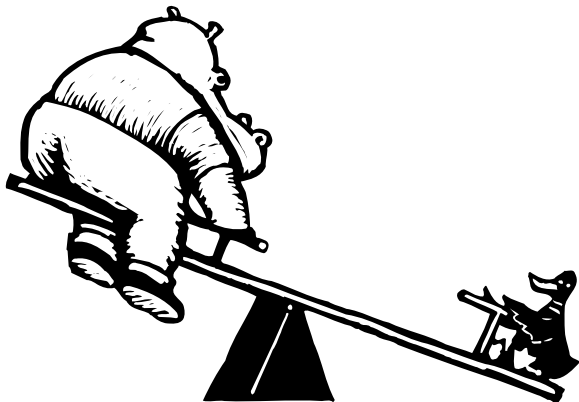
The wind is like the trees in the Spring.
 I danced in the park with the grass:
 My hands touched the air,
 My eyes planted flowers,
 I licked my favorite scent of flowers,
 I smelled the taste of time,
 I heard the air.
 The trees taste like squirrels look.

The Lincoln Memorial was made in remembrance
 Of him sitting in his chair.
 He didn't like sitting in his chair.
 The birds flew over the park, and many dogs came running,
 Though I couldn't do a thing.

Nobody came and did the backstroke in the pond,
 Because I was a fish, and lived in the pond.
 Please leave me alone.
 I don't want to be bothered.

The soft wall of patience laughed,
 Because it smelled like heaven.
 The day smelled beautiful, like a dump truck.
 The bird came back from heaven,
 And sixty swings danced to the pretty music.
 The wind came out of the house,
 And brought me a kite.
 The wind and I came and danced
 With the grass in the Spring.

Mercedes Johnson





*"hArtworks" reading at
Borders Books (2004)*

Players

They are the ones that roll the dice
and move the pieces,
but this game crushes them like Reese's pieces.
They try to cheat at the game of life,
and try to cut through like this is easy,
but it's not, so believe me.

One person rolls the dice and moves five spaces,
and they realize it's full of project places.
That's when they find out that
that guns leave traces.
Some try to roll a double ten so they can win,
but realize they're just starting over again.

Players try to run, and throw down and quit,
but they can't escape, 'cause the rhymes of life are
legit.
They move three spaces and see the truth they can't
hide,
so they move those three spaces under shame, with
no pride.

This game of life is a game of chess, so wish up.
You might as well quit, 'cause you have no king,
queen or bishop.
Don't get stressed-- it's like Monopoly
except you passed Go two times
and you still have no property.

No railroads or Park Place,
so you rolled a five, for the many times you lost a
marked case
for child support or a familiar sort
of problem in court.

You pick up a card.
It says you're living the ghetto life,
so thou shalt not prosper
with stabbings of the knife,

They're the ones who blame stress on this game,
and never survive the ray of light;
They're the players the dice revolve around
in this game of life.

I'm giving you a demonstration,
so here's some information
on the situation of life's education,
which will confrontation
if you are impatient.

These are the ones who fool around with the haters,
so, when you roll the dice,
don't forget about the players.

Antewann Pearson



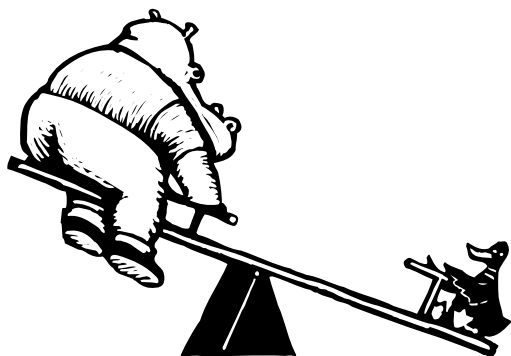


l-r: Rhia Hardman, Candace McCoy (2004)

My Words

My words are like a building with 26 floors,
And I'm sitting on the 27th,
And you're stuck on the first;
Like a mirror that reflects
Nothing but good rhymes and poetry.
My words are like rattlesnakes
In the form of letters,
That wait for you to read them
So they can attack your brain
Like thousands of knives.
My words can't be touched,
My words can't be matched,
Because my words are thunder,
My words are dreams,
My words are grace,
My words are me.

Jennifer Corbett



The Things That Cause Death

This is all for underground death.
Understand, I'm all alone,
Against underground war.
Why bomb Steven, because he was underground?
Gangs build up, but I don't want to die underground,
Under flowers,
Why offer someone death?

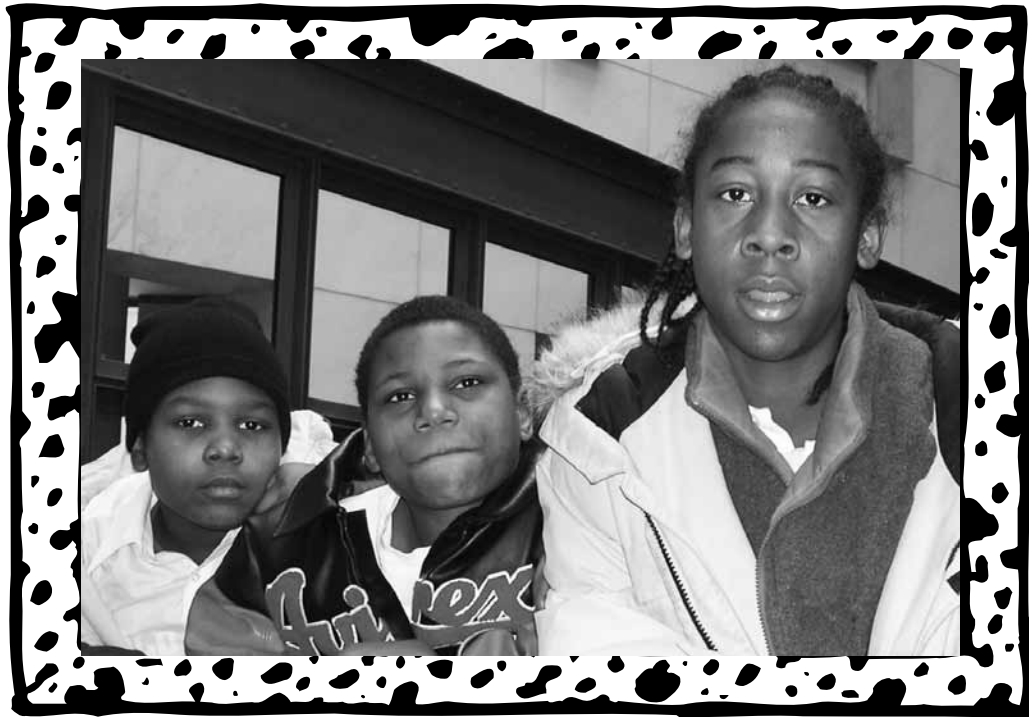
Out of sight drugs,
Don't offer him those drugs,
Offer him flowers, chicken,
Or anything but drugs.
Understand, he will die.
Won't that be a tragedy?
Rather than violent drugs,
Let's build a playground instead.

Fast growing under
Rich motherhood,
Under one-track men thinking fatherhood,
Let's stand against babies raising babies.

Makeba Childs



*l-r: David Brown,
Martanaze Dew,
Deon Smith at the
Holocaust Museum
(2004)*



Transformations

Black snakes swallowing diamonds,
sliding into brown cheetahs
running to furious lions
hunting rectangles of brick
which breaks into dust,
to powder on a baby's bottom
to colorful stars, into sea turtles
swimming toward big shining diamonds
in a burglar's hand.

Steven Reed (R.I.P.)

Truth Hurts

I live in silence and go nowhere.
I let people walk all over me.
I have no life, no friends.
I don't think I'll get a chance to be a wife.
It's hard, but the truth has to be let out.
So start at the beginning
And end with the truth.

Alexis Garrett

Time to face the facts

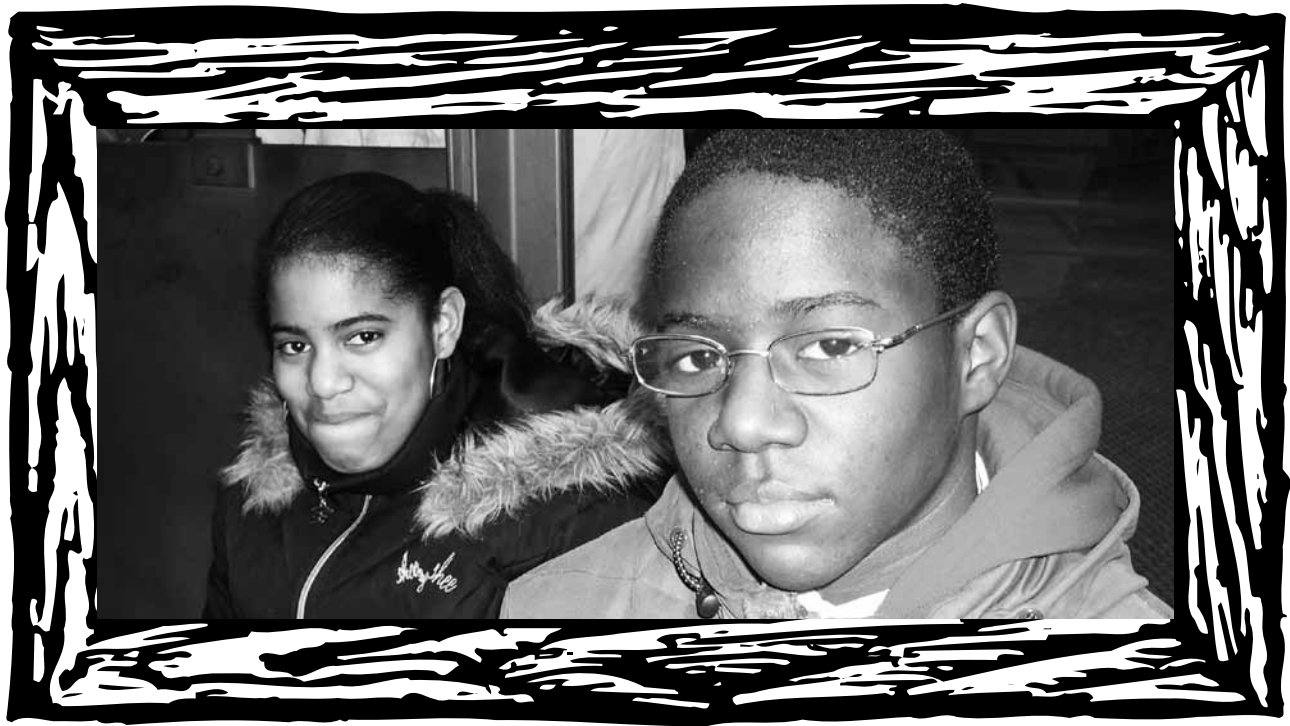
Fact, and still I wake up
in the morning for things to change,
but it seems they won't.
Better days is all we ask for--
Is that too much to ask?

We look for hope that gang violence will cease.
It never ends, even with police prowling the streets.
We've seen Devin die, and heard mommas cry
and watched bullets take the wrong life.

If you could imagine a perfect life
what would it be like?
Picture that in your head:
I wouldn't let Marc be dead
He was only sixteen years old
but he was very ill
for some people, they still don't believe life's real.

Gabrielle Martin





l-r: Jessica Carpenter, Jawara Johnson

Dangerous Month

The news, sending prophets almost every day.
 This weather is like an electric ball
 that has exploded on earth.
 The earth is as hot as a stove.
 November is a large house on fire.
 This world has giant mean dwarves
 who work for the devil.
 This world is a dangerous place in November.
 November is a big eruption.
 In November, the future will be that everyone and
 everything will die, and everything will be sucked
 into a large, trashy hole.

Clarissa Alexander

Fall

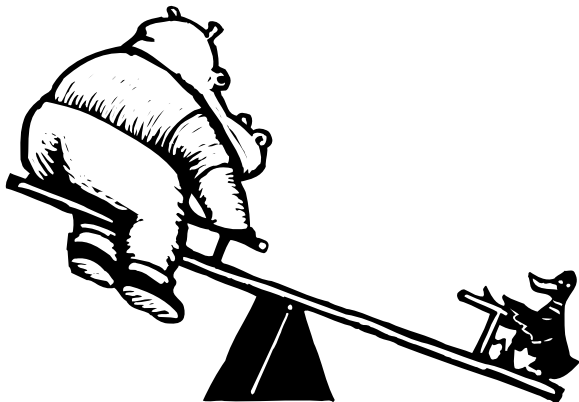
The dancing trees flutter around
 the blue and black fire,
 deeply plundering a proud plot.
 A pearl white pigeon gladly searches
 the buildings for food.
 Early in the morning I saw
 the last leaf fall.
 Now it is really fall, leaves and all.

Jawara Johnson

Bind the poetic poem

Like being pricked
 cloud-shaped needles in the heart
 the voice of a mother
 lonely, jumping off a cliff
 licking hands, paper and silver
 blackberry pie by the Mrs. in the morning
 if you whir crazy
 please, don't be
 because to be rich is good
 but to be loved is better.

Shaquiel Jenkins





Andre Harper reads at Borders Books (2003)

I Am

I am the assassin
I wonder if I can suffocate myself
I hear what I don't know
I see through plastic eyes
I want to be magic
I am not afraid

I pretend that I can read people's minds
I feel two feet tall
I touch the strange mirror against the wall
I worry about teachers calling my mother
I cry when I can't play basketball
I am the assassin

I understand day and night
I say nice things
I dream of bad things
I try to be the best I can
I hope I can be a basketball player
I am the assassin

Danny Govan



How Life Is

By mistake the evening dies down the hall
and through the leaves, life bears down in pain
it shivers with hurt
in fear of what life has in store.

I couldn't know what would be next:
Death comes to mind,
humming like a river, sharp like a tack
I could not hide in the shadows of hurt and suffer--
Heat passes through my back and out my ears.

Black sky, yellow lightning,
changes every moment of the second
Heaven shall wait. It's not time
for men or women to go,
or stay stuck in the moment
to try to play hurt will go and come,
some leave and some come.

Each generation hurts more when
the pain is coming through my fingers
and out my life, an empty room feels full
but when you look at it, it's only a matter of time
life will stop and pain will vanish.

Brittany Austin





l-r: Deon Smith, Martanaze Dew, Martanisha Dew (2004)

Five Senses

If you were to touch my name,
it would feel like hard, tough and scaly rubber
because I am a football player.

If you taste my name,
it will taste like grass and dirt.

If someone heard my name,
it would sound like trees hitting each other.

If you smell my name,
it would smell like sweat.

If you saw my name,
you would probably see dirty grass, my coach jumping,
me running alone on the 50 yard line,
falling from a tackle, my teammates yelling at me,
me walking to the locker room,
People, it's okay, and I know we lost the game.

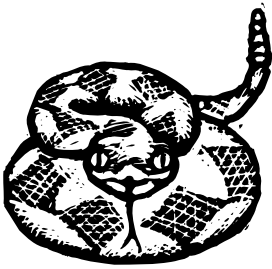
Rakeem Gilgeours

The way we live

No one is immortal
We all must die
We must live strong and not tell lies
Some people are skilled
Some people are thrilled
At others lives
By shooting guns or rolling dice
We all must die someday, some way
The things that people say will kill you any day
By lying or telling things their way
They say things about you
Tell lies too
They are outside smoking blunts
Living on the street
Don't have anything to eat
We all must die someday.

DeAndre Britten





Grams to You

Girl, don't you wear that short miniskirt
So boys like him can laugh and flirt
You got a man and he goes to church.
No high heels and tank tops will walk out of this house
You won't walk the street with your cleavage hanging out.
75 cents is in your back pocket--
Where's that plaid dress with the lovely locket?
All I'm trying to do is keep you off the streets
I think of you every time my heart beats.

Joseph Hudson



Emma Stewart (2005)

Myself

I was walking
when I turned out of this world
driving a cloud into an erupting volcano
like mad cows, saving the cost of
whatever I see, I shall be,
except that I can see everything
which makes it harder than usual to be myself.

But I am, because no one can be me but me
Dazed into the stars, like an addict without his addiction
Brown blazing glory, like a dazed dragon
But how can that be, you see?
Because I live in a world where blood grows thinner than
water
It lures you into a game of cat and mouse
Where the mouse is merely a dog, but no fear in me,
And I feel pains of millions, yet I am myself.

Shaquiel Jenkins

AIDS

I'm not spelling AIDS
I'm saying it,
And I die slowly
because of my hot waters,
they do not come over my ankles
like the shackles of armor do.
When you get on the floor
you just don't leave anymore.
I need, I need to joke with you, or else
I just want to joke with you a few times a week
because I'm dying slowly.

Davina Smith



l-r: Shaquiel Jenkins, Joseph Heath, Jamal Williams (2003)

Treachery of knowledge

Knowledge is power, meant to devour our fragile and adolescent minds.

Brain power exists only in the social blunders.

Self-proclaimed geniuses can be made or broken with a simple decision:

Hide my genius, insinuate it, or make it clear.

Peers are to school as caterpillars are to trees--

They just want to change and get away,

Get away from the torment of educated, educating tormentors

Whose so-called reason for teaching is to teach.

Come on.

The house of learning's illusions are unseen

As the amount of purity inside of it.

False prophets prophesize that prodigies will be difficult to find

In the present, and in the time to come:

Conditions render prosperity hopeless.

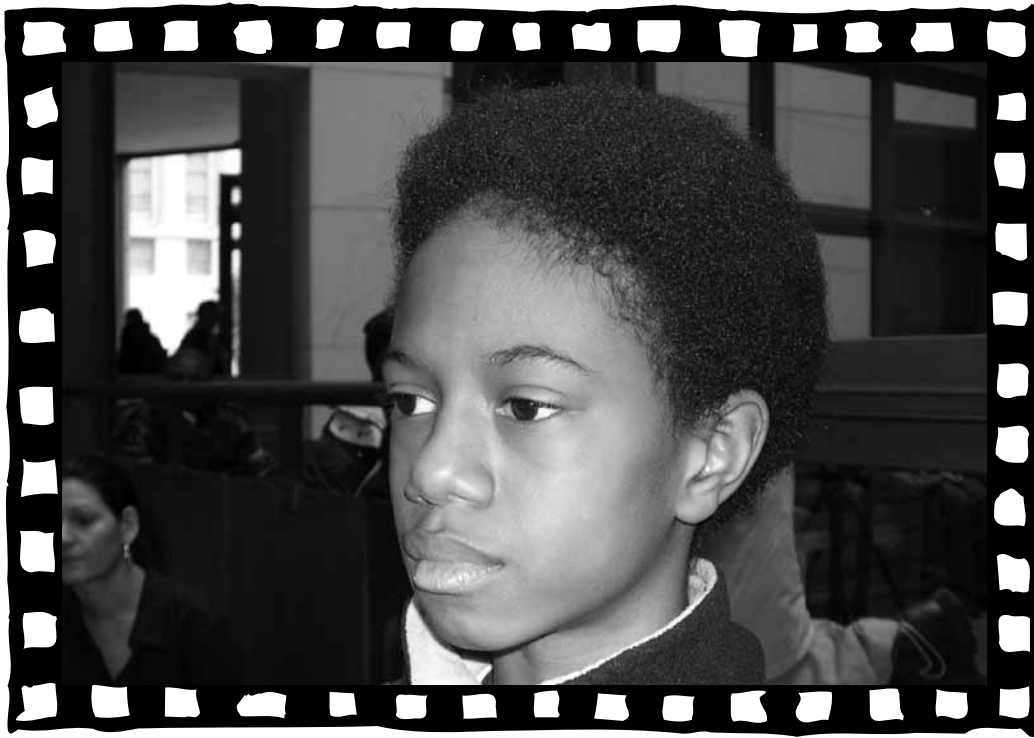
Reginald Williams

I live peacefully in a mind that goes nowhere

I live peacefully in my mind
where inside you will find
an innocent child who wants to get out
and see and explore what life's about
my mind makes decisions about where to go
how the places look, it doesn't know
it tells when and why to share
I live peacefully in a mind that goes nowhere.

Dayna Hudson





Markus Johnson at the
Holocaust Museum
(2004)

What the Mirror Said 2 Me

Listen,
You a pearl.
You an ocean
Of a lady.
You got English
Of your own.
Listen,
Somebody need an ear
To understand you.
Somebody need to be brave
To move in your face.
Listen,
Lady,
You not a game.

Sherrell Jones



The Anatomy of a Brittany

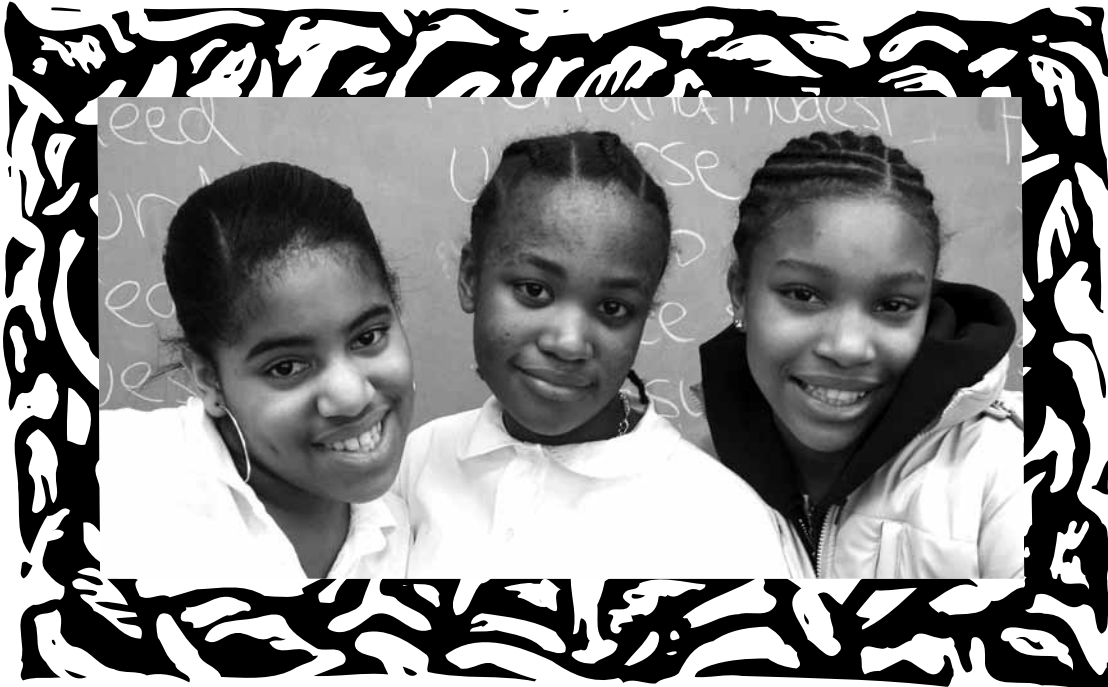
I am part of a generation filled with culture.
I wonder if I can escape the inevitable Monday.
I hear darkness beckoning me to come.
I see a stranger that I know.
I want to sleepwalk to another world.
I am one in a million.

I pretend to float on the clouds.
I feel the sapphire horizon glow.
I touch the thunder and lightning.
I worry about the solution for pollution.
I cry tears of pearls that clatter on the floor.
I am a swift rhythmic sound.

I understand that the unknown wants to be known.
I say that if age is just a number, curfew is just a time.
I dream other people's dreams.
I try to keep my heart in its proper place.
I hope I will be the rhythm of my generation.
I am Brittany.

Brittany Love





l-r: Jessica Carpenter, Candace McCoy, Rhia Hardman (2004)

I Did

1991-2003

I live irritated and go nowhere.
 I eat rare bacon and drink blended worms.
 I sleep on a hard wooden floor.
 I brush my teeth with mud.
 I live in an old dungeon--
 Well, I did.

Andre Harper

Thebes River

It will pass the workers
 that work on a pyramid.
 And some people
 about to put their king in the ground.
 Very sad to lose him.
 The river will move on,
 but the people cannot.

Travis Ellis



Me

I hate rats,
 because they are hungry
 and like to eat your food.
 And I hate ants,
 because they are sneaky and slick.
 I hate war,
 because I hate violence.
 I hate tears,
 because I hate to see people cry.

I like tea,
 because it's good and fresh.
 I like nets,
 because I like to catch things.
 I like men,
 because I want to be one.

Martanaze Dew





*l-r: Jamila Wade, Eryk Abbey,
Markus Johnson, Rhia Hardman,
Jawara Johnson, Candace McCoy
(2005)*

Parados

What is the man upstairs saying,
as fear comes over me and my heart goes wild?

Now I remember you, the healer, with your powers,
and I wonder how you can send my worst fears,
like a nightmare never ending.

Out of the darkness, let us pray.

Now my troubles have no end
and no man can fight off death.

Now the plague goes on like the sparks on fireworks,
and there are no guns or weapons that can destroy these
monsters,
and there are no shields that can defend you from the plague.

God, please help us get rid of the venomous plague.
Lift it from this place.

Let the earth rotate and show the sun again.

Delonte Williams

I am

I am lonely, without any friends.
I wonder why pain rules, coming to my race.
I hear humming in the room.
I see darkness, coming to my life.
I want raindrops to come, so my life can grow.
I am lonely, like the sky.

I pretend to sleepwalk.
I feel like my world is going to end.
I worry every day.
I cry to my mom.
I am lonely, like the sky.

I understand how to do a lot of things.
I say, I love you.
I dream that you'll be here.
I try to love.
I hope you'll be here.
I am lonely, like the color white.

Nichelle Fowler





l-r: Angelica Pratt, Shakia Brockenberry, Tamika Jackson (2005)

Ode I (What's really going on)

The Corinthian crystal of forevisions ponders the ancient king
killing
and a calm, bloody palm.

That butcher's departure time has arrived.
He must be more powerful than the fiasco
of the night sky without stars, for Daedalus,
armed with Icarus' mechanical wings,
gracefully flits to King Midas' castle.
And the nymphs follow the hopeless, hopeless nymphs.
Alas, Olympus, to the zenith.

Leers and glares are the least of his worries--
It is a fact that he will not rest until his demise is in effect.
Like a demonic worm in hell, released to feed
upon the flesh of wicked earthlings,
catastrophic death compels him, but
his sprawling can't evade destiny.

For the earth's conscience calls him empty,
and the nymphs follow the hopeless nymphs.
But now the more absurd has come
from the keen-eared elder who can read your fate
with the simple shake of a tail feather.
As free as a fallen leaf, my soul floats,
but can't find stability in this quarrel,
or any reason for embracing tranquility.
Oh exhausted Jesus with perfect SAT scores,
with the knowhow to give his own night courses...
For the parasite of knowledge needs a new host.

James Saunders



Shadows

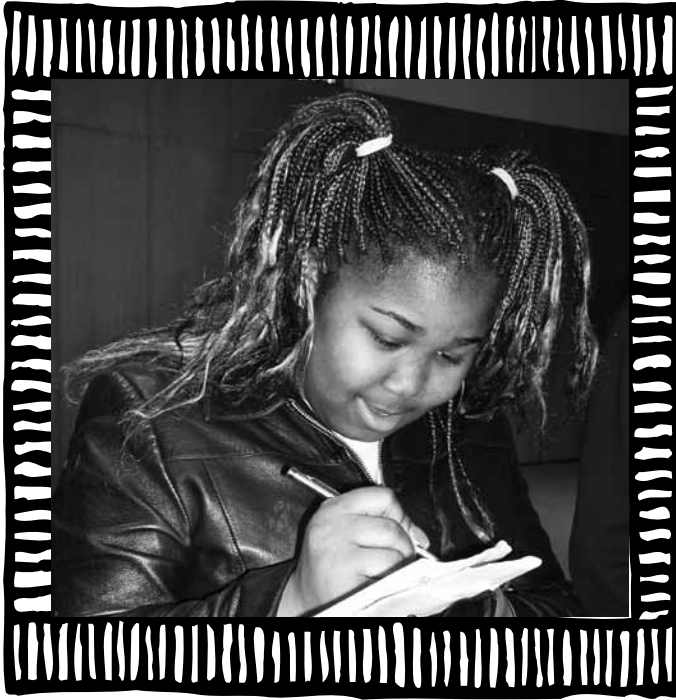
Someone came around my cousin's way
and started to shoot
and it was at night
it was cool at that time
they did not speak our language
it was one of the darkest nights we had
one moment of silence—
when we looked out the door
all we saw was shadows.

Deon Smith

Ocean

My ocean
is in my bucket,
big, blue and happy.
It smiles at me when I walk by,
laughs at me when I make stupid jokes,
sings me to sleep
when I'm too tired to do it on my own.

Raekala Middleton



Raekala Middleton signs autographs at American University (2005)

Broken Body-Broken Soul?

Hate and difference have caused destruction
and lives are put to a pause.
I've heard too many cries and seen cancelled lives,
closed down homes, hear their cry.
Death is a word that they hear often.

But the wounds begin to mend,
as they pretend they aren't hurt,
searching for some type of hope.
Realize you are not alone.
The body is broken, but not your soul.
We remember the forgotten lives,
the ones who lived their lives despised.

Gabrielle Martin



Lost Cause

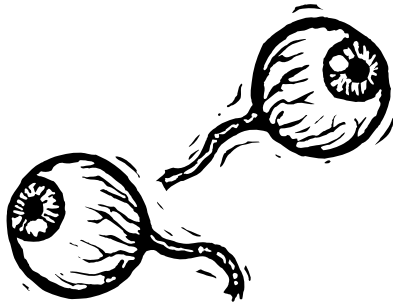
Staring out my window
with an empty look on my face
and my heart filled with no tales left to tell.
The queen bee, strong and aware
buzzes by, reminding me of a lost cause.
A storm with no rain,
a letter with no words,
the sun with no moon,
me without my father,
an oasis with not one drop of moisture
to reflect your face, strong and just like mine.

But in this dark, empty room I find comfort
strangely releasing my meaningless thoughts to you,
a wall, who used to be my comfort, my shadow,
my shade from the sun, my stars in the sky,
My heart.
I drown in the sound of your voice.

I ache, hollow and numb,
but you waltz toward me
echoing your love and I'm hoping
you will come to my rescue, as always.
Your voice frightens me,
the pain deep within your soul only shown by
a glimpse of sorrow through your eyes.
I feel like I felt you go
even if I never knew you.

Amanda Fernandez

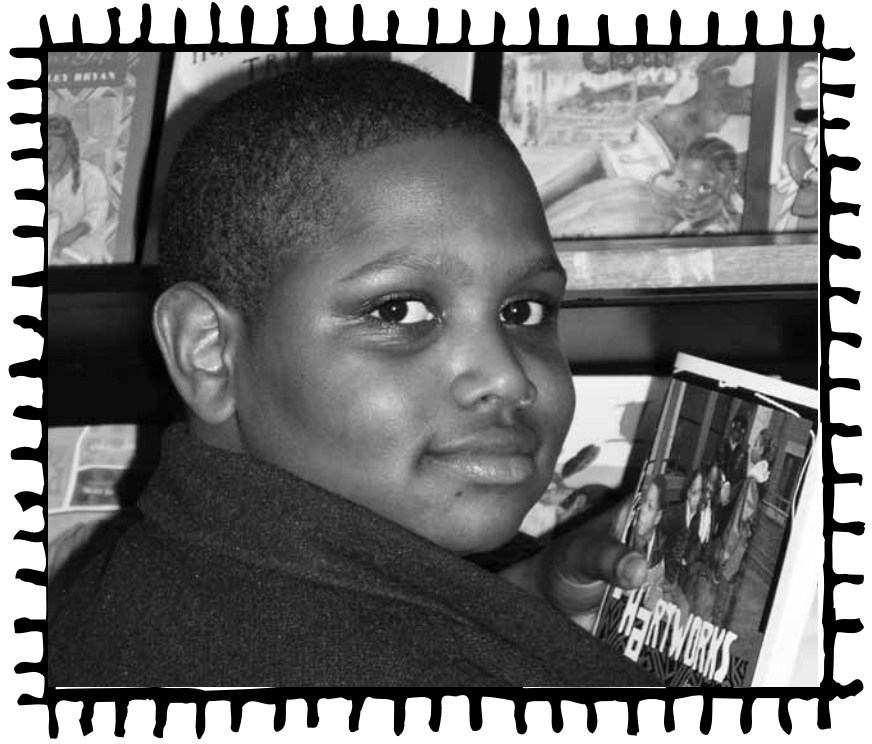




Football

Your rules are
what
we make up, like
grab
touch. The
endzone is
wherever we
like, by
the trashcan
in
the corner
by
the trash
of dirty
beds. Ant's
shoulder
hit the
back of
a
truck and still
he caught
the ball.

Devin Jenkins



Eryk Abbey (2005)

Why I Strive

Glimmer and glisten like a star so bright.
Overcome all this world can give.
Witness the wonders, witness the gold.
Behold the pleasures of fantasy, and make that fantasy reality.
Envision the blessings of tomorrow while cherishing today.
Visit yesterday to improve today,
because if you hum to the bee, the bee will give honey.
Slave in the garden and the roses will flourish.
Follow the rainbow to find the gold--
books will help a lot.
Cherish the lessons you learn every day.
Comfort the people you meet along the way.

Reginald Williams





l-r: Shaiski Johnson, Jasmine Murray, Jamal Buggs (2006)



Dying to live

The hood is not the only place of darkness.
When the sky turns black and the moon comes out,
that's when the mania takes place.

There is no doubt in my mind that I want to live
I'm running from neighborhood crews
I guess I was the one they sacrificed
Now that I am prohibited from my own world
my hood, where I am supposed to relinquish my harm done?

Where do I brag? That is unknown.
The tar black jeans, and the blue-black bandanas
are the trademark of honor.
I backed off. I perfectly knew that if I continued
I'd end up dead or in jail
So now I set a distant pace away from those that won't grow.

Gabrielle Martin



Forgive

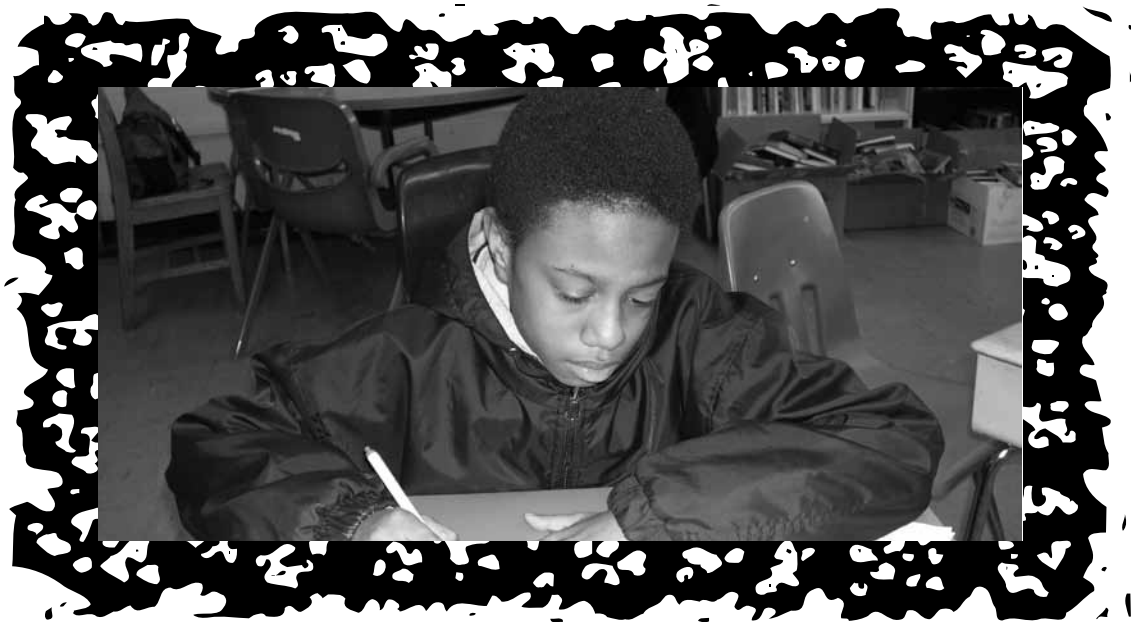
Forgive me unnamed. I lost
my daddy before I was
born.

Forgive me he never said
what he said. He never took
back his word.

I don't know what I
became. Forgive me. An anger
unfolding,

books on the floor,
desks,
ripped paper under my feet.

Tamera Pearson



Markus Johnson (2006)

To Earl (my father)

The star changing into a blue puppy,
 changing into a man named Earl
 who has a red shirt on
 who is flying across the sky
 who is going into the blue clouds
 with all the E's you can think of all around him.
 If we could meet again, I would say I love you.

Lorraine Ramsey

Poem to the Unborn Child

You weren't born into
 this world because I
 was not ready to
 have you because I
 would be lonely I
 wasn't ready to have
 a family yet, I would
 gaze out the window
 and wonder and think
 about not telling my
 child about what I said
 and how I said it.

Seleen Ford

Unfood

I see young fools sitting around in red shade,
 burning their heads off.
 Their heads vanishing like glistening juice,
 while others sit in the windfall shade
 eating hot steaming fried chicken and onion liver.
 That's better than nothing.
 I know I'd do something.

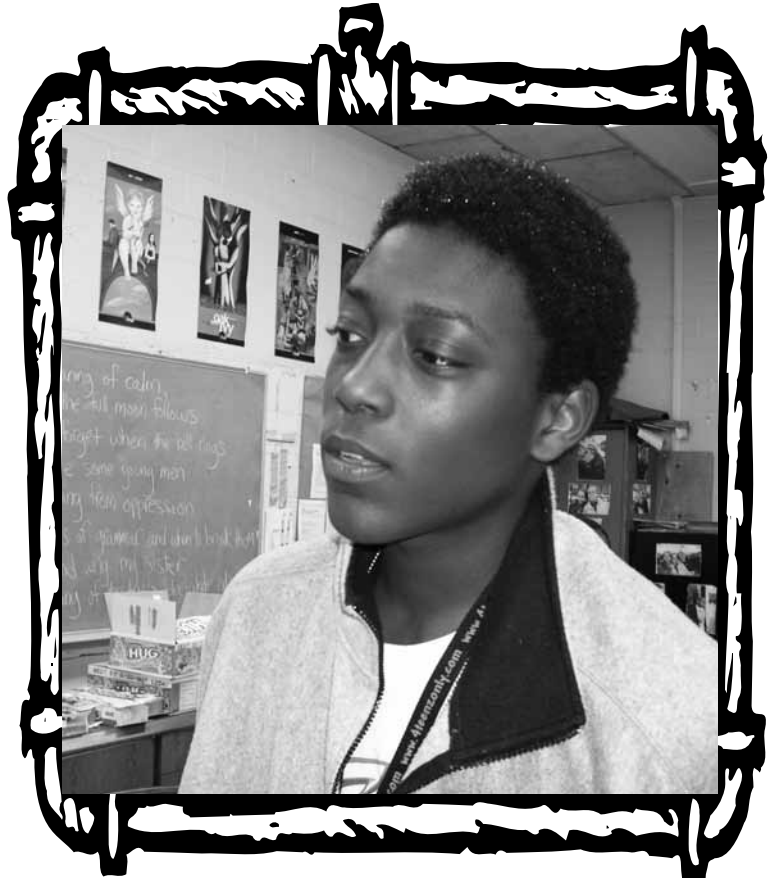
Chantz Claggett



Never Again

Never again will I sit and watch
people crying and not ask why.
People picking up guns, shooting people.
Why?
A bullet grazed my arm.
I got up and said, no more.
Never again.
For that brief moment I felt
like I was somebody,
but fear and death ran through my mind.
First comes courage, then comes honor.

Joseph Heath

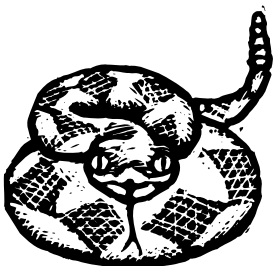


Jamal Williams (2005)

The people

The people come in different shapes and sizes
Black and white ones running around with their dogs.
Some of them are straighter than the lines of squares,
or crooked like the lines in Z's.
Dancing the night away on your sleigh
We are the people of today
So the world is going to go our way
not yours.

Alexis Garrett

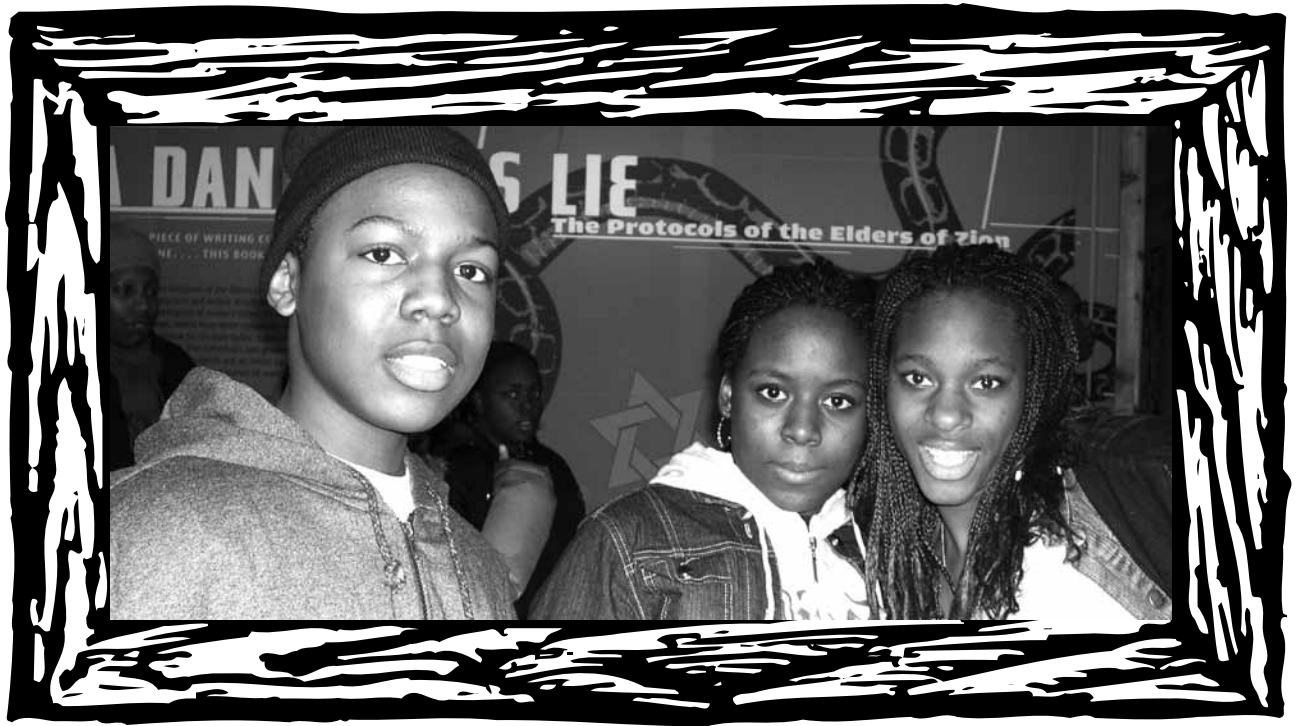


Memorial

I see yellow lightning, black sky, purple clouds.
I hear loud raging fires.
I smell dying fear that's still alive.

In back of the world there's a sky full of souls
that cannot speak.
By mistake, the evening is leaving,
pleading and needing, afraid of dead leaves;
Dead leaves afraid of me:
We both will stand.

Alexis Monroe

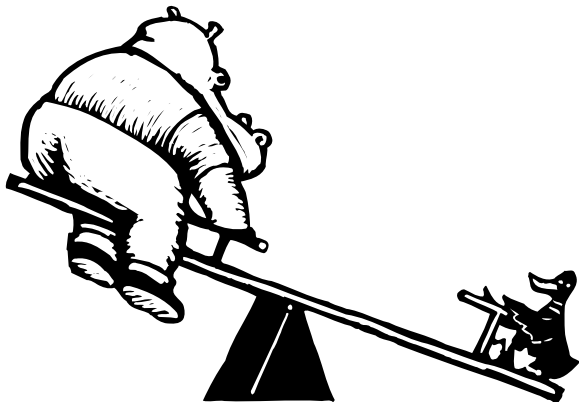


*l-r: Marvin McDowell, Shannon Allen,
Annice Ludd at the Holocaust Museum (2007)*

The Night of the Weeping Children

Sleep may not enter here
 Many weeping children shed many tears
 Midnight strikes
 Where you have fallen, you stay
 Darkness covers your eyes
 Until the break of dawn the next day
 You start to smell smoke while you were sleeping
 Then you flee to your angel
 Because you hear children weeping
 He steps out from the others, the soldiers unknown
 About to kill you because you have grown
 At all times I see them, while I'm asleep
 I see the little children of the night that weep.

DeAndre Britten



As Long as I Can Remember

As long as I can remember,
 I've had a very serious situation with my brother
 we called each other names that weren't true,
 and we said it to make each other mad.
 But sooner or later, we will start
 talking to each other nicely again,
 because we aren't just brothers,
 we're friends.

Andre Harper





l-r: Aaron Brooks, Luqman Abdullah (2006)

Just how it is

Love turns to hate,
Hate turns to anger,
Anger turns to being sorry,
Then people make up.
But that does not always happen.

Sometimes love turns into loss,
And loss turns into tears,
Tears turn into feeling sorry.
That's what happened to me.

Joseph Heath

Magnetic Poetry

Young, steely breeze,
cold to me.
Liquid questions
easy by rhythm streams.
Why drink
from my brilliant pictures.
Delicious skies
award a desire born to fly.

Tony Bush

Nothing

I am trying to make broken cars into dead animals.
Then it happened, the sun rose.
Garbage couldn't stop smashing to the ground.
When we heard the cave had music, it was a loud
echoing sound
full of my vocabulary
as food was in the dirt, rolling huge rocks
there was an important grammar without the horizon
the trees veins wouldn't maintain nearby
groping in my huge floor a distance away
from daylight to night, my tongue turns old
and the future language is not right
but I just don't sleep because sleep is like death.

Monica Harris





I don't know why

James Tindle (2006)

Every night there is a gold star in the sky.
 I don't know why.
 And a window that was fresh, now it's boarded up.
 I don't know why.
 Yesterday hope, tomorrow fear.
 I don't know why.
 They chased running chickens into death and
 plucked their feathers.
 I don't know why.
 I am trying to survive this world.
 And I don't know why.

Stephen Staton

I hate you for real, I do

I hate you truly, truly I do
 the thought of you and me being friends
 you must be a fool
 you're a dork and I'm cool
 you may say I'm evil, but I don't really care
 I hate you so much, I even hate your hair
 I hate your ugly grin, let it drown in despair
 Oh, and that laugh, let it vanish in thin air
 Oh I hate you so much, so much
 I don't care about anything you do
 Only God knows how much I hate you.

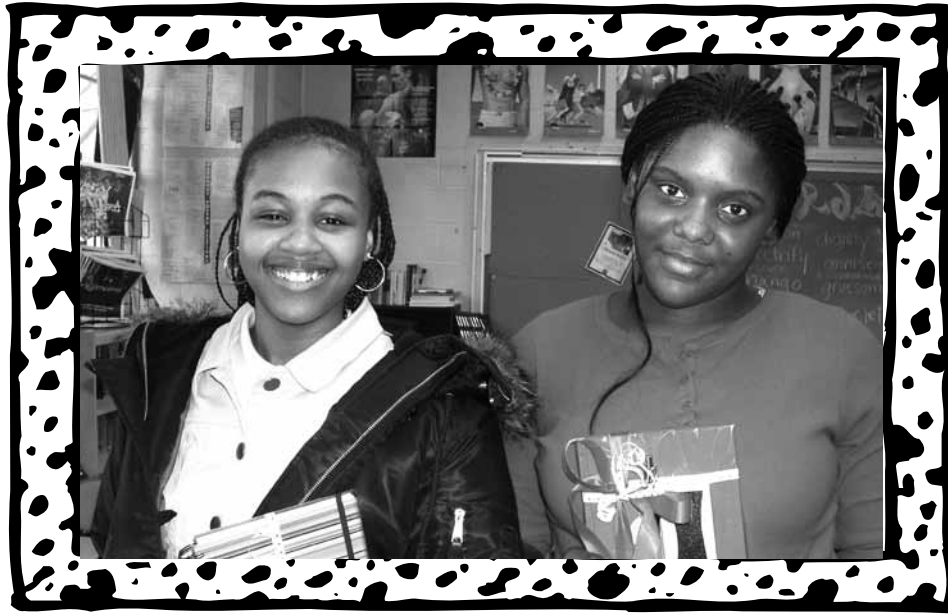
The Wrong One

Isyah Joyner

Uprising
 the golden star
 plucked the wrong thing now the hope of frost on cars
 Uprising
 the waves, why
 look down or up where's the sky
 Uprising
 the wrong one
 don't bang with sticks on drum.

Kevin Wood





l-r: Kiana Murphy, Nichell Kee (2006)

Poverty

The nightmare of illusions of tomorrow
stalk quietly around the corner
cherishing the patterns of abuse and sinister rage
upon this fragile soul.
Yearning for the grave
and wanting to escape this crisscrossed rickety bridge of a life
from this morning, the day of his birth.
Tomorrow's day will come in grief
so will hunger, stealing no to weak, loan can't pay back.

Illusions of hard eternities haunt my life
draining from my self-esteem until suicide strikes my brain
like a bolt of lightning from the hand of Zeus.
Until his sinister rage paralyzes my brain and overwhelms my temples
and as the last blow strikes the heart,
the fragile soul is shattered.

Nations are not shattered, memorials are not built.
Nobody will miss him. Nope, not one person.
But some things will
The corner on which he sat will.
The tin cup which earned him a few cents each day of his miserable life.

Reginald Williams



Coldhearted state of mind

Rejected and despised, just because I'm different.
I'm not popular
and I don't pay three hundred dollars for clothes.
I stand out from the crowd because I'm not from this neck of the woods.

I always had what I needed and didn't care the cost.
But now I strive and pay the cost to be the boss
because I learned to stay to myself.

Because the world has a coldhearted state of mind
the moment of truth is here,
the bomb will drop today,
as much as it hurts, war is on the way.

Gabrielle Martin



A Sense of a Radiant Environment

On a peaceful day where nothing can go wrong,
I stroll through a beautiful forest,
watching rainbow-colored salamanders
swimming upstream like
a race to the tongue of the future.
Lions, bright as the sun, roaring
like a yearning for adventure.
Cerulean-colored dolphins, sharks and whales
jumping and dancing for a great forest.
The best part was the bird reunion:
The vultures, cardinals and blue jays
flying off to the sun.

Delonte Morrow

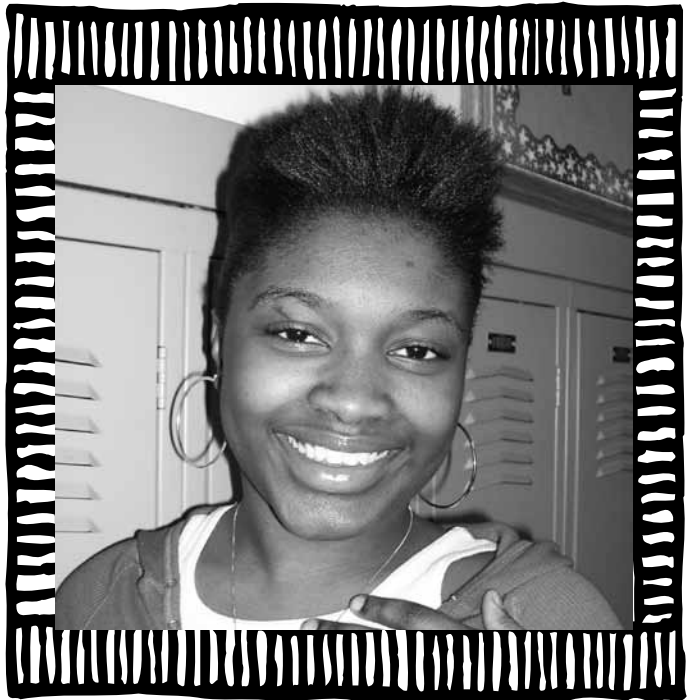


Deon Smith (2004)

Be careful what you wish for

I used to think life was simple—
Sure it had its twists and turns,
but I thought that was just part of growing up.
As I get older and as I am wiser
I know that is not true.
Not only does life have twists and turns,
it's like a maze
it has many tricks up its sleeves and you never know
if the next choice you make will lead to a dead end
where you can't turn around.
I think it's like a chess game—
If you make the wrong move,
the game is over
and you don't have much time to think
about whatcha gonna do next.
It's like a 15 minute test you haven't studied for.
Everything is moving so fast through your mind
and all you can think about is the time
and whatcha gonna do about this mess you put yourself through?
I am only 13, and that's what I think so far
I have a long life to live and I'll never
say I wish I was dead
because a wise person once told me
(before she died)
be careful what you wish for—
It just might come true.

Chayna Ross



Joenelle Curtis (2005)

Alone

I am alone in the park
where birds are vanishing so fast in the pond
it looks like kids are getting taken from their parents
people getting shot by people and getting burned in the
fire
and people are doing suicide because they are mad.
My family is killing themselves, so now I'm alone.

Timothy Rawls





Lost

So bad to be hurt, and to be outcast,
outcast to the ends of the seven seas.
My hand gets wrinkly and gray,
so much I want to let the salt water
fill my body up and
go to the heaven I've dreamed of.
But I realize while looking at my life,
lost is not a state of being,
but just a feeling.
Then I got up and, guess what?
The water was only to my knees.

Tony Bush



Rhia Hardman (2005)

Doors that stay open

Doors open to a jail
so a demon can go in.
Doors open to skeptical people
who do not believe anything.
Doors open to ominous things
that don't know how to speak.
Doors open to ancient people
who are invisible and carved.
And when the doors close,
they make tributes to those who have walked through.

Dakia Koon

Dark Sky

Sacrifice the change of yesterday's blaze
Joy bleeds magic in the dark sky
Breeze of flowers opens the free dark sky
Poison celebrates picking a daughter to become a princess.
Marble dazzles a son to be a king of grass.

Delonte Williams

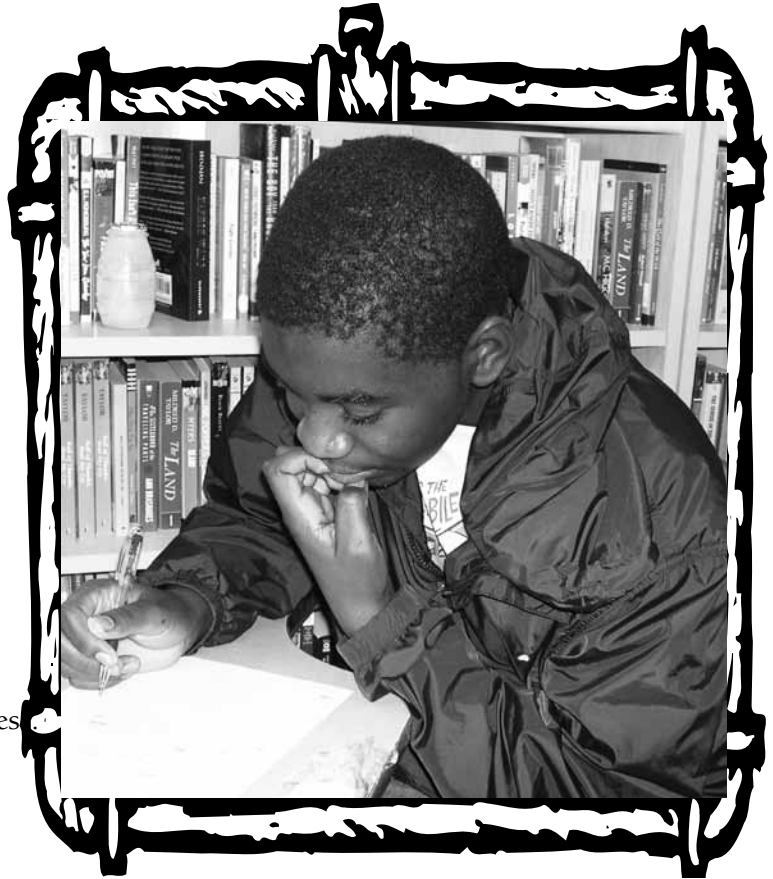




A Woman

A woman is a mother and a father
 who feeds and clothes me,
 who gets me when I am wrong.
 A woman is a grandmother
 who takes care of her grandkids
 and gives them cookies and cakes,
 all that she can give to make them happy.
 I love women,
 because without them this world would be a mess.

Marcus Jackson



James Saunders (2003)

My Mommy

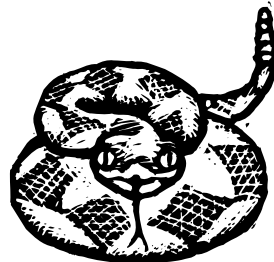
As sweet as a plum, right down to the pit.
 As good as always having a first aid kit.
 Always smiling, never a frown,
 as long as my Mommy stays around.
 As sour as a lemon, just being squeezed
 helping little kids, with their scraped knees.
 Always nearby, always alert
 "Don't be talking to no boys, don't try to flirt!"
 Always there from the farthest view,
 right there in a hurry to the rescue.
 She can sing low, she can sing high;
 she can walk, she can fly.
 She dresses in Coach, Luis and Tommy,
 this is why I love her, cause she's my Mommy.

Dayna Hudson

Clouds

Beautiful clouds in the sky.
 When 5:00 PM comes, pink and purple clouds move in,
 Tigers walk across the world,
 They jump to each of the continents.
 When I smell love in the air,
 My heart starts to pump
 And make me go to my soul mate
 Just like you.

Oralia Woods





*l-r: Ashanti Paylor,
Xavier Leake,
Bnyonka Simpkins
(2005)*

The Sun's Dream

The sun dreams of being a square
and having a lot of friends
The only friends he has are the planets and the wind
He dreams about being cold and having the flu
He dreams about taking a break in the summer,
because that's when he works the hardest
The sun dreams, the sun dreams
Oh boy, how the sun dreams

Lamont Gaines

Strong

I feel strong because my aunt, uncle, brother and sister had died.
So now I'm a soldier.
And now I am strong because
we have a killer going around killing people.
I think the sniper had a life, but it's all over
so now he is going around killing other people for nothing.
What is the purpose of killing people?
So now I am watching where I'm going.
If the police catch him
I still can't go outside for another month.
I am mad at this man.
Please catch him. Please.

DeAngelo Thomas

Kaleidoscope

Running waterfalls made out of soda
flowing down into the canyon,
water changing crystal blue
as the vines of the jungle turn into slithering snakes
with scales made of green diamonds,
turning into the stars above the night sky
stretching out on the horizon,
watching the sunrise at the top of the hill
just like me.

Tyrell Jackson





*l-r: Nichell Kee,
Keeshawn Murphy
(2010)*

Darkness

Flying through the shadows of evil and raptured secrets.
Crying tears of fake happiness and joy, showing raindrops of light.
Fire is burning before me, shifting and turning. Experience takes control.
Climbing to get to the very top, but something is holding me down.
What could it be? I don't know, but my mysterious ways showed theft of pure darkness.
But what makes it so good is that I see the light.

Sharkiyla Marshall

Mad Streets

I'm from the mad streets of Southeast!
Where you get slashed for a little cash
Or get smacked for a little crack.
If you were me, you'd know where to be--
Not at the precinct, snitching on the hustlers
You should be at home, with your mother and brothers.
In the mad streets, you can lose your life
By the gun or by the knife.
Though you see it's never happened to me,
I've still got to survive on the Mad Streets.

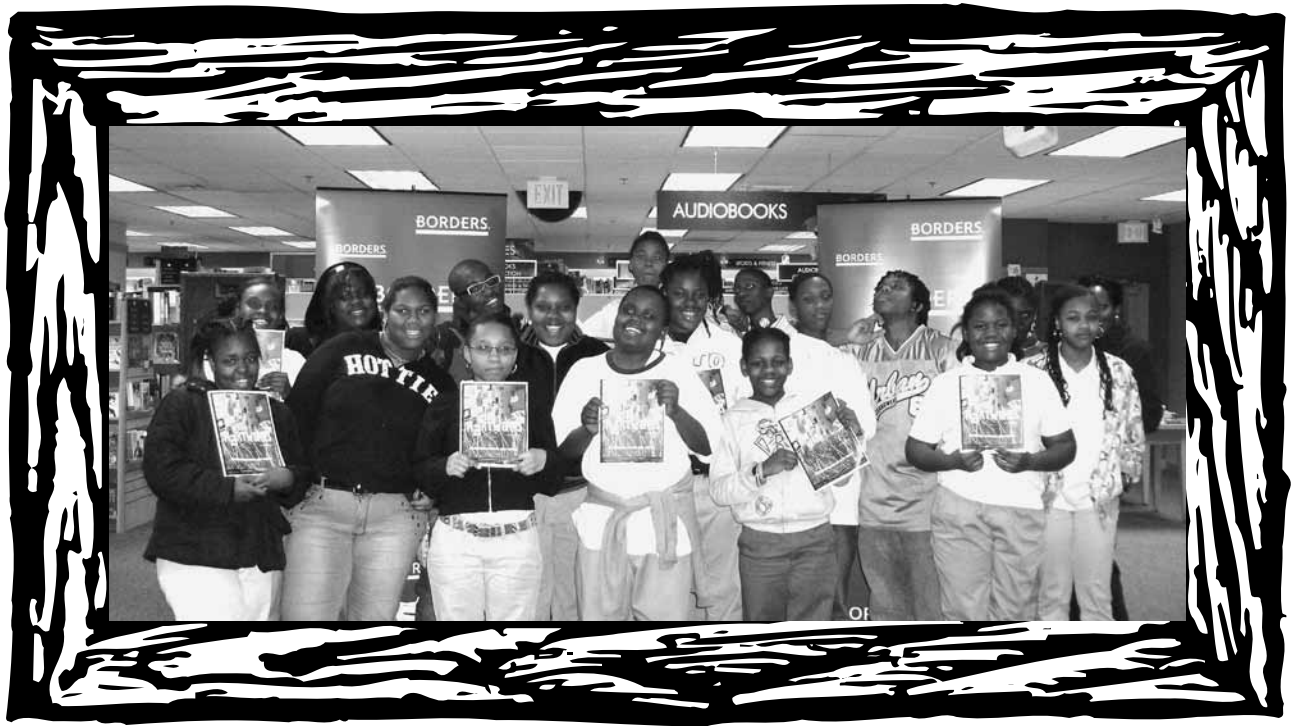
Louis Hudson

Unseen

As he sits in the darkness,
he's (cruelly behind tomorrow)
with delicate feelings.
The rare unseen mirage glistens
as the sun crisscrosses through the canyon;
And he howls at the unseen illusion
with mechanical magic.
He aches deep behind the humble valley.
As he sits, quietly hidden behind the river bed,
he mourns his echo with blisters on his back
and he shouts "I'm unseen, unseen."

Brandon Weston





"hArtworks" reading at Borders Books (2006)

Wasted

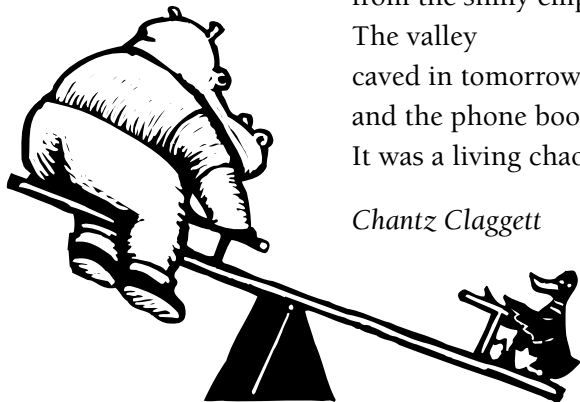
Sleeping Beauty.
Life is a waste of time.
The tears of her mate still fall.
The door of love has closed.
He rides the white horse home.
The eagles soar to seek him,
for the beauty has awakened
but the thought is lost.

Joseph Hudson

A living chaos

The hunting knife cut
through a nice tomorrow candlestick
from last year's sewer.
The stupid riverbed
was cursed
from the shiny empire.
The valley
caved in tomorrow
and the phone booth plucked away.
It was a living chaos.

Chantz Claggett



Something I Wrote

Rolling yams hippopotamuses mutter
People travel down food like hair
come under man's illuminated...
pour a singer some Kool-aid.
Can metal hide in torment?
See my drivers license on love sand by tiara
Numbers name light by construction.

Pages by aqua clear pants
igloos rumor dancing goats
elaborate, come on, let's race,
slap the platinum in the tournament
under your own territory.
Affording plants pay,
a classical bongo dies,
due to flying Nevada pigeons.
All leopards eat Big Macs
and refuse marijuana
for primetime tv.
Let the tempo rise for a
positive destiny.

Tayonne Casey





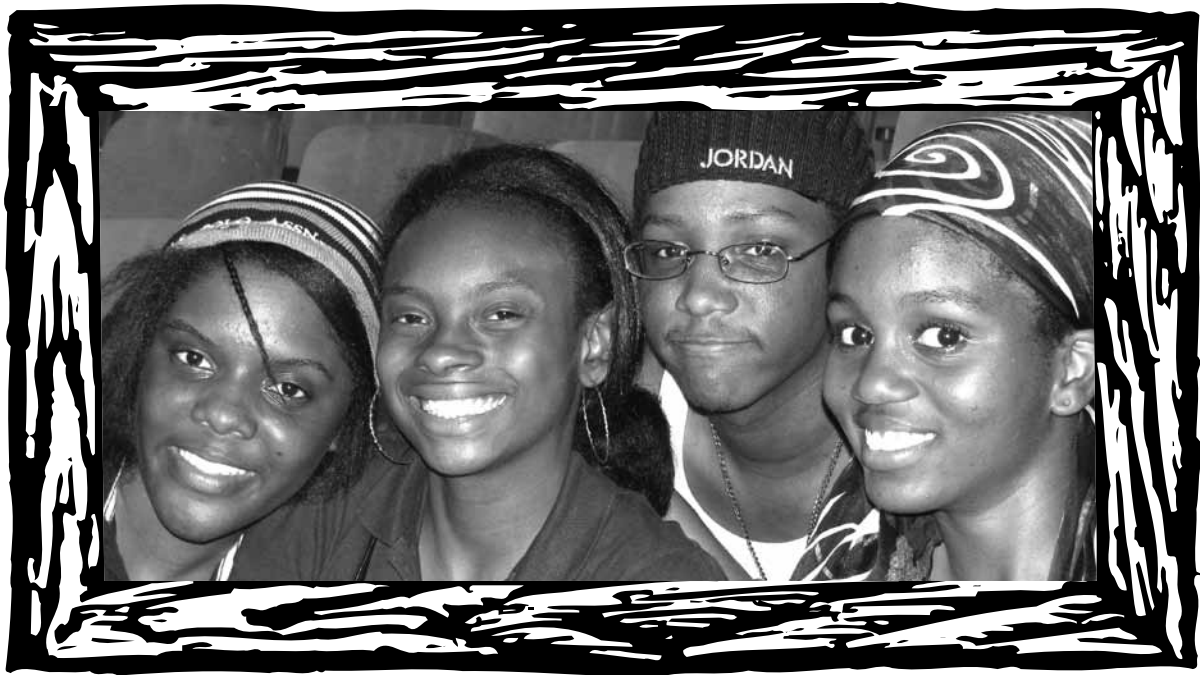
Naaman Dudley (2005)

My Immediate (thanks to the Arena Stage)

This life of showbiz is fake.
 All we need is to entertain.
 The man with the whip is the president of grass.
 Tom Walker lives a life of intense agony,
 from false accusations, abuse, bloody walls
 and images of dark making someone stumble.
 And I bet he would like to be able to sense the bloom of the flowers.
 But all he can do is to live and play the violin,
 while dead from intoxication.
 The guys live a life of hustle on the strip,
 while fantasizing about the woman in the red dress.
 And you know red is my favorite color.
 The black family is feeling blue,
 because they have a dream that no one understands.
 The boys hang out at the spot, watching and admiring
 the elegant movements of the lady, and it seems like
 her dance is a math equation,
 each movement adds up to her incandescent glow.
 They live a life of teamwork and struggle,
 They both have a dream
 and want to make each other happy.
 And Cupid is just toiling, looking to create translucent lust
 but he created love.

James Saunders





l-r: Nichell Kee, Renita Williams, Damon Kee, Maryum Abdullah (2010)

Wellington Park

Walking into Wellington Park, the scariest park,
wind blowing fast,
trees turning into living monsters,
puppies turning into chirping birds,
green frogs jumping in the air,
turning to smoke from people's mouths.
In Wellington Park,
grass turns into live seaweed,
water turns into ice from the cold night streets
turning into mountains.
See, that's why people imagine.

Thomas Carter

Wild Imagination

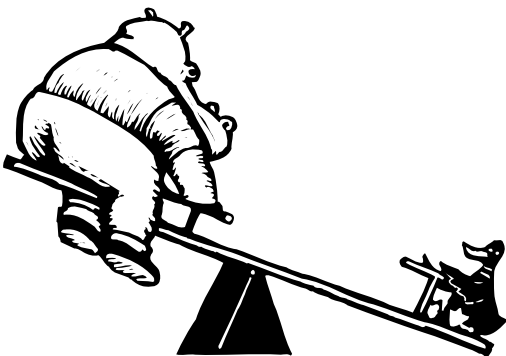
Walking down, down a street of lights.
Red rubies jump into blue, turning
into purple shells in the sea that never ends,
which jumps into green flags waving in the air,
which turns to brown skin
which jumps into black,
perfectly matching the lovely night sky.
In it, stars gleaming, pearl white cats
running in the darkness
of prowling wild alley cats, black as the day is long,
who know they have no owner, just like me.

Brittany Love

This Feeling

There will always be
a rain of alphabets.
I feel this pain, it's like
a grain of light piercing my eyes;
it's like a chamber of secrets
just waiting to be released;
this feeling gets stronger and stronger
inside me, waiting to burst out.
I wish I were an angel, so I could lift my wings.

Dana Postell



Burning Bridges

Basing basics on the serenades of moods,
My thesis on mortals was like conviction on paper:

Winning wars on a revolutionary basis
Was making the united nations seem Gemini.

Her black lies rang ding dong bells in the dungeons of hell
Arousing the super-natural intellect of Satan,

Giving us spiritual burns,
Burning our identities to ashes,
And our minds were invaded by guilt;
Our minds were longing for a much better explanation.

We were too naïve and self-conscious to bend over backwards
And accept the conviction of truth.

Consequence and price emerging from the shadows of our souls,
Giving us visions of baring death to our loves,
Baring deceit from our overwhelming friends,
Brushing off burdens of our profaned faults,
Dealing with possibilities arising in our thoughts.

I escaped the nightmares of my humanity,
Craving an inner peace
Going to streams,
Upper-class suburb parks,
Seeking a sanctuary to revive my interior deadly aspects of life.

I came to a conclusion, accepting the facts of issues,
Resorting to therapy, an odd resolution.
My observations of personal affairs
Collide in controversial wars of the mind.

Was I right?
Was I wrong?

My ultimate escape resulted in my mind dangling off the ridges--

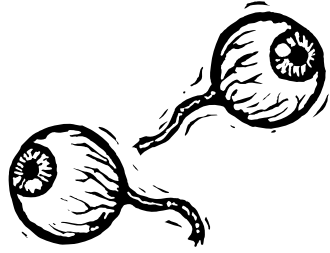
Be careful of what burns internally, they said,
Make sure it don't be bridges.

Larry Robertson



Terrance Patterson (2004)





Get Your Elbow Off the Table

I was raised by get your elbow
off the table, don't never say you're
not able, get dat money real faithful
type of family.

Always on my back, never let me
slack, they always stay packed
Do anything for me, loved me to the
max type family.

Get your butt in this house
fore I tear you up. Always
drinking out the juice cup
type family.

Tore up off the goose
put a lil cranberry in it to
give it a boost, come over
here and give Grandma a
smooch type family.

Hand me the remote right
here beside me, move out of
the way of the TV I can't see
type family.

Come here boy, then smack
me in my head, I know you
ain't wet your bed, even though
I did, I'd tell her it's water instead
type family.

You better do your homework
beat with the belt had me crying
like water type family.

Davon Ford



l-r: Jamila Wade, James Saunders (2006)

Being Young

Because you're so old
You've forgotten:

How to smile
youthfully;
How to imagine a possibility.

You say we're too young to understand:

The beauty
of an inexhaustible earth;
The joy of living.

But surely we understand
what you don't:

The difference between now
and yesterday;
The abstract tension of tomorrow.

You say we're too young to understand
what we don't know, but
we're old enough to understand
what you have forgotten.

Christa Madikaegbu

People Love Me

There will always be a postcard in the mailbox.
There will always be someone who cares about me somewhere.
There is always a bridge in between the gaps in my heart.
There will always be a little voice in my head saying, "Kiss her, kiss her."
There is always food in the fridge when I'm hungry.
And there are always friends who care.

Jawara Johnson

Victim of Bad Music

I want to leave this noise I hear
too much yelling, banging, and screaming cries.
But this is not the first.
Remembering what happened last time.
The yelling was stuck to my head for days,
just like this cherry flavored gum
on my writing hand shoe.
My hand banging,
which lands on my next problem—too many drums
in class, in my home sweet home, in the parks
in the night dark.
Have they ever heard silence is golden?
My head feels like a parade, a band, a squad.
By the time everyone leaves class
I hit the wall.
It's too late.
I am already a victim of bad music.
On and on, over again,
no matter who leaves this 4-walled room
it lives on like a dream, like a memory.
Am I crazy?

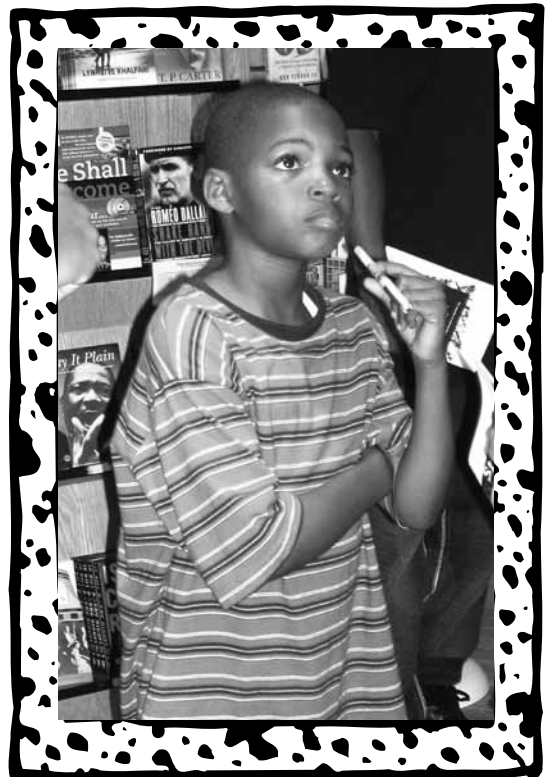
Pamula Twyman



The Bad Things that Happen to People

Everybody bursts out with broken glass
When the storm comes, the rain falls
Then the harm comes from a cloud
The jails open for the people to walk in
When they have to spend their life there
They stay there for almost 20 years,
Then they get tired and die.

Dakia Koon



Naaman Dudley at Karibu Books (2005)

The Universe

It never really meant too much to me
When space became a picture,
And astronaut books weren't used as rockets,
They were used as literature.

Yet astronomers didn't study astronomy,
They studied the orbits.
Mercury was an illusion
That led to confusion,
But it didn't help my horoscope.

And then I saw the nuclear core
Which didn't give me a thought,
But Saturn fell from gravity.
So then I wondered
What happened to Neptune's capacity?
Earth's rotation spun me around.

Now that I have the missing key,
I know that Aquarius will strike Capricorn
And the earth will be whole again.

Amani Al-Fatah

My Dream

I was stuck in the basement
In the dark, with a silent girl
Drifting through my thoughts;
I didn't know if my dream was hers:
It will be a Friday night
And I will be wearing red Hush Puppies,
My feet relieved of duty,
My soul in free-fall,
Losing my balance
In zero gravity.

Darnell Mack



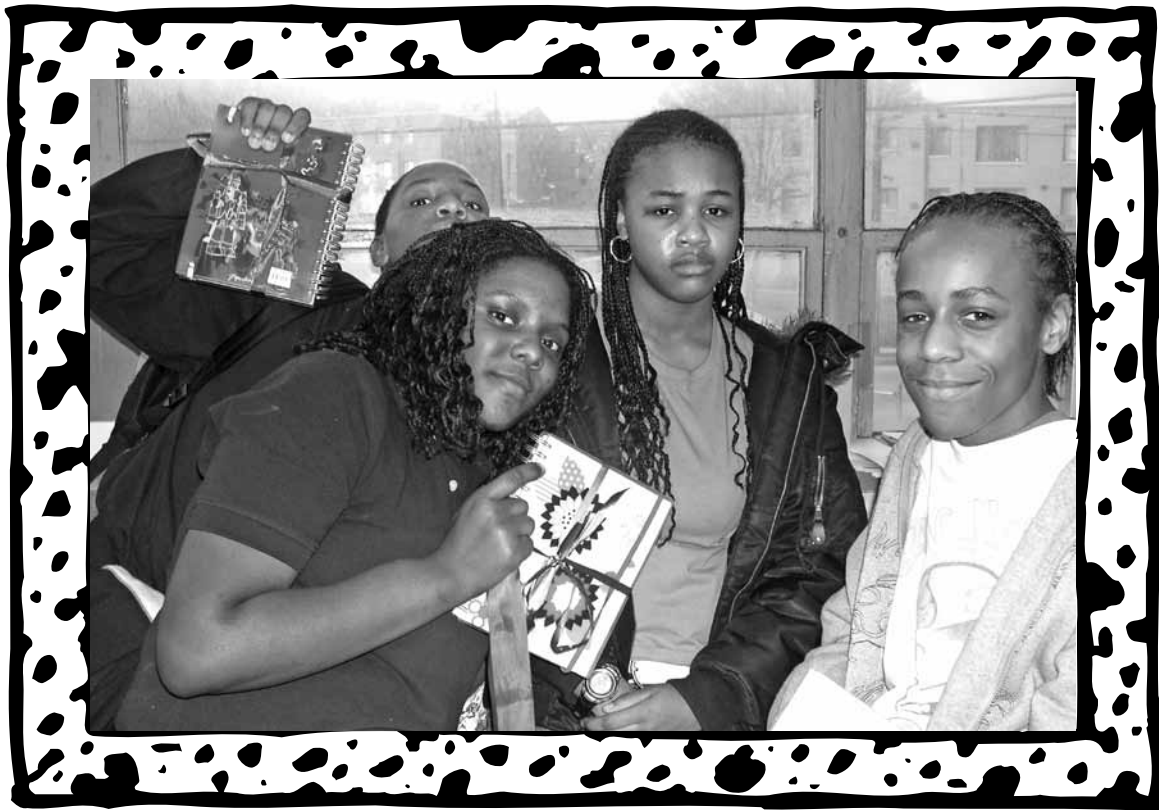
l-r: Janine Green, Sequan Wilson (2009)

Zephyr Like Quasar

The world? So dark, full of decay, and gloomy until it came.
The shiny breeze of wind, continuously
spreading peace and illuminating the world.
Riding it on a sharpened splinter, like a beam of depression,
and an empire of hate built up over the years
by the graves of the followers,
followed by the leader Hitler,
who cost more than he was worth,
and the people who can't be remembered,
because their graves were never dug.
As fast as you can click a pen to record the great miracle,
the world is changed forever.

Reginald Williams





l-r: Damon Kee, Nichell Kee, Kiana Murphy, Sequan Wilson (2009)

Ode to Failure

Failure is my Kryptonite.
 He is my nightmare that haunts me.
 He is the mold of my fantasies.
 He is the remnant of my sins.
 He is the obsidian blade, with precision,
 That cuts the fog that protects me from my worst fears.
 He was my father before I was reincarnated.
 He flourished me with coarse abuse, generated from fear.
 We used to fish at the Susquehanna every time I got A+ on a test.
 Every stroke that didn't catch a fish, he looked as if it was wasting his essential time.
 As usual, I heard the words "This is gonna hurt me more than it will hurt you,"
 And he swiftly beat me.
 He put his belt on and bound me in his arms.
 Unfortunately, his belt was spiked and
 I didn't know if he was still punishing me or hugging me.
 And now, since he knows that I have persevered through his torment,
 He continuously refers to me as his ode to failure.

James Saunders





*Jamie Warren outside
Arena Stage (2007)*

The Hand at Hains Point

Did you ever go down to see the hand--
Two a.m., midnight, by yourself?
Sit down by the statue and wonder where
The rest of the body is?

Did you ever think about digging a hole
To try to uncover the rest of him?
God bless the marble, the concrete
That lets a man hide his soul underground.

Did you ever think about the world around you,
And how much of it is stone?
The hand brings people close all day,
But still it's all alone.

Down by the big hand
Two a.m.
Midnight
By yourself...
The hand, I wish it could rise up,
But who would miss a statue?

Byron Jordan



Jazz Feels

Jazz makes me feel relaxed and sleepy,
It's like a lightning bolt of peace,
It has the power to hold me in its musical grip,
With a mystic, fast-and-slow-together sound.
Jazz is like a long lasting dream-sound
In your head, and you never want it to go away.
I seek the hidden answers in the music,
The rhythm is curved and tender,
It feels like I open a door
And step into a jazz zone,
That makes me feel alive,
In my dreams,
Relaxed
And sleepy.

Michael Toomer

Silence

Silence is the golden key,
A splash of sorrow
Might mean a mystery;
It is so heavenly.
Magic sparkles through the
Midnight air,
Privacy travels at dawn;
The music takes you places slowly.
It makes you think of a good memory--
That is what silence is like.

Crystal Watts



Jamahl Jenkins, R.I.P. (2006)

The Man On The Porch

I used to say hello to you,
And have a conversation.
You were such a nice old man,
And I would often walk by.

I could've been closer to you
If only I had tried.
You lived in secret and died that way,
And I wish I could know why.

It is like a bone in my gut.
I can just see the smirk on your face.
Your soul is everlasting, but your body is not.
Your two arms are crossed in a wooden cage.

Your angel is looking over me.
Your tender murmur is a promise.
No one can take your place;
Dear Man On The Porch, drop a feather for me.

Jessica Rawls



Hip-Hop Shoes

Hip-hop shoes've been everywhere,
Hip-hop shoes make people stare;
Hip-hop shoes sing the blues,
Hip-hop shoes are not for fools.

Hip-hop shoes dance night and day,
Hip-hop shoes go out to play;
Hip-hop shoes step to the beat,
Hip-hop shoes are on your feet.

Hip-hop shoes are in style,
Hip-hop shoes make people smile;
Hip-hop shoes are smooth and quick,
Hip-hop shoes always fit.

Hip-hop shoes go 'round the world,
Hip-hop shoes get all the girls;
Hip-hop shoes fly through the air,
Hip-hop shoes are on the feet of the mayor.

Hip-hop shoes I love to wear,
Hip-hop shoes, I have a pair;
Hip-hop shoes mine, all mine,
Hip-hop shoes send shivers down my spine.

Bernard Best





My Poem

My poem can fight,
My poem can sing,
My poem can fly,
But it has no wings.

My poem can wake
You up from your sleep,
My poem can rhyme
And stick to the beat.

My poem can give,
My poem can take,
My poem can tell
The real from the fake.

My poem can see,
My poem makes you read,
My poem isn't food,
But it does fill a need.

Krystal White

Women Blues

Women, women, women,
All women want is money--
Don't tell them how much money you have;
Don't tell them you love them,
Because they say stop lying.
They tell you to get up and get a job
If you say how much money you have,
They tell you what we don't have
And what they would like
Then you're broke again.
If you say you're broke, then they say stop lying
Then we start crying.

Keon Johnson



Stelita Better (2009)

Someone Else

You've got another girl and I know it--
Someone who loves you just like me.
Hanging on your words like they were gold,
You're gonna break her heart and destroy her life too.
You're going to leave her, and I know it;
She'll never know what made you leave.
She'll cry and wonder where it went wrong,
But she'll never know and
I know this because
The girl is just like me.

Syreeta Anderson

Who I Am

They call me dumb, but I know I'm smart
I can not draw, but I want to learn art
I'm not the greatest, but I play football
I'm not too short, but I am not tall
They call me silly, but I know I can think
I am not crazy, so I don't smoke or drink
People talk about me, and I just say "Be gone"
I am a kid and I want to have fun.

Barrett Norris



Why?

Today is the day butterflies fly
 Little children laugh and cry
 Old people think they are going to die
 And everybody wonders why.

People tell lies
 Girls trying to get guys
 We all should open our eyes--
 Look up to the skies!

There's a shining light
 It shines so bright
 Like a shooting star on a cloudless night
 Still, you would wonder why.

I can hear the silent cries,
 But I can not fly
 No one can tell you when you're going to die
 Everyone knows this and
 Still wonders why.

Syreeta Anderson



Rayshawn Hall (2006)

How Do You Say I Love You?

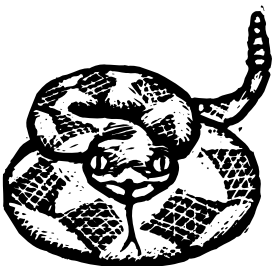
How do you say I love you?
 Do you just say it without really meaning it?
 Do you say "Ha love ya"?
 Do you say it just 'cause you don't
 Wanna hurt his feelings?

No, not me
 I don't say it unless I mean it
 I don't want to hear it unless you mean it
 But if you say it
 And I don't feel the same way
 I won't say it
 I'll just leave ya hangin'

Oh, don't get mad
 That's just me
 I'm not a part of that wannabe
 I say what I mean
 And I mean what I say
 I'm too young to tell him
 That I love him, anyway

But do you know what love means?
 I do. I just don't say it
 Unless I mean it.

Nicole Tolen





l-r: Lathan Armstead, Eric Armstead (2008)

Jazz At Wolf Trap

It is very hard to explain it,
so I'm just going to put a free verse on you:
all I'm saying is, you should have been there
and I can't explain it, 'cause it melts like butter,
and profanity is like stripes in his work.

And the musicians would play..
but not full time, because
I couldn't handle it
and they would let me go gently,
and then they blew me away,
then I'd try to run back,

And the musicians would play..
like a bird screaming to get out,
the bass would be blasting,

And the musicians would play..
the rank smell of beer and perspiration,
in an old disguised barn,
with new high-tech equipment,
and a scarlet curtain on the stage.

And the musicians would play..

If I try to explain it,
it will just slip off like butter.
I was... I mean just... Wow..
just try to explain it and, oh wow
ooh...
See?

Jessica Rawls





clockwise from left:
 Lakeisha Thompson, Kierra Parks,
 Jessica Carpenter, Damon Kee,
 Monae Smith, Nichell Kee,
 Saeeda Jones, Stelita Better,
 DeArren Dawkins (2009)

Southeast Rejection

No money
 No attention
 A place full of hate
 Too terrible to mention

The children have
 Beat up schools
 No good equipment
 And taxes are cruel

Don't tell us
 How bad we are
 Look at yourself
 Now tell me
 How bad could you be?

A bad community
 No police protection
 Nothing is well
 Southeast Rejection

Jessica Rawls



Realize

Realize the world you're in,
 Realize that you committed a sin,
 Realize that you're going to school.
 Realize that you're not no fool.

Realize where you're going,
 Realize what you're going to do when you get there,
 Realize what you are to dare,
 Realize when you have to die.

Realize the people on earth,
 Realize the ladies who are giving birth,
 Realize the little boys and girls,
 Realize you don't own this world.

Realize the pain you feel,
 Realize when you get hurt, you will heal,
 Realize some people don't care,
 Realize that life's not fair.

Realize the precious thing you have,
 Realize your child is the only real present you have,
 Realize the children love their parents so,
 Realize, keep them alive, so they won't have to go.
 Realize.

Bernard Best



*l-r: Damon Kee, Kiana Murphy,
Sequan Wilson, Janine Green (2009)*

In My Grave

While in my grave I lie in the same spot
All day and night,
Where there is no light
I have no sight.
I was bad at some points
Like when I tried
To take bubblegum out of the deli
And got away with it
But I stopped and said to myself
“I know that is a bad thing,
But I did not have any money that day”
And I did a good thing--
I bought some M&Ms the lady was selling
For the kids without a home.

But in my grave I was lonely
When I was alive,
I never knew if I was going to heaven
Or underground
But I wished that I would not
Get shot or stabbed.

Some people wish that they
Would pass away in their sleep
I used to think about that
Sometimes my friends and I
Thought and talked about it.

My uncle Joe died in his sleep
I didn't know to cry or
Let a tear drop my eye.

Victor Green





*l-r: Alfonzo Williams, Talaya Chambers,
Nakia Better, Jessica Carter (2008)*

Freedom World, Freedom

At the end of yourself
What would you do?
Fly like a bird on a winter night?

At the end of yourself
What would you do?
Believe there's no hope, and no sense of light?

My mother, my maker
Seize the air
And take a chance, be the taker

Let down your invisible shield
Free your mind
Let the sun take you in, let the wound heal

At the end of the world
What would you do?
As you walk those streets of solid gold

But when you see the valley of darkness
Don't be afraid
Show the beauty and strength you hold

Your children didn't deserve you
And the beauty you possessed
Your maker is mighty and your children were blessed

Jessica Rawls



Senses

I use my eyes to see the birth of my first newborn sister.
I use my tongue to taste the chicken that my mother cooks.
I also use my eyes to read my first baby books.
I use my ears to hear my teacher in my first year of school.
I use my nose to smell the May flowers in the spring breeze.
I use my mouth to speak up for what I always believed in.
I use my brain to show my skills in school and what I achieved in.
I use my senses every day, because without them I'd be lost.
And I'd probably use them wisely, or maybe pay the cost.

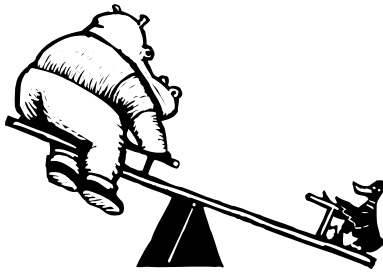
Dominic Lawrence

Shoes

My shoes have been polished and stepped on,
Thrown under my bed,
Walked through rain, sleet, and snow.
I guess you could call them ancient,
Maybe you could call them lonely,
But I call them mine.
My shoes have been laced up and laced down,
Put on and taken off,
Walked through mud, grass, and sand.
I guess you could call my shoes angry,
Maybe you could call them fierce,
But I call them mine.

Jonathan Harris

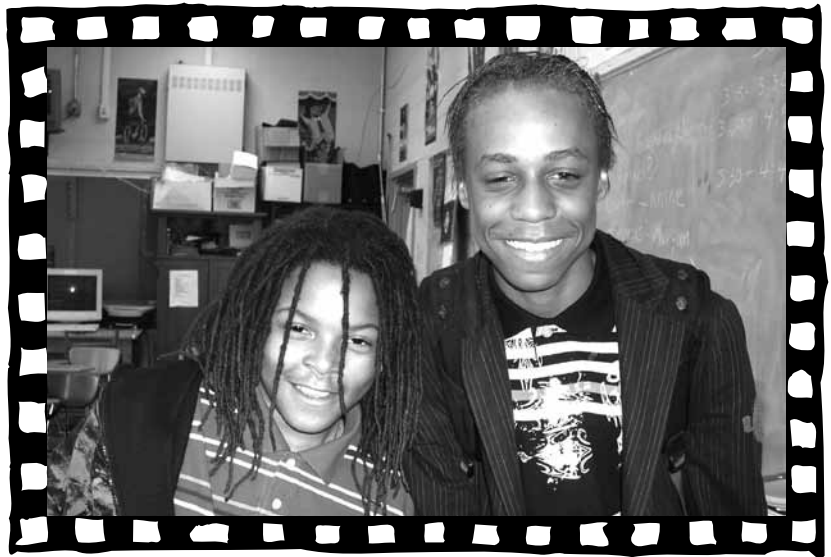




The World Is Yours

When the world ends,
 We won't exactly all be friends;
 Robbing, pushing, shoving, killing
 Get as much as you can
 Do what you wanna do
 Move out of the way--
 The ice cream man is coming through.
 Take your last dip in the pool
 Shoot your last hoop
 Live all of your fantasies
 Rob the store
 Come back for more
 Knock the police down
 State your rights
 Don't break up any fights.
 Look at yourself,
 Get a good look at your face
 Cause you won't see it the next day.
 Get your paycheck; spend away
 Get all the clothes you always wanted today
 Buy expensive gifts
 Eat all the foods your diet won't allow
 Get on a plane
 Meet the stars--
 You might as well become one.
 Live your dreams
 It's no longer a fantasy
 Leave the dishes dirty
 Like you've always wanted
 You don't have to clean your room for once.
 It's the end of the world
 And the world is yours.

Tynese McClellan



l-r: Khalil Jones, Sequan Wilson (2008)

Why?

Why do I feel so down?
 I swallow my sorrows like a person who drowns.

My feelings get hurt almost every day,
 I feel real bad when there's no one here to play.

I try to feel good by taking a rest,
 Dream to myself that I am the best.

Wake up the next day and feel real good,
 Fooling around in this bad neighborhood.

I know this probably seems funny, and maybe ain't good,
 But still I feel down in this crooked neighborhood.

Dominic Lawrence





Callie Bizzell (2010)

The Things I Could Be

The things I could be...
It's all up to me!
If I just put my mind to it
I know I can do it.

And if I just believe
I know I can achieve
I can be anything
Maybe a football player with Superbowl rings.

My job will be really good
And I know I'll work hard at it
Hey, I may come out with a new safety kit
Or even a Play Station 16-bit.

So when you see me
Don't be surprised
That I've got a good job
And you work at Popeyes.

Barrett Norris



Play Your Way Into Heaven

Every single note is a step toward
A glorious light
Play your soul into a non-stop cry of laughter
Be a dark angel of jazz

Don't give up the noise
Play from day til night
I feel your emotion
That vibe in my ear is sure to last

Don't think about tomorrow
As the white misty clouds form around you
Play, just play
Until you get to heaven

Let the applause lift you up
The vibration of the notes opens up the gate
'Til the lord will say
Oh Man, come on in!

Play for them there
And you will never fail.

Jessica Rawls



Satan's a Hitchhiker

Traveling on the road of life,
And you ain't even driving;
Riding on the river of life
With your parents by your side.

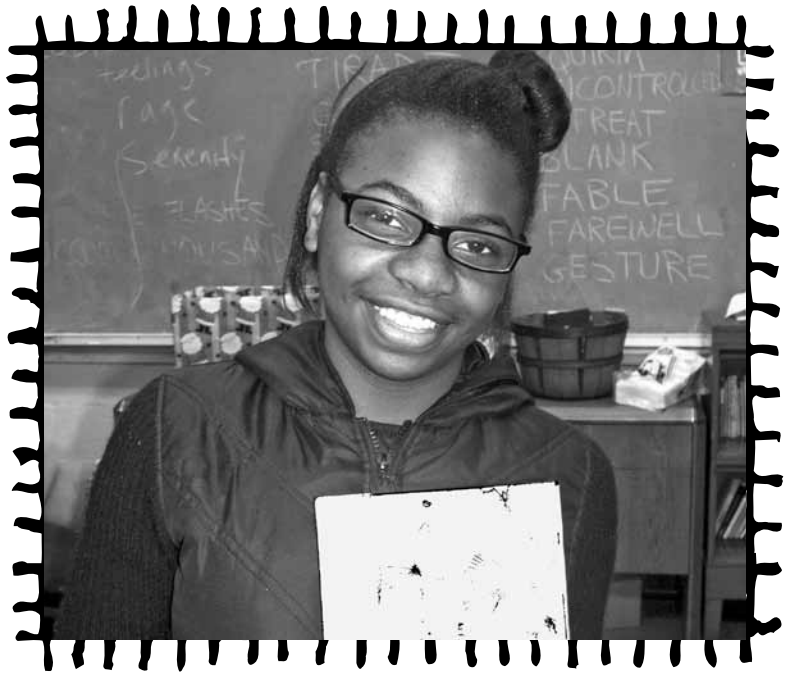
You aren't growing up in time--
Just when you're striving,
Your parents try to leave your side
When you need them to survive.

And just when you're about to die,
Smiling in a bright red suit,
Mr. Hitchhiker wants to take your loot.
And when he tries to rock your boat,
'Cause you're just trying to stay afloat--
Can beg or cheat or con or note,
Can't change his vote of staying on the boat.

Committing a sin
When you let him in
And when you begin
There's no stopping
When he starts rocking
Your boat.
A small quotation
In heavy exaggeration,
And we'll all learn tricks
If we trade in halos and pixy stix
For imps and kicks-- Six
Sixty six, Seven seventy seven
Where you gonna go,
To hell or heaven?

A bad choice for a night so sweet.
Begging withered old souls
To leave you alone
Bad bones
Coming out of fire and brimstones
Will remind you
Not to mistake a Hijacker
For a hitchhiker.

Jessica Rawls



Shawntay Kent (2010)

Why

Why do lions roar?
Why do some women treat themselves like wh---s?
Why do fights start?
Why do families part?
Why do people seem so cruel?
Why do some people act like fools?
Why do people yell?
Why do lots of people live in a jail cell?
The most important question is:
When life can be heaven
Why do people make life hell?

Crystal Watts





l-r: Sanchez Threadgill, David Thomas (2011)

Tribute

On the morning you left,
Two years ago yesterday,
It seemed like a long-lasting bad dream,
But I've realized
That it lasts forever,
And it isn't a dream.
On your birthday, the day you left me,
And all the days before and after and in between,
I ask myself
"Why you? Why me?" over and over
I keep reliving that day--
It has become a melody,
But if you were still here, it would be a harmony.
I dream of you as an angel,
As you were an angel on earth, too.
Everyone is acting as though
Your death is a big secret
But it's not; they're just scared.
It takes time.
And when you think that enough time has passed
And we're ready to think of you in peace,
Send us a message from your beautiful new home,
And I will spread the news.
This is my tribute to you.

Andrea Brown

Poem

An echo, loud and clear
But when I turned around
It was silent.

The blood pumping through my veins,
What happened?
I tried to figure out the mystery;
I looked up to the clouds.
Far away in the sky, a person,
A little girl appeared,
Dancing in the sky.

I tingled with enormous gladness.
I hoped the curtains would not close,
But they did, all of a sudden.
A windy breeze came in.

The darkness in my eye,
The rhythm in my hands,
And urgently the dream appeared.
When I woke up, I realized I was alive.

Chloe Walker





*l-r: James Tindle,
Maryum Abdullah,
Nichell Kee,
James Saunders,
Renita Williams,
Damon Kee,
Janine Green,
Kiana Murphy
(2009)*

Certain People

Certain people hope
I'll dazzle them with
Amazing grades.
I hear
Silent whispers
In the wind,
Mysterious as can be.
People appear in my dreams,
Cold, hard, frozen to me.
I hope certain people
Will stop forcing me.
They look at me with
Angry eyes;
They are putting
A dark cloud over me,
As far and urgent
As I realize.
I hope
The rhythm of my heart
Will make them dance.
I'm not a little boy,
So don't hold my hand.

Raphael Johnson

Brother Wind

Brother Wind, sing me a tune,
a high pitched tune you bring
during the typhoon.

That gusty, grim wind
from I don't know when.

A tune that causes uproar
the tune that tears out your floor.

The tune that brings pain,
the tune that comes
with the hurricane.

Brother Wind

Brother Wind

Brother Wind

Out for a spin.

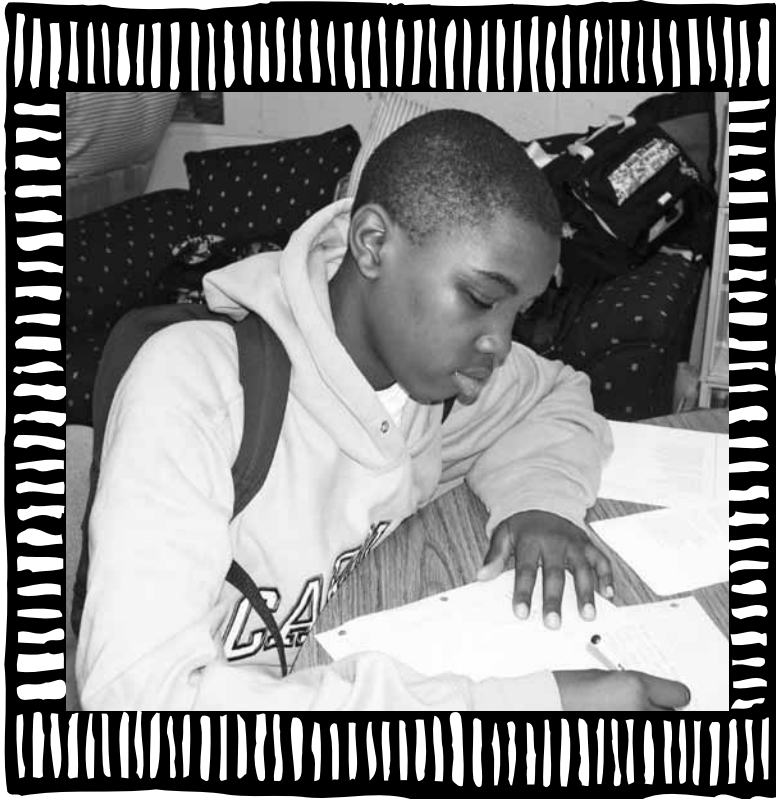
Kisha Parker

Projects

Do you know what the projects are like?
It's like a junk yard never getting cleaned up,
It's like a war never ending,
But neither side wins.
The love is gone, but the hate stays on,
And every day is a funnel
For another dead soul.
No hope, because
There's no future to hope for;
Every day there's another drive-by.
In the projects,
Water can't put out the fire
The projects are a war
That will never end
Until we all come together
And find peace.

Lorrain Allen





Walter Jones III (2008)



I Stand Up For

I stnd up for
the things that I do
I stand up for
my brother because
people like to pick on him
I stand up for
my civil rights

I stand up for myself
I'm outspoken because
that is what my mother did
when she was a child
and my mother
got it from my grandmother

I stand up for myself because
I believe in myself
One day, my mother asked
what I would score myself
(on a scale of one to ten)
I said, "10."
And she said, "That's my girl!"
That's what I stand up for.

Shaneka Staton

The Poem With A Thousand Words

The poem's power can talk to you when you are lonely,
It can tell you secrets that you never knew,
It can also tell you your future.
The poem tells me that he has come from the past.
He had to tell me a message that is soon to come.
If I don't become successful, I might live on the street
and be called a bum.
He's talking to me.
He's my only friend.
He made me realize what's soon to happen.
He wants me to stop playing and lounging.
He told me to open my eyes and see,
if I don't stop and see,
what will happen to me.

Howard Solomon

My Silent River

There is a river, far away,
That I have a desire to swim in.
I feel like I want to fall asleep,
And travel with the water.
Splashing in the water, lonely and wrinkled,
The haunted child, crying for help.
Lasting for ages, my silent river
Is hidden in my heart;
I keep it a secret, a peaceful murmur,
Like the wind riding the ocean--
I know that sound.

Suzette Martin





l-r: Rhia Hardman, Raekala Middleton (2005)

Ancestors

I think of my Uncle Rainy
 I think of my great-grandmother
 (I hardly kinew her)
 I try to picture them in my head,
 But I can't at all.
 A black shadow is all I see.
 They haunt me in my dreams;
 They haunt me while I'm awake.
 I don't understand why
 I'm afraid of the dead.
 My uncle always says,
 "You'd better be scared of the living,
 And not the dead,"
 But I'm scared of both.
 Face to face in my dream
 With the shadow
 Beyond the grave
 I see my ancestors,
 And we will look into each others' eyes.

Lorrain Allen

What I Was

Once I was a child
 Who didn't have a home--
 No money, no food,
 Just a brush and a comb.
 I walked the streets
 Without any shoes,
 Rocks hurting my feet,
 And I had no clue.
 Sleeping in a trash can,
 Dirt as my cover,
 Winter comes, and no warmth,
 Because heat was for others.
 Now I have a home,
 With a husband and kids now
 But one thing you should know:
 What I was is not what I am now

Denise Fisher





l-r: Nichell Kee, Maryum Abdullah, Damon Kee (2009)

My Resolution

I am slithering into a new beginning;
 Not completely there,
 But finding my way.
 Promise ahead and tragedy is behind me
 Divided by a brick wall that must come down.
 Like a wrecking ball to an old building,
 Fire to fire causes nothing but more fire.
 I am slithering into a new beginning
 So I crawl away from the past.

Marquise Lewis

Random

Three red robins, one blue jay
 flying down the street
 As I see them fly
 I see the trees, I see deer and wolves
 As I walk down the road
 I see the church with a cross on top
 and when I look up
 I see the lions playing in the sky,
 the rectangle shaped casket
 Of all my dead poems

Khalil Jones



Change Will Never Come; We Are Afraid To Stand Up

Echoes from the past
 Flowing into a brainwashed mind

The struggle,
 Splinters extending from the needle
 Used to kill millions

Solidify the thoughts
 Memories like a palm reading
 Uncertain, but frightening

The new year
 Vivid resolutions
 Darkness burning like an eclipse

Silence
 Among the people in the background
 Known a failure, change never occurs

Divided between
 The dumb, the smart
 The people who just got by

Influenced by the uninfluenced
 Life flushed like a whirlpool
 Forced to think of the forgotten

Words are way too powerful to use anymore

Kiana Murphy



My Poetry Calendar

l-r: Marcus Johnson, Maryum Abdullah (2009)

I who think for myself,
I who always appear,
Again today I turn a page of my childhood,
Reminiscing on all the exciting days I had.
My childhood so much fun
 the days so bright being a cheerleader
my first cartwheel my first cheer
 I learned

I who think for myself,
I who always appear,
Again today I turn a page of my teen years,
All the things that I'm starting to do

My teen days going to parties
 rec centers being myself

I who think for myself,
I who always appear,
Again today I turn a page of my memories,
The things I will always remember

My old house my grandmother
 my favorite brother sweet dreams
 my achievements

I still have sweet dreams.

Jessica Calloway

My Own Haiku

1

the flame of my heart
the suffering of thunder
the violet mountains

2

the comfort and breeze
the stairs of dreams float away
as dragonflies fly

3

the dry desert burns
the chilling ice melts away
the touch of seasons

4

lion, tiger, bear,
the animals of the wild
call for many prey

5

choices the world makes
may not be satisfying
but they can be changed

Donna James



I Hate Spring

I hate when spring comes.
 You want to know why?
 'Cause the people around here
 Just keep getting high.
 It's true, I hate the spring,
 And now you know why;
 People don't take care of spring,
 Nor do they try.
 Spring is a nightmare for 4th and Chesapeake;
 It rains on the crack houses.
 The projects start to come to life,
 And so do all the mice.
 Spring doesn't come around here,
 Or else it comes too late
 'Cause spring can't come around my way
 You know why? There's too much hate.

Denise Fisher

Silent

Silence remains your right
 like vanishing fences
 Contempt
 Shine defiantly
 Winning over the black dynasty
 Coming for throats
 Running for shelter
 Erasing the past
 Black, white, all the same
 Vanish from this Earth
 You have the right to remain

Damon Kee

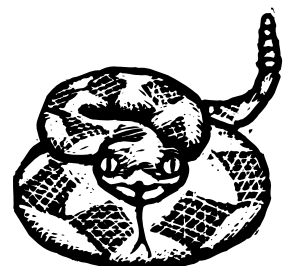


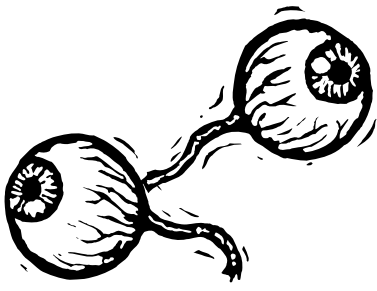
l-r: Asantae' Donaldson, Rahnell Jordan, Arman Thornton

Cold

It's going to come
 and cover me
 with its frozen
 touch of settling.
 My senses heightened
 each
 cold draft, chills me
 even with my
 thigh length
 North Face.
 Fighting the urge
 to stop and collapse.
 I trudge on to
 my paradise.
 The temperature
 seems to
 fall lower
 and lower.
 I bite my lip
 to remind myself
 I am still alive.

Shawntay Kent





I Be I Don't Know

I be broke down cars
I be stolen vehicles at night
I be stuff happens, my bad
I be what up
No reason for it
I be silence it
Was a gift
I be thrashed victims
Murder for no reason
I be corner smarts, black smarts and
A little Higher Education
I be guidance counselors
I be attendance for the fallen
I be quitting when it gets too
Hard, I be surviving through a
School day
I be a poet

Damon Kee

The World Was Ending

If the world was ending
there is somewhere
that the breeze would come alone forever.
The heaviness in the air is ashes—
It's the woods, but not in the darkness of shadows
as the globe, unfinished, is spinning in the air and into space.
It is swaying around the earth, and it doesn't stop
Numb people in space maintain the steps that are recalled
by the earth's heavenly golden garden
No one knows about it
They are scared to leave, to go into the shadows of clouds
that are dangerous,
to go out and seek the plan of darkness.

Stelita Better



La'Niyah Fenner

Anger Speaks

Anger slowly knits a sweater in my head
I stare down a pen as if it's going to pick
itself up and write out my thoughts
I try to use the force just like Luke Skywalker
It doesn't work
Things aren't like the movies
Oh I hate movies
I stand... I drag my feet to the table
I stand... I pick up the pen
I just don't feel like writing today
Drop the pen... Anger says
Take your frustration out on your family
Anger stops... waits
Anger speaks
Your friends, take your frustration
out on them
I cry... I blank out
I regain my composure...
I'm exhausted... my eyes start to water over
There must be a sprinkler near by... or
Maybe an onion
I look around... the Earth is destroyed
Anger speaks
This is what happens when you do
write...
Anger speaks.

Nichell Kee

To My Fellow Classmates

We did it. We made history.
Obama, a man of rich souls.
Amazingly talented, colored skin.
Excuses are tools of incompetence
often used for self-pity.
Those who dwell upon them
are seldom for anything else.

Which essentially smashes the point,
to continue to use as if you need them
like the air you breathe.
This man of color has changed history
because of that color.
Now, a mind frame is, "you can do anything."

At least that is what's expected.
As the economy hits rock bottom,
rich people smile and nod their heads.
As taxes slap middle class people in the face,
unemployment rockets.

Do you think the color of your skin shows you,
Or better yet, tells how you run a nation?
Black public schools need a dose of steroids
because lifting weights isn't working.
Even with it, you're still behind other races.
Is the man with a plan going to make everyone equal
or make the milky skin tone Superior?

Ashley Cooper



l-r: Brandon Gatling, Amari Knott, Steven Brown, James Stewart

New Year

I am running into a new year
I let the old years twirl back
Like a whirlpool.
I let it make me dizzy,
Like strong hands, like
All my old secrets and
It will be hard to let go
Of what I wrote to myself
About my friends
Seven, eleven, and ten years past,
But I'm running into a new year
And the old years have passed
But finally I'm twelve
at last.

Natasha Simmons



Still

I love my stillness
 my quiet voice
 I deeply cherish
 my silence
 my voice
 people challenge
 keeping my voice to myself
 can be selfish
 the daughter of silence
 I have my future
 at my fingertips

Janine Green

Who I Am

Who am I?
 I am a darkness from hell.
 I am your evil monster of the shadows.
 But when you're in the darkness,
 you can see what evil is in me.
 I am your pain of a mighty soul
 that is still alive.
 But what I want to ask you is,
 What are you?

Stelita Better

l-r: Jayden Gray, Jahir Gray

Inspiration

A poem to me is a waste of time,
 an unneeded pain, a rough draft of migraines,
 more unwanted thoughts drenching paper.

Yeah, it makes sense, I guess.

I don't see how people find hope in metaphoric nonsense,
 or how they convey secret messages through it.

All we are is bullets.
 And the words trigger confusion,
 minds bleed a pride puddle.

A poem to me is another way of screaming out loud.
 When I'm frustrated, a break of some sort,
 a natural euphoria.

Maryum Abdullah



When these trees talk.

In this household
on this tree, lined
with exotic ethnicity,
charismatic nature true to
mosaic patterns of unkempt
chivalry. My life is a lie based on
sibling rivalry, scribbled in
pandemonium
and sleep-filled convulsions.

Jittery and frivolous and
post dinner questions set on
blunt and confusing, gregariously
insulting me, with my wet toes
on these locked surfaces.
On this house, In this house, with
gentle vivid acquaintance,
responsible for the frightening concept, self-titled.
These talking walls, Techno and pop,
gyrating my moods, like gelatin, body movement
seductive
heated 90 degrees.

Dancing silhouettes
everybody six feet above my
decomposed walls.

James Tindle



Keyshon Johnson

Anger

When anger wakes up in the morning
Her hair is everywhere;
And if you step in front of her
She'll greet you with a snare.

What anger eats for breakfast,
You wouldn't want to know.
It's no anything nice and sweet
Like bubblegum and snow.

What anger wears to school?
Her favorite color blue.
And her favorite things to play with
Are construction paper and glue.

Anger has no friends, and we all wonder why.
She's mean, nasty, and obnoxious and always
makes me cry.

Monica Rockingham



My Winter Experience

Gerniha Marshall

The days are being broken
 Each one getting shorter
 I hesitate to go outside
 Below 30 degrees it is
 I look on the faces of children
 Outside freezing
 Their faces are ivory
 Just like the snow
 Coming inside to taste
 The bittersweet tea
 The warmth sends comfort
 All through your bones

DarVel Suggs

Don't Judge Me

I'm not black
 I'm not white
 I'm not a color
 matter of fact don't judge me by my
 skin color
 I'd rather give you a choice
 to judge me by the sound of
 my voice
 or my silence

Janine Green

Correction

I be stuck in my own imagination
 crushed by the weight of my thoughts
 staring into my neverending nightmare

I be on the inside looking out
 lost to worlds
 Unnoticed by my own kind

I be confused by my own life
 How did I get to where I am?
 Lucky to be alive.

I be focusing so hard I make the world stand still
 Making all the people watch my mistakes
 I watch them silently judge me.

I be listening to my two dictators
 carefully following in their footsteps
 Struggling to keep up the pace

I be wishing on a shooting star
 but only god knows it won't come true
 Just trust my hopes and no one else.

Nichell Kee



I am

Octavia Johnson

I am capable
of accomplishing
all my goals,

I am
killing souls
with blank
words,

tarnishing
promiscuous dreams.

My gaze is
slowly observing
an endless soul
tearing away
from an unkempt
body.

I believe in
conquering homelands,
tranquility overflowing,
souls and spiral windows.

Monae Smith



The Time Is Right to Make

The world a better place for
kids also adults to live better
all the colorblind people could see
bright as day

The time is right to
care for people who are disabled
and not laugh. Toss up the hating
and become happy.

The moon speaks louder than the sun
my heart beats more than it's
supposed to when I see someone in
stress. I always try to give an extra hand.

The time is right to
warm the frostbitten fingers
from cold snow. I plant my seeds
into the clouds above to make me a
better person.

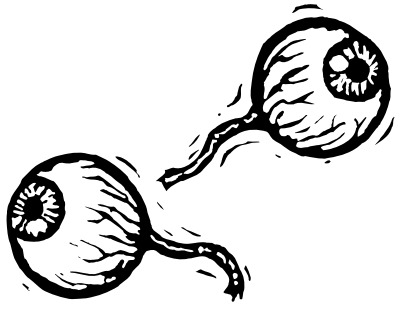
Renita Williams

Tomorrow's Promise

Tomorrow's promise has no concept,
Yesterday's truth is today's lie, except,
today's turbulence is tomorrow's arrogance,
Don't forget to get told in advance,
So through today's promise, nothing shall pierce
The causes and effects of tomorrow's fierce,
Integrity, intelligence, is my preference,
So tomorrow promises to be today's negligence.

Sequan Wilson





Those Winter Sundays

Sitting inside
Foggy windowpane
Cup of cocoa gone cold
Dogs barking from the garage

Fireplace crackling
Cat scratching at the bedpost
Draped in blankets
Kids mingling in the background

Draped in blankets
The snow covering my legs
Dressed and dancing in the snow
Breathing winter
Warm in my stomach
Until tomorrow at noon

Snowflakes in a startling minuet
My Sunday, my cup of cocoa gone cold
Fireplace crackling, dressed and dancing in snow
Until tomorrow at noon

James Tindle

Lie

You lied to me
You told me
there were so many graham crackers
we could plant a field of 'em.
I looked behind the Spam,
beside the honey,
even in the cabinet.
All I saw was an empty stomach
and a canyon of disappointment.
You lied.

Aaron Brooks



Bunny Stevenson

Signs of Me

My blistered fingers burn from
the poems I write, the wisdom to walk
through the painted gathering room filled with
a harmless fragrance. It's my duty to put
down the remote and pick up a book, a piece of
paper and a pen. The oily looking desk calls
my name to sit down but I do the opposite
and walk out. I blame MTV, BET, VH1, and music
videos for my intersected brain not following directions.
I grace under the discipline you show me
it's very familiar. I hear your voice on Monday,
Tuesday and Wednesday. Guess those are the signs of me.

Renita Williams





Atmospheric

Winds blow, sky's blue, flutes play
He realizes he's no longer a kid
Not ready to be a man
Eyes gleaming with happiness
Heart filled with a matter of dust

This dust is different
Not related to dirt
More like a shiny sprinkle of shininess
Landing amidst his chest
Shining bright like the light
Glowing across the sea at 12:03 am
Beautiful, isn't it?

His newfound discovery of himself
Being stuck in the middle
Not knowing where he is
What to do, where to go
Who's to help
He just travels with that shininess in him
Hoping that the flutes never stop
The sky never falls, the wind keeps blowing
And his heart keeps glowing.

Aaron Brooks



Sa'Mirror Chambers

Unfinished

In space in my own room
Certain bridges were burned
And my music was a new leaf
Brought to my attention...

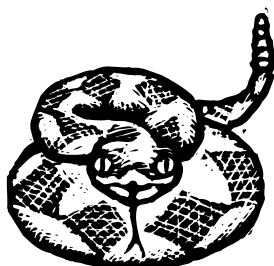
In my own world, everything
Is ersatz and the thinnest bridge...
Burned
I wish I had another word to finish this poem
I wish I lived
In a dictionary

James Tindle

Composure Keeper

Silent autopsies kept silent.
Blade swinging metal
hair pulled, drops of sweat
melting his composure, he seems
too nervous to move
and too nervous to stop moving.
Scared and caught
dragging his confidence
daydreaming in a field of lilies.

James Tindle





l-r: Jamel Pettaway, Imani Rucker, Aniya Stevenson, Amelia Thomas, Bunny Stevenson, Amontay Johnson, James Gross

The First Forty Seconds

And then I step into the Write room
 such a bright room
 with the lights and energy, can't
 call it a night room
 cause it's so bright
 the energy is so right
 While I listen to the constant chitter chatter
 the hugs come in from a fat girl thicker
 than cake batter
 who smells like zebra cakes
 30 seconds so far, the rest of the 10
 are taking too long to bake
 But I'm patient as pregnancy
 I can wait
 Like divine time, 5 seconds are
 done
 5 seconds left
 How many lines do I have left?
 None.

Markus Johnson

Poem Without E's

Pupils on a pinpoint location
 Stuck in this station
 As a child with no guardian
 At this bus stop
 With watching thugs
 And cuffing cops on this block
 A sturdy hand and cold palm
 As if a human was at risk
 And two clips on this trip to logic
 Playing match of our minds
 This mind is of a God
 A God with no job
 Just a hobby of intimidation

Aaron Brooks





Naquan Shepherd



I Be

I be chemical burn thinking
and razor-blade handwriting.
I be top-notch scholars
and mastermind criminals.
I be palm trees,
I be part of providence.

I be nonchalant,
don't care much, education is secondary.
I be contradictory to everything.
I be speak my mind, but censor it.
I be animalistic, weird nerd
a tab away from ordinary, uncanny li'l things.
I be accuracy, but nowhere near precision.

Maryum Abdullah

My People

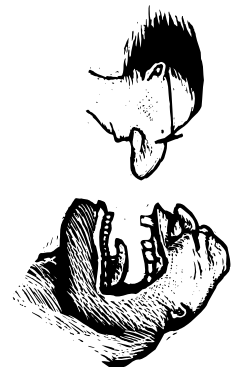
I see my black people in
the
grave,
store,
house,
at
work,
on
the
ground
floor,
in
caskets
I see my black people

Khalil Jones

What You Told Me

You told me that I was a shadow
like a salty lighthouse in the bottom of the ocean
with a boat that drowned in the darkness
It is angels with hunger and never
new love in their lives at the north pole
a light with somebody's footsteps on the stairs like a crime
some sawdust in my hands and a trumpet that won't make noise
but it prays to you and the moon.
a venom from a loyal daybreak and a bottomless trampling with it
Final word but no wilderness in life
In this universe, nothing withdraws or is going to pull away from cobwebs
So don't be scared of a monster house on Halloween
Don't give up on your dream, but give up
on darkness that won't leave you alone
Just face your fear and don't give up on yourself.

Stelita Better





Steven Brown

The Poem of the Widow's Son

Poetic Autobiography

And even though I remember
the slurred, soothing words
of my mother while
she bathed me,
I failed to
understand the fact
that she had an
addiction to a thing
she called grey goose,
the thing that made
her feel good
when no one else
was there to
put the broken pieces together,
and when her bottle
was emptied of her
sinful concoction
I was there to
accept her for her,
and give her
the love she
had sought from
the lover that
only corrupted her,
but your biographers
never understand.

Shawntay Kent

Dat pretty lightskin lady wit da
pretty butta skin and da ruby
red fingerwaves,

singin' dat song she always be
singin'. It's just her voice makin'
love with the piano. I be listenin'.

I see it goin' down in a smoky gray
and black room. It smell like cigarettes
and Stetson and polished bullets. Nobody's
talking. Dey just payin' close, close attention
to the love scene. All these dudes
got on suits and hats wit da feathers
on 'em. And dey listenin' jus like I be.

She be singin' "Love don't live here
anymore." The piano always got the
right thing to say back to her
licorice lyrics. They get along so good.
It's like one of the silly fairy tales
we read about in skool, dat ain't real.

And if they is real, then it ain't for
long cuz they always die.
Fairy tales die and leave you in a
nightmare. Like momma when daddy died.

Daddy gone and you know he ain't comin'
back. Now all momma got is that
piano and me to love.

James Saunders





O Graceful Weapons

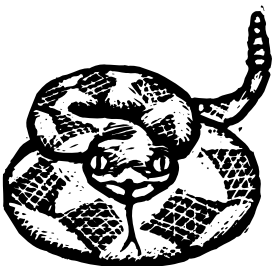
Swing with intent, my
graceful scimitars against
bland suit of armor, dressed
in cavalry, with intent....to kill.

Sing silent blades, let
this coliseum hear an eclat of tings and
tongs, move in a dither. Heckle these walls,
scream reflection.

Distend with fine simplicity
a show. Allay these rebel thoughts
my graceful scimitars, force their demeanor
quiet resignation.

Free me, these scimitars
with,gentle,vile,seraphic
intentions.

James Tindle



Atrayu Lee

What I Am Becoming

I am becoming a young woman.
I am becoming like the stars in the sky,
bright heart and a bright face,
but with no shadow in the darkness.
I am becoming like my grandmother,
but not like my sisters.
I am becoming a volcano
that is heating up silence from
the evil under the ground.

I am becoming to be on the streets
because of my family being broke
of sadness in the golden garden of life.
I am becoming a sheet of paper that is blank
but if I am not blank, it will be sadness and hurtful words
with no happiness on it.
I am becoming me in life but when I am an adult
I am going to be a different body of life.

Stelita Better



l-r: Aaliyah Bryant, Janiya Jones

Double Exposure

Picture me with a gown and a cap
sitting on a chair with a diploma in my lap
Smiling slightly for the camera
but barely trying at all
with my mind somewhere else
thinking “Hmm, do I hear last call?”

And then the bright light comes
nearly blinding me to death
and I get up slowly
as the photographer calls “next.”

In today’s self-portrait,
an image covered by dried tears
because of one of my deepest fears
I stayed back
So in the same class, is it
on the same schedule, I stick
and the ball of moving on
sits in the same pit

Marcus Johnson



Poor boy

Poor boy is naïve.

Little does he know the lies dwell on her sleeves.
Her breath still produces mints and old grapes,
so she douches it with a perfumed smile
and one of those perishable kisses.

Eyes speak louder than words,
so she shows him what she has done,
a mistake on her account,
soon truth will let out.
She spoke in confessions.

She told him her infidelities.
He spilled his guts, admitted his obsession.
She has an addiction, stronger than his devotion.
Poor boy hopes to reconcile,
she hopes for faster goodbyes.

Maryum Abdullah





l-r: Ceshelle Evans, Thomas Whitney (2006)

The Lonely River

I am the Lonely River
 I start in the Anacostia River,
 And I lead to Mississippi Avenue.
 From there I go toward the carryout
 To get a cheese steak
 As I repeatedly say chicken and rice
 And laugh at funny movies.
 Maybe I should go on a diet,
 Because I eat like there is no tomorrow;
 Or maybe I should keep eating,
 Because you never know.
 They say to be a river you have to be in shape
 I tell them I'm round.
 Lonely, I'm so lonely;
 I have nobody to call my own.

DeMonte Harris



I Am from the Neighborhood

I am from the neighborhood
 A place where I have learned to grow
 Listened to the things around me
 To ready me to go

The neighborhood is filled with sights
 Things from A to Z
 When you've seen the things I've seen
 It'll change your perspective view of things.
 Sights such as life:
 Joy, love, laughter, and energy to share.
 Sights such as crime:
 Which will lead you nowhere

People with knowledge of where they are from
 Dwell on the streets in town
 What's going on, you see,
 Is the word spread all around.

Brandon Anderson



Eric Vaughn

G H E T T O D O V E

A bird of paradise you'll never be,
 Disabled, confused, your slavery's been won
 Your cry for help is an unheard plea

G H E T T O D O V E

Strong, tough, existing through any weather
 Thinking of life outside are you always
 While knowing yours is a cage locked forever

g H e T T o d O v E

You're lost, forgotten; cares? no one has any for you
 Hopeless, unexplainable
 Although you try hard in all you do

G H E T T O D O V E

Even though the end is near, it passes by; you see it clear
 Don't feel so bad; don't act too good
 If this is life, you understood

ghettodove

You can't get out; you're trapped for life
 Bought, sold, rented, borrowed,
 What your future holds is a world of strife

G H E T T O D O V E

Brooke Dews

Pressure

In sports I thought I was the best
 better than all the rest
 In school I played the fool
 for popularity
 At home, I seem alone. No one to talk to
 no one's at home.

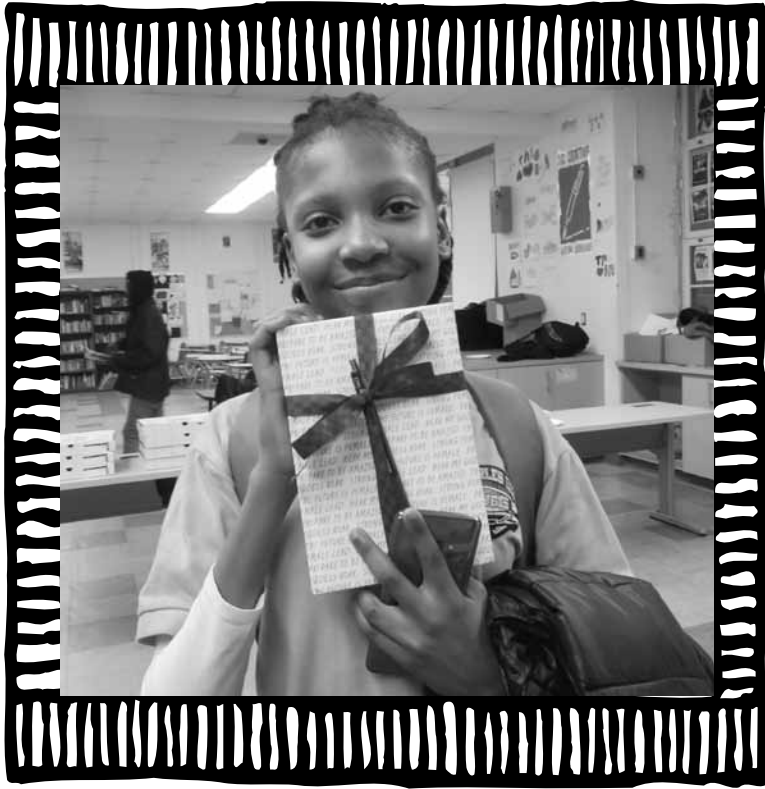
On the streets, it's nothing but
 People trying to bring you down;
 Boys trying to meet you,
 Pipeheads try to sell you drugs.

At school, it's the same—
 There's nothing different
 But the games You know
 You do it my way
 I don't do it your way
 I'm the teacher
 You're the child.

Do what you gotta do
 To make your mom proud.

Ayanna Howard





Alexis Davis

I'm from Soufeace

No, I ain't from Northwest
I don't talk proper
I use slang
I ain't goin' to Banneker
for public speaking
I'm going to Ballou
for math and science
I don't know how people
can go to Banneker
when erebody knows Ballou
got the best band.

No, I'm from Soufeace
I don't live downtown
I live across the river
I don't think I'm better
than the other people in
Soufeace
We're all the same,
on this side of the river.

I go to Hart JHS
where there are stalactites
hanging from the roof
I've lived here all of my
fourteen years on this Earth
You know I'm from Soufeace
Erthing about me says Soufeace
There is Soufeace coming
from ery part of my body.
I'm from Soufeace
not Northwest
not Southeast
I'm from Soufeace
I got class
And ya know that's right
Baby.

Tiffany Kelley



Haiku

1
Train crash 6 AM
As the moon strikes the dark
street
Shadows dig the night

2
the dark runs from day
As the sound of cracked heads
blares
And blood's everywhere

3
Crash! bang a gun's shot
Every night the light screeches
And darkness is over

4
the light is so hot
As the sun burns my blunt eyes
I grab my dark shades

5
In the dark I creep
the light burns and my soul's
pierced
dark forever night

Rickey Lewis





Understand

You think you're cool
'Cause you're out of school.
But what you're doing
Makes you a fool.

You hang on the Ave.
From 9 to 5.
You and your friends
Talk all your jive.

You drink and hustle
And hustle and drink.
All that drinking
Makes you not think.

You hustle to your mother,
Father, sister, and brother.
When will you learn
We must watch out for each other?

You sing those songs
That have no good point.
You sing them and
Play pool at the juke joint.

You do your thing
And break families' hearts.
When you die,
Our souls will part.

Jeanna Williams



Brooklynne Brown

Worth Fighting For

Because you only live once
You can't come back to life
Once you've gone
Fighting for your life
Is more important
Than fighting for anything else
I think if more people
Fight for their lives and stop
Fighting over material things
This world would be a better place to live
People are getting killed over
Coats, shoes, clothes, etc.
This is not what people should fight over
I think life is too precious
For people to want
To take a life

Koryon Kerns





l-r: Renita Williams, Aaron Brown (2009)

What My Poem Can Do

Watch out! Beware!
 My poem does not scare.
 It eats and it sleeps and
 it gives you the creeps.
 It rolls through the
 walls that sound in
 the halls, don't
 go to sleep it will
 appear in your dreams
 and give out sun beams.
 While you burn inside
 you're dead outside.
 You feel my poem
 scaring you to death.
 Then, you begin to
 take a deep breath and
 when you wake up
 my poem is gone.

You wake
 up to find that
 it was only a poem.

Antionette Reese

Dreams

I have dreams about love
 The love that I have never dreamed of before
 The love that is pure as a beautiful white dove

I often say to my dream lover
 "I love you"

He says "Erika, that is the real meaning of Love"

Erika Robinson

Please Don't Go

My love, I'm sorry
 For what I've done
 I'm telling you what I know;
 I would be alone forever
 So please, from my heart,
 Please Don't Go

You make the sun come
 Out for me,
 And rainbows blissing
 So happily
 The stars are your magnetic slaves
 Here to enhance me with
 Your heavenly kiss. (If you go
 I will miss)

My love, would you stay?
 Please, I need you
 By my heart
 Back into my life
 my home
 my dreams
 my hopes for us
 my feelings

my Love
 Please Don't Go

Michael Bell



Martanaze Dew (2004)

Sweetdreams River

The crystal blue waters, over light beige sand
 Reflecting the sky as I say "I am."
 Passing through the rapids of sound-breaking speed,
 Leading you to the falls of your life.
 Watch me as it whispers in your sight
 The rainbow of colors falling off me.
 Look under the mountain and you will see
 I'm as quiet as can be til I hit the edge.
 Sounding like glass, clashing into a mountain so deep.
 Just look and watch me as I go to sleep.
 I worry I won't wake until I hear that mountain break.
 Big as an elephant
 Quiet as a mouse
 I will watch you as you sleep.
 I won't wake until I see daybreak.
 "Sweet dreams," I cry, as you
 Go to sleep.

Curtis Banks



Music Tunes

Listening to the sound from out the boom box
 With the beat and loud bass.
 Each sound of tone in my ear –
 Loud enough for the neighbors to hear.
 Voices loud; it sounds like a miracle.
 Beats and tunes make your feet move.
 Party over here. The music brings you near.
 Feet moving, bodies jumping up and down;
 You will change that frown
 right to a smile. Beats, feets, music tunes,
 Bad enough to make the radio go BOOM!!!

Shauneka Starks



"I"



I am not a stereo, even though
I'm heard loud
Known throughout the halls
To rock the crowd.

My rage grows
As it spreads among us,
Living in a world of no peace
When it's just us.

I am not a king,
But I am majestic;
A professional in time,
Reading books for a lesson.

I am not a clock,
But I flow like time
Living life in the skies,
But it's all in my mind.

The answer "I don't know"
Goes with the question "Why?"
If you read between the lines,
Is it still a lie?

Eddie Glen

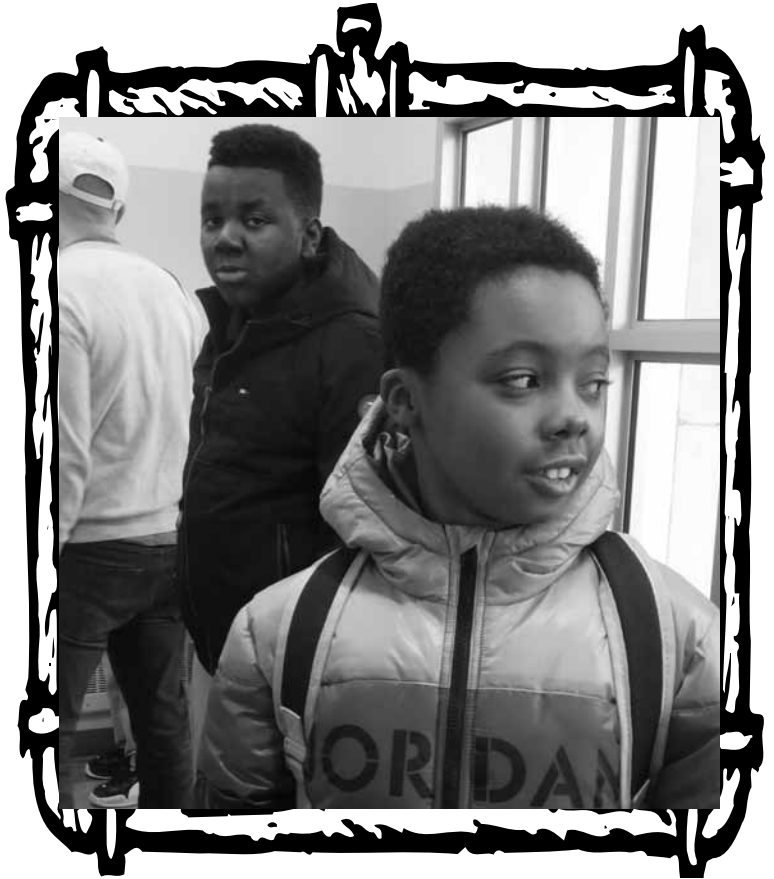
Haikus With Rhythm

Baby girl next door
Wants a new bike for Christmas
But that's just her dream

The old man upstairs
Wants a brand new wooden cane
But don't have a dime

Old Mrs. Sanford
Said she needed some knee-highs
But doesn't have shoes

Karen Baylor

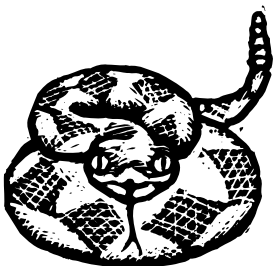


l-r: Keyshon Johnson, Renaldo Abney

Phrasing

Lots of words, depressing my mind,
Theme songs, advertisements, lines.
Feelings, touches, memories. Laughs,
cries, and anger. Jokes making me
think twice. Big, small, tall, short.
Stop! Stop! this is too much. Women,
girls, Men, boys, Relationships.
Wow! Phrases, Classes, Learning all
in a bunch, growing like prairie grass.
CVS, Peoples, Rite Aid whatever. Black,
White. Both red. Plaid is my heart.
Black when mad, red when broke, pink
when happy, blue when sick. Walls.
White, thick, thin, whatever Gwen.
Drugs, alcohol it's all the same just
say it kills. Forget the dumb names.
Candy, sweet, nice, great. These lines
are all real not fake.

Gwendolyn Miller



You & I

I craved;
You forgave.
I cleaned house;
You're my spouse.
I had plaque;
You ate a snack.
I molded clay;
You went out to prey.
I drank scotch;
While you watched.
I went to shake;
When you forsake.
I gave first glance;
You saw romance.
I lied;
You tried.
I understood;
You did what you could.
I sang in a choir;
And made you feel the fire.
I was intelligent;
You stayed impotent.
I had to qualify;
You wanted to multiply.
I didn't mean to interlope;
You read my horoscope.
I did not let you authorize;
You just figured out my size?
I tried to uplift;
You gave me an awesome gift.
You treated me like a maid;
I did not mean to cut you with
that blade.
Then I realized I never won;
You and I are now undone.

Brooke Dews



l-r: Chyann Wicker, Janiya Jones, Jonathan Jones

Promis

A promise to tomorrow:
To sleep and wake up
on a hot embrace
from the scorching fire
And when we spring,
tomorrow we fall,
and summer's brilliance
can be winter's call.

Khalil Jones

River Without Love

A river that flows south and it reaches nowhere
This river passes nothing but hate
It waters nothing, and no one wants to be near it.
This river loves shame, heartache, and pain
It passes through a town of lies and deceit
You can never believe what it says
It whispers nothings and makes you trust it
But then it lies and leaves you on the banks to die.
This river flows through the time of depression.
This river has no end, but you can stop this river
Because it flows within.
Learn how to trust someone;
Spread the love you have around.
Make a new river with whatever you choose
If it's happy, it can be your crown.

Gwendolyn Johnson (R.I.P.)

Street Boys

Playin' football
On the city streets,
Lookin' for frogs
Down on the creek,
Hearin' your mommy
Callin' you to eat,
Feelin' the cold
Beneath your feet.
Eatin' at the table
And askin' for more,
Hearin' the street boys
Knockin' at your door.

Everett Holland



l-r: Keyshon Johnson, Amari Knott, Gerniha Marshall

Parental Conviction

This great bold bountiful Nubian fiend
 Full-fledged queen
 With vanilla skin
 A manila walk

And a Jezebel attitude,
 Having pom pom braids
 Atlantic sea pearls laced around her feline wrist of diplomacy
 While sporting shimmering suede shoes,

And also roaming with a cocoa butter type of brotha
 Blending his caramel pigmentation with his damped eyes
 Having bronze and silver around his Hannibal knuckles
 And possessing himself with a pharaoh personality.

She, being lured in by his prepackaged smile and million dollar lines
 He, being captured by her arched eyebrows and arched hips,
 Getting hypnotized by her rotating feminine lips--

I curse every moment.

Conceiving me in the depth of December
 Blessing and baring me birth in September
 I was dangling at the end of the umbilical cord
 Cuz my generation is X
 And I'm too young to endure. Wobbling a beat of roller coaster tracks and tricks
 This baby's not balancing your African mix:
 This mother's somehow accident prone
 And this father's a project gigolo,
 Jiggling five other mothers on the highest peak of his ego.





l-r: Tyray Johnson, Rendell Johnson, Naaman Dudley, Anton White, Darius Johnson (2002)

Hoping my mother's life won't become a new dirge in the mist of depression.
 Swing me your blues
 In a jazzy sort of way
 So I can compose it on his withered old grave
 While we'll be playing spades on our pharaoh's tomb
 Because I regret to say that he's been playing your trust like the alto sax
 Shaping and molding you like one of his artifacts,

Cursing me with a three-digit 6
 Asking me what could be better than his five-page letters
 Which were feeding me legal lies
 (So I couldn't sue)
 Telling me how he wishes to devour your image
 And make lava consume your tribal bones

And how he wants to gnaw on your soul.

You slice and dice his words like sword play
 But that just ain't enough.
 I challenge his intelligence by asking him the square root of masculinity
 His mouth drops like the gravitation of Jupiter has joined his false statements.

I wish I could make peace with his corrupted mind
 Mend my mother's bridge of vengeance
 I yearn for the omega of this family oppression
 Cuz these damaged cobwebs of pain don't get fixed by scarred black widows.

Larry Robertson





Donnell Kelly (2005)

Feeling the Music

Jazz music makes me wanna sing scat.
 It makes me wanna play slow, mellow gospel music.
 The music makes me think about
 Sitting in front of a fireplace on a rainy day
 With someone I love and care for.
 It makes my imagination wander
 In a world of gospel, jazz, and classical music.
 Now I'm thinking about playing soft music
 In a restaurant or
 On stage in front of thousands of people.
 I feel as if I were playing an upright piano
 About a hundred years old
 And every chord I hit is beautiful
 And makes a new song.

Jevon Billups



HATE

Hate is a boy who doesn't do anything
 he don't eat food, just take it
 he don't have a car, because he smashed it
 he don't have a favorite color, just language
 he don't go to school, because he got put out
 he don't have a place to live, because he burned it.

Gregory Kinard

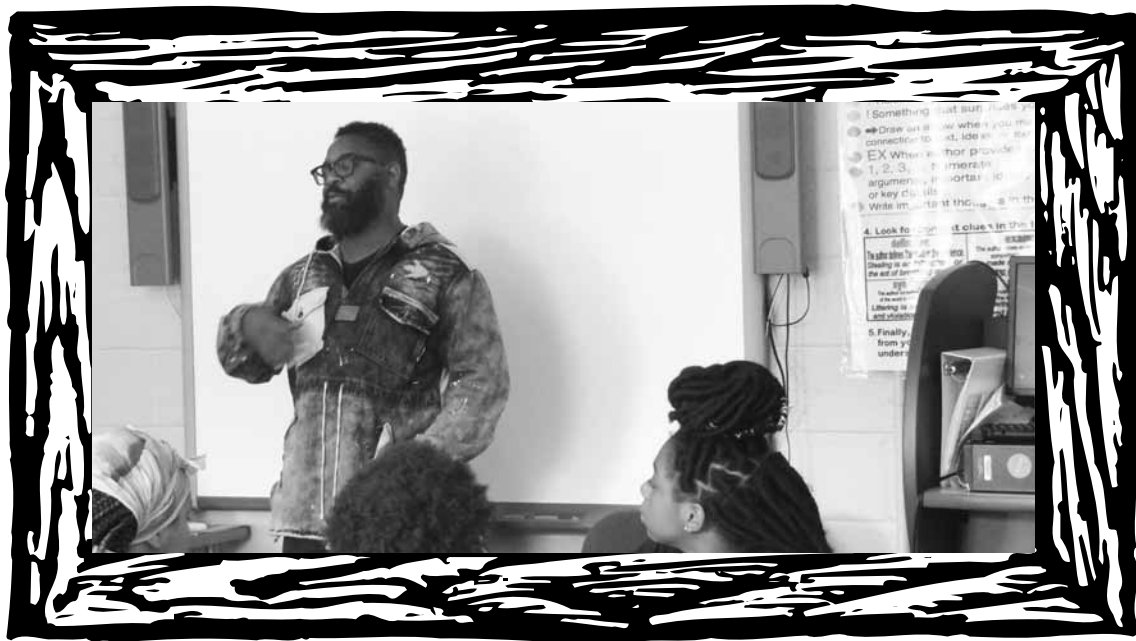
1996

The New Year is coming. It's 1996.
 I'm going out to find a girl to hug and kiss.

When I found a girl to hug and kiss,
 she turned around and gave me lip!

After she gave me all that lip,
 she walked away and said I was sick.,

Jeremy Demoz



D.C. Creative Writing Workshop writer emeritus Reginald Dwayne Betts discusses his latest book, "Felon," with eighth graders

Jazz Be Played On Crowded Harlem Streets

The cars, The lights, The people
My people,
Trucks 'n Busses,
Jazz be played, Jazz be played.

In the house or on the corner
I play my Jazz where I feel
The Hip people say,
Jazz be played, Jazz be played.

So I play my heart out on my flute
Jazz be played,
Echo out of my ears
Jazz be played, Jazz be played.

Encore, and my mother saying
Stop it, Stop it, Stop it, but I
Don't care
She's not
Hip. So
Jazz Be Played.

Starshima Joyner

The Blues

I have the going to school blues.
I hate to have the thought of
Waking up early in the morning blues.
Mother wakes me up from my long night's sleep.
When she comes in, I get under my sheet.
I wash up, brush my teeth, then I get something to eat.
The advisory is gone.
I think I did something wrong.
My report comes and I get a C.
Sometimes my mother yells at me.
I think some people expect too much of me.

Derek Williams

No Money Bluez

Ain't got no money
I try to gamble with
Something I ain't got.
Sometimes I win,
Sometimes I lose a lot.
I'm going to Florida,
– Ain't got a cent to my name –
Ain't that a shame.
January I don't like
Fifteen birthdays, I wish I had the might
They stole my VCR
Tried to steal my best friend's car
I got the no money blues.

Cameron Shields





Amelia Thomas

My Uncle

I realize you're gone
 Your laugh echoes in my mind
 You were my father's best friend
 Now there's a cloud over him
 When I heard of your death It seemed untrue
 Tears dropped from my eye
 My heart was beating rapidly
 Every day you and my father
 Took a drink after work
 And laughed at all the things that happened
 My father struggled
 Through your death slowly.
 You never let me go wrong
 I dazzled your eyes
 As if I were the best
 You were proud of my school work
 And just
 For me to be called your nephew.
 I loved you with all my heart
 That part of my life is so dark now
 I used to look forward to seeing you
 On the porch every day after school
 If you were not there, you would just appear.
 You used to make my father laugh.
 This is my tribute to you.

Cameron Shields



No One Knows Who I Am!

As a raindrop falls from my eye,
 As a river flows into my hands,
 No one knows what my name is;
 No one knows who I am.
 If I were a football player,
 They wouldn't know me;
 If they had a surprise,
 They wouldn't even show me.
 My whole world is a sham
 Because no one knows who I am!

Michael Bell

My True Name

My name is enormous,
 A huge, dazzling cloud
 Far out over the ocean.
 My name is tender,
 Like a mind filled
 With the desire for knowledge.
 My teachers think my name
 Is a hidden door,
 Dark in space,
 A curve ball going through a window
 Or a child outside looking at the stars.
 My mother thinks my name is
 Everlasting, Forever, and Promising,
 An echo in the clouds,
 With tear drops falling
 Mist in the air,
 Like particles spinning around.
 My true name is appearing
 Out of the darkness,
 Bursting into the light.

Barry Robinson



Song of the wind

A call on the wild,
Going on and on,
Like a lonely lost child.
Cries of the night:
Cymbals glide
Drumstick slide.
A continuous beat
Melodious but neat
Charming your ears
Easing your fears
Blowing away
Pianos play
A gentle saxophone
Sometimes, but hardly ever, alone.
It's accompanied by
The player's sigh
As the crowd shifts to a hush.
A little laughter, and clapping after
But something's still missing—
A small raindrop caught in the storm
A sound is born.

Peaceful, relaxing
The moon is waxing
Look into the night without any fright
Look into the day, but not with dismay
For every pound and beat
Means something to me.
A chill, a thrill
A sentimental feel
Always open; never closed.
Your ear has to bear
Your look is a stare
As the music invites you
To the dreams of another day;
Let them take you away.

Zulaikha Edmondson



l-r: Ja'Marion Montford, Reginald Dwayne Betts, Ayana Francois

To The Friends

To my friends who made me see
Who showed me all reality
Who told me what will never be
To the friends who made me see.
To the friends who taught revenge
Who taught me not to be a friend
I couldn't see how not to be one then
But I'll remember til who knows when
To the friend who taught revenge.
To all my friends that are my friends
Who understand true friendship never ends
To all the friends that stood by me
In my special time of need
To all my friends I really knew
To all my favorites: Thank you!

Ayesha Johnson





Nike Air

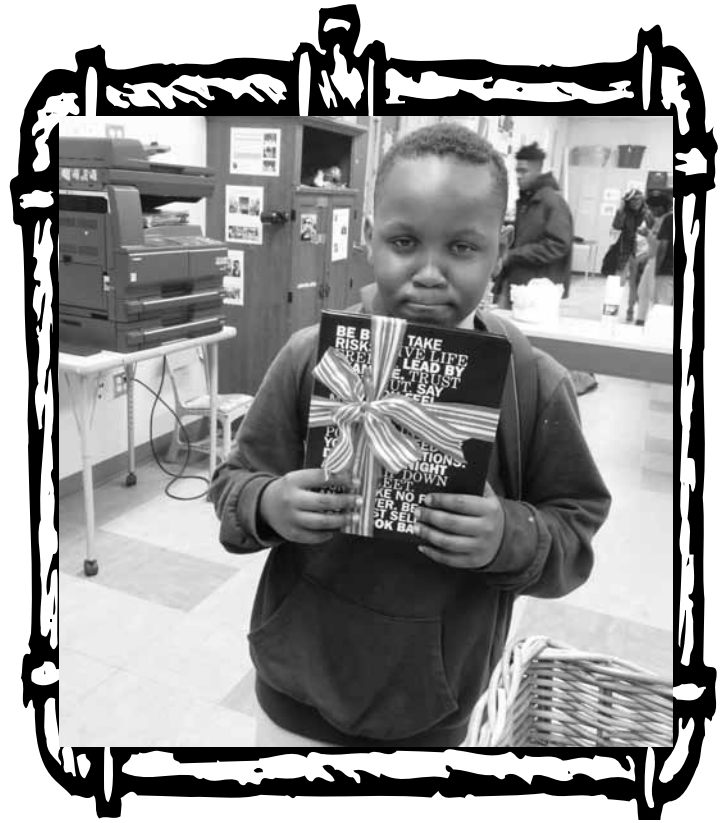
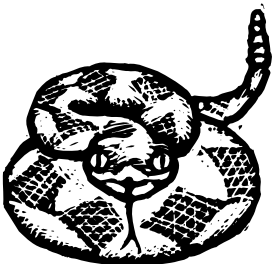
Through the woods with a secret
 Lasting with desire
 Hidden behind a door
 Waltzing through the misty trees
 Tender soles
 Curves and cuts
 Chilled through the bone
 Light as a feather
 Haunted the courts
 Jump with no struggle
 Pushed up by an angel
 You hear the mumble
 Of the mean defenders
 Jump through the air
 Pull the rim to your chin
 Swish! He's on fire
 Just like the dream
 Unstoppable

Cameron Shields

Remember Me

Remember me as a bird
 Flying in the air.
 Remember me as a king
 Upon the crystal stair.
 Remember me as a gentleman
 Calling you ma'am.
 I want you to remember me
 For who I am.

Michael Bell



Christopher Beverly

Drowning To Sleep

I was happy
 Bedtime
 I jumped in the bed like I was swimming
 I drowned to sleep
 There I was lying, moving helplessly
 I woke up embarrassed
 As if people laughed while I drowned
 I ran for my life, so they would not know me
 I dived into my mother's arms,
 Scared to look out the window
 I drowned back to sleep
 With my heart pounding, about to break
 I arrived in a land filled with swimming pools
 With me drowning in them and
 I died
 Scared, I wanted to leave but couldn't
 Too many walls
 Too many pools.
 I found a way to leave –
 I woke up and was happy
 Now I never want to drown to sleep again
 Because it's scary.

Bernard Best



l-r: Armani Thornton, Laniyah Johnson

When I Watch You

When I watch you
Sitting on the corner
Asking for change,

When I watch you
Lonely in the night
Sleeping by the trash cans,

When I watch you,
Your face looking wrinkled
From drinking liquor

When I watch you:
You used to be the cutest girl
In the neighborhood

Where did you go wrong?
Where did you go wrong?

George Williams

When I Watch You

When I watch you
When I watch you night and day
I feel like staring the night away
Walking together by the ocean shore
Taking walks 'til we get to your door.
When I watch you
When I watch you, you try to ignore me
You try to dodge me but I just watch
Seeing your every move until you stop.
When I watch you, you sometimes stare
Winking at me and blowing kisses
You play with my mind and try to tease me
But I still watch you and
Write you letters.

Demetrius Ratliff





La'Niyah Fenner



Furious

My name is furious
 I live in the House of Darkness
 My favorite game is Truth, Dare, or Consequences
 You better tell me the truth
 You better do my dare
 Or you will suffer the consequences
 My favorite color of lipstick is
 The darkest shade of burgundy
 My eyes are full of fire
 My mouth is full of heartbreaking words
 My hands are like bricks
 My eyebrows are your warning
 Don't talk if they say no
 Do if they say so
 My favorite food is burnt lasagna
 Because the world is
 Black, bloody, and cheesy to me anyway
 I drive a purple car, but I love walking
 In the valley of the shadow of death
 Because I am furious.

Karen V. Baylor



Haiku

- 1
Morning sun shines on the
Black sapphire sea. Beneath
all visions that we see.
- 2
Kids squirm over said
prayers. While Sunday school died.
Their grandma's sighed grief.
- 3
Tall trees sway deceit.
While children's eyes uncover
defeat. As suns set.
- 4
Dreams grow large as hearts
burn on fire. Hopes are sent
to the forbidden.
- 5
The evening of life
exaggerates feeling of
ruins of our hope.

Ayesha N. Johnson



l-r: Jamal Whittington, Martanaze Dew, Bruce Brown (2006)

Do You Get What I'm Saying?

I was going to take off
But my wing broke
About to sail
But the wind stopped
Ready but suddenly choked

She was very smart
But had the wrong connections
Ready for college
But the bus left without her
Do you think it was bad luck?

April Timberlake



Poem

In poetry I'm not a whiz kid
I don't like to write because
My mind goes blank every word
I hear, "Come on Markia,"
"You can do it Markia,"
But they don't know that
I just don't want to do it.

I wish they would leave me alone
I want to talk on the phone
Or be at home
I don't want to write
I don't think about writing.

Every time I hear, "Markia write a poem,"
All I hear is
A blender churning bricks
It feels like I'm in a race
I just wish they would
Get out of my face.

Markia Washington

I Fly

I fly through the air
I see many things –
Shooting and killing
Don't hear no angels sing.

I fly through a cemetery,
The place I don't want to be,
Many people have flowers
That they can't see.

Then I float up in the air
Don't know what I am doing
I wake up from a nightmare
With the flight still going.

Everett Holland





Jayon Gray (2004)

The Dream of My Life

I woke up
 And grew up
 And found out what my life was;
 I finally saw why I was living.
 By the time I found out,
 I was just in time
 Just in time not to grow older by myself,
 Just in time to share my life.
 But as time went by I forgot
 What life is, who I was, who my family was.
 My life went from happiness to being
 afraid of learning what life was
 all over again
 So I just let go.
 I was too old to learn again the unsolved mystery...
 I saw a light
 And then my life woke up without me
 falling asleep.

Jeanna Williams



Why I Wanted to Write You This Poem

I wanted to write you a poem
 A silent, urgent poem
 With expression and passion
 With all of my heart.
 I wanted to write you a poem
 Just to tell you I love you
 To tell you how much I care
 To give you a helping hand.
 I wanted to write you a poem
 To slowly get you on your feet

It used to appear to me that
 You were just mean and evil
 But now I realize that all you did
 Was help me and my mother.
 I wanted to write you a poem
 A windy rhythmic poem
 Even though you're dead and gone
 I still hear your silent echo
 In the dark shadow clouds.

Demetrius Ratliff

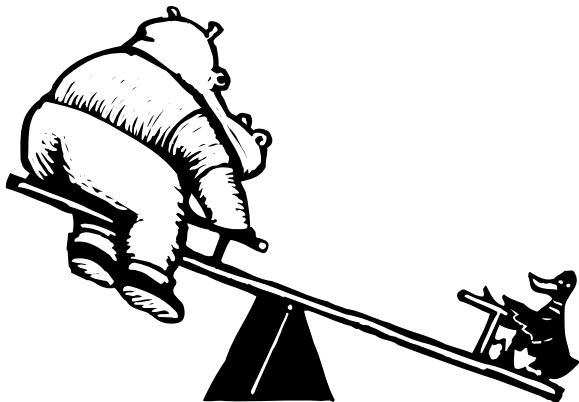


l-r: Chyann Wicker, Janiya Jones

The Cloud

This big cloud appeared, enormous and real
 I never had a hope so dark and so real
 I walked to the door with the rhythm in the sky
 Echoing around me, trying to keep me alive
 The rapid wind blew through the trees
 And from that day on I never saw
 The enormous cloud I always fear
 The cloud silently shrank into my big, brown eyes.

Shanda Holmes



What I Was Told

I was told that Santa Claus was real –
 I was told a lie.
 I was told that people could live forever;
 Then why did Granddaddy die?

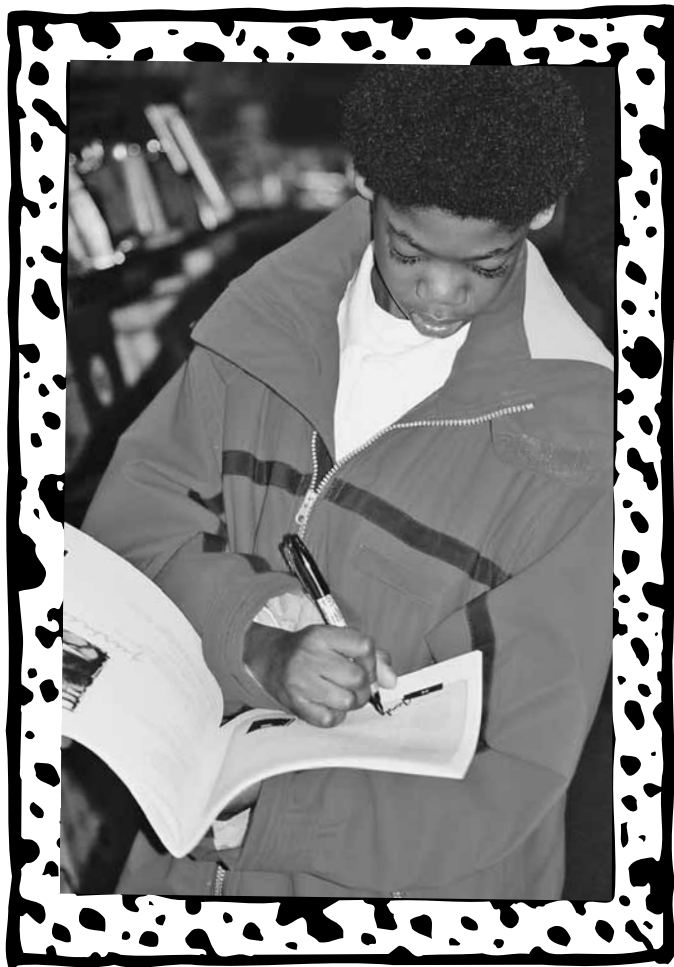
I was told to wish upon a star,
 Yet my dreams never came true.
 I was told never to give up,
 But that seemed the easiest thing to do.

I was told how to live my life
 But I was never given the way;
 I was told to always speak up but
 I hardly got my say.

I was always told to give,
 But yet I never received.
 I was told that there wasn't a God
 So why do I still believe?

Karen V. Baylor





*DeAngelo Thomas
signs a copy of
"hArtworks" at
Borders Books (2002)*

A Different Kind of Hope

Dedicated to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust

Marching, from dawn til dusk
Watching the day ease on by
Into a noisy night
A Jew had endured.

From stomachs growling
To babies howling,
Not knowing why they're here
With such pain and agony, without a cure.

Just praying a prayer and
Hoping, hoping for a better tomorrow
Hoping that the cut in their life
Would hurry up and heal.

Hoping someone would hear their prayers
In the middle of the morning, day, and night,
Pleading for better shelter and medicine
Praying for a normal meal.

Somebody listen:
There's a believer out there,
A different believer out there
Calling for a hero, perhaps you.

Hear their prayer;
Compare it with your prayer.
Pray for the unfortunate
Then wait for a miracle.

Karen V. Baylor

Noah, What's Going On?

Noah, what's going on?
What did she say?
Noah, what's going on?
Have you had your break today?
Noah, what's going on?
Have you had your flight of fear?
Shed a tear?
Or drank a beer?
Noah, what's going on?
When were you born?
First taste of corn?
Or played the French horn?
Noah, what's going on?
Noah doesn't no'ah.

Devin Hanna





Brandon Gatling

Oh Beautiful Blue

Oh beautiful blue,
How good you look
So pretty the sight
Of your color.

I love your jeans
I love your socks
I also love your ink pens.

Oh beautiful blue,
How pretty your sky
I love everything with
The color blue.

Oh beautiful blue, I love you.

Cherrika Robinson



The Room

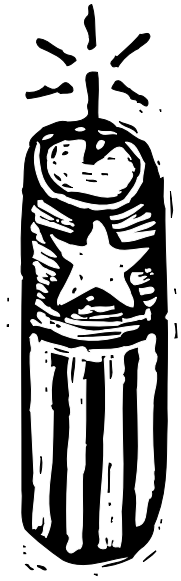
In one corner I see a discarded picture
Not because it's ugly
But because the artist
Felt tired, and never was it complete.
In the other I feel shame
I have nothing to be ashamed of
But yet, you can't tell me that.
I moped and slugged in the other direction
There I saw a woman
Even though she didn't feel like one.
She was jobless,
Not because of laziness
Or lack of concentration,
But because of the address
In her record
She started to get self-conscious
So I turned to the other corner
There, I saw a cloud of gray

I felt despair
And it sang a tune in my head:
"That's just what I'm talking about.
You look at me
And what do you feel?
Despair. Is that all I amount to?"
So I turned to the next corner
Only to find myself back at the picture.
I turned and turned
Around in that room
Looking for a crack,
Looking for an escape.

All reality is in this room.
Fortunately, the door is locked.
Unfortunately, I'm in it.

April Timberlake





My Libretto

DeArren Dawkins (2009)

I was the girl with all the attention
 Always center stage with recognition
 I was someone you just couldn't shake
 And I was best friends with good-old heartbreak
 I've never seen a boy get over me
 They never get out of the web I weave.

And until this day, I was the one
 When I woke up, I turned on the sun
 The clouds parted for me, whatever my pleasure
 #1 in their hearts, the gem of all treasure
 Whoever I dropped, I could surely pick up
 And whenever I'm finished, could re-open his cut.

Ayesha Johnson



All Alone

Late at night, all alone in bed, it's completely dark.
 So I call no one and suddenly my mom
 is there. And then I look out my window, the clouds
 are floating back and forth. I wonder how the earth
 will look in the morning.

All alone in the shelter, I wish it was morning
 but suddenly it becomes dark.
 I call for my father but my mom
 is there. The house is surrounded by clouds
 but I feel my house shaking above the earth.

The best thing in life is the shape of the earth;
 The time I think about it seems like morning.
 The time I think about it seems dark.
 My father says I am crazy; I think about my mom.
 And the time I just forget about seems like clouds.

Shawntice Patterson



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Back cover, top, l-r: Danielle Blake, Renita Williams (2005)

Bottom left: Matthew Griffin (2005), Bottom right: Brittany Love (2004)





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