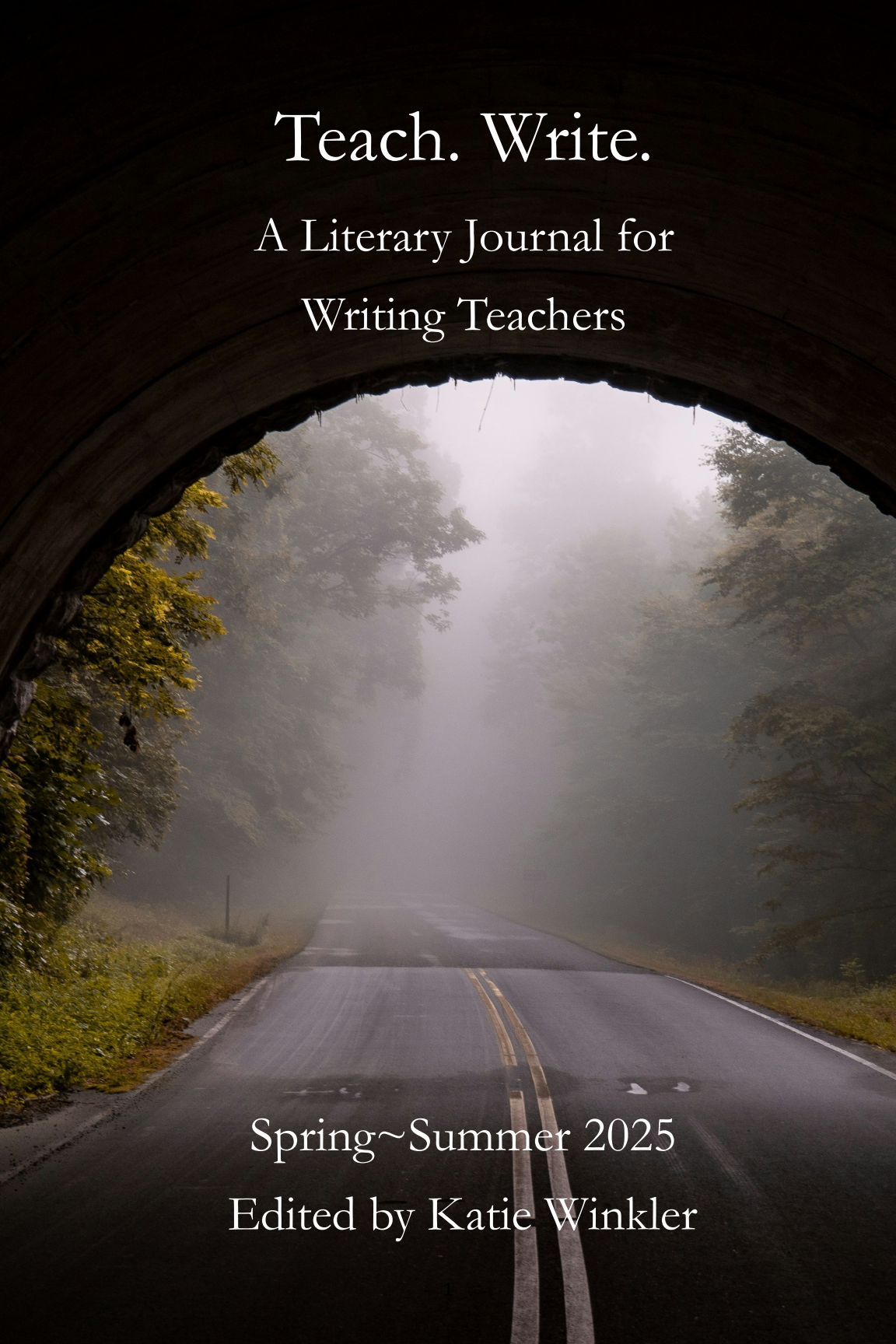


Teach. Write.

A Literary Journal for Writing Teachers

Spring~Summer 2025

Edited by Katie Winkler

TEACH. WRITE.

A Literary Journal for Writing Teachers

SPRING ~ SUMMER 2025

Katie Winkler ~ Editor

Cover Art by Aaron Burden via Unsplash

©2025 by Katie Winkler

For more information, please contact:

mkwinkler56@gmail.com

19 Candor Drive

Fletcher, NC 28732

Teach. Write. retains archive rights

ALL OTHER RIGHTS REVERT TO THE AUTHORS

Material may not be reproduced without written consent.

From the Editor,

Early in the morning on Friday, September 27, 2024, my husband and I awoke to the sound of torrential rain, powerful winds, and falling trees all around us. We knew the storm would be severe, but few were prepared for the hurricane force winds and flooding that would rip through our beloved Blue Ridge Mountains. The region had not seen anything like it in anyone's lifetime, some even calling it a 1,000-year event.

For days after the storm, our little neighborhood, cut off from communication and isolated due to fallen trees and power lines, rallied together to make it through. The first day, with every able-bodied person working, we were able to clear seven large trees from our one main road. At one point, I looked out our upstairs window and saw the neighborhood children removing limbs and leaves from our driveway. We fed each other, provided water for each other, and comforted each other, especially our next-door neighbor who lost eleven family members, including his parents, in one of the many mudslides caused by the heavy rains.

The heartbreak was only matched by the outpouring of aid and compassion that came our way all over the Carolinas and North America. Governmental, corporate, and non-profit organizations like the National Guard, FEMA, U.S. Cellular, Lowe's and Home Depot, Beloved Asheville, Samaritan's Purse, Mission North America, and the Cajun Navy, with their incredible mule trains, stepped into help. First responders, line and tree workers from all over the US, Canada, Mexico, Central and South America came to lend a hand. It was truly amazing.

Six months later, fueled by all the dried deadwood still on the ground and more high winds, fires are now raging across the region, but there is still hope. Again, Carolinians are rallying, again people from all over are coming to our aid, and as I write this, a gentle rain is falling.

Therefore, I dedicate this edition of *Teach. Write*. to the enduring spirit of the people of Western North Carolina and to all the brave and caring souls who have come to our aid. All of the photos depict not only the aftermath of the disaster but also the beauty that has been, is, and will be all around us, in more ways than one.

Katie Winkler

Inside this issue:

The Other Side ~ How to Begin Again—B. Lee	6
Strange Debris—Scott Kent	8
(TIME)—Rick K. Reut	11
Frozen by Fear—Brenda Kay Ledford	12
Howl down the Screaming Wind ~ Tic toc—Colin Ian Jefferey	14
Rage in the Night—Isabella J. Wu	16
After the Floods~Charred and Brittle~Souffle—James Gering	17
The Traffic Island ~ They Shall not Pass—Michael Colonnese	21
"Had Lockdown Glitch…"—Kelly Outler Kirkland	24
Biogenic Opal and Diatoms—Henry Steves	28
Kick Them Back—Stephen Phillip Druce	36
Cracked Vase—Megan Peralta	37
With the Prick of a Needle—Sophia Hua	38
Karen—Ericka Clay	42
Nature Writing Class—Richard Pariso	44
The Truth ~ To Read Is to Fly ~ The Genius—Laura Hess	46
Yet We Remain—Gary Smith	54
The Light We Pass On ~ I Don't Get It—Patrick G. Roland	55
Montjoie—Brian G. Smith	59
Skin of Words—Sophia Hua	64
Passing Time—John Radosta	66

Thirsty in a Hot Desert—Sina Farajzadeh 70

Finding the Magic in Learning—Fendy 71

Bat Eater—Alison Fung 76

Driver's High—D. Larissa Peters 79

A Moment in Time—Gospel Chinedu 80

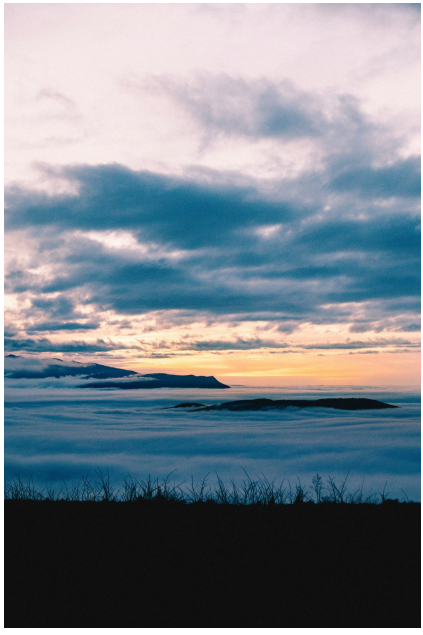
Mutiny in Room B4—Rebecca L. Brothers 81

Eat Live and Hunger—Shome Dasgupta 83

Interpretation of the Self ~ She Says—Rachel Turney 89

Contributors 93

Photo Credits 97



B. Lee

The Other Side

The flood took the sofa,
the fridge, the kitchen table—
but left us,
ankle-deep in what mattered:
one neighbor with a shovel,
another with a story,
and a dog shaking off the river
like none of this
was ever a problem.

How to Begin Again

Start with breakfast.
Toast, maybe. Something simple.

Then, walk outside,
let the sun press its warm palm
against your forehead,

and if that feels like enough for today,
let it be enough.



Scott Kent

Strange Debris

Stream of Consciousness — Hurricane Helene

The people know the salt of the sea
and the strength of the winds
lashing the corners of the earth.
Carl Sandburg

Ever since Hurricane Helene came through Western North Carolina, I see the world with new eyes, with curious eyes. Everywhere I look I see strange debris. Every day as I drive back and forth between Hendersonville and Asheville, I spot something new in the ditch or along a creek or a river. Lawnmowers, televisions, mattresses, shopping carts, a hot tub on Terry's Gap, cracks in the bridge. Moments flutter by when I do not think of Helene like when I'm in class at the University of North Carolina—Asheville or when I'm just sitting alone in my room not looking out the window. Sometimes when I'm driving where the storm didn't quite fully reach, I will forget briefly, I will sing a happy song. I then turn a corner, see the scattered rubble: paper, plastic bins, horizontal stop signs. The list keeps going. Cars, trucks, buses. The remnants. The scraps. All of the storage facilities emptied out. A Kalvinator, Granny Jo's old Dixieland dresser, and Edith still hasn't found her sewing machine. Larry said it was probably down the mountain, down with all the other equipment, down where the Swannanoa River meets Sweeten Creek. Everything down there got crushed in between trees. The violence of that night comes creeping back in my mind like a vicious vine. I shift my eyes, catch my breath. move on. I have to because my new eyes have also become joyous eyes. C.S. Lewis once said that "Hardships often prepare ordinary people for an extraordinary destiny." In Western North Carolina, on the day after Helene, the hardships were evident, the suffering was congealing on everyone's faces. But with this dread something else sprang forth with an endearing fantastical force. Our relief efforts were almost seamless. The movement to restore seemed to come without much effort. We knew what had to be done. I witnessed strength, perseverance, humility, determination. Everyone did. Whole communities rallied together

essentially revealing our unbreakable bond as a human species. Meanwhile, the strange debris sits on the sides of roads and in the backs of trailers. Have you seen them? My gaze doesn't grow weary, I see healing infused onto the fragments piled high on every corner of almost every street.

I go back to that night every now and again when that mean, mean Helene, that banshee, howled and wailed and shrieked throughout the night. The night the wicked beast hung over Appalachia swallowing up valleys – smashing, disfiguring, ravaging everything in its path. The twisted world above and around us came crashing down and those wild wild winds came from every direction throwing oaks, maples, poplars, sourwoods, southern yellow pines slashing, banging, and roaring into each other. Trees falling everywhere into people's homes, families running, screaming, crying, hugging, fleeing for safety in a little corner of a home hoping another tree doesn't come crashing down, hoping the water stops coming in. Not only are the people wounded, these Appalachian Mountains are wounded. Walt Whitman once talked about agonies and how they wound him. He said, "Agonies are one of my changes of garments; I do not ask the wounded person how he feels…I myself become the wounded person." I myself have become the wounded person; I have become the wounded mountain. I also feel myself and the souls of others in that bizarre and peculiar debris and I am reminded of an anecdote from someone I know who barely survived the raging waters that rose up the morning after Helene when the water poured into Fairview: *I am floating on the top of my car and the water keeps rising. I see my house being swallowed; I jump in and swim through muddy water to get to dry ground while objects I cannot see hit my side. I somehow survive but I will never be the same.* And now the anecdote of the mountain: I erode sediment and rock and root and I become a new river.

It was the gestures of love that kept me going in the beginning when I was without power, water, food and peace. It was witnessing first hand the compassion on the faces of the community. These gestures of love are a medicine. I'm talking about that medicine that is within us and that flows through us and that renders itself through our actions and expressions of love. Oh how life shines when the human and natural spirits converge from madness! That convergence unleashing our true calling as a species, a kind of elemental healing, a radical alleviation of our souls, a oneness, a union that was once obscured by lame political division rears its lovely head into itself and begins to work, begins to become that one thing. In tragedy, the earth and its creatures know what to do. We get to work. We clear driveways. We bring water to

neighbors. We give away free eggs that came from our own hen houses while we stand behind a little table in our driveways tripping over wires and sticks spread about the ground. We cry. We laugh. We donate money to a church so that they can rebuild a family's driveway that is now scattered about the valley below. We go to a stranger's house and help them cover their roof with a tarp. We pile up debris by the roads. We cook ramen noodles outside by a fire. It's the best ramen we ever ate. We go run a chainsaw down the road and clear a path for a family we don't know to leave their homes. We allow others into our homes that haven't showered in days because we are the only ones they know that have running water or power. We shovel mud out of family businesses, out of family's homes. We stand out by the road and give away fresh burritos to the local community. We stay awake all night in a bucket pulling new power lines for our fellow humans. We donate diapers, food, medicine, and water. We drive slower than normal observing the damage. We stop on occasion to ask a neighbor if they need anything. We swim through rubble. We fall in love with strange debris. We see things with new eyes and our destiny unfolds. We take. We give. We love. We forgive. We become extraordinary. We heal. Meanwhile, we hope we are prepared for the next storm that lashes at us from the corners of the earth. We know we will be, we know we will.



Rick K. Reut

(TIME)

…as time flies fast – unless GOD cuts its wings.
But then time seems to simply start to run
out of space. Time sometimes only brings
slow-motion sighing from the setting sun.
Yes, time can heal; but time can also kill
like a wind blowing out candles. When a rain-
storm starts, you feel all you can feel until
you come to find out if it is in vain…

…as time flies fast – unless GOD cuts its wings. But then time seems to simply start to run out of space. Time sometimes only brings slow-motion sighing from the setting sun. Yes, time can heal; but time can also kill like a wind blowing out candles. When a rainstorm starts, you feel all you can feel until you come to find out if it is in vain…

Brenda Kay Ledford

Frozen by Fear

Throughout the eerie night,
the wind howled like coyotes
fighting for their prey.

Sleet beat against my window
as tree branches pounded like
nails on my roof. The demon

screeched toward Clay County,
suddenly it forked within 50 miles
of wiping us off the map.

Hurricane Helene devastated
the Blue Ridge Mountains,
rivers flooded and washed

away houses, barns, animals,
cars, and the bodies of victims.
No one was spared the wrath

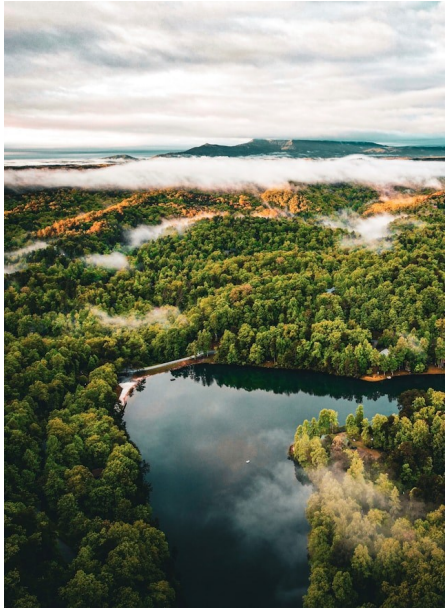
of the vicious villain. The city
of Asheville obliterated, homes
and the art center abolished.

Hungry, thirsty, tired, frightened;
homeless people cried.
Everything they worked for

all their lives was ripped away:
things you could never replace:
photos of family, cherished possessions

that the heartless monster demolished.
Life would never be the same:
it would take years to recover.

My heart palpitated as I viewed
the photos of the devastation:
I wept and prayed for my neighbors.



Colin Ian Jeffery

Howl down the screaming wind

Howl down the screaming wind
Stem gushing flow of innocent blood
Rescue souls lost from whirlpool's trap
Floundering lost amidst thunderous waves
Dashed and broken upon jagged rocks.

War mongers' demands beyond control
Silencing all prayers for peace
Lies told to quell the panic
Inmates running the asylum
Madness giving birth to destruction.

Tic toc

Time, relentless and hard
Sweeps me swiftly forward
Moving onwards without pause
Each lover soon a memory.

In childhood time seemed paused
Bright summers never ending
Holidays of happiness and adventure
hared with family and friends long dead.

How can I hold back time
Trapped and precious to my heart?
Slipping rapidly away
Chaining me to loneliness.



Isabella J. Wu

Rage in the Night

My lines
Frittered away to an audience
Deaf of hearing.

Broken notes hidden inside
Beneath frostbitten lands where
Arctic gales sweep the streets

No beats end to end
We defend, bravely--
Just sonatas to a deaf crowd,
Music drowned out by noise

Rage,
Rage,
Goes the night.
Rage,
Rage,
Goes my heartbeat.



James Gering

After the Floods

Bella and Houdini commute from Sydney
to the mountains under rains of vast scope.
They sympathise with coastal residents in
their wake, battling to protect beloved dwellings.

The deluge hasn't spared Houdini's mountain rental
on its sloping lot. Water has penetrated fissures
in the basement, is pooling on the floor
and lapping at the first step up from the foyer.

Houdini salvages some belongings,
then calls the letting agency.
Above the basement waters, the hearth is cosy.
Houdini hands Bella wedges of Toblerone,

and out come the board games, but not Monopoly,
never Monopoly—a game too nettlesome
for a duo who don't own real estate.
'Bella, my sweet, my saviour,' Houdini says,

're the housing subject, can I tempt you
with a book barge for sale in Britain?
Think ice-cream truck serenading a street,
only it's a book barge courting a canal.

and you, my darling, could be submerged
in a sea of stories spilling off shelves.
Or perhaps a revamped coach bus appeals,
electric scooters in the cargo bay

for dashing here and there?'
Bella flicks a lock of hair from the light
of her eyes and declares them a couple content
on the upper decks of their flooded rental.

Charred and Brittle

Under clotting clouds, Bella & Houdini hike
to the cliffs of Bald Head,
chaperoned by flame-damaged trees.

Bella steps over a collapsed gum, its trunk
all charred and brittle.
So much at risk, Houdini thinks–
landscapes, people, beliefs, and it pains him
to know the damage can't always be undone.

Happenstance pulling Houdini down,
ever closer to the worms.
Mortalised–is that a word?

The escapist channels a bug
scuttling over charred earth, nowhere
to hide. He topples off a ledge and lands
on his back, tiny legs whirring comically.

And Houdini's diary gathers pace–
hurtling onto the page some days, stumbling
there on others.

My dear Bella, trying here not to be
a fraught bug in the manner of Kafka's Samsa,
trying here to stay tuned to wide realities–

today an Afghan town, Zaranj, on the Iranian
border, where the displaced crouch in a furrow,
waiting for darkness and the signal to run.

Souffle

At home
in the Blue Mountains,
watching
the evening news,
Houdini sees
a dazed Kentuckian,

of furrowed brow
of shaky hand,
standing in a maelstrom
of hurricane debris scattered
about him–his home
and belongings:

broken furniture,
rumpled garments,
front door teetering
in the fork of a tree,
oven discombobulated
in a roadside ditch.

Houdini
pensively lays out cutlery
and checks
the gruyere souffle
rising golden
under the grill.



Michael Colonnese

The Traffic Island

There are multiple secondary entrances to the campus of Johns Hopkins University. And at one of those secondary entrances, a roundabout surrounds a small overgrown traffic island that's scarcely fourteen feet across.

Around the circumference of that island, the university's groundskeepers have planted a thorny ornamental hedge that has once again grown to be nearly four feet tall and three feet wide and that they probably need to prune back every spring as it continually threatens to overtake the entire center of the island where it encircles a weeping willow tree. From the roadway, the bottom third of the willow's trunk isn't visible, although its spindly branches hang behind the surrounding hedge like a twiggy curtain, and its canopy protrudes above the thicket like the top of a beach umbrella.

Only a young man who had recently been homeless and was consequently accustomed to searching for safe places to spend the night would have noticed this overgrown traffic island at all—much less considered its potential as a temporary residence, but perhaps only a young man who'd also applied for admission to Johns Hopkins University and had, in fact, already been accepted for the upcoming spring semester might have imagined he could spend the entire month of December in such a setting while he waited for student housing to become available.

And once he'd summoned the courage to hurdle that dense thorny hedge and reach the small domed space beneath the willow, he found the twig-protected soil dry and softened by a scattering of last year's leaves and judged it suitable for his purposes. After nightfall, the fumes and noise from the circling cars and the sweep of their passing headlights would likely be minimal and the constant fear of being discovered would probably recede once he was safely hidden behind the hedge and beneath the willow trailing branches where the confusing emotional traffic that was a byproduct of homelessness might also diminish and allow him time and space for sleep and self reflection.

Besides, there were the advantages of an on-campus life to consider. The university's library was almost always open, and he could spend entire days inside if it were snowing or sleeting. He was only slightly older than most of the

undergraduates, and as college students were generally a scruffy-looking bunch, he imagined it might be fairly easy to blend in. Moreover, there was a student center with public lavatories and a university gym with locker rooms where he would certainly be able to wash himself or perhaps occasionally enjoy a shower, and there were multiple dining halls where he could attempt to claim he'd forgotten his student ID card and score a hot nutritious meal. Or, failing that, he could always dumpster-dive into a cafeteria's trash bin after dark because college students ordinarily wasted a lot of food.

He still had eighty-two dollars stashed in one foul-smelling sock and hoped his savings would last until January as he needed to hoard his remaining cash to buy textbooks once the new semester began, and calories would likely be harder to come by during the three-week winter break when the university would be closed. For protection at night after library-hours ended, he had a duck-down Army-surplus sleeping bag and some heavy plastic sheeting that would keep out whatever precipitation that the surrounding landscaping couldn't absorb. But over the Christmas holidays, obtaining the extra food he'd need to prevent himself from shivering violently throughout what would very soon be the darkest and probably coldest of winter nights was soon likely to become a challenge.

Meanwhile, from the first week in December until final exam week, he might try to sit in on a few large lecture-hall courses and maybe learn a little something about scholarly disciplines like radio-astronomy or cultural anthropology. He was so deeply focused on his promising future that he seldom bothered to notice the direness of his present circumstance. Nonetheless, from his limited and mostly speculative experience, he'd already concluded that college professors liked to hear themselves talk and probably wouldn't mind if an inquisitive student quietly occupied an empty seat.

There was even the semi-remote possibility that this homeless young man could find some way to ingratiate himself into the large and diverse student body and either finagle an invite or else manage to crash an end-of-the-semester party at some fraternity or sorority house where he might possibly be able to sweet talk some inebriated co-ed into sneaking him back to her dorm room. For someone who was about to inhabit a traffic island for a month, he had an unwarranted confidence in language and in his powers of persuasion.

He knew the odds of academic success might temporarily be stacked against a homeless young man who was beginning his life as a college student

by occupying a traffic island, but he was expecting to major in English and was already planning to become a novelist—although even as he settled into that cold but twig-protected place, he remained profoundly unaware that many additional years of vulnerability and loneliness would be necessary before he could even begin to imagine that life on such an island might one day become a memory that he could write about.



They Shall Not Pass

Not only Western Civilization
but any college class
that might someday require them
to write so much
as a single coherent sentence.

Literature, Philosophy,
Introduction to Sociology.
(Tutors are also available
for their remedial math
and science courses.)

And they've gathered tonight
(albeit reluctantly)
for mandatory study hall
required of all student athletes
on academic probation.

Ishmael Storm, Joey Greene,
Ricardo Fernandez,
and Kennedy Freeman,
four second-string players
on the defensive line

and each of them, like me,
(or rather as I once was)
inordinately hopeful
and the first in his family
to graduate from high school.

For although they're now far
more likely to leave campus
with a concussion than a degree,
they still somehow imagine
they'll have careers in the NFL.

I've re-sheathed my red pen,
unwilling to draw blood.
Hopelessness is another enemy,
and the path ahead
is already narrow and impassable.

Thermopylae and Verdun.



Kelley Outler Kirkland

“Hard lockdown glitch at local high school leaves students and parents frantic”

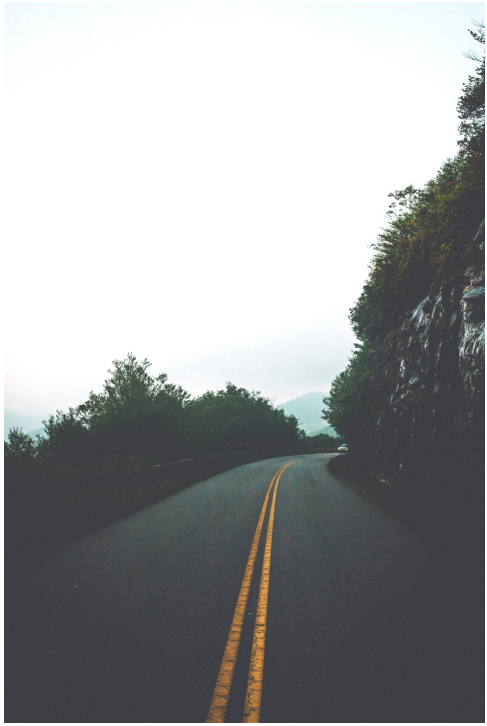
When The Alert locks our screens
During a lesson on implicit bias,
All your eyes, big and round, cling
To the stitches of my clothing like
Little children awaiting instruction —
That’s what I’m here for, after all,
A guide to light your way through
The Romantics and Transcendentalists,
The comma splices and dangling

Modifiers. But what training could I have
In this? Turn off the lights. Everyone to
The corner closest to the door. Not.
A. sound. Do you hear me? Only the
Slow closing of newly-installed blinds.
The heavy metal cabinet wheeling
In front of the glass door, locked
Together, we forget to breathe. I see
You closing your eyes. Looking at your
Feet. Holding each other’s hands, listening –
For the sound that will confirm our fears.

I stand in those minutes like a mother bear
Making herself bigger on hind legs, but even
A beast is no match for a child with ill-intent
And an AR-15, a car careening at full
Speed. I will take a bullet for each of you,
I want to say. I want to say that if someone
dies today it won’t be because my mother
Body didn’t shield you from the ugly parts
Of the world and a broken psyche. It won’t
Be because you aren’t, every one, my
Own young.

Later, in the break room, we will say we
Didn't sign up for this. But what else does
it mean, today, to teach? To lay ourselves
Down so the youth might rise bigger than
we? Let the cubs grow fierce and mighty,
didn't we say?

Later, when we hear the All Clear, I look
Down at my shaking hands and up at your
Eyes, all big and round, and know fully,
finally, the charge of teaching other people's
children.



Henry Stevens

Biogenic Opal and Diatoms

for Meg Boeshart and Kristi Costello

Will Box's breakdown happened in the twelfth week of the Spring semester, around ten in the morning. Will didn't look like the type to break down. He was too put together—button down blue shirt and khaki slacks, leather belt and loafers. He tried to dress like authority in the Old Dominion Writing Center because he got paid $25 an hour for his expertise, though he thought he was fairly well qualified to give it. He had done four years of undergraduate study, double majoring in English and Classics, with an honors thesis applying postcolonial frameworks to the work of Petronius, and immediately entered the MA in Linguistics at ODU, with a special focus on the Teaching of English to Speakers of Another Language. He started that day convinced he could help anyone who walked through those doors.

The appointment was one of those things that shouldn't matter so much. The whole job was just one of those in-between jobs. Will had finished his teaching certification last semester and now he was waiting to hear back from the adjunct offers he'd reached out to at Norfolk State, as well as here at ODU. In his teaching portfolio, Will talked about his anti-racist pedagogy, how he would use labor-based non-grading in his hypothetical classes. He described his role as that of reference book, fan club president, and therapist. He'd quoted Peter Elbow and bell hooks and Asao Inoue and Roxanne Gay and Jimmy Butts, so he thought he had a pretty good chance of getting a call back.

The student's name was Percy Kutzing. His booking noted that he was a masters' student writing a prospectus in the field of oceanography. This made Will excited. He generally divided his students into categories: first year students in Eng 110C who had never written at the college level before, international students (usually masters or Ph.D.) whose first language was something other than English, and upper level graduate students writing long and complex essays that needed more global advice. He figured with a name like Kutzing, this guy was probably the second.

Admittedly, Will had never written a prospectus. He looked it up and learned that a prospectus was a summary of research goals used to propose a project to an academic committee, and that a good prospectus, according to Wichita State University's online writing lab, was one which included a working title, a well formulated research question and hypothesis, an introduction to the material, a background for understanding prior research, and an explanation of the methodology and philosophy behind the experiment. Though he had never written one, Will thought this sounded quite similar to any other APA style scientific paper, and should be of little trouble to him. He felt proud of himself for having looked it up beforehand–this was the kind of dedication that made him a good tutor.

Percy came into the writing center at 9:45 am wearing baggy, paint-flecked blue jeans. The jeans were sun bleached and the paint flecks were also white. His coat was tan canvas, a sherpa jacket with wool lining and a patch on the back like a biker. The patch was a huge, black circle with a red branch across it that had some kind of pink polka dot pattern, and a white skull superimposed over it. His T-Shirt was black with a large green square on it, the square, Will noticed, was full of letters, like a wordsearch. Percy's hair hung in long strings down his back, light brown like his scruffy beard, and his earlobes had spacers in them. He wore a hat with the WWF logo on it, that minimalist panda, and there was the beginning of a tattoo sleeve at the inside of his left wrist. He did not seem to be an international student, and Will wasn't quite sure how to classify him.

Will watched Percy check in at the front desk. He knew it had to be Percy; no one else had an appointment at ten. Most of the other tutors hadn't even come in yet. Percy asked the front desk worker for a different tutor, but the front desk told Percy that the other tutor had a personal emergency, and so they had put him with Will. This made Will feel weird, like he was some pretentious undergraduate instead of the mature masters student persona he had an easier time performing to 110 students. Percy must have been working with the other tutor for a while, and that he might be stepping into something he did not fully understand. But he told himself that this was ok because he had been learning in situ ever since he had gotten this job. He got up to introduce himself.

"Hi, Percy?" He asked, approaching the front desk. "I'm Will. I'll be your tutor for today. Our sessions run for 45 minutes, so we can start now and end

at 10:30, or we can wait and start at the normal time at 10:00 and end at 10:45. What do you think?"

Percy shook Will's outstretched hand.

"Well, yeah," he said, "Why don't we get this started then. No need to waste time."

Will liked that answer. If a student finished early, he had a longer break before the next one, but he wouldn't have to take another walk-in. Very convenient since he had skipped breakfast and was looking forward to his Einstein Bros bagel at 10:45, which would now be at 10:30. All he had to do was get through this appointment.

"So, what are we working on today?" Will asked.

Percy was a slow talker who said a lot of things Will already knew from his booking, but Will nodded and listened patiently as if this was the first time he had heard them. Percy took a moment to lay out the context, that he had been working with the other tutor, that this was a proposal for a big research project that he and his professor were doing, etc. Percy opened his laptop and pulled up a document with some writing in size 14 font, bolded, some sections in red.

"I'm not such a good writer," Percy said. "But this is what me and the other tutor did already. Down here, this part I just want to make flow better, and then I guess get your ideas on what I need to do."

As soon as Percy said that the first paragraph had been done with the other tutor, Will's eyes skipped down to the next paragraph. It was a STEM subject paper, alright. The first sentence had to do with Aluminum concentrations in global oceans, and then the next sentence was pretty much incomprehensible. Something about Antarctica. The sentence after that mentioned the Amundsen Sea, which Will assumed was some body of water on the coast of Antarctica, probably in the Southern Ocean, but he was searching to find anything to say about this. He wasn't sure whether it was good or bad. The silence ticked on. To buy himself some time, Will asked Percy what he was looking for out of this meeting.

Percy thought for a moment. Will filled the silence by telling him that, according to Wichita State University's Online Writing Lab, a good prospectus was one which included a working title, a well formulated research question and hypothesis, an introduction to the material, a background for understanding prior research, and an explanation of the methodology and philosophy behind the experiment.

“I learned early on that the best writing centers are in the weirdest places, like Arizona State, or North Central Texas Community College,” Will said. “Places you couldn’t predict from US News and Rankings.”

Percy said that was fascinating, but he didn’t need much help with structuring the prospectus. He said he had a buddy doing a Ph.D. in oceanography who had forwarded him a template to use to make sure he got all the right components. What Percy said he needed was to make it flow right, and to figure out when he had written enough, or if he needed a bit more. Will did not like this answer. Flow was already the toughest kind of advice to give, and staring at the screen as Percy talked, he had still been unable to come up with anything to say. He simply did not understand what he was looking at, and his mind was starting to race.

Will glanced at the clock in the bottom right hand corner of Percy’s screen. It said 9:50. Only five minutes had passed. Another 40 minutes to go. He felt weird unable to fill the time with something helpful, but if it was a flow question, then there was one trick he knew to buy time when he still didn’t know anything to say, but he was ashamed to resort to these tactics because he felt that someone like him ought to be able to just know what to say.

“Often, when I have students with concerns about flow, I ask them to read their work aloud,” Will said. “That helps us hear where there are issues, and we can note them and take a look at them later. What do you think?”

“Oh, well, I guess, I could do that,” Percy said. “I just don’t really, you know, feel that confident reading my own writing. I’m not such a good writer, so, I don’t really feel comfortable.”

Will didn’t let his exasperation show. He had seen so many students that no writing quality meant anything to him, but he had also seen so many students that he knew that there was no way he could reassure Percy of this. The real lessons in life, Will thought, have to be learned by ourselves, at our own paces, and can’t be taught unless we already know them. He had gotten that from reading *Siddhartha*. The Herman Hesse book, not the real Buddha.

“Would it be better if I read it,” Will asked.

“Oh, yeah that would work,” Percy said. “I’m sorry. I just want it to sound good.”

“Don’t worry,” Will said. “It will.”

It was now 9:55, still 35 minutes left in the appointment, and Will was no closer to understanding what useful thing he could say to Percy than he had been ten minutes ago. It frustrated him. He was being paid to do this job. Peo-

ple didn't come here to be told he didn't have anything to say. And he thought about how he was probably younger than Percy. Will had gone straight from undergraduate into his masters, and this was his first year. Most of the science people had a couple of years between their undergraduate and graduate programs. Plus, this was a research project that Percy's professor was advising him on, and that didn't usually happen until at least a year in. Will felt humiliated, and terribly inadequate, a feeling made worse by his struggles reading Percy's paper. And then he almost lost it when he realized he didn't know how to pronounce the word diatom.

It was the when he got to the phrase *aluminum adsorption into biogenic opal by diatoms* that he realized all was lost. He just stopped. He resaid the word diatom. Will looked at Percy in shame, expecting to see the scientist smirking, but Percy seemed to hardly notice the fact that Will had stumbled. His eyes were closed. He opened them when Will stopped reading. Percy pronounced it correctly, and Will continued on reading. He stopped again to ask if adsorption was a typo. It was not, Percy explained, because adsorption was the capability of all solid substances to attract to their surfaces molecules of gases or solutions with which they are in contact, and Will realized he was truly out of his depth. Only when he had struggled to the bottom of the second paragraph did Will realize that a diatom must be a type of shellfish.

"Microscopic unicellular organisms, actually," Percy explained.

Potato tomato, Will thought, annoyed. He asked Percy to explain what he was talking about in this paragraph while silently calculating how much more they would get done. There were still four more paragraphs to go, and it was already 10:10. He wished that the time could last long enough for them to at least finish the five paragraphs before him, or he would feel like even more of a failure. Percy explained that as aluminum sank into the water column, it combined with the silicon in opal to form an alumina opal that was adsorbed to these small, unicellular organisms living in the Amundsen Sea to form amazingly beautiful and intricate latices. He went to Wikipedia, and the article had a picture of one, and Will agreed. It was extraordinarily beautiful, unlike anything he had ever seen.

"Yeah, see for this project we're going to take one of these cruises down from Chile into the Amundsen Sea and we're going to take samples and collect data because even though we have aluminum concentrations data for all the oceans, we still don't have a huge amount of data for the Southern Ocean, and in the Amundsen Sea in particular, the ice sheet is really large, so there are

these warm pockets that form under there and they melt the ice from the underside, generating this really cool mixing effect. That's what I'm interested in," Percy said.

Will was transfixed by the image of the diatom. He tried to imagine them drifting in the water column. Their crystalline lattices glittering in the dark and green salt water. Blue white ice above. A heavenly, deathly, freezing floating. A perfect silence.

Will realized that he wanted to go on this expedition with Percy. The natural world was more beautiful than anything written by a human hand. He was still seeing the tiny diatoms with their naturally biologically generated opal shells glittering in the Antarctic depths. The wikipedia article called them "sea jewels." He wanted to sail on this cruise and sample the water and listen to Percy explain every last detail of mineral concentrations in the world's oceans. Or maybe Percy only knew about aluminum, but even that was extraordinary. He could listen to Percy talk about just aluminum for days. And then he realized that he really could not help Percy at all. He knew nothing. And yet Percy was looking at him expectantly. Will couldn't disappoint him. He had to say something.

"Well, it seems quite good," Will said. "Great. Good job."

"You really think so?" Percy asked.

The question terrified Will. He was here as the tutor, the one who was supposed to know and to provide, upon whom stability rested and from whom assurances would follow. This was an authority he had seen others lose, but never allowed himself to unearn. A tutor had to be right. That is, a tutor could never say something they didn't know was true. They had to hedge themselves when they had to hedge themselves, but better than that was to know, and to know was Will's real reason for being here in the first place. But he had said it was quite good. And so now Percy thought it was quite good. If it wasn't, then Will would hurt his reputation as a tutor and the whole Writing Center's reputation in general. And the truth was, Will had no idea if it was good or not, because he was too illiterate to read it.

So he doubled down with what he knew. He offered some advice on slightly reordering the wording, moving a lower sentence up, and moving an upper sentence lower, deleting the space between a pair of paragraphs and making a new paragraph break, anything that wouldn't feel too disruptive, now that he knew how little he knew. But it was difficult, because he still wasn't sure if he was disturbing some intricate meaning he didn't understand. With every piece

of advice, Will imagined Percy being chewed out by an invisible advisor and saying, “But I went to the writing center and the tutor there told me…” and realizing then that Will had lied to him, and hating Will. Will imagined Percy standing on the boat in Antarctica, chatting with a scientist, both of them wearing brown Carhartt coveralls and huge white parkas, telling the guy about how he almost didn’t get to go on this cruise because his prospectus was so bad because this guy back at the writing center in Norfolk was such a terrible tutor.

As the Percy in Will’s mind tore him apart, the Percy at Will’s desk seemed to become more comfortable, and confident, and the Will at Will’s desk became more fidgety, nibbling at his nails as he struggled to make sense of the pages he was reading. Percy slouched back, even reading some of his paragraphs aloud, and Will hunched forward, occasionally picking at the keyboard like a gaunt heron. Will panicked as he saw Percy trusting him. Don’t trust me, he wanted to scream, I have no idea what I’m doing and this is literally thousands of dollars and years of your life and probably the biggest moment of your whole education and I’m screwing it up for you. And Percy grinned and laughed and said this version sounded a lot tighter. They reached the final paragraph, and it was only 10:20.

“But is it what you want to say?” Will asked.

“I mean, I guess,” Percy said. “You’re the writer. If you think that’s good, then yeah, it’s good.”

“No but,” Will said, straining, “Please. Just tell me. Is this what you want to say? I don’t know science, ok? Like, I can rearrange it and all, but I don’t know what half this stuff means.”

“Whatever you think is right,” Percy said.

Will was about to argue with him, but then he stopped. He was never going on that boat to Antarctica. It didn’t matter. Percy, unlike him, could read the essay. He thought these changes sounded good. If Percy’s advisor chewed him out, it was on Percy. Or if Percy turned around and blamed Will, then so what? It didn’t matter. Will couldn’t control it, and he’d done the best he could. So instead of insisting, he gave up and started to bring the session to a close.

Will reminded Percy about the four parts of prospectus, how Percy needed to clearly state his hypothesis and research questions, how he needed his background and what could be done to differentiate that from the lengthy introduction he had already written and how to do the methodologies section.

And then he left Percy to free write for the last ten minutes. He stood up, stretched, and went out to get water, feeling weirdly exhausted and sad for some reason. His mood didn't improve when he got his bagel either, and he felt downright worthless by the time he made his way back to the Writing Center.

When Will was coming back, he met Percy on his way out. The scientist smiled broadly and gave him a fist bump in passing. As he passed, Percy said over his shoulder that he would bring the prospectus back once he had more of it done. Will smiled and waved to him. Percy couldn't see the tremors still quaking in his hands.

The writing center was still pretty empty. The other tutors were still yet to arrive, except the guy at the front desk who was completely absorbed in playing online chess. Will sat down at his computer to type the client report, but he just couldn't. It seemed like an impossible task for some reason. Exhausting even to think about. So he closed the page and pulled up pictures of diatoms on Google image. Resting his face on his palm, he stared wistfully at those beautiful unicellular organisms with cell walls that looked like hexagonal mesh, like a science fiction superstructure, like a living crystal foam.



Stephen Philip Druce

Kick Them Back

The bully boot,
the fully cruel,
the tyrant brute,
the ridicule,
they'll smile and kick
you at their leisure -

kick them back or
they'll kick you forever,

they'll kick you around
from pillar to post,
they'll kick and watch
your soul capsize,
they'll slowly roast
until you're toast,
they'll persecute
and terrorize,

they'll poke their fun,
they'll smear your name,
they'll beat you numb -
they''ll taunt and maim,
they'll kick you and
your soft successor -

kick them back or
they'll kick you forever.

Megan Peralta

Cracked Vase

This padded chair—
A churchy teal or
Repentant beige—
Is just steel legs
Holding me up

As the silken lilies and
Scarlet carnations wilt
In the dry, cracked
Vase of my chest

As student after student
Mounts the stage to
Bring you back to life
Blooming you into
A different woman

I wonder how we
Missed each other
The petals of our
Lives falling into
Opposing turbid
Waters

I wonder, both teachers,
What we taught each other

Sophia Hua

With the Prick of a Needle

I'm six years old, sitting on the crinkled paper covering the examination chair. Dr. Kupelian looks in my ears with the otoscope. I don't understand the big words she says to my parents. All I catch are the words "tremendous decrease."

* * *

Six years into my life, hearing loss washed away my sense of confidence. My teachers' voices grew fainter, my friends' chatter softer and less intelligible. The muffled sound of silence wasclosing in. I tried to get seats near the front of the classroom, but when that failed, I strained with all my might to hear the teacher's instructions. By the time I was 11, it seemed only a matter of time.

* * *

I'm sitting in another chair. Heavy headphones weigh me down. Every beep that punches through my eardrums is electrifying. Ringing swarm through my head. Sheepishly, I raise my hand. "It's ringing." Our school's hearing test proctor stares at me, and I can only hear a muffled reply. "What?" I ask, high-pitched ringing burrowing into my head. Shaking her head, she makes a red "x" next to my name.

* * *

That night, I overheard my parents' conversation.

"Hearing is vital," said my dad. I could practically make out his worried expression.

"I know, but think about the plane tickets!" my mom shot back. "Thousands of dollars."

“But Cindy, she’ll struggle in the future. What if she misses something important in a lecture? Her grades will be affected.”

Mom gave in at once. “Alright, alright. Contact my sister. She’ll know about treatment.”

“I already have. All that’s left is acupuncture.”

“Then acupuncture it is.”

* * *

A few weeks later, I’m sprawled across another hospital bed, this time in Chongqing, China. Doctor Yang brandishes a sharp pack of needles. I swear I see her eyes gleam as she runs her callused hands across their tips. Around me, patients are clustered all over the steamy room, most men with paunchy bellies. The walls are lined with ancient poems, and apprentices, wearing neon purple smocks scuttle across the room with the smell of murky steam wafting behind them.

I scoff as people cluster at the register, gullible patients wasting their money on quack medicine. I avoid the doctor’s gaze, frightened by her hag-like appearance. Her eyes are so small she appears to be squinting. Her white jacket signifies her position as head acupuncturist, her hair pulled into a stiff, substantial bun. But as soon as she smiles, her teeth gleam like white pearls.

She starts to pinch my pressure points, and I let out a high-pitched squeal as I feel my neck numbing. Immediately, she draws a needle out of her pack and stabs it into my muscle. I feel my body tense as she plucks it out, and I massage the momentary pain.

She slaps my hand in admonishment. “No,” she says in her poor, heavily-accented English. “Bad for you.” After a minute, ten needles prick up from my stomach. With each stab, my nerves squirm.

“Yi ma,” I call to my aunt, who is sitting in a chair next to my platform bed. “Rather than torturing me, shouldn’t we be fitting hearing aids right now?”

Dr. Yang interrupts. “No. That is not the answer,” she says, her voice serious. “With acupuncture, everything is centered around the root. We nurture it—carefully water it. Putting on hearing aids

does little to nothing."

My aunt nods along. "I used to have shoulder problems from playing Mah-jong all day." She arches her back. "Thanks to Dr. Yang, I've healed."

I am still in doubt, but I push the feeling down. The doctor starts to plunge the needle in and out of a pressure point, making my muscles jump.

***

Every day for a week, I would undergo acupuncture treatment. Each time I walked out the hospital doors, my ears felt less clogged. I started picking up different sounds, like the muffled whirring of the fan overhead, or even the elevator gears shifting. On my last day in Chongqing, my dad pulled up a YouTube hearing test and tried different hertz hearing levels.

Surprisingly, I aced the test up to superhuman level. On the way back to my aunt's house, I found myself joining in on their conversations without any auditory conflicts—for the first time in my life.

Over the course of seven days, my dreams became a reality—a reality I never imagined Eastern medicine could achieve. Looking back, I've realized that, as cliche as it sounds, things really aren't what they seem to be. And, who knows? That might be a good thing.



Ericka Clay

Karen

In the 90's, there was a taste for it.
An almost overgrown zeal she took
To whacking away liked weeds.
Her love of teaching.
She reasoned its roots lost water
And shriveled because she was an old
Maid now–thirty-five–but that couldn't
Be it. By the looks of things on her TV,
Thirty-five was the new twenty.

It was more of a shift that didn't even
Start within her own heart. It was outward
And everywhere and the way the new janitor
Slid his eyes over his neatly trimmed
Nails when she confirmed her name
Was Karen. Apparently, she had become
A nomenclatural pariah without even
Becoming aware of it.

All day long she taught children who looked
More at their screens than her face. That wasn't
Education, but the complaint was a faded tune
In her principal's ears. Education now consisted
Of a laborious list of all the things she intended to do
But couldn't quite pull off.

Like when she wanted to teach *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*
And the collective gasp in her teacher's meeting
Seemed like a response to her wanting to light the children on fire.
Too racist, too many curse words (although she was sure
Some of her kids ate those for breakfast), too…real.

That night Karen went home, took a long bubble
Bath and remembered something she hadn't deemed
Worth remembering for a long time.
There she'd been, young and alone in her room–
The best combination–long wooden ruler in hand,
Teaching the doll she'd named after herself,
Instructing her on the ways of the world
She'd one day cease to know.



Richard Pariso

Nature Writing Class

My young students forage for signs. House sparrows
flit among strawberry bushes
just a few scarlet fruits

still hanging. A woodchuck startles
whistles
trundles fat rolls
rears
a moment
watches as we watch.

The girl who never speaks
dallies with a salamander
browser in brown leaves.

Ha ha –
a woodpecker's tapping a concrete post!

Someone holds up a spruce cone stripped of scales
by squirrels. Sow, seek, eat, and scatter –
when will this rummage cease and what will come of it?

Cedar Creek. We humans, on a bridge between two hungers:
A kingfisher flings his rattle-cry, fish rise
to damselflies, to trouble our reflections.



Laura Hess

The Truth

We were discussing how the college fair went last night when
one inquisitive student asked, “Dr. Hess, when you were our age,
what did you imagine your life would be like now?”

And suddenly, for a split second, there I was again,
my head on the desk in calculus, having slept through class,
knowing that I could do all the homework that night and still
get the highest grade, knowing that it made no difference
because I was so alone in this universe,
invisible to everyone in such a deeply real way
I’d gone from 115 to 85 pounds in three months without even—
without especially—my mother noticing or doing anything about it.
My head on the desk, my life a morass of one void after another,
my classmates around me speaking in low voices of their plans
for after school, their plans for the weekend, their plans for their
life,
their plans. I could not envision anything like a future for myself.

“I could not envision my future,” I answered my student,
with a pleasant smile on my face, as if I were saying,
“I had every intention of becoming the first woman president.”

“But why?” one of the brightest students in the class asked,
all the students listening now, so I had to stay in the present and
try
not to remember anything too real. “Oh, for many reasons,”
shuffling the Odyssey essay rubrics now, getting back on task,

but they keep asking, where did you go to college,
if you didn't know what you wanted to do what did you study.
A barrage of questions out of nowhere. As if
they could see me and I was a real person
this late in the game. As if
my life had meaning for them, as if
it could give meaning to their lives.

The Odyssey essay rubrics.
I should hand them out.
But I'm telling them how I had a music scholarship,
I started at the university undecided, switched to a math major,
then an English major—but I left out all the detours.
Oh, the detours. Every day

around these sixteen-year-olds who are planning their lives,
receiving so much guidance, their careful parents monitoring every step,
trusting me to guide their children to a place where their words will have meaning.
If there is anything true in what I say or do around them, it is in my hope
that they will never know the kind of emptiness I grew into too young,
the kind of emptiness that I couldn't imagine when I was their age
would still fill every moment of my heart's beating except when I
stand in front of them and say, "It's time to write."

To Read Is to Fly

You wake in the classroom.
All around you, the books are speaking.
It is like a dream of a school where
you learn everything at once.
You learn what can't be known,
how to remember your dreams
in every language
as the books go on speaking
the truth in no language.
Because this is what it means
to learn how to sleep
to learn how to wake up
the sun shining through the window
your head lifting from the pillow
of the book you fell asleep to
years ago, on your way to
another life where
you'll meet the teacher who will finally
explain the reason you can't fly
yet.
The books keep speaking.
All those words they hold,
all those stories of the air and wind
swirling inside your mind
until the bell rings,
the students rush in.
Your heart is made of unspoken poems.
Your hands cannot find the pencil in time
to convey your heart beyond the edge
of the page over the edge of which
the students come pouring into
the classroom only to stop,
listening,
just a moment.
The books whispering now,
catching their attention.
And there is only one story left to tell.

The Genius in a Standardized Testing World

On the last day of July 2015, very early in the morning, I boarded a plane in St. Louis, Missouri. I was on my way to China. For the next five years, I would teach Advanced Placement English Language and Composition at a high school for Chinese students planning to study abroad. During my time there, I would encounter many amazing and sometimes perplexing situations. But something I have often wondered since my time in China is how well today's educational system and its standardized testing methods work at identifying a genius.

The high school I would be teaching at was one of the first places I was taken after arriving in Guangzhou, across the Pearl River estuary from Hong Kong. Set on a sprawling campus with lush gardens near one of the city's universities, from the outside the high school appeared as modern as much of the city itself, with a wall of green glass rising from the entrance. Inside, I climbed the stairs to the shared teachers' office on the third floor, a large room with windows facing a small forest of palm trees. I was shown to my desk and introduced to the Head of the English Department and the lead teacher for AP Language, with whom I would be working in the years to come.

Martin was a patient, kind, and knowledgeable teacher who guided the department with wisdom and a generous spirit. How fortunate I was to work with him and the rest of the team at the school. Also, I was fortunate to work with the students at this school, who were some of the best and brightest in the city if not the entire country of China, as the application process to be accepted here was very rigorous.

During my time at this school, I would meet so many hard-working and intellectually advanced students. But there was one student in particular who stood out among the rest. I will call this Chinese student by a Western name, DaVinci, since the Chinese students at this all-English-speaking school chose such names for the benefit of their mostly Western teachers. DaVinci, I have little doubt, possessed a unique literary genius, with skills in writing such as I have encountered in no other student during all my years of teaching.

The question is whether the educational system was one in which DaVinci could flourish.

The educational system I was teaching in at this school in Guangzhou was essentially a Western model, the Advanced Placement model, but with a twist. There are distinct differences in Chinese and American approaches to education that could be examined. For now, I will focus on a particular similarity in the systems, namely how they each use standardized testing to rank student achievement.

With the school in China, as with schools in America, so much of a student's destiny can be altered by a single number: the score on some given exam taken on some given day under some given circumstances. There has been plenty of debate on the effectiveness of standardized testing in measuring actual or potential student achievement. By examining how the system worked for a particular student, I hope to extrapolate some general conclusions about how well this system works for students like DaVinci.

Teaching high school at this school was an extraordinary challenge as much as it was a gift. There I was, in a room full of about twenty adolescents brimming over with energy and enthusiasm, expecting the absolute most from their teacher who was meant to guide them toward the elusive score of 5 on their AP exam, thus securing them a spot at an Ivy League school or at whatever university they were dreaming of attending.

AP Language was sometimes regarded as the toughest class at this school. Math and science courses often came easy to these students. But learning how to interpret some of the most complex texts ever written in English and writing essays in response to them was something else altogether. Yet these students dove into the work head-first, and it was astonishing to hear their interpretations, how they dissected the texts with passion and rigor, seeking the essence at their core.

We began each school year by having the students take a complete AP Language exam. Spending a week introducing strategies on each of the four parts, the first time we completed a practice exam took about a month, starting with the MCQ (multiple-choice question) portion of the exam. Then we would focus on each of the essay types—the Synthesis, the Rhetorical Analysis, and the Argument essays. The students would complete this preliminary exam for a base-line score from which we could measure their progress at midterm, and finally when they received their scores after the exam in the spring.

When DaVinci completed this baseline AP Language practice exam, his scores were not impressive. Quite the opposite, in fact. It was clear that he would need extra attention so that he could acquire the basic skills to pass the exam. In fact, it was not entirely clear to me why he had not chosen to enroll in English 11, the option that students who planned to focus on math and science usually chose instead of AP English courses.

With a few years of teaching this course under my belt, I by this time fully understood that a student might begin the year with a low score on the practice baseline exam yet manage to pull off the highest score of 5 on the exam come spring, with a great deal of effort and encouragement. Having met not a few students who had been flat-out told they were not the best at writing, the first place to start was with un-brainwashing them of this misconception. By identifying their strengths and finding areas for improvement, they could make progress.

After the preliminary exam, we slowed the pace down and began exploring each essay type more in detail. Along the way, there were plenty of recommendations given as to how to write the kind of essay that was expected of them on the AP Exam. There were sample essays to review, there were recommended outline structures offered, there were pre-formatted thesis statements to fill-in-the-blank with the necessary information.

Nevertheless, we weren't entirely geared towards exam prep. We completed a variety of assignments and projects to broaden the scope of the course. We'd made it through units on community, the economy, and gender. It was second semester by now, and we were working our way through a unit on language.

By this point, I was seeing glimmers of something happening in DaVinci's writing. His essay on gender had started off basically as expected, but then near the end veered off in a peculiar direction, something that did not fit with the standard format his classmates were following. While the suggested formats for essays were exactly that--suggested--it was unusual that students deviated from the pattern and experimented with new forms. It was fascinating to see something going on with DaVinci's writing style. His writing style? Could I even say he had a writing style at this point? Up to now, his essays had been so fragmentary and incomplete, there was not really enough to add up to a distinguishing voice. For most of my students, by this time in the year, I could identify something written by them just by reading the first few paragraphs.

DaVinci was still struggling. I continued to wonder why he had chosen this class. He would come to see me during office hours, as most students did, for extra help on their essays. But the frustration and near-voicelessness in articulating that frustration was practically palpable. He would nod his head at my suggestions for improving his work, then slump off, appearing already defeated.

But now we were in the language unit. This was the opportunity for students to write an autobiographical piece of sorts, focused on one of the themes of language we had studied so far. As I began reading the stack of essays that was handed in, there were many that focused on the cultural significance of growing up speaking Cantonese in the Mandarin-dominated society. These essays were illuminating as to the traditions and historical context of the region where I was teaching.

I kept grading papers, the stack decreasing. Then I came to DaVinci's paper. What unfolded before my eyes was so completely startling, something so radically subversive that could never be read out loud as a sample essay in class. This essay revealed a deep understanding of what had happened to language in communist China, its message so intricately woven into a story related to dialect, placed within the framework of a mythical garden.

The only other person I showed this essay to was Martin, my supervisor. He gazed at me wide-eyed, and we silently wondered in awe how this remarkable writing had come to be.

The only theory I could come up with was that DaVinci was reading some exceptional literature--works by everyone from John Locke to Jonathan Swift to Virginia Woolf with a little Marge Piercy and Amy Tan in between. It was the reading that was teaching him how to write, not the stylistic recommendations for the Synthesis, Rhetorical Analysis, and Argument essays for the AP Language exam that had been recommended over the last several months.

As the final stretch of the school year wound down, and DaVinci began handing in work that transcended any pre-structured assignment, it soon dawned on me. If you take a bird and clip its wings. If you take an eagle that has the natural ability to soar and swoop and reach the heights of freedom and beauty of form. If you take that eagle, if you take that regal bird and set it down in a box with four walls and a book of formulas, and you tell it to crawl on its belly like a broken-down snake. If you tell that bird that it's going to undergo a future-determining test of its ability to crawl on its belly. Well, that eagle is going to fail that test.

DaVinci may have passed the AP Language exam come spring. But he did not get the elusive score of five that many of his in other ways more "teachable" classmates received. Even for the final exam for the class itself, at the end of the year, DaVinci barely passed. Having spent the first thirty minutes of the allotted exam imagining a whole world that he could never completely get down on paper before the bell rang and he'd have to stop the flow of his genius, he needed more time. And all I saw on the paper to grade was a fragment of some remarkable yet incomplete idea that could not be finished later since accommodations and modifications of assignments were not an option at the school.

Where does such a mind fit in the educational system we have today? As much as I tried to encourage him, DaVinci had already made up his mind. He was going to study computer science. The system had not rewarded his gift with scholarships or prizes. He went in the direction that his scores took him.

Is something lost in this game of upholding a particular standard? During and since my time in China, I have served as a reader for the AP Language exam and read hundreds of essays from students around the world. Yes, I have come across a handful of amazing pieces in the process. But never have I come across anything like what I saw in DaVinci's writing again.

If I failed him as a teacher, so did the system as the structure in which he was allowed or not allowed to explore the possibilities before him.

How to fix this problem? Oh, how to fix this problem. By getting rid of standardized testing? That is not for me to decide.

What I can say is that I imagine a world where genius can flourish. I imagine this world, and in this world, I see many things. Mostly it's like looking into a library or a forest or a garden full of beyond beautiful flowers. It's something expansive and wonderful, something without time limits or prefab structures. I imagine I will be looking for this world a long time, a place where too many of the lost DaVincis have retreated, if only in their imagination.

Gary Smith

Yet We Remain

(after taking students to the Ian Potter Gallery)

Every year for the last ten
I've brought them here, wide-eyed
to view the beauty
breathing from the walls, to be
dazzled into a story, a poem:
some narrative long-held
in charcoal and oils, but soon
to be released and reimagined
as their own art.

Owl-wise they glide
the beautiful walls
and ponder the pastels, the oils
Then stand entranced:
a Streeton landscape here
an Arthur Boyd there.
The colours of some
strike at the eyes
like wild snakes.

Percival and Whitley glare:
We are all dead now,
they seem to say –
we who painted these.
Yet while you watch us, we remain
we ghosts whose frenzied brushstrokes
now hibernate in canvas
only to arise again
at the Springbliss of new eyes
dancing over us.

Patrick G. Roland

The Light We Pass On

Some search for the light,
never stepping beyond the shadows.
Some stand still, beacon in hand,
waiting to be found.
And some ignite their own flame,
pushing into the unknown,
seeking those left behind.

Teachers do not linger at the edge of darkness…
they move forward, relentless,
their light not just a guide, but an offering.
They do not wait; they press on.
They do not simply shine; they kindle.

And in that spark,
students learn to light their own way,
bring clarity to where confusion once lived,
chase not just knowledge, but purpose.

Do not hold the light…extend it.
Do not stand still…seek.
Do not merely glow…illuminate.

Teachers are more than beacons;
They are flames passed from hand to hand.
And you need not be a teacher to carry light…
only to be willing to share it.

I Don’t Get It

I don’t get it.
Four words.
Harmless alone,
Together, they slice like daggers.

An uppercut to any writer.
(Or anyone who dares to be one.)

When I share my work,
those words—the ones I fear most—
haunt me.

I don’t get it.

No rebuttal.
No follow-up.
No second chance.

If I have to explain,
I’ve already failed.

I don’t get it.
It comes alive
echoing inside me,
drilling through my heart,
coiling in my stomach,
thrashing—waiting.

It waits, a dragon, its acrid breath
Poised to melt my psyche.

But, like a sworn legion,
excuses march from my brain,
sidestep my heart,
invade my stomach,
and attack the

I don’t get it.

Too strong.
Excuses retreat,
clamber back to my brain,
regroup, resist.
I should ask.
I don’t want to ask.
A good writer asks...

What don’t you get?

Their response might be worse than
"I don’t get it."

But is anything worse than
I don’t get it?

Their words ricochet
off the walls of my understanding.

And maybe
just maybe
I don’t get it either.


ASHEVILLE
BEAUTY
ACADEMY
BOTANIST
BARREL
LATE NIGHT
COCKTAILS
BRUNCH
DANCE
28
HIP

Brian G. Smith

Montjoie

The sound of the nylon is what betrays her. My ears catch the discreet swish of fabric surfaces brushing against each other before the Jolly Rancher blue raspberry ski jacket enters my peripheral vision. I interrupt my collecting of this week's compositions and turn my head to apprehend the tardy offender.

Alicia inches her way along the side of the classroom on long, exaggerated tiptoes, but the whistle of the jacket meant to protect her from the school's latest cost-saving policy fails to mask her entrance.

Bad choice of wardrobe if you plan to be tardy, I want to tell her.

This winter has been as long as a Jacques Rivette movie and as severe as the first grade teacher who regularly pinched my earlobes for getting math problems wrong. We have seen no sun since the first week of January, no temperatures above freezing since December. It is the last week of March, and there are still two feet of snow on the ground, as if Queen Jadis has entered our world. As a result, the school district has exceeded its heating budget and ordered all thermostats to be set at a bracing sixty-five degrees. Most students now wear outdoor clothing in class. Most don't need to worry about the noise it makes.

Upon recognizing her attempt at stealth has failed, Alicia gives up and sulks the last few steps to her desk, exhibiting the enthusiasm of the condemned. Her face might, under other circumstances, be pretty, but she keeps that hidden under Kabuki theater layers of makeup and a permanent scowl. Right now the scowl is sour enough to curdle cream at a distance.

I steel myself for yet another attempt to convince her that I am not her executioner. It has become increasingly difficult this year, thanks to the implementation of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme. Our little Midwestern city is the headquarters of a multinational chemical company, and the school district has decided it would be prudent to offer the international students who want to attend university in their home countries the opportunity to earn a diploma that actually means something and will be recognized abroad. And so over the summer my advanced French course became "IB French," with the goal of preparing students for the arrogantly rigorous IB High Level exam.

Only three of my forty-five advanced students have signed on as Diploma Candidates for the full Diploma Programme. A further three, while not "DipCans" (yes, that is really how our IB Coordinator refers to them),

are utilizing IB's *à la carte* option to take the French exam in hopes of earning college credit. These low numbers are not simply a result of my own lack of enthusiasm and promotion. Administrators have been dismayed that the inaugural group of DipCans is a paltry twelve district-wide, and a sum total of none of them is seeking to use the diploma for admission to a university abroad. That leaves thirty-nine students in my two IB sections who simply wanted to continue the experience of camaraderie with their French cohort: playing with the language, working with French music videos, comparing the Lupin stories with the TV series. All of these enjoyable and motivating activities now reside in the back of a metal file drawer to make room for tasks that instill the skills IB deems relevant for success on an IB exam and in something it has decided is the 'real world.'

Alicia reaches her desk and drops three books, two binders, and her purse into a pile on the surface. It looks like a building has collapsed.

No French textbook, I note. Again.

"*Bonjour*!" My greeting drips with practiced enthusiasm.

Before she can sit down, one of the three-ring binders slides off the pile and onto the stained gray carpet, spilling a collection of papers. Students titter in anticipation. I determine not to give them the satisfaction of a battle royale.

Alicia observes the mess with surprised despondence and huffs. "Oh, Monsieur Gilbert!" Even after four years she pronounces the first syllable like Jack's sister and sounds the -t at the end. A novice scraping a slack bow across untuned strings could not set me more on edge. Nevertheless, I intensify the beam of my smile to maximum lumens, hoping to conjure a spark of magic that might turn *la Bête* into *la Belle*. Alicia ignores my effort and sinks to the floor. Crouching down, I help her sweep the scattered papers back into the binder.

"Is one of these for me?" I ask in French, giving her the benefit of the doubt that her assignment could be hiding somewhere in this disaster. IB expects students to be able not only to read a variety of texts for various audiences, but to produce them as well. That includes police reports and business proposals, as well as today's 'real world' text: a blog entry about the effects of mass tourism on the French Alps. Both the students and I know that most people will never be called upon to write these kinds of texts in English, let alone French. No teenager in the age of TikTok writes online blogs any more, nor do they read them. It is no wonder I feel the force of revolt slowly amassing and trickling down to the lower levels in my French sequence. We start registration for next year after the upcoming Spring Break, and already I am hearing from my students in French Three that they are considering stopping. Word on the street is, the IB course is too challenging. Too much *gravité* and not enough *joie de vivre*.

Alicia looks doubtful and begins fishing through the mess, then through a fuchsia folder that matches her lip gloss.

"It's not a good day, *Monsieur*." Except for my title, she speaks English, but at least she has the French pout going for her.

She continues moving papers around. I stand back up and wait, fully expecting this to be for show and result in distraught surprise at not finding the non-existent paper.

"The day is what you make it, Alicia." I continue in French, hoping she understands more than *le jour* and *Alicia*. "Besides, Spring Break starts today. A whole week off."

"A week in Aspen," she puffs, still pretending her composition will appear if she shuffles the papers enough times. "Might as well be staying here."

"But anything is better than this flat, boring town, *n'est-ce pas*?" I wonder how her parents' plans may also be contributing to her behavior today. After four months of cold and snow, the last place a teenager wants to be during Spring Break is in even more cold and snow.

She finally rewards me with a shrug and flops herself onto her seat, elbows on the desk, chin cradled in her hands, eyes fixed blankly on something imaginary near the front of the room. Maybe it's her blog entry.

Her desk is on a side wall next to a poster-sized illumination of the Battle of Roncevaux Pass, taken from a medieval text of *La Chanson de Roland*. I take a breath and contemplate the scene. I do this often, because I identify with the valiant soldiers fighting against an overwhelming force. For a moment I can feel the cold mountain wind, can see the battle standards straining against their staffs. This is more than my imagination. My drab surroundings dissolve to near transparency, and I actually hear the clash of armor ring in my ears. I even taste the iron of blood in the air, as the betrayed Franks try to counter the ambush.

"Montjoie!" the figure of Roland calls, grimly determined to avoid sounding the horn for reinforcements. *Hold the line!*

I can't blame my students for wanting to cut and run. Right now, even I am struggling with the call to hold the line. Two weeks ago, I began looking at nearby school districts to see if any have openings for next year, even if it's in my other certified subject area of English. For the past eleven years my students have consistently scored high on the AP French language exam and on university placement exams, landing as freshmen in junior-level courses. All without the helpful rigor of the International Baccalaureate Organization, *merci beaucoup*. My issue this year is less the failure of an old dog to learn new tricks than it is the confusion of a successful general who learns he has been betrayed into the hands of the enemy by his own advisors. Unlike the Franks, however, I feel there are no reinforcements waiting to be summoned. Retreat appears to be my only option.

"I miss Patrice and Caroline." Alicia's quiet plea drags me back out of the picture. I struggle against it, but the classroom reemerges. The illumination fossilizes once more.

"I understand." Once I regroup, I abandon French for English. There doesn't seem to be much point. "But they haven't seen their friends and relatives in months. We don't want to wish them out of that opportunity, do we?"

Alicia's best friends in the class are twin sisters from Quebec whose father works for the chemical company and was transferred here the previous summer. Even though Spring Break is next week, their parents excused them from school this week as well, so they can spend extra time at home. It strikes me that Alicia is dealing with her own sense of betrayal, part of which are the changes I've had to make to my class.

She sighs and sits up straighter. "I guess not."

I pat her desktop in lieu of her shoulder and finish collecting the assignment. I will not be skiing in Aspen next week. Nor will I be snorkeling in Cancún or gorging myself aboard a Caribbean cruise ship. I will spend my break at home reading blogs. Instead of cross-country skiing with my kids at the city forest, I will be carefully crafting feedback intended to make the students better writers of French, knowing the feedback will be forgotten the second the paper hits the recycling bin. Just another skirmish in a year-long war of attrition.

"*E voilà!*" Alicia abruptly squeals. I turn to see her withdrawing a sheet of lined paper from her purse, folded into quarters. "I told you I had it," she says. Her tone is triumphant but not smug. She unfolds it, and I accept the proffered assignment with a smile, a genuine one this time.

During lunch I start grading the blogs. The more I do here, the fewer I have to do at home. Who knows, there may even be time for a quick game of Carcassonne with the family. Alicia's submission, being the last one I collected, lies on the top of the stack. The folds and the time spent crammed in her purse have produced ripples and peaks like the Roncevaux Pass. I smooth it into a workable surface, pick up my purple grading pen, and brace myself for the task.

Her effort is pleasantly surprising. It is riddled with spelling mistakes, of course, especially the liberal application of thé acuté accént. This is French after all. There are a fair number of grammar errors and made up French words–*franglais* imposters like *bringez* and *vacation*. Or misused words like *travailler* for 'to travel' and *rester* for 'to rest.' But even a sympathetic French speaker (not quite the oxymoron people imagine) would understand most of the text. Plus Alicia uses the appropriate blog format, keeps the tone conversational, and incorporates valid details from the reading and video texts we have used in class.

I think back to her days in my French One class four years ago. She was an extremely rotund, pimply freshman, eyes wide like a spaniel puppy with a car bearing down on it, who even at the end of the first semester couldn't say "*je m'appelle Alicia"* without pronouncing it "jay." At the beginning of this school year, a product like this would have been beyond her. I recall her response to the first text type I taught and assigned: an informal email to a fictitious pen pal describing their favorite freetime activity and what it says about their personality. "I couldn't even tell you that in English, Monsieur Jill-berT." But she did do it, in fact, and as I read this text, the warmth of satisfaction blossoms inside me like aged cognac. Maybe I haven't completely missed the call to be the reinforcement she needs. She has come far, and my exertions have played a part in that.

When I reach the end of the blog entry, I see she has left two blank lines. The text then continues in English. "Monsieur Gilbert, just wanted to let you know this topic was *très intéréssant*."--I don't bother to shake my head over the acutes.--"I even understood some of the speakers in the video lol!!! My family goes skiing in Aspen every year and I never really thought about the environmental impact we might be having there. It makes me feel a bit guilty. Or at least responsible. Anyway, maybe this will be a career field for me? At least it will make me approach our ski trip on Spring Break differently. So thank you for that and I hope you could understand my blog. Even though blogs are sooo 2010."

I finish and glance back over at the illumination on the wall. Once more I hear the Frank call out: "*Montjoie!*"

A smile cracks through my stressed visage.

I finish the day with the sounds of battle dimly in my ears, spurring me on. After school I grade five additional entries and pack only five more into my satchel for the week. The rest can wait, and leaving them here will keep them from tempting me away from more valuable endeavors.

I leave the building and the battle and step out onto the snow-covered walkway. The air seems not quite as cold, and the slow drumroll of water from the edge of the roof tells me the temperature must finally have climbed above freezing. A nearby car horn sounds one time–long, urgent, and clear–like the call of a lone battle trumpet. Looking up into the iron-colored sky, I smile as a hole opens in the cloud cover and a single ray of sunlight kisses my face.

Sophia Hua

Skin of Words

writing is refuge.

not a gentle shelter—
but a fortress built from
fury and grace

when gloom creeps in
like morning frost
when paths ahead
yield murk and fog

my compass is written word
each sentence an excavation
past easy answers,
deeper than what
I thought I knew

writing holds me
when I am falling.
each word a steel beam,
each paragraph a foundation
rising from rubble
I build while
I break

grief is no foreign emotion
on paper—it floods the margins,
stains pristine pages
with dark teeth

hatred is but a match strike—
brief, violent, illuminating

it burns through my sentences
catches fire in
spaces between words
until its heat transforms into
something I can hold
without burning

in this space,
I am both lost and found
breaking apart, rebuilding
word by raw
word

with power to create,
I find myself
crazed and free

in words that make
and
unmake me.



John Radosta

Passing Time: A Four-Minute Mystery

"Did you see that?"

"I know, it's so uncouth."

"I should write her up for that."

"It would be a fine example to the rest of the student body."

"I don't care about that. I just hate it when kids spit gum onto the floor. Got a pen? I'll write her up before she's in her next class."

"This is my favorite writing implement. Don't abscond with it."

"You're a vocab king. You must be doing state test review. Anyhow, why would I keep your pen? I've got a pile of them across the hall."

"Oh, I know you wouldn't steal. Nevertheless, I need to remain vigilant. My room was burgled. The culprit could be anyone."

"You know it wasn't me, right?"

"Of course not. But as the great Ronald Reagan said, 'Trust, but verify.' "

"Look at you pulling out the Cold War references.—Hi, Tyler. Morning, Sophie—You know my students don't even know who Reagan was? I asked them to name as many presidents going backwards as they could. They got to Obama. But about your room: what did they take?"

"Some CDs, my print of Walt Whitman, and one—can you believe it—one of my tower speakers."

"Did they leave any clues?"

"Like the rats they are, you mean? No."

"Too bad."

"Although…"

"What? There *was* something left behind? Maybe we can unravel this little conundrum. See, I can use big words, too."

"You do have quite the adept mind. —Hey, Michelle, don't forget you owe me that quiz—As for the clue, it wasn't so much an object, as a stench. The stench of deceit."

"Well, you couldn't pin a stench on a person, could you? Should we forget about the gum and get to class?"

"Now that I think about it, I could identify that stink if I came across it again. I have good olfactory memory."

"Yeah, but you couldn't prove it in court."

"True, not in court. Still, it had a ring of familiarity to it."

"Shouldn't the bell have rung by now? Hope my kids don't start a fire. That happened to the guy you replaced, you know. Before your time."

"The smell reminded me of my grandfather, for some reason."

"Like a mixture of Fixodent and Metamucil? So the suspect's an old man. That's half the math department. Come to think of it, it's the entire history department. And you know, that fire was before my time, too. I heard about it from one of the old timers my first year."

"No, my grandfather was a college professor. Always wore tweed. That woolen stuff soaks up body odor like baking soda in the fridge."

"Oh. Anyhow, the bell's about to ring, so I'd better get going.—Alec, get in your seat."

"That tweed, it just emanates its smell like a trail of breadcrumbs. It's comforting, like a… like an old friend. Yes, that was the familiarity: an old friend turned to dishonesty."

"That's familiar to you, is it?"

"Most definitely. And now that I've got my clue, I'm going to follow it to the bitter end. I'll expose the malefactor as sure as Sherlock Holmes always gets his man."

"Well, you can't be that sure of who did it."

"And you can be my Watson. We'll be a Dynamic Duo, avenging the plunder of my possessions."

"I'd be happy to. Carl Standish prefers the Harris tweed, but Artie Jackson has a herringbone for every day of the week"

"You have one, too, don't you?"

"Funny thing."

"What's that?"

"Turns out, my room was robbed, too. And the jacket was stolen."

"Your tweed coat?"

"As a matter of fact, yes."

"Let's examine your closet. Maybe the thief left some evidence.

"No, I checked, and then rummaged around in there, so even if he did, there'd be nothing left."

"It seems every time I ravel up one hanging thread—which, by the way, is the original metaphor from which the word 'clue,' meaning 'end of a piece of string' is derived—there you are to snip it off, as if it were just a frayed knot."

"Are you suggesting I'm the culprit? Surely you jest."

"Jest or no, you do stymie my investigation at every turn. —No, Jason, you can't go to the lav. Why is it always my class when you need to go?—Why don't we examine your closet, just to be sure. It's large enough to conceal a tower speaker, if you move that pile of old rank books. Tell me again why you keep to those, now that we've converted to on-line grading?"

“Because paper never crashes, and I can find any grade for any student in the past twenty-three years in minutes, while I can’t find last year’s grades without going to IT. But wait, how’d you know about my secret stash of rank books?”

“You’re so proud of them, you mention them incessantly.”

“As a matter of fact, I’ve been very careful to keep them quiet. Admin said I’m not allowed to keep them, for privacy reasons.”

“So you admit you’ve a secret to keep.”

“And yet you discovered it. How did you come by that Walt Whitman photo? If I recall, Marylou turned the book room upside down when she retired, looking for hers. And the CDs. Didn’t the music department have to cancel their spring concert because all of the music for the voice solos disappeared the morning of the show?”

“Perhaps I was a bit hasty in demanding to see your closet. I mean, why would you secrete a large piece of audio tech in a place where the acoustics are baffled by…your tweed jacket.”

“We seem to have arrived at an impasse. And there’s the tardy bell. See you at the end of B block.”

“Indeed. And now, may I have my pen back?”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”



Sina Farajzadeh

Thirsty in a Hot Desert

In a hot desert
I was naked, burning under the sun,
Squatting upon the ground,
I held my heart in my hands,
And was eating of it.
A bestial creature came toward me,
With a short shadow shattering across the sand,
And cried, “Is it good friend?”
“It is bitter! Bitter as bile,” I said;
“But I like it
Because it is bitter,
And because it is my heart,” I continued.
The bitter taste made me thirsty,
But the creature left me suddenly,
As sudden as it had approached me,
Giving me no drop of water,
Only a taste of his absence,
Left me to face death,
All alone, once more!

Fendy

The Magic of Learning

In a small village on the island of Java, nestled among tall mountains and lush forests, there was a school unlike any other. It wasn't made of bricks like the schools in big cities, nor did it have shiny floors or fancy equipment. The school was built from bamboo and wood, with walls covered in colorful drawings the students had drawn. The roof was made from palm leaves that rustled in the wind, creating a peaceful sound. This was not a place of rules and regulations but a home for learning, where nature was a teacher, and curiosity was the guide.

The teacher at this special school was Pak Budi, who had been teaching for many years, but his methods were different from most. He believed that the best way to learn was not by students sitting in a classroom and memorizing facts from a book, but by experiencing the world around them. Pak Budi had a gentle voice, always full of encouragement, and a heart full of patience. The students loved him because he made learning feel like an adventure. Every day, he took them outside, showing them the beauty and lessons of the natural world.

Pak Budi's students weren't just any students. They were children who lived in a village far from the big cities, where the roads were not paved; the nearest store was miles away. They didn't have the newest books or the most advanced tools, but they had something more important—eager minds and a thirst for knowledge. Pak Budi often said, "The best tool for learning is a curious heart."

The school had only one room. There were five desks with only six students. The small classroom had an open window, which let in the fresh breeze and the sounds of nature. The walls were covered in simple drawings, some of which the students had created themselves. The blackboard, which was made from an old piece of wood, was cracked and faded, but it worked well enough. Pak Budi didn't mind that the school wasn't perfect; he believed that perfection wasn't needed for learning to happen.

One day, as the students gathered for class, Pak Budi announced, "Today, we are going to learn from the world around us. I want each of you

to bring something from your home or from outside that you think is important or special."

The children were excited by the idea. They ran home to find their treasures. Some brought things from their homes, like a worn-out book, an old photo, or a special piece of jewelry. Others brought objects from outside—the bright green leaves of a tree, a colorful stone, or a branch shaped like a snake. But one student, Joko, brought something different: a small, delicate flower.

"This flower comes from my mother's garden," Joko said, holding it carefully in his hand. "She says this flower brings good luck, and I wanted to share it with the class."

Pak Budi smiled at Joko. "Good luck is a wonderful thing," he said. "But let's think for a moment. Why does this flower grow so beautifully in your mother's garden?"

Joko looked at the flower thoughtfully. "I think it's because my mother takes care of it. She waters it every day, and she makes sure it gets enough sunlight."

"That's right," Pak Budi said. "Just like this flower, you need good care and attention to grow strong. The soil, the water, the sunlight—all these things help the flower grow. And in the same way, we need good care and a strong foundation to grow in our learning."

The students listened carefully. They understood that learning wasn't just about reading words from a book. It was about paying attention to the world around them, just like Joko paid attention to the flower. Pak Budi didn't need fancy lessons or tools. He used the things around him to teach valuable lessons.

After Joko shared his flower, Pak Budi asked the class, "Now, let's think about something else. Where does the water come from that helps this flower grow?"

"From the river," said Sari, another student. "Our village gets its water from the river."

Pak Budi nodded. "Exactly. The river provides water for the plants, and it keeps the village alive. But have you ever wondered how the river works?"

The students looked at each other, puzzled. "How does it work, Pak?" asked Dika, another student who loved asking questions.

"Well," Pak Budi said, "the river is always moving. It flows from the mountains down to the sea, and it never stops. Just like the river, our minds should

always keep moving. We must never stop learning. Even if we feel tired or confused, we need to keep going."

The students nodded, understanding. The river was a powerful example of how learning should flow constantly, like water. They could always move forward, just as the river moved forward, even if it seemed slow or difficult at times.

Pak Budi then took the students outside. "Today," he said, "we will learn from the trees. Look at the big trees around us. How do they grow so tall?"

One of the students, Rina, raised her hand. "I think it's because the trees have deep roots that help them stay strong."

"Exactly!" Pak Budi exclaimed. "Just like the trees, we need strong roots to grow. These roots are like the foundation of our knowledge. If we have a strong foundation, we can grow tall and strong, just like these trees."

The students looked at the trees around them, their eyes wide with wonder. Pak Budi continued, "Learning is like planting a tree. We start with small seeds—tiny pieces of knowledge—and then we water them with curiosity. With time, the tree grows, and so does our learning."

Later in the day, as the students sat down to write in their notebooks, Pak Budi said, "Now, let's try something different. I want you to think about what you've learned today. You've seen the flower, the river, and the trees. Now, write about how learning is like those things. You can write a story, a poem, or just a few sentences."

The students got to work. Some wrote about the flower and how it needed care to grow. Others wrote about the river and how it kept flowing, never stopping. Joko wrote a story about a flower who wanted to travel to the mountains but needed the river's help to get there. He imagined that the flower could talk and ask the river to carry it to new places, just like the students wanted to go far in their education.

As the sun began to set, Pak Budi looked around the classroom. The students were busy writing, their faces focused and serious. Pak Budi smiled softly to himself. He knew that teaching wasn't just about giving facts. It was about showing his students how to think, how to wonder, and how to find meaning in the world around them.

The next day, Pak Budi took the class on another field trip. This time, they went to the rice fields. The students marveled at the sight of the green rice growing in neat rows. Pak Budi pointed to the rice plants and said, "Learning is

like planting rice. The seeds must be carefully placed in the soil, and they need water and care to grow."

"But Pak," said Sari, "what happens if the rice doesn't grow?"

Pak Budi thought for a moment and then answered, "Sometimes, things don't grow the way we want them to. But that doesn't mean we stop trying. We learn from the mistakes, and we try again. The rice doesn't always grow perfectly, but with patience, it will grow."

The students thought about this as they walked through the rice fields, their feet wet from the mud. They understood that learning was not always easy, and sometimes it was hard. But as Pak Budi had taught them, it was about trying again, just like the rice would keep growing.

One afternoon, Pak Budi asked his students, "What do you want to learn next?"

The students sat quietly for a moment, thinking. Finally, Dika spoke up. "I want to learn about the stars," he said. "How do they shine at night?"

Pak Budi smiled. "That's a great question. Let's learn about the stars next week. We'll look at the night sky and think about how far away the stars are. And we'll learn about how they shine, just like our learning can shine if we keep going."

The students were excited to learn about the stars. They couldn't wait for the next lesson, knowing that learning was a journey that never ended. Pak Budi had shown them that the world was full of lessons, and they didn't need to look far to find them. Every day, something new could teach them something important.

As the days passed, the students continued to learn in Pak Budi's special way. They learned about the rain, the clouds, and even the birds that flew above them. Each lesson was a chance to see the world with new eyes, to understand that learning wasn't just something that happened in a classroom—it happened everywhere.

Pak Budi's lessons didn't just teach his students how to read and write. They taught them how to think, how to question, and how to see the beauty in the world. And that, Pak Budi believed, was the most important lesson of all.



Alison Fung

Bat-Eater

I'm stuck—
still locked in the isolated
cell of my mind
where those words
couldn't reach me

murmurs of "she's the virus"
whispers of my own identity
ripped away, used against me

so I locked myself away
looking down from
tiny attic window
like ones I used to draw
on every crayon house

peering into a world
no longer my own
a world I'm scared
to enter now

I'm stuck—
safe up here
like a belfry bat
Hiding from a world that
named me "bat eater"
headlines saying
"Chinese virus infects the world"
headlines prophesying
the collapse of my world

Just a little Chinese girl
hiding in an attic
as world falls
into frenzy

One day, I walked into school,
friends by my side
the next, friends hurled names
at me, names that weren't mine
names that plastered
themselves onto me

and no matter how
hard I scrubbed,
they stuck—



D. Larissa Peters

Driver's High

Propelled by a 4 am departure, my fueled anxiety—an East Coast
leaving—slowly dissipates into miles and miles. 15 hours, I'm
charged, hyped,
        hopped up on music, books playing off platforms, thoughts
        thought, dreams and dreads

towards a shift south through mountain curves and canals: Mark
Twain's inspiration turns to sounds, blue and improvised. I coast—
across wide Texan country, slipping
        across the ribbon of road, sliding into a palette of pink and
        orange,

purples shading to shadows. "70 miles until your next fuel". Now
this eagerness, no longer thinking, replaced by a soul's loosening
into lit dash marks and stars.
        July 4th fireworks burst, drive up towards the moon on my
        left and right: silent

explosions, through New Mexico, to the edge of Arizona. And
there, California, a runner's sadness. Greed for more, more energy,
music, more landscapes to fill my view.
More
        thoughts to think. More time for that old: "I have miles and
        miles to go".

Gospel Chinedu

A Moment In Time

Again, at the shoreline of dawn.
I've gathered myself. I let the seed
of my joy take a root in my heart.
I nurture the sprout into a testament
of bloom. Lavender. Lush. Green
as the blossoming field. Today, the
wind is ferocious, it blows my fears
away into the water. & together we
watch it sink. & together we watch
it sink. Merry, merry is the note on
my lips. It comes like lightning —
a flash light & then it disappears like
white ink on a white page of memory.
Everything in an instant, colourless
like non-existence. Like water. Like
clean spring flooded on the arid face
of a deserted boy. A moment in time.
& then, merry, merry the note on my
lispy lips slips. & together we watch it
sink into the silence. The ferocious wind
blows it farther & farther away. Until
I crave lushness. A bed of green to lay
on. Purple lavender nurtured into purple
bloom. Like the sprout of joy in my
heart in the beginning, when I gathered
myself at the shoreline of dawn..

Rebecca L. Brothers

Mutiny in Room B4

Oxymorons abound in second grade, the highest of these being dustless chalk. I'd been teaching for twenty-some-odd years, beginning my career with the sexy-slick red wax pencils on transparency sheets for the overhead projector's spotlight. I'd seen the dittos fade from their grape-print glory to the flash of our Xerox. I'd been made to adopt a computer, my least favorite fostering to date, and told to GET WITH IT or get out.

Things changed. Kids did not. The second graders continued their lives at my feet on the carpet, sweet little larvae picking their noses and delighting in SOME PIG being both RADIANT and HUMBLE, Charlotte weaving into their second-grade dreams.

Then there was Rachel, her Old Testament name a stark contrast to her fashion forward style. Green shirt, red shorts, mismatched knee socks over Pepto pink Keds.

A little librarian, she corrected her classmate's grammar and table manners while forgetting to keep her peanut butter-filled mouth closed. Despite her nitpicking, she was beloved by all. When elected classmate of the week, her peers voted her "Best on the Swings" and I worried for her teenaged self. She was kind to the outcast with too-short pants and, as the largest girl in class, a wonderful anchor for the tug-of-war teams. They fought over her fiercely when picking sides.

And she had an intense teacher crush on me.

Nothing romantic, just little girls in love with the idea of a grown-up woman who wielded the chalk. We'd been warned about it in teacher preparation school, though none of our choir needed to hear that particular sermon.

We'd all been little girls begging to be class pet, to take a note to the office, to be class monitor while teacher took smoke breaks. My own teacher crush had been Ms. Cheek, a wonderful woman with a beehive and rapier wit. She killed it when reading *The Mouse and the Motorcycle.*

Rachel's teacher crush was intense. She wanted to pass out every paper, lead every line, and fetch every memo. I had to carefully balance my

attention, because she was damned reliable, and it was hard to pass up the opportunity to make my day easier. She was anointed monitor regularly, and that day was no exception. That day of the caffeine slump, the "a kid-threw-up -before-10" exhaustion, the paste eater in the back row driving me to the unfiltered Camel aroma of the teacher's lounge.

Rachel sat in my director's chair up front, pink Keds dangling, a piece of my dustless chalk in her hand. Her dark eyes darted about the room already, an officer ready to name names on our green chalkboard. I took my cue to high heel it to the sanctity of adult space.

I don't remember how many cups of scorched coffee I downed or with which colleague I shared the gallows humor of the breakroom. I left refreshed, a little, ready to tackle more booger digging on the reading rug and witness the miracle of phonics taking root in little minds. However many minutes had passed, it was evidently enough.

I could feel the shift in the room as I entered, smell the nervous sweat of little bodies. There stood Rachel at the front, Keds noticeably scuffed, broken chalk in her hand. The board was covered with the smeared evidence of much writing recently erased, the director's chair lay on its side, and Albert smashed on the floor.

Albert, our bald-headed Chia pet man. Albert, the highlight of our week as we gave him green mohawks or a monk's blank-topped tonsure. Slimy greenery hung from his neck like a noose.

I turned into Rachel. Her chest was heaving, her face magenta. She stood her ground. She'd chosen popularity over me, her crush. They'd apparently rioted on her, she'd written down a slew of names, and then someone had erased it all. And she'd let them.

My nightmares show the mutiny, with Rachel holding her own. I see her grown up, on my side of the desk, wielding her chalk and her answer key, and choosing again between being the teacher and keeping her status as anchor of the team. I see her beehive hair deflecting spit balls and her pink tennis shoes tapping to the beat of her fierce reading of the pig-loving spider, her merciless delivery of the line "She never moved again."

Shome Dasgupta

Eat Life and Hunger

April 13, 2016--Junior Ring Day

Author's Note: Below is a transcript of a speech I gave to students on their Junior Ring Day.

When I found out that I would be speaking tonight for Ring Day, I was humbled, honored, and excited. But it didn't take me too long to realize that --oh--I have to talk in front of my peers, my students, and their parents.

So immediately, I became nervous, paranoid, and hungry. Since then, I started to think about what to say. I've had sleepless nights, sought advice from fellow teachers, observed other speeches, including trying to watch a video on YouTube of Abraham Lincoln giving his Gettysburg Address, but I just couldn't find one. I even wondered if it would be possible to take a public speaking course at UL within a span of a month. I sought advice from everyone I know, and from everyone I didn't know. It had been quite a journey. I talked to priests, strangers, various teachers, friends, and I even searched for me first grade teacher, Ms. Serentine; however, I still don't know how to spell her name so I couldn't properly search for her. I took long road trips, traveling from Cade to Lafayette and back again. I even developed a new paranoia of driving with the window down, and a car that's driving past me hits a rock, which causes the rock to fly through my window and hit me in the head, causing severe damage. Again, it had been quite a journey. I sat under an oak, with my back against its bark, eyes closed and thought, still not knowing what to say.

However, after a week of sitting under the oak and befriending squirrels, I finally had an epiphany, a sudden realization, a spark. And it all became clear to me. I found myself in a Zen state, so to speak; I felt somewhat enlightened--I was one with the world and all it entails. I finally realized that what I believed for so long is actually true--yes, that's right, Checkers has the best chicken wings in town. They really do. It isn't Hurricane Wings or Buffalo Wild Wings or Wing Stop, and though Smitty's comes close, all in all, Checkers has the best wings for sure, especially if they ask you to pull to the

side, into the parking lot--this means that they're making them fresh--nice and hot and spicy, and drenched in sauce. This was my epiphany of all epiphanies, and once I realized this, I thought about you all, my Juniors #soontobeseniors LOL JK ROTFL. For my students who aren't up to date with today's language, these abbreviations stand for laugh out loud, joking, and rolling on the floor laughing.

Juniors #soontobeseniors LOL JK ROTFL, I was fortunate enough, for my first year here, to teach each and every one of you. For as much as I have seen you all grow, you all have seen me grow. I think some of you all know already about the rough time I had been going through, but just before my first day teaching here and during the same week that I found out that I'll be teaching here, I lost a very close friend of mine, close enough to be my sister--she had taken her own life. To say that I was at a loss is to say the least. My friends couldn't help me. My parents, who were in India at the time, couldn't help me; I couldn't find solace anywhere, until I found myself in front of you all. There were times when I was teaching and holding back tears at the same time as thoughts of my late friend would enter my mind as I'm trying to cover Plato or *Julius Caesar* with you all. But whether you all know it or not, I found solace through you all. Through your patience and humor and kind spirit, I was able to go through a tough time in my life. We grew up together, you and I, during my first year, and I honestly couldn't have asked for a better class to start the year with. I would like to think that I impacted you all the same way you all have impacted me, and I just want to thank you all for saving me during this dark time of chaos and confusion. Thank you for that.

Juniors #soontobeseniors LOL JK ROTFL, I can't express how proud I am of you all. For the past 2 years, I've been blessed to be in your presence--I've seen you all cry, laugh, be mad, and everything else in between. Though I am nowhere close to being a parent, I see you all as my adopted children.

Before I developed my paranoia of flying, I've been around the world, visited several countries, from India to England to Thailand to Austria, France, Singapore, Germany and Greece, and of course, as you all know, Canada among other places. I've been immersed into several different cultures, and these cultures, these worldly identities, I find in each of you all. You all embody the world, you all are Renaissance beings, displaying the wonders of the world through your mind and body. It's humbling to know that you all exist, to know that the future of this world will be in a good state as long as you all around to be a part of it. As a former student here, very much embedded in the variety of

spirits which this school exhibits, I look at you all, and I see ghosts. I see ghosts of myself and my school friends. When I see you, I see me, and when you see me, I see myself.

Juniors #soontobeseniors LOL JK ROTFL, as you enter your last year here, I'm asking you for a few favors.

1. Recognize and realize every moment you have here, for none of these moments will ever be replicated--I speak from experience. You won't find what you have here anywhere else.
2. Utilize your resources, meaning, excluding myself, you all are surrounded by the best teachers in Louisiana. They are all here to help you succeed in every aspect of your life here at school. They are your mentors, your counselors, and you know, sometimes even your friends.
3. Look around the room, look at your peers, your friends. We talk about life-long learning and know that you are all surrounded by life-long friends, whom, 20 years later, you'll be talking to the same way you talk to them now. My closest friends all still stem from this school. And to even those you aren't close to, there will still be a special bond, when you run into them or hear about them, a silent bond--the idea that you all went to a small school in the middle of the cane fields. The idea that you all know the ins and outs of each other, that you've gone through the goods and the bads together during a much important time of your life, will forever be a part of you.
4. As you enter your last here at, I ask that you give it all that you have. Start strong. Finish strong. From experience, I can tell you that your senior year goes by extremely fast. I do have some regrets when it comes to my 12th grade here, for not giving it all that I had, and luckily, I am able to appease these regrets as I stand here before you all. Have no regrets--go after it--when you're down and tired, withdrawn--this is the time when you go full force, when you overcome obstacles while you're at your weakest point, this is when you should show your strength the most. I have no doubt that you all will be able to.

Juniors #soontobeseniors LOL JK ROTFL, I also ask that you all eat as much as possible. There are so many great edibles out there--wings, boiled crawfish, boudin, gumbo, tacos, pizza, cheese and crackers, soup, and salad--yes, that's right, salad. Eat and be nice. Eat with your family. Eat with your friends. Eat at

home. Eat at school. Eat outside, or inside. And more importantly, eat with me. And most importantly, give me your food.

Before I end, I just have a few more ideas I want to get across to you. I just want you all to close your eyes. Close your eyes and think. Close your eyes and imagine. Picture yourself on the last day of school. Picture yourself driving down the newly paved road one last time. Picture yourself rolling. Keep your eyes closed. Imagine that you've given it all that you have, imagine that you all represent the embodiment of this school. Imagine studying, taking tests, and talking with your friends and teachers. Imagine choosing which colleges you'd like to attend. Picture yourself receiving your diploma. Now picture a 12 piece order of hot wings, Buffalo II sauce, with a side of Ranch. Imagine how it tastes as it hits your taste buds, the spicy sauce that tickles your tongue--with each chew, there is harmony, and that harmony is you, as seniors. I ask that you hunger and always be hungry--to hunger not only for academics but for life here at school and after. Hunger, and eat. Andre 3000 has a line in Hey Ya, saying "shake it like a polaroid picture." I would like to change that up a bit and say, "eat it like a 12 piece chicken wing."

Eat life and hunger.

I'll end here with a quotation. It is an ancient unknown aphorism that I'm making up:

Be Unexpected.

Be Unexpected.

By that I mean don't live up to what others expect you to be, live up to your own expectations--don't be restricted, don't feel restrained. Set your standards high and go beyond it during your senior year. You deserve it. You owe it to yourself. You'll be able to do it, I am confident of it.

Be Unexpected.

Congratulations to you all and have a great night.



WRITE YOUR OWN

A Teacher Writes to Her Own Prompt

Rachel Turney

Interpretation of the Self Using Adjectives in Free Verse

Using language in new and creative ways helps students build confidence. I teach at the Immigrant and Refugee Center of Northern Colorado and my student group is high school to retirement age. The students come from all over the world and are currently located across three different states. This is a remote class of advanced level students held in the evenings via ZOOM. It has been truly incredible how we have been able to come together and learn from each other over the past two years. Despite our many differences, we have found so much in common and enjoy a rich and vibrant online community.

I introduced the use of free verse to my students because if you can provide humor, share an experience, and break from the chains of conventions, you have truly mastered a language. To help my adult students show this ability I have implemented strategic poetry exercises so that they might find a creative space to share their use and application of a concept without judgment. Poetry is art and has no limits, no borders, no boundaries, and no right and wrong. That type of flexibility allows students the freedom to interpret, create, and write with confidence!

After a particularly onerous lesson in which we discussed the correct order of adjectives we jumped into using adjectives to describe ourselves. This was a real-world way to apply language in expression. The submissions could be a poetic and/or realistic interpretation of the self using adjectives. The students wrote their pieces and posted them in an open format on Google Classroom. I then used words from their writing to create a poem of my own expressing the qualities I admire most about my students. All excerpts here were taken from students who have refugee status.

Here are three student submissions (shared with permission; no changes were made):

“I'm a pretty, young, and generous women.
I'm little, white mexican.
I'm somewhat round, and talkative lady.”

"I'm lovely spouse, mother of 3 kids who take care of them ; hard worker, friendly and curious to

learn new things. Cooking is my favorite thing to do. I'm excellent communicator, and organizer in

anything that I'm doing.I'm also helping ful for anyone who needs my help if I can ; and I love to

share with anyone.I'm passionate to my work and I love what I do. I like discipline around me and in

everything I do.I don't like injustice."

"I describe myself, introvert, empathetic, hardworking, thoughtful and resilient."

Here is a portion of my poem inspired by the student samples:

"..She is resilient beyond measure. Her wingspan is larger than a continent. She doesn't like injustice because she herself is fair and balanced. A house built on brick laid slowly, methodically over a lifetime. She is generous and round, we have that in common. Her love for her children fills her screen. Her pride is the color red, splashed across mountains like the most beautiful Colorado sunset…"

We created and shared this work together over two class meetings. The students read their self-descriptions out loud and I shared my interpretation of the creative fulfillment their poems brought me in return in our next class period. Creating responsive poetic works has helped us build a connection that lasts beyond our twice weekly class meetings, bridging our time, distance, language, and cultural barriers. Your students can't be far from your mind when their words are on a constant loop in your head.

She Says

She tells me about selling tamales in the parking lot at Walmart when she first arrived.
But, I am here now, she says.
She tells me her husband was injured and lost his job and has been out of work for weeks.
But, I am here now, she says.
She tells me her son is in the hospital and she hasn't heard from him in days.
But, I am here now, she says.
She cries and says she misses her family.
But, I am here now, she says.
She tells me she used to be a lawyer and now she serves school lunches. She likes the work and feeding children is more important, she says.
She tells me she was employee of the month which feels really good because it means everyone can understand her.
And, I am here now, she says.
This is my mother, she says, framing a wisened version of herself into the Zoom box. She is visiting for a month from Africa and I haven't seen her in four years.
But she is here now, she says.



Contributors

Rebecca L. Brothers is a Louisville, KY author living with hearing impairment. After more than twenty years of teaching literature and composition, she now writes about her Bluegrass State. Her work can be found in *Kentucky Humanities Magazine, The Dirty Spoon* podcast, the *Spirits and Ghouls Anthology* from Flame Tree Press.

Gospel Chinedu is a Nigerian poet or Igbo descent. He currently is an undergraduate at the College of Health Sciences, Okofia where he studies anatomy. His poems are mostly speculative and cut across different themes. He has received numerous awards, and his works of poetry have appeared or are forthcoming in *Chestnut Review, Worcester Review*, *Augur Magazine, Fantasy*, and numerous other publications. Gospel tweets at @gonspoetry

Ericka Clay is a published novelist and poet. She released her latest novel, *A Bird Alone*, last year. She lives in Arkansas with her husband, daughter, two rats (yes, you read that right), and an insatiable need to push buttons, both figuratively and literally. You can learn more about Ericka and download her books for free at erickaclay.com.

Michael Colonnese is the author of *Sex and Death, I Suppos*e (published by Oak Tree Press), which he describes as a hard-boiled detective novel with a soft Jungian underbelly, and of two prize-winning poetry collection: *Temporary Agency (*published by The Ledge Press), and Double Feature, which won the Gell Poetry Award and was subsequently published by Big Pencil Press. A retired university professor, he lives in the mountains of western North Carolina, near Asheville.

Shome Dasgupta is a high school English teacher and author living in Lafayette, LA. He has been teaching for roughly twelve years and at various levels, stemming from grade school to high school to the collegiate level, including both independent and public schools.

Stephen Philip Druce is a poet born and raised in Shrewsbury England. He is published in books and magazines in the USA, the UK, Ireland, Hungary and South Africa. Stephen has also written plays for the London theater and BBC Radio 4 Extra.

Sina Farajzadeh is a Ph.D. student in English Literature at the University of Tehran. He was born in Urmia, Iran, in 1990. His first book, *Contemporary Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, was published in 2019. Farajzadeh teaches English and Poetry, and his verse and fiction have appeared in different literary magazines.

Fendy is a writer from Malang, Indonesia, with a passion for storytelling and learning. Having worked in various fields, including sales and marketing, Fendy's experiences have given him a deep appreciation for teaching. He believes that knowledge should be shared in a way that is fun, engaging, and accessible for everyone, no matter where they come from. Fendy strives to create stories that inspire others to see the world through a different lens, just like his own journey in education has shaped his understanding of the world.

Alison Fung's first notable teacher was her fourth grade English teacher. She had just been placed into the schools advanced English program and as the only girl of 10 in the class, her teacher, Ms. Farris, was her biggest inspiration and motivation to write. Now, whenever Alison can't think of what to write, she thinks of her.

James Gering is a writer and teacher from the Blue Mountains near Sydney. He taught at USYD for over a decade and ran creative writing classes for the upper mountains community. The program began when the local government provided grants for healing after the upheaval of the pandemic, bush fires, and flooding rains. The write workshop grant ended two years later but the teaching and bonding continued.

Laura Hess, for most of her teaching career, taught composition part-time at colleges and universities in the USA until 2015 when she began teaching Advanced Placement English in Guangzhou, China until 2020. Currently, she teaches eleventh grade English at a classical curriculum charter school in Texas.

Sophia Hua didn't expect to apply writing techniques to her life when she first started taking writing classes. Her kitchen-sink drafts extended into kitchen-sink decisions - both boldly and fearlessly made. Thanks to her tutor, she strives for improvement without stepping down the ladder. Sophia believes becoming a writer is embracing not only the art of writing but also the courage to submit pieces - sharing one's work with the world, facing feedback, and growing through the process.

Scott Kent is a lifelong resident of Hendersonville, NC. In 2021, when he was forty-six years old, he decided to go back to school to pursue his life's dream of becoming a published writer and is currently in his final year at the University of North Carolina Asheville studying English and philosophy. He has presented papers at two philosophy conferences, worked as an intern for the Great Smokies Writing Program and is considering becoming a teacher.

Kelley Outler Kirkland is a high school English teacher, a CF caregiver, and a dabbling poet from Southern Appalachia. She earned a Bachelor's in Creative Writing from Georgia State University where she studied under David Bottoms then poet laureate of Georgia. Her Masters in English Education is from Kennesaw State University. Her work explores themes of death by overdose, caring for a child with complex medical needs, and mothering and teaching during debilitatingly uncertain times.

Brenda Kay Ledford is a member of North Carolina Writer's Network and listed with *Poets and Writers*. Her work has appeared in many journals including *Asheville Poetry Review, Main Street Rag, Our State Magazine, Charlotte Poetry Review,* and many other journals. She's received the Paul Green Award 13 times from North Carolina Society of Historians for her books and blogs. She blogs at:
http://blueridgepoet.blogspot.com.

B Lee discovered a love for poetry in high school, thanks to a teacher who assigned a final poetry project. While most students saw it as a chore, he poured everything into it—and received the kind of honest, gracious feedback that made him believe in his own voice. That moment turned fear into passion, and he's been writing ever since.

Richard Parisio is a naturalist, educator, and poet living in NY's Hudson Valley. His chapbook, *The Owl Invites Your Silence*, won the 2014 Slapering Hol Press Poetry Chapbook Award, and he holds a Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing from Cedar Crest College. Parisio's full collection, *Trailside Register*, will be published by Bushwhack Books this spring.

Megan Peralta lives in California with her wife and their menagerie. Her wife Monica has always been an inspiration, as has her poetry mentor, Ms. Mack. Peralta has been a writing teacher in the Asian-American community since 2013, finding joy in helping her students develop their unique voices.

D Larissa Peters resides in California. A memorable moment in writing class was the teacher's red pen on a personal essay: "I don't understand the problem here." Twenty years later, she can still feel the disconnection. Her desire is for the reader: "I've felt that!"

Rick K. Reut was born in 1984, in the USSR. He studied philosophy at EHU in Minsk, Belarus, and literature at Saint Petersburg State University, Russia. For most of his life after graduation, he has worked as a translator and a tutor of English as a foreign language.

Patrick G. Roland has been a teacher long before he ever put pen to paper. His true passion lies in guiding others, seeing their growth, and celebrating their progress. To him, there is no greater achievement than empowering others to achieve. Few moments are more powerful than seeing a student's words come to life after countless failures and revisions: a testament to resilience, learning, and the transformative power of writing.

Brian G. Smith is a retired teacher from central Michigan. He credits his mother, a teacher and author, as his inspiration for writing. As a teacher of both English and German, Brian strove to impart to his students the ability to turn the command of language into something beautiful.

Gary Smith, an award-winning poet, short story writer, and experienced writing teacher, has a PhD in Creative Writing and taught creative writing subjects at Holmesglen Institute and Deakin University. Gary has performed at the Melbourne Writers Festival, Montsalvat Poetry Festival, and on Melbourne and regional radio stations. His writing has been published in a variety of national newspapers, journals and magazines. Gary is a past Secretary of the Melbourne Poets Union.

Henry Stevens taught at the Old Dominion Writing Center for one academic year before teaching Introduction to Composition for Old Dominion University's English Department.

Rachel Turney is an educator and artist located in Denver. Her poems, research articles, drawings, and photography can be found in a few publications.

Blog: turneytalks.wordpress.com

Instagram: @turneytalks Bluesky: @rachelturney

Isabella J. Wu (a.k.a. the Incandescent Writer) is a word-weaver—a writer of stories, blogs and poems—who runs her own editing business. She earned her Master of Fine Arts in creative writing from Houston Christian University where she was encouraged and instructed by excellent professors.



Photo Credits

All photos depict scenes from Western North Carolina (city scenes are of Asheville) and are courtesy of Unsplash except those by Katie Winkler

Wes Hicks	5
Katie Winkler	7, 10
Ignacio Moreira	13
Katie Winkler	15
Colin LLoyd	16
Paige Laine	20
Mathis Mauprivez	23
Frederick Shaw	25
Wes Hicks	27
Erin Doering	35
Stephanie Klep	41
Airam Dato	43
Katie Winkler	45
Jehu Israel	58
Stephanie Klep	66
Clayton Manche	69
Paige Laine	75
Wes Hicks	78
Paige Laine Elmer	87
Michael S.	92
Katie Winkler	96