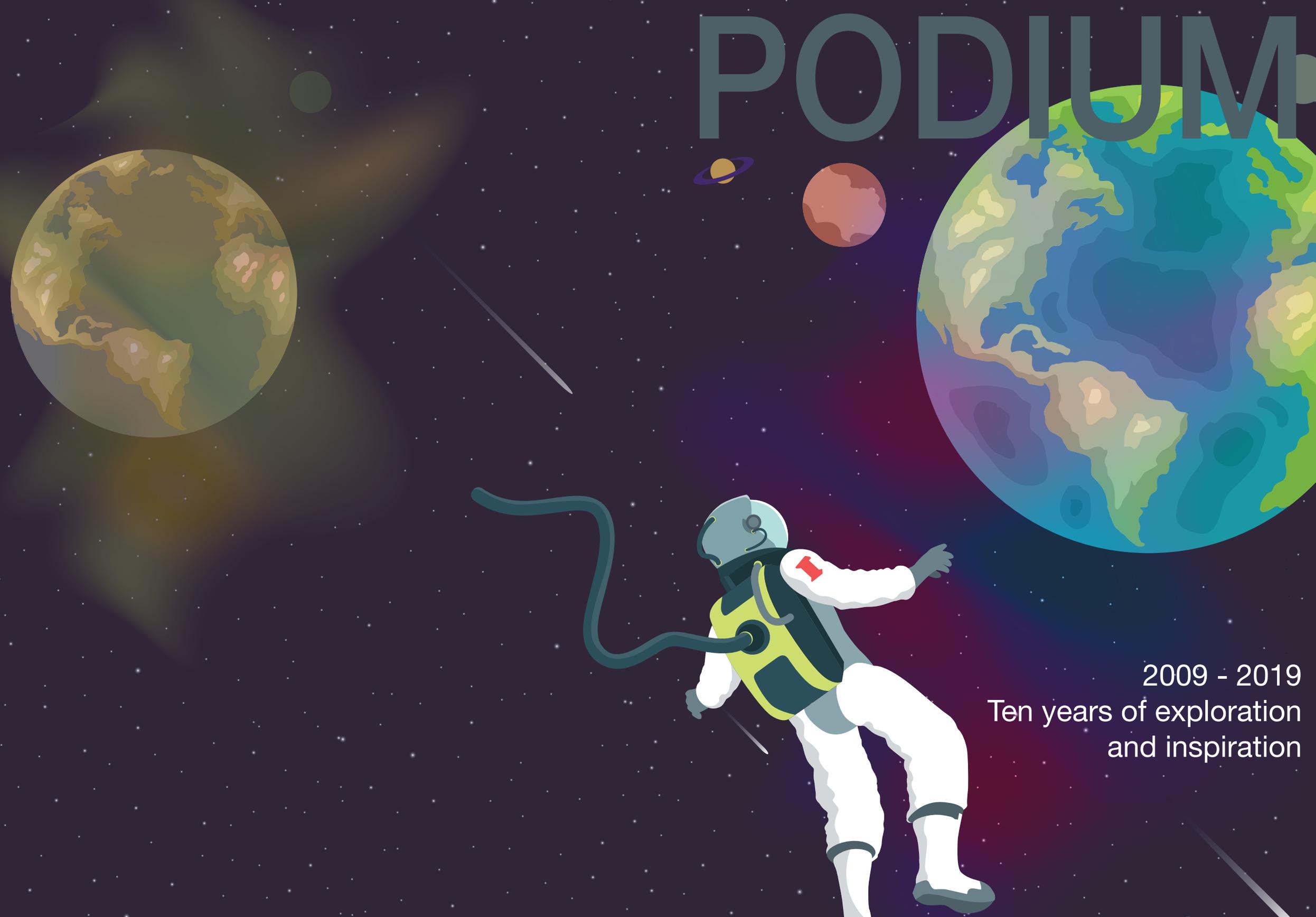


PODIUM



2009 - 2019
Ten years of exploration
and inspiration

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About The Podium Foundation

Since its founding in 2008, Podium has served over 5,000 youth and received recognition from the Richmond City Council, Richmond School Board, and the VA General Assembly. Podium has been featured as a “Best Practice” in US Mayor, a national publication, the only non-profit in Richmond to ever receive this distinction.

Podium’s mission is to provide under-served youth, ages 10-19, with the skills to become confident and capable writers and communicators in school, their careers, and life. Programs increase self-esteem, creativity, and skills used in our students transition to college and the professional world. Programs are organized into three tiers: 1) Foundational Education, 2) Crafting the Inner Communicator, and 3) Understanding the Professional Self.

Annually, Podium serves over 500 youth and provides over 400 hours of instruction.

To learn more, please visit www.thepodiumfoundation.org

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Welcome to the Tenth Anniversary edition of The Podium Foundation Journal.

To celebrate a decade of amazing collaboration, mentorship, and personal growth, we at Podium have compiled selections from the huge body of writing our youth have produced.

The selection process was, of course, extremely difficult; the sheer amount of talent contained in these publications blew us away each time we settled in to make our choices. For the youth from our earlier years, we only saw a snapshot of their potential; for those who grew alongside our programs, we had the special opportunity to watch their confidence, craft, and skill expand and refine through the years. Over Podium's life serving Richmond's marvelous young people, we've been honored to collect a body of work - from journals, poetry slams, 'zines, and performances - that presents a raw, real picture of the shifting, changing world we not only share with them, but will one day turn over to them.

For our students will inherit the earth. Podium's alumnae have already begun. The development of their ideas, communicated through poetry and prose, is vital to the progress of our society. Our youth are very aware of their roles as protectors of civil liberties and innovators of our culture. Their writing reflects their hearts. It has been, and remains, Podium's mandate to encourage them, provide them the tools to become leaders, and sustain their zeal to be heard and acknowledged for the power they bear.

Podium is a collaboration of support from foundations, businesses, community members, partnerships, volunteers, college interns, and many generous folks. Like us, our supporters are dedicated to an impeccable, comprehensive education for the students of Richmond. Without them, without you, Podium is not possible.

We are watching tomorrow's leaders develop. We see it every day in our programs. You'll see it on these pages. The future is very bright, and very close.

Thank you for supporting Podium,
David L. Robbins and Lindy Bumgarner, Co-founders

The Ultimate Weapon is the Mind (2009)
Dakiece
Huguenot High School

Let it be known...
That the mind is the key
To the locked door keeping
You away from accomplishing
Your dreams in life.
All that you need
Is to light a fire inside your heart
And let the mind be your paintbrush
And the words that come out of your mouth
Be your art.
And start...
To recognize the gift and the weapon
Given to you by birth.
Let every word that comes out of your mouth
Become a masterpiece,
A vocabulary explosion,
A diplomatic word release
And never be scared to unleash
The mind's ability
To your advantage in life.
Because in the long run...
The mind is the ultimate weapon.

Why I Keep Trying (2017)
Aniyah
Lucille Brown Middle School

I put everything into this relationship
Only to realize you didn't care.
I swam all the way to the depths of the ocean
Only to realize you weren't behind me.
I climbed all the way to the highest peak of the highest
mountain
Only to realize you weren't following.
I love you with everything I have
Only for you to throw it all away like everyone else.

But then, you may ask, why do I still try?
I still try because I know, one day someone will care.
I still try because I know, one day someone will be behind me.
I still try because I know, one day someone will follow me.
One day, someone will love and cherish me as I them.

And until that day comes, I'll keep trying.
There will be many failed relationships, many lost loves,
But one day, someone will stay, and I'll stand behind them as
they have me.
So why keep trying?
Because eventually, someone else will try too.

Where I'm From (2011)

Elena

Open High School

I am from paintings;
The smell of old books.
I am from poison and playbooks in the wall
I am from the tall pines,
Stretching above old buildings.
The weeping willow of my neighbor's
Reaching over a hundred feet high.

I am from cracks in the floor,
Lost words disappearing
From old playgrounds,
Long abandoned,
Where I spent lonely days.

I am from sweet potatoes with marshmallows
And trips in the car
To go see family who lived hours away.
I am from televisions blaring at all hours
Straight through the wall of my room
And falling down ladders
At six in the morning
Trying to reach my alarm clock.

I am from town embarrassment
Expensive skate parks, never used.
From ducks who walked up the street
To my yard every time it rained.
From walks to school through the graveyard
Roland, Bruce, Lambert, and Tom
Who died without a name.
I gave them one.

I am from "I can't wait to" and Slurpees
Late at night in the car
Going to Reddish Knob
To sit and bond with my father.

We Are Young (2013)
Ashley
Huguenot High School

Because we are young, the world expects us to be naturally happy. No one understands the battles we fight every day. We were fooled as children into thinking that being a teenager was all fun and games. Well, it's not. You have to act like an adult, yet be treated like a child. I got problems on top of my problems. As a teenager, innocence no longer exists. You're expected to know right from wrong. At this chapter of your life, you're so vulnerable to anything and everything. This generation has gained the label as the most corrupt youngsters of this century. Is it really our fault that evil is always amongst us? We just drink the milk that we're fed. Who's holding the bottle? Who's milking the cows? If we so call live in the land of the free, then why is it that I can feel death always walking with me? Fatal candies, intoxicating concoctions, and temporary pleasures whisper my name as if they know me. I give in sometimes and regret it all the time. How am I supposed to be a productive citizen of this country when the devil keeps following? Unnecessary assumptions. Man, I'm just trying to function. Do I intimidate you because we were taught as children to not disturb the peace yet I have this hardcore passion to speak out? To be myself? Something you don't want me to be. Trying to silence me is a lost cause. I will always stand for the people. For the youth. This is Podium. I will never be done. Don't tell us we're obligated to be happy when all I see is war, death, and scheming politicians on T.V. You must be crazy. How about you be grateful and thankful that we don't hate you...yet. You should be happy that we don't rise against you. You be happy.

Untitled (2012)

Nyja

John Marshall High School

Fighting losing battles, Mom never let me retreat
“Pick up your sword, pick up the pen,”
She said. “That’s how you defeat.”
Pops showed me hard work and dedication,
Never used excuses just reasons.
Coach made me ride the bench,
So I got better practice over four seasons.
With time came growth, found myself
Giving farewells rather than greetings
Because Aunt showed me people
Can be false, treasonous, and deceiving.
Uncle taught me not to put faith in a
Dream catcher because nightmares can creep in.
Take what you need, leave the rest,
Learned that at church from the Deacon.
So I shoot for the stars, conscious
Of the moon and what I believe in.
Eyes closed and mind open,
You can find what it is you’re seeking.

The Social Equation (2015)

Justin

Thomas Jefferson High School

I expand my mind, it adds to my grind.
When you subtract me from social convos,
I divide your social circle pronto
Because I'm too squared for your quadrilaterals at all angles.
I want to be compatible with your equation, forget tryina fit in.
I'm the factor that y'all keep quittin on.
I'm too serious for you to be committin on?
Do I try too hard? Did I find x?
Why don't y'all see my points? Is my value complex?
Am I irrational for your theorems?
What's your side convos? I wanna hear them.
Let's get him to rap, we wanna hear him.
But for real, we don't get near him.
He's too odd for some reason.
He's a prime number trying to get even.
If you study me, you can understand
That I'm social, but focused on a plan
To increase my probability
Of the possibility
Of living out my music,
Measured by my acoustics.

I march to my own tempo,
In my intervals, timed by instrumentals.
I average at a high range.
Where's the median?
I changed.
Cause the inside matters most.
I do rather than boast.
Is that why I'm negative to people?
Too educated to act equal.
I don't do it for the gram,
But I'll pose for a photo quick
To check myself like a frisk.
I'm positive, I'm social,
But why no one want to talk to me?
I stopped running from rumors,
You'll continue to walk from me.
I just wanna speak and get along.
Is that too meek?

The Difference between Being Black and Being Black in America (2016)

Shakirah

Open High School

I shouldn't be afraid of the cops. And I shouldn't see many brothers and sisters being slaughtered by the cops broadcasted on the news either. But hey, that's the consequences of being a black person in America, right? I want to go outside and see the beautiful things that my life has to offer without having to worry whether or not my time will come. But I can't stop worrying, can I?

I want to be that Black girl that you hear about making a difference. But instead, I'll be seen as a stereotypical troublemaker, because that's what I'm perceived to be. I'm tired of turning on the news and hearing that another Black man or Black woman has been killed. "All Lives Matter" and "Black Lives Matter" are not the same thing. It has never been.

My life is worth more than what it's made out to be. I'm more than what I'm perceived to be. Jail is not where I end up. No, I will not drop out of school. I will exceed the expectations of those set by people who think that I'm bound to fail. Yes, I'm Black. Yes, I'm a Black woman in America. But I'm not a Black woman in America who won't be someone. Yes, I have goals. Yes, I have dreams. And, Yes I'll be someone.

The only problem is that I'm scared. I'm worried that either myself, someone I love, or someone I know will get shot and killed. I'm scared of going outside, other than going to school. I'm tired of everything that Black people go through being brushed off like dirt in the wind. I'm Black and I'm American, so what is really the difference between being Black and being Black in America?

Strength (2010)
Khatori
Thomas Jefferson High School

Every day you prove your strength, strength to never let
Your emotions be seen
By anyone.
To never admit that you are tired.
Tired of being tired.
I can see through you.
A translucent light shines through your heart, blinding me
As I stare.
I can feel a steady beat.
No wait, that's my heart.
Then again it might be yours.
Our hearts are beating the same rhythm, melody.
As I wait for you to sit, relax, take a break.
Just one breath. Tears fall from my
Eyes because I see a strong, black woman.
The woman that God has blessed me with to do
The things of life and never admit to being tired and never let
emotions be shown.
I'm so glad and proud to call that woman.
MY MOTHER.

TO NEVER ADMIT THAT YOU ARE TIRED.

Prisoner (2011)
Gerrod
John Marshall High School

Time continues to move
Yet I'm stuck standing still
With no direction of my own
And no free will.
Held down by steel and chairs
The markings on my body resemble gangs.
Moments of laughter and joy
Taken by the boys.
Choices I've made
Things I've done
Caged like the beast I am
I was never made to be number 1.
I wake from that nightmare
And try harder to be better
And never bitter
For we are not a product of our projects
But products of our own commitments.
We are all prisoners
Of our own personal interest.

Picture House (2016)
Rachelle
Huguenot High School

Picture house,
I would say picture-perfect house,
but perfection is something
I believe we will never achieve
from the slightly crooked picket of the fence,
to the worn down paint on the shutters.
You can see the reflection of what's on the inside,
a failing marriage, housed, that should've ended ten years
ago.

A conflicted 7-year-old child barely passing school
as a scream for attention.
A 15-year-old vixen sleeps around to shelter herself
from the pain of the house falling apart.
But, you know what? The pain always crashes back
by the end of her promiscuous adventure.

The house was once filled with love,
but now the kitchen is a desolate wasteland.
From the always-empty fridge,
to the oven where no one ever
prepares promises and love anymore.
It just holds the extent of their distaste.
The wallpaper, peeling off, shows barren supports of this
tragic structure.
The covert is crying for repair
under this heaving pressure of derision,

This is a
piCtURE hoUSe.

Decorated Veterans (2015)
Unitha
Thomas Jefferson High school

The first blow -

my heart beats erratically in my neck, blurred
images reflected in the shattered glass.

The second blow -

pain radiates in my shoulder, tears flow autonomously,
anger runs through my blood,
spills onto the carpets, strengthens my resolve.

The third blow -

there is no third blow.
My hand speaks up, says what my mouth cannot,
yells my outrage against his chest.
No longer the kicked puppy; the beast in me rises,
stands up to the dog fighter,
barks my freedom.

The first bruise is black, ugly.
I am a decorated veteran.
The second is faint,
blue, like the stripes of my freedom.
There is no third.

Colors of Done Love (2014)
Da'Quon
Huguenot High School

Blue is the bruise you left on my heart,
and Red is the blood from the knife in my back.

Orange you glad I didn't say Black is for you?

White is the empty space that is left for you
to paint a picture in my mind
to remind me the pain was real.

Silver is tainted color, the blade was shared,
poking each other to see who would be the first bleed-
while the loser was always me
emotionally,
I only said my arm. Not my heart.

That's where the true black comes in,
the real color of your heart.

You said you were tired of those Yellows but
you act just like them.

We are the same color on the inside, blood Red.
Purple is for those roses we cherished,
tearing apart
thorn by thorn, then
petal by petal.

We did that cliche - He loves me,
She loves me not, and
even though we came up with an odd number of petals, I was
holding the last.
And that's how I knew that you loved me not.
Green is that cheerful color that I will never be,
Green is the color of the letter that you left for me.
I mean green will always be my enemy because green is your
favorite color, and that brings back memories.
Pink, the last color that signify us, it's the universal signal for
love,
Pink is what I no longer hold.

Because Newtown Can Happen to Anyone (2018)
Destiny
Richmond Community High School

Keep quiet. Don't make any sounds.
Get off your phone. This is serious!
But, we already had a drill this month.
I don't know why they chose to have another
Less than a week apart. The kids are screaming!
Shove the green card under the door, same as always.
But, why are they jiggling the handle so much?
I thought this was just a drill?
He... he has a gun.

I have a cousin who's seven years old.
He's in second grade in elementary school
And dreams of being a firefighter.
An artist. Just something.
I remember, one time, he looked at me
and said, "I'd be sad if you died."
On December 14th, 2012, my cousin, by age alone,
Could have been a victim at Sandy Hook Elementary.
Twenty students and six staff mowed down.
His spark would have ran out, and just like the others,
You forget the victims but can remember the site,
Even the shooter in some cases.
We refer to these shootings by place or by school.
Columbine. Sandy Hook. Tech.
Lockdowns have become mainstream, like hating arithmetic.
Many people love checking Instagram during these drills.
As if this couldn't happen to our school. To my school.

It pains me to think my cousin knows what a rifle is.
He's just learning his fractions.
When they drill at these schools,
You never know if something or someone is really out there.

‘Taint Over Til Helga D Sings – A folk tale (2011)

Isaac

Armstrong High School

This is the story of a big lady named Helga D.

She aint have nothin goin fa her. She ugly, aint have no money, can’t cook. I memba da day I went to her house thinkin she can cook (ya know cuz she big an all). Po’ chile done burned the salad in da frigidale!

I say, “Good gracious girl. You ain’t never gon get u a man!” (Cuz she can’t cook an she BIG. Dat don’t make no lil bit o’sense.)

She say, “I’s fine all by myself.” (That what people say when dey don’t wanna admit sumthin.)

I felt a lil bad fa po’ girl so I was gon upstairs ta have a lil chat wit God but he was busy wit da chilluns. I went ta Jesus but he walkin on water, and I can’t git on da water. I’s bout to give up. I’s saying ta myself, “Self?” And myself say, “What?”

I say, “Boy, you’s crazy comin all up here fad at ol’ Helga, wit her big self!”

And I guess somebody hear me cuz I heard sumthin laughing from sumwhere. I look, an it be dat snake from da Garden O’ Eden!

I say, “O, no! Git away from here!”

Dat der snake hissed an he left.

But when he left, he left behind this purdy dress. When I git home, I give da dress to dat ol’ Helga ta try on. When she finish putting it on, I look at her an I can’t believe it. Come ta find out, she had a body on her!

I say, “Lord fagive me an my thoughts!”

I tell’s her ta look in dat mirror. When she seen herself, she jumped round up. I’s scared, cuz I’s thinkin she gon start an earthquake or sumthin! Dat girl opened up her mouth an sum kind o’sound came out her mouth. Whatever twas, done broke a glass up in my house!

Next thang I know, people from here were came ta my house ta find out what twas. An that ol’ Helga started doin what dey now call singing. Even doe her body glasses an stuff was breakin, dey love it!

I’s done married dat ol’ Helga now, as long as she stay sangin an wearin dat dress dat ol’ snake left behind.

America (2010)
Sibomana
Huguenot High School

Let me say your name: America. You, who are so good to everyone. You accept people from around the world. You offer a nation where people can live where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. Everyone is given respect. I thank God for bringing me to America without accident; we passed through the oceans and went to different countries. Furthermore, I thank the United States of America for receiving us. My father didn't know English, but he still had a chance to go to work and learn.

I have been brought to America from a place where we did not have liberty. Since we didn't have free school, we had to pay for our education. We didn't have a lot of cars and had to walk from my house. It took me about thirty minutes to reach my school. Now, I have a free ride. I will always remember by ESL teachers who taught me many kinds of words and how to spell them and write. I will never forget them. America, you helped me to find a good way, a school that gives all the ability and intelligence to think about what we can do and to choose between good and bad. The name of America is scattered like good news to the oppressed of the world. America takes care of women when they are pregnant. Its inheritance and good extends from the young to their old parents.

One thing I can say and advise African Americans is to remember where you came from, and where you started when you were born. You didn't know that this is the time in which you would live. As a result, you all have a good way to think about your future. You have a good house, good cars, and more. There are many people who don't have these things so be thankful. Come and distinguish yourselves and never neglect this land. Let us love one another, white and black, as sisters and brothers. Let us come to support this country. Help those who don't understand. Finally, if we do this, our country, and ourselves, will change and grow.

It's Okay to Not be Okay (2015)

Jasmine

Henderson Middle School

My eyes are full of tears
being closed-in everyday.

Sometimes feeling worthless,
Like I don't belong.

My feelings of life are like dried rose petals.
I can't think.

I'm scared to share everything I feel.

Sometimes it's hard.

"Don't lose who are you are, in the blur of the stars

Seeing is deceiving, dreaming is believing,

It's okay to not be okay."

Heritage (2011)

Leslie

Thomas Jefferson High School

Speaking in the past tense
Lamenting over we probably should've
It's past Christmas and the children still aren't home.
Mom hung herself in a purple cloud.
Dancing towards forever in a silver studded gown.
Then there's Dad on the porch with his gun and pipe
Talking smack to the boy about the fight.
And there's the little girl on the curb watching all this.
She smiles as the wind blows
Uprooting all the trees.
All the houses have been destroyed.
The families line up between candy coated canes watching
Waiting for the sun to melt the pain.

6 22 31

Grandpa is a boy.
Growing up, he left his ambitions on Emmit's grave.
He met Grandma on the river,
Making sunlight for the daisies.
Able to smell the desire burning from his lips.
Injecting his joy into Grandma's sad sorrows.
Like now, the truth is a muddy river.
When he met mama
She dug her nails into the fear and submission into his back.

10 2 93

Grandpa is dead.
Long gone.
A baby girl.
Wrapped in sin and smothered in indulgence.
Prowling over a sharpened tongue.
Grandpa's house is silent.
The new family moves with shadows of doubt and envy.
Gluttony birthed a new monster in caramel skin tones.
Young woman at 15, with Grandpa's eyes.
Seeking evolution through truth.

Blocking real thoughts and true feelings.
Praying that Grandpa might come teach her something.
That Grandpa would come soothe her tears.
Grandma is a waxed doll.
Eyes and ears sewn shut.
She sits in carefully woven armchairs.
With masks of Sunday newspapers and Time magazine.
Watching the show from a dark corner.
Covered in rotting webs.

4 18 30

Baby girl is a woman behind a podium.
Flailing hands to talk.
She is a peacemaker.
And so much like Grandpa.
She watches her family.
Remembering Grandpa on the steps with the boy.
And mama in the kitchen has hung herself in a purple cloud.
Little girl drowns herself in dark liquor.
Ease the pain till we see Grandpa again.

Healing Silence (2011)

Saraiah

Richmond Community High School

Hushed, completely silent. The loud sounds of the world,
Everyone's beautiful struggles, no longer with a meaning.

Silence. Silence is the bridge over the waters between
Life's success and failures. Silence is the only sound that
Can cure your soul's pain. It's a healing. It's my healing.
Silence is a climbing flame that warms my world of despair,
My inner light as if my heart were the sun, shining so
Bright. It wakes my soul, forces a smile on my face.

Now I'm happy, quiet, and I can listen to my soul speak,
But only for a while. Silence isn't a lack of words, music,
Curses, screams, colors or the whistling of the wind
But the rest of your inner self.

Silence is the sound of your mother singing, speaking to
You. the sound of her hello silences you.

Unfortunately, no one, not a soul can go an entire day of
Silence. Because they are selfish. Too selfish to give our
World a rest, a time to breathe, take a break.

I'm selfish, I won't go a simple 24 hours to lessen the load
Of the weight the world has to carry.

Silence. That's all it takes.
Shut up. That's what everyone is longing for.

Silence is a conversation that could fill the room, even fill your
inner
Self until you burst.

Silence, do as I say.
Silence, I am your god.
Silence, it wasn't my fault.
Silence, she made me!

Silence this commotion.
Silence this screaming.
Silence, I'm not to blame.
Silence, you don't know me.
Silence, it's my burden now.
Silence me.
I am no longer with a sound, along with the world.
We are all without noise.

So quiet. It's impossible not to hear a man across the seas
breathing,
Panting. He's out of breath, tired of screaming and
commotion in the
Universe. He has said and done more than enough. Then he
realizes
That he has given enough trouble to Mother Earth. It's time to
be
Silent, lay with her under the surface of the earth.

Unfortunately, I can't be silent. Now is not my time. I am with
noise,
Corruption. I am still a child, so I have to talk. I have to
scream
And worry Mother Earth to death. But perhaps I could be
silent for
Just one day. Allow Mother only my small share of peace and
rest.

My Life (2009)
Michael
George Wythe High School

The life of a hood child:
An outcast to society,
Excommunicated from others
Born in one place, but lives in another.
He is unfamiliar with surroundings,
Tossing gang signs in the air
And flexing .45's with no care,
Repping hoods that you'll never die for.
You still try to come back for more,
Single and living but still wants one girl
Still wants her to be his world.
He is loved by none, hated by all
Is why he can never stand tall.
He is talented and curious
But people don't understand how serious.
Now back to the girl,
Who he wants to be his world.
Her smile is like the sunny day,
And she's quiet like the winter snow,
Talented and lovely,
Beautiful and kind.
He loves her for her,
And if with her will never let her go.
He doesn't care about the money, cars, or clothes.
Nothing compares to her love.
He wants to be in love,
And to fly away like a dove. He doesn't mind giving up his life
As long as she becomes his wife,
And puts up all the gang stuff,
And the acts to look tough.
He'd rather not play it rough
Or end up in handcuffs.
He's done the twelve,
Rotting in a cell,
But now is seventeen,
And hates being real mean.

He doesn't want to impress her,
But wants to address her.
His love is real strong,
He doesn't want anything to go wrong
So when you catch him dreaming,
You'll catch him pleading.
The sorrow in his heart
Will end up tearing him apart.

El Salvador (2011)
Rosa
Huguenot High School

I moved to Virginia not too long ago,
Giving up sun for rain and snow.
Richmond is fine, but not my land.
Let me fly to the surf and sand.

El Salvador, such a beautiful place.
El Salvador, there's Mama's face.
El Salvador, where I used to roam.
El Salvador, my country, my home.

I've made friends along the way,
But when I leave, they'll have to stay.
To keep in touch, I guess I'll write,
But there's no way I'll miss my flight.

El Salvador, such a beautiful place.
El Salvador, there's Mama's face.
El Salvador, where I used to roam.
El Salvador, my country, my home.

I Ain't See It (2014)
Charles
Armstrong High School

It hurts to see it's broken,
And we ain't fix it yet.
Well, I'm tired of trying to fix it,
Cause ain't none of y'all
Trying to see it.
I guess I'll sit here and act dumb,
Like I ain't seein' it too.

But even if I don't see it,
I'll still hear it.

Did you hear? (2017)

A.J.

Armstrong High School

Did you hear? He can't afford shoes.
He lives with his druggie mother and baby sister.
He walks in tan, old Adidas and hand-me-downs.
He lives in a shack of a house and his dad disappeared.

Did you hear? His baby sister is really sick, but this man is well.
He's got a pair of old Nikes, but in good condition.
He shops at the Goodwill and thrifts.
He lives in an apartment, sharing his room with his sister.

Did you hear? His mother died yesterday and his sister's well.
He works three jobs while his sister is with his grandma.
He paid for the funeral, and for his sister's medicine.
He lives in a one story home, sister by his side.

Did you hear? He finally got out of the ghetto.
His sister is in school now and he's got a car.
He still wears those worn sneakers in his mansion.
He knows where he came from. Your rumors mean nothing.

Children of Color (2014)
Monsell
Huguenot High School

No one takes our generation seriously
They say we are lazy
That we are unreliable like blank white canvases
While they are stained with paint bright red
Ten gallons worth of blood stains
We are white but what that means to me is
Purity, unlimited potential
All the character you can't, or refuse, to see
Because underneath the surface
Is all but hidden purpose, a congregation of
All colors that help define one another
So no disrespect to our ancestors or any
Related predecessors who somewhat helped
Support us
But you who came before us couldn't
Begin to understand or even comprehend the
Diverse complexity
Of our colored blend
I'm a colored boy of a colored generation
That will not soon reach its end
We may leave our lessons from our prime
And chronicle them for a future time in a text
And as we proceed to what are surely our
Last breaths then and only then will this
Generation make way
For the next

Don't Be Afraid (2017)

**Sha'nya, Jasmin, Kinaya, Shaun, and Aris
Lucille Brown Middle School**

Hey, you, it's okay to be afraid,
but don't be afraid of the work you made.
The audience means nothing...
Well, in truth, they partially do. They reply if
they were listening to you, so
let your voice be heard!
I know it's a bit hard when
it shakes with every word.
Once you're done, in the applause you'll bask,
but best believe, questions will be asked!

These things flow in an artist's head.
We get held back but are given the
go ahead again. Audience: please be a dear,
but also, be sincere. It'll make us happy
when you shed a tear.

Artists! Let your voice be heard.
Have the audience on the edge
of their seats with every word.
It's okay to have stage fright,
just make it through the night!
(Sha'nya)

Who here likes to write?
Who has published their writing?
For those who haven't, I was once like you,
scared to show my work, to spread my wings and
talk with people about my feelings.
Now, you must be wondering,
why do I need to share? I'll tell you.

Sharing gives you a voice, a strong, powerful voice
that's ready for the world to learn a lesson.
Sharing, for me, helps my confidence,
sorts out my problems, and shows people who I am.

So help me help you share what makes you happy.
Teach the world a lesson.
You're the key to a locked door somewhere.
(Jasmin)

Let your voice be heard! Don't be afraid to show
who you really are. Hear what I have to say, for
it may change the way you think. Don't be shy
and keep it inside. Let your light shine.
Think about legends, motivators, and leaders
who have changed the world.
What if they kept their voices to themselves?
Live life with no regrets. Don't wish
you could've said something: just say it.
(Kinaya)

Being afraid is a door that's locked,
but you are the key, lost in yourself.
You're frozen and can't move,
but you know what's behind that door.
Your life can be better, but will have bumps.
Somehow you're locked in your own cage, your jail, your
closet.
You can see through the keyhole.
Your hopes are on the other side.
Your dreams are on the other side.
The experience of taking chances
is past that door,
to experiment with your life is key.
(Shaun)

In this room, voices are hard to hear.
Some aren't heard at all.
But voices are important here,
so speak for those who cannot.
Even a small cry can echo
into a roar.
(Aris)

Captivation (2014)
Peyton
Huguenot High School

Captivation is part of a
Writer's occupation,
Can unbind slaves and bring liberation,
Can unlock emotions and
Unscrew mentalities.
Algebraic expressions can't match
Lyric philosophy.
I'm a living vessel, a conduit,
Typography moving in me
Literally, spiritually,
Planting in my mind images of
Divinity.
Envisioning a beautiful,
Painted canvas,
I say a writer is an Artist,
And writing in propaganda.

Crowned in Melanin (a Barbie Beauty) (2017)

Destiny

Richmond Community High School

Black girls always wear weave? Our hair can't seem to be long enough to cover our insecurities because we were taught that pale skin and long hair made a proper girl. My black Barbie dolls were molded in a white image with long, silky hair and dainty arms with a thin waist. Before I fully took notice of different skin colors, my extensive doll collection became family. Each one, I took in like a new sister, cousin, or brother. Their skin resembled freshly unwrapped chocolate (dark and white). When I got older, I noticed my permed hair was like Barbie's. It was long and silky, but I couldn't forget my roots because my hair was also coarse. Thick enough to tangle my self-hatred in a web of hair grease and blow dryers. I remember the days I wanted my complexion to fade. To bleach itself to the whitest black there was and be a proper girl. As if I wasn't already one.

I was birthed by a black Barbie, one who wouldn't take no for an answer and worked hard for everything she had. My ancestors are the Egyptians, who built pyramids that topple over any elaborate Barbie dream-house. I am the color of toasted caramel. My hair is the color of night, dark enough to pass for black on a good day. I've taken pride in a brown that Barbie just can't seem to get right: she takes her pride in having black copies. I was born with a golden spoon in my mouth because I carry the weight of so much heritage on my shoulders.

I was born rich in melanin and lavished among the gods and goddesses who look down upon me. But, before anything else, I am a Barbie beauty. I was crowned in melanin.

Abyss (2018)

Cat

Lucille Brown Middle School

Let's go deeper into the abyss.

I'll hold you by my side, and we'll go down.

The cold dark waves will wash away our minds.

When tiny lights flit by, we will forget.

Although, I hold your hand, and when I look back, you're gone.

Now, I'm by myself, and I am lost.

I've been alone the whole time; you were never there.

You were just a dream,

But so was I.

Bullied (2017)

Ilaria

Henderson Middle School

You don't know how it feels to get bullied,
To not be heard, to be called names.
We feel trapped, while others feel free.
I'm doing this for everyone, not just me.
When you get bullied, you finally see
The tears of victims, of someone like me.
They always talk about police brutality.
But, how about kids in the classrooms?
When you get bullied, you finally see
What it's like to be him, and her, and me.

A 16 Year-Old's Rant (2019)

Christopher

Thomas Jefferson High School

Modern humans don't really value anything.
Everything, nowadays, has to have the most bling,
Not just jewelry or materials that shine
The phones, clothes, or even those who look breathtakingly
fine.

When a serious conversation is brought up or thought about,
We change that conversation's route
Because not everyone's mind is on a thinking level
They've been hypnotized by the physical
So they can cast aside with doubt.

They don't think we can change
That this world is deranged,
Cold, and heartless, and it will forever be the same.
You or me; this or that.
Friend or foe; White or Black.
It's diversity, but the percussion of this
Is what brings us down. I wish I was speaking
Opinion, but that's the fact, diversity in power causes wars
That destroy families from shore to shore.
Diversity in personalities
End up bullying for these formalities,
Which kills people, personally, from the inside.

In all reality, we were born with eyes, yet very few can see.
Love is a game, and people who trick others hearts are so
cold.

Everyone should walk around with a shudder,
Have the audacity to lie and put it on your mother.
What makes it worse is that people are this way
Because once they were the victims, and it's sad to say
Then, they adapt to this mentality
And treat someone else this way,
And the cycle spins another day.
If we banded together, we wouldn't have to worry
about watching our backs. Bonds aren't severed

When everyone is on the same page.
There would be no neck pains from looking up
Or talking down to someone
Because the field has been leveled.

Kids nowadays, we don't see all that parents do,
The hard decisions, hard work, but we notice
When they didn't get those shoes, or a phone that's new.
We get mad when we get punished for wrong,
Like we are going to ignore what we did all along,
And have the audacity to try and sing the innocent song.

But, parents are on the idiocy too,
They don't respect us and all we go through.
We get stressed, overwhelmed,
Try to keep a social life and stock in check,
Sometimes at both we fail,
But they won't see that or ask why.

Sit down and care about what's going on inside,
And notice some of us can be a little wise.
People need to see with another's eyes.
Let some heat out and vent;
I hope my message was well sent.
Minds understood is what I meant
But for some, even if I didn't title this,
It would've been titled from society,
A 16 year-old's rant.

Powerful Beyond Imagination (2011)
Jasmine
Richmond Community High School

Often success is defined as the gaining of fame or prosperity. But, what is fame? Being liked, known, being the center of attention? Is that what we really consider success?

We go through each day, achieving what our peers expect of us. But what about our happiness? Today, happiness has become just a smile to hide what we really feel. The true definition of happiness is self-satisfaction, the love you show toward others and the care you have for your peers. But why care when those around you only care about what you'll become?

We strive for what others expect us to be. We strive for this imaginary mountaintop, a peak where we will somehow be satisfied, but the truth is that there will be no satisfaction when your success is undermined by the opinions of others. Our hearts long to be at the top, but we fail to realize that success is the happiness we fulfill in our daily walk and talk.

Marianne Williamson wrote, "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate; our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond imagination. It is our light more than our darkness that scares us. We ask ourselves. Who are we to be brilliant, beautiful, talented and fabulous? But honestly, who are you not to be so?"

Fear intimidates our success, and success intimidates our mind. The thought of being bigger and better scares us into being less than who we are.

B_oken Keyboa_d
Tristan
Open High School

An arm flies by,
With a painful hit.
I am knocked to the floor,
Like a sheet of glass.

I felt something missing.
Did a pa_t fall off?
Eve_ybody sta_es.
Yet my head is neve_ bent down.

I'm a blind man missing a finge_.
My wide b_ight face can't see.
I stay at an obtuse angle,
Like a chunk of metal t_apped in its body.

I am told to spell wo_ds:
“_epeating,” “_eluctant,” “dest_oyed.”
I hea_” “The ‘_’ key is missing.”
“A_e you su_e about that?”

Eve_yone is laughing.
I am su__ounded,
Like a wounded gazelle,
The_e’s nowhe_e to _un.

Demons Love Scrabble, He Won't (2016)

Dannay

Lucille Brown Middle School

There are demons inside me. They help me, they hurt me.
They will hurt you.

They say you have become a nuisance. They say you like
games.

Letters and numbers and codes all configure in my brain and
release the tiniest amount of pleasure. I like games.

Whispers and chills up my spine configure in my brain and
keep me alive and tempted.

I'm tempted to play games with you.

They're tempted to play a game with you. Their aspiration
is to use your weakness and make a fool out of you. They
want to show you harm so mean that it will leave each of us
breathless, in different senses.

Letters line themselves up and make words that will make you
wish you could escape the deep grave you unintentionally
dug yourself in the dirt that rotted our souls and left us both
clueless as to why we tried to become "us" in the first place.

The look on your face as they rush out of my body and pin
you to the ground is what they live for. They live to see you
turn blue from their hands choking you ever so tightly until
your body feels numb. They live to see the crimson colored
drops fall down to your chest from their nails clawing at your
throat inflicting the worst possible pain on you, a pain that
makes you feel both everything and nothing at the exact
same time because that's what you did to me; that's the pain
you caused me.

I did nothing to deserve your constant ridicule and
degradation.

I did nothing to deserve your sorry excuse for love when you
and I both know that that word was ever in your vocabulary;
it was the only word you never played in your favorite game
because you had no idea what it meant.

You never even tried while I tiredly lugged your baggage because you didn't know how to apologize for your past mistakes and endless lies and I was the only one willing to take your weight.

I was the only one who was willing to take it and for that you decided to take me and break every piece of my brain only to reshape it to fit your codes and configurations but little did you know, you had only caused these demons to make a home in me and become my only way out of the prison that was your hollowed out, stone cold heart.

So I let them break these walls down and fill your mind with devilish screams and cries from every single innocent soul you have ever burdened with your games and your crooked smile. Let them bang your head against the bricks you surrounded me with.

Let them drown you in the river you took me to in the summer of '09 where you told me not to trust you but I didn't listen because you had that look in your eye that made me want to play your game. Let them throw you in the fire that burned at the end of your cigarette and smother you in the thick smoke they blew into my lungs as you told me you were the only one I'd ever need.

Your code is cracked.

Your letters are scrambled.

You could never hurt anyone any more than you did me, which you will never do again.

Thank you.

Thank you for these demons,

They figured you out.

They shifted the Scrabble you put in my brain until it spelled out the word you never could.

These demons love Scrabble.

You thought you would, too, but they knew better.

Girls At Midnight (2013)
Christine
Thomas Jefferson High School

Remember the first time
We snuck out of the house?
Adolescent girls.
We ran across the street
Hiding behind trees like criminals behind bars
We raced through alleyways
Screaming with laughter
Certain that with each passing second,
My mother was bound to come
Downstairs and notice the pillows
Thrown under the covers
That surely must look like girls,
At midnight.

The Truth (2018)
Justin
Armstrong High School

I beat myself up because
I try to fix the things I can't fix,
So I gained this Purple Heart.
I have a battery-powered smile.
My self-esteem is like my lawnmower,
It just won't start.
And when it does, it clinks and clanks
Until it falls apart
Waiting on someone to fix it the next day.
Wondering about the galaxy, looking for my "Me."
I've been solar searching.
Looking for the person who stole my sunshine
By the words placed on me.
I'm just a boy.
Bones broken to bleed out the rainbows
That paint the walls I dance in.
It's not just the church that shames love,
It's the people we love who shame love.
A man found a gun and tried to kill the truth deep within.
You held the gun, but he pulled the trigger.
You held the gun, but he pulled the trigger.
He pulled the trigger because you shamed his love.
He pulled the trigger because you made him feel like less of a
person.
Sitting in his room, doubting his life.
Your words kill us; although,
We are already killing ourselves.
We spend so much time wondering what people think of us,
Wondering if they will accept us.
My peers are blinded by the words of others.
Any gleam of happiness that flies by
They take as a threat,
Being envious of something that they lack.
Leadership, self-confidence,
A state of mind.

Different/Difrent: A Poem About Dyslexia (2014)
Courtney
Open High School

The pages are colorful
and bright.

There are little black
squiggles that I can't
comprehend.

Everyone's eyes
are on me.

Now I sit in my
chair, humming.
My friends have left
and I stay,
but new friends are coming.
They're coming to play.

Some don't understand me.
I don't know why.
I am the honey bee
learning to fly.

Teachers say I'm different;
Mommy says I am
Special,
But I'm just like every
other student
trying to reach my
potential.

Thu pagez r carful
and drit
Thar r black
swigols that I
cint comprhend
Everyeonz iz
are on me

Now i sit me
Chair huming
My fins have left
anb i sta
but now fins are cuming
Thayr cuming ot play

Sum dont understand me
I don't now y
I m thu huny b
lurning to fli

Teachrs say I m difrent
Mummy says I m
speshel
but I m jus like evry
othr student
tyrying to reach my
potentol

I Ain't Crazy (2013)
Lachaunté
Franklin Military Academy

The lady says, "Sit back and close your eyes."
So I do.

The room around me goes dark
I feel relaxed, as if I'm all alone
Her next words are "I can only help you if you
Let me."

And I tell her for the fifteenth time
That I'm not crazy
Yeah, sometimes my emotions are untamed
And tend to break out of their cage, freely
Roaming,
There's no one I know crazy enough to try to
Calm
The beast in me
Because nobody's brave enough to sit
In a cage with a lion

I'm not crazy
I'm just not normal
I have horns that I've tried to chop off
Time and time again
But they won't go until I grow my wings
And I'm no angel
Don't be fooled by this outer shell
I specialize in mimicking innocence
Perfectionists like her make my brain itch
If I act on my thoughts
I might win this cute, white jacket with buckles
Placed in back so my emotions can't run freely

I tell her again, "I'm not crazy."
At least
I don't think I am

